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Attitudes and Practices about Tobacco Smoking at a Jesuit University: *Cura personalis* or Individual Rights?

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined opinions about tobacco use on campus from the perspectives of students and faculty on a Jesuit university, Regis University, in Denver, Colorado.

Participants: Students, Faculty and Staff of Regis University were invited to participate in a survey during the fall of 2014.

Method: An exploratory descriptive survey methodology using Chi-square statistics for bivariate comparisons and qualitative content analyses were utilized for this study.

Results: The survey had a 27% response rate. Undergraduates comprised 56% of the sample, with 27% graduate students, and 17% faculty/staff. Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported that the presence of second hand smoke (SHS) on campus bothered them as did 83% of not current smokers. Nineteen percent of current smokers reported that walking through smoke is disagreeable. Comments from respondents revealed support for as well as against a smoking ban on campus.

Conclusions: The majority of respondents support a complete ban on tobacco smoking on campus, and compared to a 2009 survey of Regis University faculty, staff, and student, support for a complete ban on smoking on campus has increased, while the rate of current daily smoking has decreased on campus. However, there is clearly tension between the concept of *cura personalis* and the belief in freedom and individual rights among the respondents on this campus.

The deleterious effects of tobacco on health are well established. It is also well known that the vast majority of people who smoke, or use tobacco in any form, begin their use before the age 21.

According to the 2012 Surgeon General's Report, very few people start smoking after age 25.¹

Nearly 9 out of 10 adult smokers started by age 18, and 99% started by age 26.² In addition, second hand tobacco smoke (SHS) has been shown to be carcinogenic in numerous studies.³

This has served as the impetus for laws, worldwide, requiring restaurants, bars, schools including colleges and universities, housing and a wide variety of public spaces to be tobacco free.

In places where these laws have been passed, a reduction in the use of tobacco and in smoking-related illness such as heart attack, has been observed.⁴

This study conducted at Regis University, a Jesuit university in Denver, Colorado, followed up the results of the 2009 survey to reassess student, faculty, and staff opinions about tobacco use on campus. The authors hypothesized that smoking rates have decreased, and support for restrictions has increased since the 2009 study. Results reveal students divided on individual rights versus the traditional values of this Jesuit university. The

current study results, the focus of this article, stand alone and reveal a continued theme of tension between a smoking ban, current smoking practices, and *cura personalis*.

Background

Tobacco smoking on college campuses

Peer pressure is exceptionally powerful for young people.⁵ Attending college is the first time, for most young people, that they are living away from home and therefore away from parental oversight. In recognition of these factors, the American College Health Association (ACHA) has adopted a no tobacco use policy for all colleges and universities.⁶ This policy states that ACHA “...encourages colleges and universities to be diligent in their efforts to achieve a 100% indoor and outdoor campus-wide tobacco free environment.”⁷ The American Cancer Society has a similar policy regarding the importance of creating and maintaining tobacco free campuses.⁸ The American Nonsmokers Rights Foundation (2014) reports that there are now 1,514 campuses that are 100% smoke free, and 317 that also prohibit the use of e-cigarettes.⁹

New research into the effect of nicotine on the developing brain supports efforts to ban smoking on college campuses. The brain continues to develop well into one’s 20s,¹⁰ and studies have shown that adolescents, even those in later adolescence, are more vulnerable to the long term neurological effects of smoking tobacco, as well as tobacco addiction.¹¹ In fact, nearly 90% of smokers in the United States began smoking prior to the age of 21.¹² Previously, workplace smoking bans have resulted in decreases in smoking rates for the employees,¹³ suggesting that complete smoking bans on college campuses may both decrease the rate of initiation of smoking by the age group most vulnerable to its effects, and also increase quit rates among those who have already begun to smoke.

Currently, Regis University does not allow smoking in any university-owned residential facilities or in the public parts of the campus.¹⁴ In the 2009 survey conducted on the Regis University campus, respondents reported that designated smoking areas where students congregate and smoke existed and were visible.

Borders, et al.¹⁵ found that schools with designated smoking areas had a higher prevalence of smoking, and that students on campuses with smoking prevention education programs were less likely to smoke than students at schools with no program. Shields showed that smoking bans influenced smoking prevalence adding further weight to the decision by colleges, universities and places of employment to ban tobacco.¹⁶

One concern the university administration might have is that if tobacco were not permitted anywhere on campus, students would simply go off-campus to smoke. While this may be true, studies of offices that institute tobacco free workplaces have found that employees smoke less, and many are motivated to stop altogether.¹⁷ It seems reasonable to assume that the same would be true for university campuses. In fact, Seo, et al. found that in a comparison of two large universities, one that implemented a smoke-free policy and one that did not, the one with the smoke-free policy had positive changes in the students’ smoking behavior, perceptions of peer tobacco use and smoking norms.¹⁸

Values

Jesuit values, as cited on the Regis University website, are the core Ignatian values guiding its educational mission. They include the *magis*, contemplatives in action, unity of mind and heart, *cura personalis*, finding God in all things, and men and women for others. Jesuit core values are based on the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order of priests and Society of Jesus. These Ignatian, Jesuit values are the core tenets of the Regis mission of values-centered education. To promote health of not only the body, but mind and spirit, particularly, *cura personalis* is central to tobacco cessation efforts. *Cura personalis* implies a dedication to promoting human dignity and care for the mind, body and spirit of the person.¹⁹ It might be argued that this basic Jesuit value would naturally encompass care of the whole person, including doing all that is possible to promote good health and preventing any and all activities that might cause damage to the body and mind. These six Ignatian values are foundational to Jesuit education and support the mission of a “pursuit of inner freedom to make intelligent choices, commitment to service, a provision of values-centered education, and nurturing of the

'life of the mind' searching for truth".²⁰ A brief review of these values is indicated.

Magis. Simply stated, *magis* means *more*.²¹ It is an aspiring to the fullest realization in human potential of heart, mind, body, and spirit.²²

Contemplatives in action. This value calls a person to a compassionate commitment towards others, being thoughtful before acting towards others.²³

Unity of mind and heart. This kind of unity of heart and mind entails a heart free from inner obstacles of prejudices and narrow perceptions and challenges societal and psychological distortions, urges transformation of self-absorbed thinking, and enables active solidarity with those most in need.²⁴

Cura personalis. A central focus of curriculum in Jesuit education is *cura personalis* -- the personal care of the whole person while respecting individual human dignity. Faculty members are concerned with the development of students' potential as persons of self-worth and social responsibility.²⁵

Finding God in all things. At the core of Ignatian spirituality is the experiential ideal of finding God in all things -- every situation, relationship, and in all places of creation.²⁶

Men and women for and with others. This value encourages that no decision should be made without first considering how it will affect the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized in our society. This value ensures a "faith that does justice" and related learning on this value is through "contact" rather than "concepts" presented in class.²⁷

Core values underpinning the mission of Jesuit colleges and universities compel faculty and students to engage in self-reflective growth that encourages depth of thought and imagination in their personal and professional roles. With this foundation of core Jesuit values, the Regis University question of "How ought I to live?" is important to consider in light of this study of students' knowledge, attitudes and practices about the use of tobacco on a Jesuit campus. Attention

must be paid to whether faculty and staff are assisting students to reach the *magis* for their future productive lives. *Cura personalis* goes beyond mere academics and has bearing on current campus smoking policies. Maximizing the welfare of all, social responsibility requires that the current approach to smoking on campus be revisited.

In the unpublished 2009 survey of students at Regis University, it was found that a majority, over 75%, of students attending the school at that time, did not smoke. In 2009, about 43% of students reported that the presence of SHS on campus bothered them, and 35.2% of students supported a complete ban on smoking on campus. Of those students that smoked, most did so outside the Adult Learning Center building although there were many other locations where smoking occurred. The study also indicated that a large majority of students wanted to quit, and that they would take advantage of a smoking cessation program if one were offered on campus.

Methods

An exploratory descriptive survey methodology using Chi-square statistics for bivariate comparisons and qualitative content analyses were utilized for this study. In September 2014, the authors emailed a link for the survey to all students, faculty, and staff at Regis University in Denver, Colorado through the Office of Student Services. Two reminders were sent over the next four weeks. The authors developed the survey tool using questions from the 2009 survey, and added several questions drawn from other national surveys of tobacco attitudes and use. Questions included personal tobacco use history, attitudes about exposure on campus, and attitudes about restricting smoking on campus. The authors gathered information about gender and living status (on or off campus), and assessed the respondents' affiliation (undergraduate, graduate, or faculty/staff). The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey, and was downloaded into a database for analysis.

Students from the traditional undergraduate and graduate programs were combined with those from the nursing and business school programs to examine differences by undergraduate or graduate

student status. Respondents were defined as current smokers if they reported “Smoking >100 cigarettes in their lifetime” and “Smoking every day”, nondaily smokers if they reported smoking > 100 cigarettes in their lifetime but not smoking every day, and nonsmokers if they reported smoking fewer than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime. Opinion questions included 5 response categories (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). These were collapsed into agree, neutral, or disagree for analysis. We also allowed respondents to make comments, and examined those for themes. We used chi-square statistics for bivariate comparisons; SAS was used for the analyses. The survey was approved by the Regis University Institutional Review Board and participant consent was assumed with survey submission.

Results

The authors received 1157 responses, out of an estimated 460 faculty and 3840 students who could have received the email (27%). Overall, undergrads comprised 56% of the sample, with 27% graduate students, and 17% faculty/staff (Table 1). The respondents were 70% female, and 76% lived off campus. Only 4% of the respondents reported daily smoking; 68% of the smokers were undergraduates, and 53% were male.

The majority (88%) of respondents reported that the presence of SHS on campus bothered them; this was much more common among not current smokers (91%) than current daily smokers (32%; $p < .0001$: Table 2). Likewise, 83% of not current smokers, compared to 19% of current smokers agreed that walking through smoke is disagreeable ($p < .0001$). Most respondents, regardless of smoking status, reported support for limited smoking areas on campus (70% vs. 62%; $p = .20$). While there were no current smokers who supported a complete smoking ban on campus, 54% of not current smokers did ($p < .0001$), and 21% would assist in passing such a policy. There were also significant differences by affiliation (see Table 3). Graduate students and faculty were more likely than undergraduates to report being bothered by smoke on campus (92% vs. 86; $p < .01$), and that walking through smoke is disagreeable (86% of graduate students and 84% of faculty, compared to 76% of undergraduates; $p < .01$). Graduate students were the most likely to support both a partial ban (71%) and a total ban (61%) on smoking on campus; 70% of undergraduates supported a partial ban, and 46% supported a complete ban, while 61% of faculty supported a partial ban, and 56% supported a complete ban ($p < .01$). Of the 27% who responded, there were a total of 308 comments submitted. Combining undergraduate and

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Variables	Overall (n=1157)	Current daily smoker (n=47)	Not current daily smoker (n=1110)	P-value*
<i>Affiliation</i>				
Undergraduate	646(55.8)	32(68.1)	614(55.3)	0.0504 (P)
Graduate Student	315(27.2)	13(27.7)	302(27.2)	
Faculty/staff	196(16.9)	2(4.3)	194(17.5)	
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	804(69.5)	22(46.8)	782(70.5)	0.0006 (P)
Male	353(30.5)	25(53.2)	328(29.5)	
<i>Living Status</i>				
Off	884(76.4)	39(83.0)	845(76.1)	0.2785 (P)
On	273(23.6)	8(17.0)	265(23.9)	

Table 2: Participant Responses by Smoking Status

Variables	Overall (n=1157)	Current daily smoker (n=47)	Not current daily smoker (n=1110)	P-value*
<i>Does the presence of SHS on campus bother you?</i>				
No	134(11.6)	32(68.1)	102(9.2)	<.0001 (P)
Yes	1,023(88.4)	15(31.9)	1,008(90.8)	
<i>Walking through cigarette smoke is disagreeable</i>				
Disagree	126(10.9)	28(59.6)	98(8.8)	<.0001 (P)
Neutral	102(8.8)	10(21.3)	92(8.3)	
Agree	929(80.3)	9(19.1)	920(82.9)	
<i>I support limited smoking areas</i>				
Disagree	228(19.7)	14(29.8)	214(19.3)	0.1994 (P)
Neutral	129(11.1)	4(8.5)	125(11.3)	
Agree	800(69.1)	29(61.7)	771(69.5)	
<i>I support a total smoking ban on campus</i>				
Disagree	384(33.2)	43(91.5)	341(30.7)	<.0001 (P)
Neutral	169(14.6)	4(8.5)	165(14.9)	
Agree	604(52.2)	0(0.0)	604(54.4)	
<i>Would you assist in passing such a policy?</i>				
No	927(80.1)	47(100.0)	880(79.3)	0.0005 (P)
Yes	230(19.9)	0(0.0)	230(20.7)	

graduate students, there were 257 student comments. Of those, 113 were negative or disagreed with having a smoking ban on campus. Most who disagreed discussed the infringement on freedoms: “A complete ban might be a bad decision. While many would benefit, it wouldn't be agreeable for a few” and “I believe people who smoke have a right to do it and expect Regis to respect their right.”

A total of 117 comments agreed and were in favor of a total ban. Supportive comments include “I find it very important that such a health oriented school take a stand against smoking on campus”, and “I hate walking through smoke to get to class. Butts are everywhere and the campus smells like smoke.” Many students

who supported the ban discussed the health effects: “I have asthma and second hand smoke bothers me and makes it difficult to breathe at times”, and “I can feel smoke go straight into my lungs from walking by a smoker. I really dislike it.” Interestingly, there were a few comments that highlighted the conflict between *cura personalis* and personal freedom: “I know smoking is bad and I have lung issues from second hand smoke. But people do have freedoms,” and “It's not my place to tell people they can't smoke; however, I don't like exposure to secondhand smoke.” There were also comments that highlighted the smoking culture at Regis: “Since a lot of people smoke, I feel like I have to smoke to be liked and don't like feeling like that.”, and “I have parents that smoke so it doesn't really bother me, but

it seems more like the cool thing here.” We did have one comment regarding electronic cigarettes: “I know people who use e-cigs in the dorms and it really bothers me as an asthmatic. I support a ban.”

A final category of comments addressed the difficulties of quitting smoking: *“I don't agree with smoking but think that services should be provided for those who do smoke.”*, and *“People should be able to do what they like but there should be more prominent resources to help quit.”*, and finally: *“I wish I didn't smoke.”*

Discussion

The majority of students, faculty, and staff at Regis University support a complete ban on tobacco smoking on campus. Since the 2009 survey, support for a complete ban on smoking on campus has increased, while the rate of current daily smoking has decreased. These trends are positive signs. However there is clearly a tension between the concept of *cura personalis* and the belief in freedom and individual rights among the

Table 3: Participant Responses by Level of Education and Faculty/Staff Status

Variables	Overall (n=1165)	Undergraduate (n=650)	Graduate (n=316)	Faculty/Staff (n=199)	P-value*
<i>Does the presence of SHS on campus bother you?</i>					
No	136(11.7)	94(14.5)	25(7.9)	17(8.5)	0.0038 (P)
Yes	1,029(88.3)	556(85.5)	291(92.1)	182(91.5)	
<i>Walking through cigarette smoke is disagreeable</i>					
Disagree	127(10.9)	87(13.4)	22(7.0)	18(9.0)	0.0053 (P)
Neutral	104(8.9)	67(10.3)	23(7.3)	14(7.0)	
Agree	934(80.2)	496(76.3)	271(85.8)	167(83.9)	
<i>I support limited smoking areas</i>					
Disagree	230(19.7)	117(18.0)	54(17.1)	59(29.6)	0.0045 (P)
Neutral	130(11.2)	75(11.5)	37(11.7)	18(9.0)	
Agree	805(69.1)	458(70.5)	225(71.2)	122(61.3)	
<i>I support a total smoking ban on campus</i>					
Disagree	389(33.4)	244(37.5)	80(25.3)	65(32.7)	0.0001 (P)
Neutral	171(14.7)	106(16.3)	43(13.6)	22(11.1)	
Agree	605(51.9)	300(46.2)	193(61.1)	112(56.3)	
<i>Would you assist in passing such a policy?</i>					
No	933(80.1)	529(81.4)	246(77.8)	158(79.4)	0.4192 (P)
Yes	232(19.9)	121(18.6)	70(22.2)	41(20.6)	

students and faculty. The “right to smoke” was a common theme in the anti-ban comments; this argument has frequently been used by both individuals who are opposed to any restrictions on smoking, and by the tobacco companies. However, smokers are not a “protected class”, and bans on smoking in a variety of settings, including workplaces, and in public housing have been upheld in the United States courts.²⁸

On the other hand, *cura personalis* requires a respect for the body and mind. Additionally, the Jesuit value of *magis* aspires to the fullest realization in human potential of heart, mind, body, and spirit.²⁹ Since many of the students on campus are still at the age where their brain development is incomplete, helping them make the right decision about using tobacco would be supported by the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and *magis*.

The concern for personal freedom and liberty also extends to those students and faculty who do not wish to have exposure to tobacco smoke. The vast majority of respondents found the secondhand smoke exposure on campus to be disagreeable, and many commented on how distressing it was for them to be exposed to secondhand smoke, even from the limited areas currently designated for smoking. Of more concern were the students with medical issues, such as asthma, who reported being negatively impacted by second hand smoke, and a pregnant student who was concerned about the health of her unborn child. Freedom to smoke must be balanced with freedom to breathe.

In this survey, the graduate students and faculty were stronger supporters of a complete ban than the undergraduates. It was also interesting that a few respondents commented on Regis’s “smoking culture.” Adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to tobacco – not only to its physiologic effect on the brain, but also to the cultural norming of tobacco-related behaviors. Teens who view more smoking in the movies, for instance, are more likely to take up smoking in the future,³⁰ and teens who have friends who smoke are more likely to smoke themselves.³¹ Further limiting access to tobacco during these formative years may prevent some young adults from

becoming adult smokers, and thus greatly improve their future health.

In an institution where smoking is restricted, it is crucial in respect for Jesuit values, in particular *cura personalis*, and personal liberty, to provide adequate and evidence-based smoking cessation resources for students, faculty, and staff. Medications, such as nicotine replacement therapy, and varenicline, as well as counseling can improve quit rates significantly.³²

Limitations

Initially the survey did not allow faculty to identify themselves; this was corrected after one week, but there may have been faculty who were frustrated and did not complete the survey even when it was sent out again. Our response rate was only 27%, and thus we may have had response bias, most likely towards having respondents who feel more strongly in either direction about the issue of smoking on campus. This is only one campus, and the results may not be generalizable to other institutions.

Conclusion

Whether approached from Jesuit values or personal freedoms, the message is the same; a campus ban on smoking is supported by the respondents. Academic settings are stimulating environments for philosophical debates on issues and values of note in an effort to encourage personal growth. However, the identified benefits to a smoking ban are multi-dimensional: personal, social, and medical. Allowing smoking on campus not only violates the tenets of *cura personalis*, it puts students at risk, and infringes on the personal freedoms of students and faculty who choose to not to smoke. Students, faculty, and staff have shared their perspectives on the use of tobacco on campus and a response is required. The risks to no smoking ban on campus are numerous and do not encourage personal growth. HJE

Notes

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