

Linda L. Brown, Ph.D.

13715 Clover Lake Dr.

Suite 200

Chardon, OH 44024

Phone: 440.564.1373

Cell: 440.667.7584

Fax: 440.564.7989

LLB@dbbrown.com

**Smoking on the University of Akron Campus
Results of the Focus Group Discussions
Requested by the UGIBC Sub-Committee to Review Smoking on Campus
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I. Introduction

On May 27 and 28, 2008, focus groups were conducted to:

1. "Get feedback on the implementation and enforcement of current smoking-related legislation on campus: There is no smoking permitted in buildings; There is no smoking permitted in the doorways or outside the doorways of buildings if the smoke infiltrates inside the doorway/building."
2. "Get feedback on the overall issue of smoking on campus: What, if any, policies should be implemented regarding smoking on campus, and how would such policies impact students and employees?"

Four focus groups met:

1. Smoking students
2. Smoking employees
3. Non-smoking students
4. Non-smoking employees

A structured format was created that was used to conduct each focus group. A \$10.00 coupon to an on-campus eating establishment was given to each individual participating in the focus groups. These gift certificates were appreciated. Each session was scheduled for 1.5 hours, and all sessions lasted between 1.25 and 1.5 hours. Participants were generally on time, and pleased to be able to attend.

Most participants were active in the discussions, outspoken about their opinions, and assertive about voicing their "rights." Many expressed appreciation to the University for soliciting their opinions on this topic. All themes and comments contained in this report are from the focus group participants. The facilitator did not challenge any comments or beliefs, but rather documented the comments and asked for clarification when needed.

The following pages include:

- Focus group demographics (Section II)
- Themes common across all four sessions (Section III)
- Themes that emerged from each of the four focus groups (Sections IV-VII)
- A copy of the focus group format and questions (Section VIII).

II. Demographics

		Smokers	Non-smokers
UA Affiliation	Total Students	9	8
	Part-Time Student	0	1
	Full-Time Student	9	7
	Total Employees	6	12
	Part-Time Employee	1	0
	Full-Time Employee	5	12
	Faculty	1	2
	Staff	4	4
	Contract Professional	1	6
	Grand Total (N=35)	15	20
Student Rank	Freshman	1	0
	Sophomore	3	1
	Junior	2	0
	Senior	3	3
	Graduate Student	0	3
	Post baccalaureate	0	1
Student Residence	On campus	1	1
	Off campus	8	7
Number of cigarettes smoked per day	Students	10-40 (mean=16.4)	
	Employees	10-40 (mean=22.5)	
Demographics		Smokers	Non-smokers
Frequency of rated importance of the issue of smoking on campus*		5 very important	5 very important
	Students	4 somewhat important	3 somewhat important
		4 very important	8 very important
	Employees	2 somewhat important	4 somewhat important

*Participants only selected the "very important" and "somewhat important" ratings. "Neither important nor unimportant, Somewhat important, and Very unimportant" ratings were not selected.

III. Repeated Themes

What follows is a summary of the themes and comments raised in each focus group. In some cases, actual quotes are included as illustrations. In general, smokers tended to be more defensive and assertive as they perceived that they could potentially lose their right to smoke in the foreseeable future. Non-smokers were passionate about the possibility of a smoke-free campus, but many were sensitive to the needs of smokers. Most indicated that they would probably be very satisfied with a clearly communicated policy that could be fairly enforced.

Common themes across *all* groups

These themes were clearly heard from all four groups.

- The current policy is not clearly understood by most, nor has it been communicated widely on campus.
- Most understand the policy to say that smoking is not permitted within 25 feet of an entrance to a building.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding smoking in the parking decks.
- The current policy is not enforced, nor is it understood how it should be enforced.
- The current policy could be a good way for both smokers and non-smokers to coexist *if* it was enforced. For the most part, if the current policy were to be understood and enforced, that would satisfy most participants in the focus groups.
- The cigarette butts littering the campus (outside of the smoking receptacles) are “disgusting.” Cigarette butts littering the parking structures are “disgusting” as well. (Interesting, the smoking employee group had the most to say about this theme.)
- In general, most smokers are polite. However, the rude ones spoil it for the rest of them.
- Need more ash cans throughout the campus.
- Need to recognize the rights and needs of *both* smokers and non-smokers.
- Recommend that UA look at what other universities are doing in terms of their smoking policies.
- If the campus goes smoke-free, UA needs to offer smoking cessation support and other types of support or education for smokers, especially for employees.
- All groups were interested in knowing the outcomes of the online survey, the focus groups, and task force’s work and recommendations. (The focus group facilitator did not offer this—it came up on its own in all four sessions. The facilitator made no promises about any type of follow up.)

- IV. Themes and comments from smoking students** (This was the most outspoken and assertive group.)
- There are perceived to be more serious issues on campus than smoking—smoking isn't illegal. UA should focus on other illegal problems on campus.
 - Smoking is “their right” and is not illegal. They feel “vilified.” They do not believe that non-smokers understand.
 - Believe that “it's not fair to single out one group to make a sacrifice.”
 - Smoking is a large part of their daily habits.
 - They are willing to accept the cost of their decision to smoke.
 - The present policy is okay, but could be clarified and communicated more widely.
 - There are different interpretations of the current smoking policy.
 - The current policy is a good compromise between a completely smoking and smoke-free campus.
 - How would enforcement of any policy be funded?
 - If the University was to go smoke-free, some believed that student government would want to become involved in the decision.
 - Make sure the “25 foot rule” is enforced.
 - Maybe mark the 25 foot perimeter somehow.
 - Most smokers want to be considerate of others.
 - UAPD walks right by smokers when they are less than 25 feet from Polsky's doors and does nothing.
 - Who is supposed to enforce the existing policy?
 - “Would I be kicked out of school for smoking?”
 - Smokers want to smoke where others are smoking.
 - Smoking gives them the opportunity to meet new people—it's a social activity.
 - They wouldn't mind standing farther away from doorways and buildings to smoke.
 - They don't want their smoking to annoy others.
 - Enforcement of a smoke-free campus is expected to be difficult.
 - Feel that non-smokers force their opinions on others unfairly.
 - They resent the “walk-by cough.”
 - “Butts on the ground bother me.”
 - The faculty doesn't always follow the policy (see them smoking right outside the Arts and Sciences Building).
 - Is UA being fined by the State for current smoking infractions?
 - If the campus went smoke-free they:
 - Might be less happy at the University
 - Wouldn't enjoy coming here as much
 - Might make her feel less connected to UA
 - Would eat and by coffee off campus
 - Would consider moving off campus
 - Still smoke, depending on the “punishment” for smoking
 - Probably wouldn't leave because it's more important to finish their degrees.
 - New students might be deterred from attending UA
 - Some recommended the establishment of covered designated smoking areas on campus, while others disagreed with this.
 - If there would be designated smoking areas, be sure that they are sheltered, and that there are a number of them scattered conveniently throughout the campus.
 - This group was “insulted by any potential offer of support to quit.” They'd find the resources on their own.

- Some question the belief that second hand smoke is very dangerous. “Second hand smoke being dangerous is b*****t.” (A number of smokers agreed that smoking outside does not pose a health risk to anyone but the smokers.)
- Deal with automotive emissions before dealing with smoking.
- “It s****s that the world has to be divided into smokers and non-smokers.”

V. Themes and comments from smoking employees

- Smoking is “their right and is not illegal, and is heavily taxed. The rights of smokers are threatened.”
- Would be quite angry if the campus became smoke-free.
- Recognize that they are accountable for their own “bad decisions.” “Leave us alone—we have rights.”
- A smoke-free campus would be an example of intolerance of diversity.
- “Tired of others telling us what to do.”
- “Smoking is important to me—I will continue to smoke.”
- Saw themselves as rebels to a certain extent.
- Some believe that smoking outside doesn’t affect the health of others.
- Ash cans seem to be placed too near the buildings; why not move them back 25 feet from building entrances?
- Some of the ash cans are not emptied frequently enough.
- “Since the ash cans were removed from Polsky’s parking deck, it’s a mess; a litter box of butts.”
- Covered, designated smoking areas might work: smokers would police themselves, the “mess” would be confined, and the policy would be more easily enforced.
- Provide more ash cans to capture the butts because people smoke while walking.
- Buchtel Hall’s ash can is within 25 feet of an entrance.
- Visitors and parents smoke—a smoke-free campus would not be welcoming to them.
- Many of the participants don’t smoke inside their own homes.
- Some believe that smoking would continue on campus even if UA were to go smoke-free (unsure if this was sincere, or merely a threat).
- These participants were very proud of the UA campus.
- Generally okay that the buildings are smoke free.
- Believe that the current policy is fair, although it is not enforced to the extent that they think that non-smokers would like.
- Believe that faculty and staff comply with the policy however students do not always do so.
- Believe that students will be less likely to comply with a smoke-free campus than would employees.
- Concerned that if the campus is smoke-free, would *everyone* be “policed,” not just faculty and staff.
- Some wondered if anyone has been cited for noncompliance with the policy.
- One participant noted that UA doesn’t seem to offer a period of transition whenever a change occurs.
- Some would appreciate support or help from UA if they decide to try to quit smoking. (Several individuals in this group had tried to quit in the past.)
- “Most UA faculty are not benefitted (i.e. do not receive healthcare and disability benefits), so this won’t save the University much money.”

- Some do not believe that comparing a university to a healthcare setting is unfair because they are “completely different settings.”
- They don’t believe a smoke-free campus would contribute to being a more “leading edge” university.
- If the campus went smoke-free some would consider leaving, but realistically it wouldn’t be their only reason to take a job elsewhere. They would feel somewhat alienated from the University however.
- If the campus went smoke-free this group recommends that the University focus on making sure the students comply—especially in terms of dealing with their rudeness and noncompliant behaviors.
- “The smoking problem is overblown.”
- Wondered if considering going smoke-free is a “PR ploy.”
- Have some concerns that UA adopt a smoking policy that is more stringent than the State Law.
- Enforcement of a smoke-free campus is expected to be difficult overall.

VI. Themes and comments from non-smoking students (this group was more outspoken than the non-smoking employee group)

- Would like to see the current smoking policy enforced—“there are no teeth to the policy; it leaves a lot of gray area.”
- It is annoying and unpleasant to walk through “a cloud of smoke” to enter a UA building
- Believed that smoking is a choice.
- Ash cans are too close to the buildings.
- Never saw the smoking policy before the day of the focus group.
- The policy is too vague.
- The policy needs to be in the handbook.
- “Why can’t UA be a leader as a smoke-free campus?”
- The policy should be written so that it is easy to understand.
- Have called the phone number to report smoking violations and nothing happened.
- If the current policy was enforced, it would send a message and people would comply.
- “It’s not *my* job to enforce the policy.”
- Someone should write tickets to those who do not follow the policy. “Enforcement should be visible.”
- UA needs to respond quickly to complaints regarding policy violations.
- The “smoking report phone line” is perceived to be ineffective.
- How would enforcement of any policy be funded? (they don’t want to pay extra)
- Using students to enforce the policy won’t work.
- Most frequent annoying smoking locations:
 - Outside the Student Union
 - Pedestrian entrances and exits of parking decks
 - Olin Hall
 - Kolbe
 - Bierce
 - Arts & Sciences
 - Mary Gladwin
 - Auburn Science
 - Gallucci
- Feel stressed when walking past a group of smokers; some can be hostile

- Kudos to UA for trying to control smoking.
- “Smokers are people too.” (They were sensitive to smokers to a certain extent.)
“A smoking ban could be a hardship for smokers.”
- A smoke-free campus would improve the reputation of the university.
- Five students thought that it would be difficult to enforce designated smoking areas; two students thought this would be a good compromise.
- One student offered that King’s Island has effective designated smoking areas.
- The UA policy needs to be clearly communicated during new student orientation.

VII. Themes and comments from non-smoking employees

- Would like to see the current smoking policy enforced however there is much confusion about the current policy.
- The policy needs to be clearly communicated during all student and new employee orientation.
- Smokers often do not stay 25 feet from an entrance to a building.
- What are the consequences for those who do not comply with the current policy?
- It is annoying and unpleasant to walk through an “outdoor living room of smoke” to enter a UA building
- Smoke sometimes filters up into open windows above the first floor of a building if smokers are outside
- Some smokers are very rude and don’t move away from the doorways.
- Most frequent annoying smoking locations:
 - Outside the Student Union
 - Outside the College of Nursing
 - Outside the Polsky Building
 - Shrank parking deck
 - Leigh Hall alcove
- Could try specific designated smoking areas; not just “25 feet from an entrance.”
- Faculty can sometimes set a bad example for students in terms of smoking.
- Cigarette butts catch on fire in the mulch outside of Leigh Hall.
- UA employees can be seen smoking in UA vehicles.
- Smokers take more frequent breaks than non-smokers.
- Smoking is a topic at staff meetings.
- This group recognized that a smoke-free campus would pose challenges to many, especially students. They noted that many smokers would be angry if the campus went smoke-free.
- Foreign students would have more difficulty with a smoke-free campus because they are used to having cigarettes “everywhere.”
- A smoke free campus could have some benefits:
 - Fewer headaches
 - Prevention of breathing problems
 - Fewer health problems
 - Attract more events, conventions, meetings, weddings, etc. (except for Founder’s Day)
 - Cleaner campus
 - No second hand smoke
 - Less fire protection
 - Less manpower to clean the campus (the butts)
 - Fewer employee breaks
- This group encouraged UA to look at other organizations’ models and processes for going smoke-free.

- Some ways to improve compliance with the existing policy:
 - Remove benches outside entrances
 - Managers, supervisors, department heads and deans should “crack down” on smoking employees.
 - Offer support for quitting (clearly and widely communicated, free of charge, offer lower insurance rates for non-smokers)
 - Promote it as a health-conscious effort
 - Offer nicotine gum in lieu of cigarettes?
 - Have random checks of places where smoking is frequent
 - Educate the campus
 - Cite research as to the benefits of not smoking
- Senior UA Administration needs to accept the responsibility for enforcing any smoking-related policy.
- “Smokers are not bad people—it’s an addiction. Some are very productive” despite their smoke breaks. “They have a right to work here—a smoke-free environment could alienate them.
- Need to recognize the needs of both smokers and non-smokers.

VIII. Focus Group Format and Questions

Intro: Thanks for coming today. Introduce myself. The UA Smoking Taskforce has asked me to conduct a series of focus groups. These focus groups are to get additional feedback (beyond the online survey) about:

1. the administration and enforcement of current smoking-related rules on campus,
2. how smoking policies impact those on campus, and
3. should the campus become non-smoking, what would the impact be on students, employees, and others?

The focus groups include smokers, non-smokers, students, and employees. As you know, all are volunteers.

Hand out demographic questionnaire and explain it.

Any quick questions before we begin? I will be taking notes to capture your comments and to feedback the information to the taskforce. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO GIVE EXAMPLES OR STORIES THAT ILLUSTRATE OR REINFORCE YOUR OPINIONS.

1. What do you think of the current policy which prohibits smoking in all places of employment (i.e. in buildings), in doorways or outside doorways if the smoke infiltrates inside the door or building?
2. Are there advantages to the current policy?
3. Are there disadvantages to the current policy?
4. Do you think that the current policy is being enforced? Please give examples.
5. How might you improve compliance with the current policy?
6. How would your behavior be affected if the campus went smoke-free?
7. Would your decision to either stay at UA or leave UA be affected by it being completely smoke-free?
8. a) Are there any benefits to a smoke-free campus? (non-smokers only)
b) What alternatives to a smoke-free campus would you recommend? (smokers only)
9. How might a smoke free campus policy be enforced?
10. Do you have any other ideas or comments that you would like the taskforce to hear?

NOTE: As for any successful focus group, the discussions flowed freely and often answers to the above questions were offered before the specific question was posed.