

Case Study
Bowdoin College
Presidential Leadership in Policy Change

Private college located in Brunswick, Maine

Enrollment: 1,650 students

Fraternity/sorority membership: Banned at Bowdoin since 1998

Gender breakdown: Male: 49%, Female: 51%

Racial breakdown: Caucasian: 77%, Hispanic/Latino: 4%, African American: 4%, Asian/Pacific Islander: 8%, Alaskan Native/American Indian: 1%, Non-resident aliens: 3%, Unknown: 3%

Summary:

Policy/Program Description. In September 2002, Bowdoin College instituted new tobacco policies that made all residence halls smoke-free and expanded comprehensive cessation services to all students, faculty, and staff. ***Background.*** A survey found that the percentage of students who smoke increased from 3% to 10% between freshman year and graduation. This plus an awareness of tobacco prevention efforts at other Maine campuses, and state-initiated smoking bans sparked an initiative by Bowdoin Health Services for tobacco policy change. ***Strategy for Action.*** Critical student and administrative committees supported the proposed policy changes. President Barry Mills took a leadership role. He announced the new tobacco policy in a letter to the Bowdoin community. ***Outcomes.*** The changes have been widely praised by current and prospective students, parents, faculty, and staff. Institutional support for a smoke-free environment has empowered students to regulate policies through peer-enforcement. President Mills' leadership on tobacco issues serves as a model for other colleges. ***Future Plans.*** Bowdoin stays abreast of regional campus tobacco issues through involvement in Maine's Tobacco-Free College Network, a group that advocates smoke-free policies and programs on college campuses throughout Maine.

Lessons Learned

Letter from President Mills Announcing the New Tobacco Policies

Background:

A combination of internal and external pressures influenced Bowdoin College's Health Services Center, led by Director Jeff Benson, to make smoke-free residence halls and expanded cessation services a priority. These included:

- ◆ The Office of Institutional Research's annual Health Survey indicated that the number of smokers at Bowdoin tripled between the beginning of freshman year and graduation.
- ◆ Representatives from Health Services attended a New England College Health Association conference where they learned about the positive effects of new tobacco policies instituted at the University of Maine at Farmington.
- ◆ The State of Maine banned smoking in all indoor workspaces that couldn't be properly ventilated, demonstrating Maine's changing attitude and environment concerning smoking. Bowdoin's Health Services saw an opportunity to become a part of that change.

Strategy for Action:

Proposed Policy Changes. Bowdoin's proposed changes recognized the importance of creating a smoke-free environment, as well as providing cessation services for members of the Bowdoin community who were nicotine-dependent.

The following changes were proposed:

1. A ban on smoking in residence halls, making all indoor spaces at Bowdoin smoke-free.
2. Expansion of cessation services to include referrals for students to off-campus health education and cessation classes at a local hospital. Campus student cessation services already included:
 - ◆ Unlimited one-on-one cessation counseling
 - ◆ Individualized treatment plans
 - ◆ Prescription benefits for Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and bupropion
3. Referrals to comprehensive cessation services would also be made for faculty and staff, and would include:
 - ◆ Cessation classes
 - ◆ Support groups
 - ◆ NRT covered by insurance, with Bowdoin covering the copay of any other cessation-related prescriptions

Seeking Support for Change. Knowing that support from campus groups would be necessary, College Health Services Center Director Jeff Benson approached the following constituencies to discuss the proposed tobacco policy changes:

- ◆ *Student Government.* Student government generally supported the proposed changes, but opted not to take a formal stance on the issue, because of concerns that they might alienate smoking students. Still, seeking their opinion was an important step.
- ◆ *Student Affairs Committee.* The committee, made up of representatives from various student life offices and groups, was quite supportive of the proposed changes. The committee also held the authority to make policy change. Had President Mills had not exercised his authority to make the policy change, the Student Affairs Committee would have voted on the policy proposals. It was thus critical to seek their support.
- ◆ *Senior Administration.* Senior Administration, comprised of deans and other top administrators, gave unanimous support for the new tobacco policies.

At meetings with each group, Benson made educational presentations in order to gain support for policy change. In addition, Benson took the time to meet one-on-one with key students, faculty, and administrators. Benson also used his weekly health column in the school newspaper to write an article about the risks and negative effects of smoking in dormitories.

After gaining general support for the proposed changes, Health Services began a six-month process of gathering information and fleshing out the details of the new policy. Part of this process involved exploring what other colleges of similar size and academic culture were doing about tobacco. Finding that few other small New England colleges had strong tobacco policies, Benson saw the opportunity for Bowdoin to "lead the field" in this regard.

Soliciting Presidential Leadership. Once the opinions of all critical constituencies had been sought, obtaining the support of President Barry Mills became Health Services' top priority. President Mills had the power to make policy change, and since there was general support on campus, a decision by Mills would be the most efficient route to a smoke-free environment at Bowdoin. Benson arranged a personal meeting with the Mills to discuss the policy proposal.

According to Benson, the two arguments that convinced President Mills were:

1. Second-hand smoke is a Class A Carcinogen with no threshold for a safe level of exposure. Supporting an academic, working, and living environment where individuals were exposed to carcinogens presented a serious ethical dilemma.
2. Smoke-free dorms may reduce the uptake of smoking in colleges by up to 40% (Results from the Harvard College Alcohol Study).

President Mills' initial concern was the potential for backlash from students who might view the changes as paternalistic. However, health services had already sought out the opinions of all critical constituents. Mills used his authority to make the proposed changes official college policy.

President Mills saw this as an opportunity to be a leader among the schools that Bowdoin benchmarked itself against, and to become more competitive as an institution. Bowdoin would be one of the first small, private, New England colleges to implement smoke-free policies, and Mills would be one of the first Presidents to take a strong stance on the issue. Demonstrating that health is a priority could also enhance Bowdoin's appeal to prospective students and their parents.

Presidential Policy Implementation. Bowdoin's new tobacco policies were announced in a letter from President Mills to all faculty, staff, and students at the beginning of the 2002 academic year. (See "Tobacco Policy Change Announcement" at the end of this case study.) Because the President himself had called for the policy change, implementation was almost immediate. The change was announced on a Friday, and took effect the following Monday. Bowdoin is a small school, so dissemination of this information was fairly simple. In addition to a letter from the President, distributed both by email and hard copy to all students, staff, and faculty, meetings were held with dorm proctors and Resident Assistants (RA) to help them understand the policy and how to best communicate the changes within the dorms.

Enforcement. Enforcement of the new policies is informal. The overall goal is to change the tobacco culture on campus to make respecting smoking policies part of a larger cultural change. No tickets or fines are issued. Instead, peer enforcement is the main strategy for preventing smoking violations. Thus far, the administration has not needed to establish more formal enforcement policies, as violations are rare.

Outcomes:

The tobacco policy changes have been widely accepted. Student backlash was minimal, confined mainly to a few editorials in the school's conservative student newspaper. On the other hand, the primary student newspaper and the progressive student newspaper have been very supportive of the change. President Mills has received praise and support from students, staff, and faculty. The

smoke-free residence hall policy has been instrumental in supporting a smoke-free culture at Bowdoin. While enforcement is informal, the issue has not become a disciplinary concern. The policy aims to empower nonsmokers to enforce the rules among their peers, knowing that they have institutional support for their right to carcinogen-free air.

Results from the most recent health survey are not yet in, and it is assumed that it will take a few years to detect change in tobacco use among students.

Although cessation services for students are not widely used, several faculty and staff members have taken advantage of the expanded services. Individuals are receiving needed assistance and the availability of services sends a clear message that Bowdoin supports faculty and staff in their attempts to live healthy lives.

The smoke-free environment has been appealing to prospective students and their parents. Bowdoin has received positive feedback from parents of incoming students. During the first year the college received about a dozen letters from parents of prospective students, praising the tobacco policy changes made at Bowdoin.

President Mills' leadership has also influenced policy at other small New England colleges. His letter announcing the policy changes to the Bowdoin community (printed below) has been adopted as the basis for proposed policy changes on similar campuses.

Future Plans:

Members of Bowdoin's Health Services Center are involved with the Maine Tobacco-Free College Network to keep up with new trends in college tobacco use and policy.

Lessons Learned:

- ◆ *Lobby hard at the highest levels of administration.* Take the time to lobby those in power to commit to taking a stance on tobacco, be it the President or the administrators to whom (s)he listens most closely.
- ◆ *Solicit student support.* Seeking student opinions will reduce backlash to administrative action and ensure a more smooth transition when a new policy is established.
- ◆ *Gather information about what similar schools are doing.* Benchmarking your school's policies against those of comparable schools can be a powerful argument for change. In Bowdoin's case, finding out what other schools were doing revealed an opportunity to become a leader in the field.
- ◆ *Present research and data to all campus constituents.* Include results from national research projects as well as information about your own school.
- ◆ *Consider faculty and staff when proposing policy change.* Faculty and staff spend five days a week or more on campus, and are often present for many more years than students. Creating a supportive environment for the entire campus community will help garner greater support for proposed changes.

Letter from President Mills Announcing the New Tobacco Policies:

To Members of the Bowdoin Community:

September 5, 2002

A healthy and safe campus is important to all of us at Bowdoin College. That's why the time has come for all college buildings to be "smoke-free." For the safety and wellness of each of us -- as well as to comply with Maine law -- smoking is no longer permitted in any college building, including all student residence halls, apartments, and the College Houses. I ask those who smoke to do so outdoors, at least 50 feet from a building entrance and away from open windows. I also ask that smokers dispose of cigarettes in an appropriate manner. For those who would like to quit smoking, the College stands ready to assist you.

After reviewing college medical data, I am convinced that the elimination of indoor smoke will be beneficial to us all. As many of you know, environmental tobacco smoke, or "second hand smoke," is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a "Class A carcinogen." In other words, it is a substance known to cause cancer, with no safe level of exposure. In fact, environmental tobacco smoke is the third leading cause of preventable death in this country. Further, Maine law does not permit smoking in indoor workplaces, except in very specially engineered and ventilated spaces. The Maine statute does not cover student residences. However, college survey data indicate that while very few of our students arrive on campus as smokers, a significant number become smokers while here. Some experiment with "social smoking," which greatly increases the chance that they will become addicted to nicotine. Restricting smoking in all our student residences should dramatically decrease the number of students who would otherwise become addicted. It should also greatly reduce the risk of fire in these buildings.

I realize that it can be very difficult for some smokers to quit. That's why I have asked Dr. Jeff Benson, director of health services, and Tama Spoerri, director of human resources, to develop a college-funded smoking cessation program for students and employees ready to participate. Additional information on this program will be made available in the next few days.

The College does not mean to try to force its students or employees to quit smoking. For those who choose to continue smoking, and for those who have difficulty quitting, I simply ask that you smoke outdoors in a manner that does not affect others.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Barry Mills

For more information on Bowdoin's tobacco policies, contact:

Jeff Benson

Director, Health Services

jbenson@bowdoin.edu

This case study was written in September 2003.