

**Case Study**  
**The University of Arizona**  
**Tobacco Social Norms Marketing Campaign**

**Public university located in Tucson, Arizona**

**Enrollment:** Approximately 36,000 students

**Fraternity/sorority membership:** Approximately 12-15% of students

**Gender breakdown:** Male: 47%, Female: 53%

**Racial breakdown:** Caucasian: 71%, Hispanic/Latino: 14%, African American: 3%, Asian/  
Pacific Islander: 6%, American Indian or Alaska Native: 1%, Multiracial: 3%, Other: 2%

**Summary:**

***Policy/Program Description:*** In 2000, the University of Arizona (U of A) launched an intensive social norms marketing campaign to correct student misperceptions about campus tobacco use.

The campaign was implemented to support new campus tobacco policy changes including smoke-free residence halls and a ban on smoking within 25 feet of any campus building.

***Background.*** Results from U of A's annual Health & Wellness Survey showed substantial student misperceptions about the prevalence of peer tobacco use. U of A was already increasing tobacco control policies, and the time was right for a social norms marketing campaign to correct student misperceptions about campus tobacco use. ***Strategy for Action.*** A multidisciplinary team developed normative messages about tobacco use, pilot-tested the messages with students, and ran ads in the campus newspaper and on the campus cable television station. ***Outcomes.*** After year one, there was a statistically significant drop in the number of students with misperceptions about campus tobacco. Significant decreases in smoking levels followed. ***Future Plans.*** U of A Health Promotion staff would like to further explore the "social smoker" phenomenon and develop normative messages to address this population.

**Lessons Learned**

**Background:**

The University of Arizona (U of A) had been addressing tobacco use to a limited extent since 1995 through social norms marketing campaigns (SNMC) that focused mainly on alcohol use. U of A decided that a more intensive tobacco-related SNMC was needed for two reasons:

1. The annual Health & Wellness Survey found that tobacco use was a priority risk factor among students, second only to alcohol use. The U of A survey is based on the Core Institute Alcohol and Drug Survey and the Harvard College Alcohol Study but includes items specific to U of A issues.
2. The survey revealed that students had greatly exaggerated misperceptions about student smoking rates. These were even more substantial than those about student drinking.

In 2000, U of A received a one-year \$2,500 Pacific Coast College Health Association Dr. Joel Grinolds Grant to fund a tobacco SNMC. Previous demonstrated success with SNMC for alcohol helped U of A Health Services staff determine that a similar campaign could work for tobacco.

At that time, all campus buildings were becoming smoke-free, and smoking was prohibited within 25 feet of all campus buildings. Believing that past student backlash against tobacco

policy stemmed from an exaggerated sense of the number of smokers on campus (and thus the number of students that would be impacted by the policy change), Health Services concluded that a SNMC could have a positive impact on student perceptions and behaviors and garner support for the policy changes.

### **Strategy for Action:**

***Committee Work/Health Promotion.*** The Health Promotion and Preventive Services Unit, a part of the Campus Health Service that led previous alcohol and tobacco SNMCs at U of A, took the lead in developing the new tobacco SNMC. The team included:

- ◆ Campus health care providers
- ◆ Education staff
- ◆ AOD specialists
- ◆ Graduate and undergraduate student
- ◆ Risk management staff
- ◆ Human resources staff

***Message Creation and Testing.*** Health Promotion staff decided which student misperceptions to focus on based on the Health & Wellness Survey results. Students were key players throughout the campaign development process. All messages and campaign advertisements were pilot tested on about 50 students through interviews, focus groups, and sample advertisements posted in common areas for student feedback. Students were asked about the campaign's look, believability, and message clarity. The final campaign featured normative messages such as "73% of U of A students do not use tobacco" and "2 out of 3 smokers want to quit smoking."

***Implementing the SNMC.*** Sixteen 3x8-inch ads ran in the campus newspaper from September 2000 through March 2001, along with cable TV advertisements five times a day. In addition to the newspaper and cable advertisements, tobacco cessation classes were advertised in the newspaper classifieds and through campus posters and flyers. Health Promotion initially relied on the Pacific Coast College Health Association grant to pay for the advertisements.

***Challenges in Implementation.*** The major obstacle in implementing the SNMC was persuading health educators to alter their thinking about the best way to present health information to students. Traditional health education materials emphasize the negative consequences of high-risk behavior and encourage students to avoid those behaviors. Social norms marketing, on the other hand, highlights the positive behavior of the majority of students, and encourages students to adopt those behaviors.

***Presidential Support.*** University President Peter Likins openly supported the campus tobacco policy changes. He frequently mentioned Health Promotion's Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) work in convocation addresses to incoming classes to show his support for movement toward a healthy and safe environment at U of A.

### **Outcomes:**

***Survey Results.*** After one year of the tobacco-focused SNMC, results from the Health and Wellness survey showed a statistically significant decline in student misperceptions about peer tobacco use. The percentage of U of A students who believed that "most" students had used

tobacco during the past 30 days dropped from 93% before the campaign to 59% after. There is often a lag between correcting misperceptions and changes in behavior. Studies of SNMCs suggest that two full years of campaign implementation may be required before changes in behavior will be observed. Indeed, no significant changes were reported in tobacco use in the first year after the campaign was initiated. In the three years since the campaign began, there have been significant declines in tobacco use among U of A students. This can most likely be attributed both to new tobacco policies on campus and changes in the normative environment related to the SNMC.

***Acceptance of SNMC.*** Social norms marketing for tobacco has been less controversial than it was for alcohol. Alcohol SNMCs usually stress responsible alcohol use while tobacco SNMCs focus on nonsmoking norms, leaving no gray area about condoning risky behavior.

#### **Future Plans:**

Although U of A's tobacco-focused SNMC was only funded for one year, tobacco use is still an element of the broader Alcohol and Other Drug SNMC at U of A. Since the advertisements have proven effective, Health Promotion provides funding to continue the tobacco messages. Tobacco use has declined, but the battle continues. Health promotion workers are particularly concerned with social smokers—students who report that they do not smoke regularly, but use tobacco in social situations, like when drinking alcohol. Social smoking is often a pathway to regular smoking and nicotine addiction. U of A hopes to be able to fund an SNMC geared specifically towards social smokers.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- ◆ *SNMCs should be part of a comprehensive tobacco prevention strategy.* SNMCs will have limited effect in an environment that does not restrict tobacco use. At U of A, the SNMC worked synergistically with campus tobacco use policy changes.
- ◆ *Highlight students' and workers' rights to carcinogen-free air.* Presenting exposure to environmental tobacco smoke as a workers' rights issue is a critical strategy to gain support for policy change. The message of preferring smoke-free air was conveyed in the U of A SNMC.
- ◆ *Pilot test your campaign materials.* Campaign materials need to be tested with students. Pilot testing is the best way to ensure that messages are appealing and effective.

***For more information on the University of Arizona's tobacco SNMC, visit their website at:***

***<http://www.socialnorms.campushealth.net>***

***or contact:***

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