

# Eliminating the Smoke Screen: Steps to a Smoke-Free Harvard 2012

**Presented By the Harvard Institute of Politics Tobacco Control Policy Group**

Members: Chris Taylor '12, Isamar Vega '13, Ken Liu '14, Fabiola Vega '13, Simon Thompson '14  
Advisor: Mackenzie Lowry '11

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

While current College-wide smoking policies restrict smoking in and within 25-feet of Harvard buildings, the latter policy remains generally unenforced. The Harvard administration can effectively enforce its smoking policy by taking measures to: 1) increase awareness of current smoking policies for all members of the Harvard community, 2) expand the awareness and accessibility of smoking cessation programs for undergraduates, beginning with outreach to freshmen, 3) increase access to stress reduction programs for undergraduates, 4) initiate University-wide smoke-free policy, beginning with Harvard Yard in 2012. By improving the existing smoking cessation and educational programs that Harvard offers, a healthier, smoke-free undergraduate population can be attained.

### 1. Enforce current smoking policy.

The most useful policy to enforce to reduce smoking on campus is Harvard College's ban on smoking within 25' of a Harvard building entrance. At the entrances and in the outdoor common areas of the undergraduate houses, libraries, and classroom buildings, students smoke at all hours. Student awareness of the smoking policy could be easily increased by posting visible and numerous signs at the entrance to each of these buildings prohibiting smoking. Roving Securitas and HUPD officers can help enforce the policy and respect it themselves. Additionally, students can remind individuals outside of their buildings that smoking is not allowed. Finally, simple signs and posts can be placed around the yard so that both visitors and students will visibly see the smoking policy in a quit-friendly way. In this way, awareness of the smoking policy will increase and bring with it a concurrent decrease in the smoking that is pervasive across campus.

### 2. Expand and promote cessation programs.

While the College currently does have programs aimed at aiding students to quit and provides materials to help them through the University Health Services and the Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Services, it lacks promotion for such services. Incoming freshman should be made aware of any assistance the College provides to students who wish to quit smoking as a means of encouraging those entering the school to consider abandoning their habit. An inclusion of this information in Opening Days, possibly as a topic of discussion in an entryway meeting or an extension of the talk on the school's alcohol policy, is recommended. Involving existing freshmen talks on alcohol, drug and sex talks should incorporate smoking cessation programs available at the school.

### 3. Expand and promote stress reduction programs.

Harvard, largely through the Center for Wellness, offers a variety of programs designed to reduce stress; however, these programs are not introduced to undergraduates early enough in their educational careers and are often inaccessible to students with busy schedules. Despite the multitude of initiatives and programs, students often do not utilize them to their fullest extent either due to scheduling issues or expense. Furthermore, the programs are not well promoted. It is recommended that the College introduce stress reduction programs as early as possible to undergraduate students. The inclusion of a lesson on stress reduction and resources at Harvard during orientation week would be highly beneficial in the long-term. Additionally, to ensure that students continue to utilize stress reduction resources throughout their time as undergraduates, reinforcement of such methods and resources by proctors and advisers would be beneficial.

#### 4) Declare Harvard Yard smoke-free in 2012

Harvard Yard is the center of activity for undergraduate students. A move to make the Yard smoke-free would be symbolic of a greater movement toward making the University more health conscience in its policies toward its students, staff, and visitors. The Yard is the place where freshmen are welcomed, and a movement toward a smoke-free yard would largely influence newcomers to the University to be aware of their own smoking habits. We additionally recommend that the university compliments this strategy with an active policy to publicize the smoke free policy in a positive way. Communicating a “Quit Positive” stance is more favorable than negative smoking stance, especially if the signage is coupled with phone numbers for a Quitline or for Harvard University Health Services so one may inquire about cessation offerings.

#### Significance and Urgency

Harvard University finds itself in a paradoxical situation. The university is a leading research institution that has published several research studies proving that smoking kills, yet is greatly lagging when it comes to its smoking policies. Its policies are archaic and are falling behind several institutions. Not only have many universities in the country surpassed our university in smoking policy, but so have several other institutions within the Ivy League. The University of Florida, a school of 52,000 students, has gone smoke free. Yale, not yet smoke-free, is making this issue a priority, as Dean of Yale College Mary Miller is quoted as saying in a January 2011 Yale Daily News article: “Our educational commitments extend beyond the classroom and to the larger health — and long-term, lifetime health — of our community.”

It is not even necessary to look to other universities. Harvard Longwood Campus is completely smoke free as of March 16th, 2009. While this move is important, the greatest actor is the college. Harvard needs to take a proactive role in something it knows is negatively affecting its own students. Currently, 1 out of every 10 students is a smoker at Harvard. Whether students are smoking due to stress, eating disorders, or any other reasons, Harvard can no longer be a willing participant in the demise of its own students. We can make a difference, but that only happens when the university decides to stop standing idly by and pursues an active role in protecting the health of its students.

#### Recommendations and Implementation

We recommend the University Provost or President appoint a committee which would comprise of key stakeholder groups at Harvard with at least one representative from the following groups: students from each of Harvard's 12 Faculties (College, Law, Medical, Dental, Public Health, Extension, Education, Divinity, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Design, Engineering, and Business), faculty, employees, the Harvard Union, the Harvard Department of Environmental Health & Safety, Alcohol and Other Drug Services, the Freshman Dean's Office, House Masters, the Bureau of Study Counsel, Harvard University Police Department, and including but not limited to the Administrative Board. This committee, titled the Harvard Tobacco-Free Initiative, would be similar to Yale's "Tobacco Free Yale Workgroup," a current investigative committee regarding a smoke-free Yale campus. Once the committee has conducted a review of current policy and discussed the feasibility of future initiatives, we recommend the authoring of a memo to be presented to University Administrators who would transform these recommendations into policy. The policy would include the following:

- 1.) Smoke-free University areas, date of smoke-free changes being enacted, enforcement and consequences/fine policy
- 2.) Cessation benefits and revised communication plan of said benefits, for both students and staff
- 3.) Recommended revisions to First-Year Orientation Week Programming and Wellness initiatives
- 4.) Public Relations and communication regarding smoke-free policy, including signage

Once these recommendations are adopted, we recommend the decisions be announced immediately through the Harvard Gazette, the Harvard Crimson, and other media outlets. The announcement of smoke-free Harvard policies and date said policies will be taken into effect (recommendation: two months from date of announcement, in order to allow smokers ample time to quit) should be accompanied by ample information regarding the University resources to assist in quitting. Additionally, training of HUPD Officers and other University Officers who are entrusted to enforce University policy (Proctors and Tutors, for example) will need to be conducted well before the initiative takes effect. Once the policy has taken effect, we recommend revising the training of the incoming Harvard Class of 2016 to include a component regarding the effects, consequences, and cessation strategies of tobacco use, as well as encouraging one's peers to quit smoking by being well-versed in existing University resources. With that, we recommend revising the training Drug and Alcohol Peer Advisers to be even more knowledgeable and proactive about tobacco cessation. Furthermore, the Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Services may consider revising their office name to the Office of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Services, to be a more visible resource to students interested in information or assistance regarding tobacco use.

This model of being peer-to-peer "quit positive" will be effective because it is enforced on multiple social and psychological levels: from University endorsement to additional resources and education to peer vigilance, a smoke-free Harvard can be achieved and sustained. It will require a University-wide effort that will be well worth the reward in not only improved health and wellness of our community, but also in being a leader in encouraging long, healthy, smoke-free lives.

## Conclusion

By offering expanded tobacco cessation and stress reduction programs, Harvard can reduce and prevent the use of tobacco among students. With enforcement and enhanced support for smoking cessation programs, Harvard students will benefit from lower rates of upper-respiratory disease and other health-related problems, and better access to crucial stress-reduction activities and programs.