

Case Study
University of Washington
Ban on Campus Tobacco Sales

Public university located in Seattle, Washington

Enrollment: 37,400 (26,900 undergraduate, 10,500 graduate)

Fraternity/sorority membership: 12% of students (30 sororities, 18 fraternities)

Gender breakdown: Male: 48%, Female: 52%

Racial breakdown: Caucasian: 53%, African American: 3%, Asian Pacific Islander: 23%, Hispanic: 3%, Alaska Native/American Indian: 1%, International: 3%, Unknown: 14%

Summary:

Policy/Program Description. In March 2000, the University of Washington (UW) banned the sale of tobacco products, ending 49 years of campus sales. ***Background.*** Two public health fellowship recipients led a campaign to ban campus tobacco sales when they realized that the student newspaper advertised tobacco products and campus stores sold tobacco. ***Strategy for Action.*** They first gathered data on tobacco use among UW students. As a part of the campus tobacco assessment process, they learned that minors were buying tobacco at UW stores. This finding was confirmed by Washington Department of Health compliance checks. Letter writing campaigns, boycotts of student facilities, educational campaigns, the decision of UW to divest from tobacco stocks, awareness of tobacco sales bans on other campuses, and local media involvement all built pressure for the ban on campus tobacco sales. ***Outcomes.*** After an 18 month campaign, UW banned campus tobacco sales in March 2000. UW residence halls became smoke-free in the fall of 2001. Smoking rates have decreased at UW since the ban took effect. Other schools have used the UW experience as a model. ***Future Plans.*** The campaign to ban tobacco advertising in the school newspaper continues. Special attention is being paid to the high level of tobacco use at fraternities and sororities as well as tobacco company sponsored events at “Greek” houses.

Lessons Learned

Resolution to Ban Tobacco Sales at UW

Background:

The campaign to ban tobacco sales at the University of Washington (UW) began in December of 1998, when two UW School of Public Health Fellows, Abigail Halperin and Ted Eytan, noticed an advertisement for smokeless tobacco in the student newspaper. Knowing the health risks associated with tobacco use and the influence of advertising on this vulnerable population, they approached the school newspaper to propose that they stop accepting tobacco advertisements.

At the meeting with the Advertising Manager of the paper, Halperin and Eytan were told that the paper would not stop advertising tobacco for two reasons:

1. The advertisements generated funding for the paper and gave newspaper staff an opportunity to learn to produce the colorful inserts that advertised tobacco products.

2. There were no ethical issues involved since tobacco was a legal product sold by the student unions and cafeteria newsstand.

When they learned that UW sold tobacco at three campus locations, Halperin and Eytan shifted their focus to banning tobacco sales on campus.

In January 1999, they met with the Director of Student Union Activities and Facilities (SUAF), who monitored what campus stores sold. The SUAF Director expressed sympathy for the cause but refused to consider banning tobacco sales, because they were an important source of revenue amounting to \$28,000 a year, or 1% of the student union budget. He also pointed out that tobacco sales were legal and claimed that the UW store complied with all state and local regulations, including prohibiting sales to minors.

Halperin and Eytan sought support from the Graduate Student Senate and the Student Union Facilities and Activities Advisory Board (SUFAB). SUFAB's support was most critical, as it had the authority to decide what could be sold in campus stores. However, both groups resisted any policy change, citing their reluctance to "moralize" the issue of tobacco use. The SUFAB board was also concerned with lost revenue from tobacco sales.

Strategy for Action:

Gathering Critical Information. Their failure to enlist support for the tobacco sales ban with campus constituents spurred Halperin and Eytan to re-think their approach and conduct a series of steps:

- ◆ They first collected data on tobacco use at UW. They found that from 1993-1999, there had been a 56% rise in daily smoking among undergraduates, and a 93% rise in those who had smoked in the past 30 days. These figures surpassed national increases of 27% and 74% in daily and current smoking rates, respectively. Based on these rates, they determined that almost 2,000 of UW's 27,000 current students would die from tobacco, most of them prematurely. These facts were critical in educating campus constituents to gain support for the policy change.
- ◆ They suspected that minors were buying tobacco at campus outlets (11% of incoming freshman were under age 18) and asked the Washington Department of Health to do a compliance check. Sting operations revealed that campus outlets sold tobacco products to youth under age 18, leading to a citation against the university.
- ◆ Comparing UW policies to those of other schools, they found that UW was out of step with other Pacific 10 Conference Schools, most of which did not sell tobacco products on campus.

Armed with evidence of high smoking rates, failure of campus outlets to refuse sales to minors, and tobacco sales bans on other campuses, Halperin and Eytan started to gain more support for their cause. Some student organizations and individual students, especially those from the School of Public Health, joined an electronic mailing list organized by Eytan. Eytan also created a website with information supporting the ban of campus tobacco sales.

Letter Writing Campaign. Support grew among campus groups ranging from the Medical Student Association to the Primary Health Care Center Providers. They began a

letter writing campaign to SUFAB, which had the authority to change the tobacco sales policies. Although the letter writing campaign did not succeed, it brought the issue of tobacco sales to the forefront.

Boycott of Student Facilities. The financial benefit that tobacco product revenues provided was the sticking point in banning sales. The group knew that UW also made a significant amount of money by renting rooms in the student union to various campus organizations. Because of this, the group organized a boycott of student union building rentals by student groups and health science departments on South Campus (where the Medical School and School of Public Health are housed). Presentations were made to the Health Sciences Dean and the Dean of the School of Public Health, who supported the boycott of South Campus Center room rentals. The loss of revenue from room rentals to groups such as the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program exceeded the profits from tobacco sales. Under threat of more room rental losses, tobacco products were removed from sale in the South Campus Center in October 1999.

Overcoming Obstacles. Tobacco sales continued at two other campus outlets, which were more prominent and profitable than the South Campus Center. Indeed, the Facilities Manager began to allow students to use their student meal cards to purchase tobacco products at the two remaining campus outlets. This decision was made without informing those campaigning for a tobacco sales ban. The convenience of using a meal card to purchase tobacco would increase tobacco sales profits, making up for losses at the South Campus Center.

Despite the setback posed by the meal card tobacco purchase option, the campaign for policy change continued to gain steady momentum. Some of the highlights of the push forward included:

- ◆ *Media Coverage.* When alerted about the situation on campus, several major news outlets ran multiple stories on the UW tobacco debate. One station highlighted the fact that tobacco could be purchased with meal cards, an account often paid for by parents.
- ◆ *Education.* Efforts to educate campus groups and organizations about the reality of tobacco use and nicotine addiction at UW continued. Support from all major student and faculty groups was lobbied, and many joined the campaign for policy change.
- ◆ *Divestiture.* In a separate initiative by an alumnus and students, UW voted in December 1999 to divest from tobacco stocks. The decision to divest was explained purely in financial terms (tobacco stocks were not doing well since the Master Settlement Agreement), but the successful divestment campaign built additional support for the ban on tobacco sales.
- ◆ *Supportive UW Policy Discovered.* Campaigners discovered a little-known UW policy prohibiting the sale of goods that are not directly relevant to the University's educational mission. Many concluded UW cigarette sales were in conflict with this policy.
- ◆ *Student Senate Resolution to Ban UW Tobacco Sales.* A resolution to ban tobacco sales, drafted for the student governance committee of the Associated Students of UW by Halperin and another committee member, was debated in the student senate

and passed by an overwhelming majority. Passing this resolution (see below) was a major turning point in the campaign.

By the time Halperin and Eytan presented the tobacco sales ban proposal to SUFAB in February, 2000, they had built a groundswell of support from major campus constituencies. Student support for the ban was especially critical in influencing SUFAB's decision. On February 15, 2000, with two network television news crews present, SUFAB voted to "immediately and permanently" end tobacco sales on campus. The policy was enacted 30 days later.

Outcomes:

All UW campus tobacco sales were banned as of March 2000. The successful campaign at UW influenced other colleges, such as Western Washington University, to ban tobacco sales on campus. Universities and state health departments from around the country have used the UW experience as a model for mounting tobacco campaigns against substantial obstacles. The University of Oregon is currently waging a similar campaign.

A 2001 behavioral health survey at UW found that smoking rates have decreased since the tobacco sales ban took effect. The campaign is credited with building the momentum needed to create smoke-free residence halls, which occurred in 2001.

Future Plans:

Tobacco policy advocates at UW plan to continue working with the school newspaper to develop guidelines which would preclude accepting tobacco company advertisements. They also plan to work more closely on the issue of tobacco use in fraternities and sororities, where tobacco promotional events take place.

Lessons Learned:

- ◆ *Know the facts about your own campus.* Halperin and Eytan were unprepared in their first round of proposals with campus groups. They needed data on tobacco use at UW, the potential impact of UW policies on tobacco use, and the projected mortality associated with this use. They also needed to know the history of tobacco related policies at UW and at peer institutions. This information became a powerful tool for gaining support.
- ◆ *Don't approach tobacco use as a moral issue.* Concern about moralizing or judging tobacco use created initial resistance to policy change. Presenting the facts as an objective public health issue is important.
- ◆ *Pay attention to the bottom line.* Financial matters are important to colleges. Understanding the financial impact of tobacco on campus is a critical issue in policy change.
- ◆ *Use the media.* Using the media to draw attention to campus tobacco issues can put pressure on key stakeholders.
- ◆ *Be prepared for a long fight.* It took 18 months to stop tobacco sales at UW. Be prepared to educate and persevere in the face of obstacles.

ASUW Resolution to Ban Tobacco Sales at UW:

**Associated Students of the University of Washington
Governance Committee
98th Regular Session**

Resolution 98-01
Date: January 18, 2000
By: Abigail Halperin
Karl Hardy

**ASUW RESOLUTION REGARDING THE SALE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS ON
CAMPUS**

WHEREAS, it is acknowledged that tobacco products are legally sold to and consumed by persons 18 years of age and older, and that these products are readily available in close proximity to the campus of the University of Washington,

WHEREAS, the smoking rate among University of Washington undergraduate students has increased by 83% from 1993 to 1999, significantly outpacing the national trend,

WHEREAS, research has shown that approximately 39% of college smokers either begin to smoke or become addicted to tobacco after entering college and that promotion of tobacco in the form of advertising and sales displays may influence the initiation of and addiction to tobacco use,

WHEREAS, smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disability in the United States, and that although the vast majority of smokers wish to stop smoking, only one third are able to succeed in quitting long term, and thus smoking related illnesses will be responsible for the premature deaths of an estimated 2000 current University of Washington undergraduate students,

WHEREAS, the majority of our peer educational institutions do not sell, advertise, or otherwise promote tobacco products on their campuses,

WHEREAS, the sale of tobacco products on campus adversely affects the health of the campus community by:

1. indirectly promoting the use of this substance by setting an example for advertising policies, altering perception of social norms and having sold cigarettes to minors,
2. conflicting with the educational mission and the policy on the sales of goods and services of the University of Washington,
3. introducing a financial conflict of interest by profiting the Student Activities and Union Facilities Department, a division of the Student Affairs Office, which is

- responsible for the prevention of alcohol and substance abuse on campus (as mandated by the Federal Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Act),
4. undermining the work of our nationally recognized medical center, which treats thousands of patients with tobacco related illnesses each year,

WHEREAS, the University of Washington Board of Regents recently voted to divest all of the University's tobacco company stock holdings.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON:

THAT, be it recommended, that the ASUW does not support the sale of tobacco products in student union facilities or by the Student Activities and Union Facilities Department on the campus of the University of Washington.

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Or visit:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/ted1/tobacco.html>

This case study was written in September 2003.