

Protest of Tobacco-free Policies on College Campuses: a Historical Analysis

By: Christopher M. Seitz, [Robert W. Strack](#)

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Abstract:

Purpose: Although the threat of protest may be a barrier toward implementing a tobacco policy on college campuses in the USA, the prevalence and severity of such opposition has yet to be investigated. The purpose of this paper was to determine how often campus communities protest against smoke-free policies and rate the disruptiveness of the protests.

Design/methodology/approach: Researchers located and analyzed news reports regarding 21 protests over newly implemented or proposed policies on college campuses in the USA.

Findings: Protests over college campus smoking policies are typically non-disruptive and consist of a small group of students who publicly smoke tobacco products and attempt to gain support of fellow students.

Practical implications: Those advocating for campus tobacco policies should be aware that the campus community may protest, but that a heightened concern of a protest's effect on the campus community may be unfounded.

Originality/value: To authors' knowledge, research studies regarding opposition to anti-tobacco policies cannot be found in the literature. This paper may be used as a practical resource by advocates to educate campus administrators about the low turnout and lack of severity of any possible protest to a new campus tobacco policy.

Keywords: University | Policy | College | Smoking | Campus | Protest

Article:

Introduction

The American College Health Association (ACHA) recommends that colleges in the USA implement indoor and outdoor tobacco-free policies in order to protect students, faculty, and staff from the first-hand and second-hand harms of tobacco (American College Health Association, 2012). Fortunately, the number of campuses implementing such policies is rapidly increasing. For instance, as of January 2, 2014, there were 811 colleges across the country that instituted policies to make their campuses free of tobacco (American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2014). In the state of North Carolina alone, intense advocacy efforts from 2006 to 2009 resulted in tobacco-free policies implemented at 33 colleges (Lee *et al.*, 2010).

Regardless of policy recommendations made by health experts, a large number of colleges in the USA have not implemented comprehensive tobacco policies. Although the number of tobacco-free colleges is an indication of progress, simple math suggests that there are still thousands of colleges in the USA that implement only partial tobacco regulations or, worse, none at all. Currently, 371 colleges in the USA are only smoke-free (American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2014), meaning there is no restriction on using smokeless tobacco products. Moreover, it is unknown what level of tobacco policies the remaining 3,313 colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014) currently implement, which likely vary in stringency in terms of both indoor and outdoor restrictions of different tobacco products (Halperin and Rigotti, 2003).

There is an obvious need for energetic students, faculty, and staff to continue advocating for more thorough tobacco policies; however, research suggests that there is a wide range of student opinions regarding campus tobacco policies. The great majority of college students support restrictions toward using tobacco products on campus. For instance, Rigotti *et al.* (2003) surveyed over 10,000 randomly sampled students from a nationally representative sample of colleges and found that a large majority of students supported a wide range of tobacco control policies for college campuses. This finding was reflected in other large-scale college studies (Seo *et al.*, 2011; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). However, when comparing tobacco users to non-users, research suggests that students who use tobacco tend to be less supportive of restrictive policies, especially when those policies prohibit tobacco use both indoors and outdoors (Berg *et al.*, 2011; Loukas *et al.*, 2006; Thompson *et al.*, 2006).

One barrier in advocating for tobacco policies can be the opposition of users who have negative opinions of restrictive campus policies on tobacco use (Harbison and Whitman, 2008; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). Administration unease about potential push-back regarding a potential tobacco policy is reasonable, as debate and disagreement have been time-honored traditions on college campuses. However, the negative opinion of tobacco users toward campus policies does not necessarily translate into oppositional behavior.

Beyond opinion studies, the literature is virtually non-existent regarding actual negative campus reactions, such as protests, toward tobacco-free policies. Since concern about protest may be a challenge in advocating for such policies (Harbison and Whitman, 2008;Thompson *et al.*, 2006), there is a need to understand how campus communities react to tobacco policies in order to better inform health professionals who engage in advocacy efforts. As such, the following historical analysis attempts to answer the following research questions: what ecological factors influenced protests against college campus tobacco policies? How have college communities protested against campus tobacco policies? How disruptive are such protests?

Methods

Theoretical framework

The historical analysis is framed by the Theory of Triadic Influence (TTI). Flay, Snyder, and Petraitis developed the TTI in response to the large number of health-related theories that surfaced over the past few decades. The authors believed that several of these theories shared similar constructs and could be integrated into an ecologically based theory that describes levels of causation and streams of influence (Flay and Petraitis, 1994; Flay *et al.*, 2009). The TTI states that there are three levels (variables that predict behavior) of causation: ultimate, distal, and proximal. Ultimate-level causes are broad-sweeping and well-established causes that people typically do not have any personal control over (e.g. policies, cultural environments, religions, mass media). Distal level causes are variables over which people have some level of control and are connected between one's self and their cultural environment (e.g. values, beliefs). Proximal level causes are variables mostly within the control of a person, as compared to ultimate level variables (e.g. decisions, intentions).

Similar to levels of causation, the TTI argues that there are three streams of influence: cultural-environmental, social, and personal. The cultural-environmental stream of influence includes variables related to one's culture and environment (e.g. policies, religions, mass media outlets). The social stream of influence includes social relationships (e.g. parents, teachers, peers) and a person's perception of their social world (e.g. social normative beliefs). Finally, personal influences include biological aspects of a person (e.g. testosterone levels), personality traits (e.g. extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) and one's perception of oneself (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy) (Flay and Petraitis, 1994; Flay *et al.*, 2009).

For this study, historical descriptions of campus protests over tobacco policy were analyzed within the TTI's three streams of influence. The authors did not frame the study from the three levels of causation, since the historical analysis would not allow for testing causality, but rather for understanding different influences on student protest behavior.

Historical documents

During the Fall of 2013, the authors gathered information regarding campus protests toward smoke-free policies through historical documents. These documents included news outlets in the form of campus newspapers, community newspapers, and local television reports, in both print and online formats. Other possible forms of news outlets, such as blogs and social media outlets, were not included in the study because the authors felt that even though traditional news reports may be biased at times, those who create the reports operate under a level of journalistic accountability. On the other hand, those who publish news through blogs and social media outlets do not have the same level of accountability in broadcasting objective accounts of events and happenings, allowing for considerable bias and uncertainty in reporting factual accounts.

News articles were accessed by using a variety of search engines and search terms. Community newspaper articles were located through LexusNexus Academic. Campus newspapers and local television reports were accessed through basic internet search engines, since both are not available through LexusNexus Academic. It is important to note that most campus newspapers are available online and that using a basic internet search, though not without limitations, is able to retrieve campus news reports. News articles were located by using the following search terms which were used in various combinations: Smoking, smoke, tobacco, ban, policy, college, university, campus, student, faculty, staff, react, reaction, and protest. The first 100 web sites resulting from each combination of search terms were skimmed to determine inclusion or exclusion in the study.

News articles resulting from the search were initially analyzed by the lead author for inclusion and exclusion factors. Articles were included in the study if the article described any kind of protest behavior toward a campus tobacco policy. Articles were included if a protest was toward either proposed or implemented tobacco policies. In addition, news articles were included in the study regardless of the type of tobacco policy that was proposed or implemented (e.g. smoke-free, tobacco-free, indoor, outdoor). Articles were excluded from the study if the article did not describe any type of protest behavior toward campus tobacco policies.

Coding

In terms of the study's first and second research questions, the authors coded each news article's information within the framework of the TTI's streams of influence. Specifically, information from each news article regarding cultural-environmental, social, and personal streams of influence was coded for each protest. The authors coded article information as "cultural-environmental" if it included: the college in which the protest took place, the semester and year of the protest, the policy that was being proposed or implemented, the leader(s)/group(s) who were spearheading the policy, and sources of funding to implement the policy. Also, if not included in articles, the authors would additionally search each college's web site to locate the enrollment of students at the time of the protest in order to provide additional data regarding the cultural-environmental context of the protests. Article information was coded as "social" influences if it described: the social group(s) who planned the protest (e.g. group number, group

name), the protest activities of the group(s), the social group(s) who planned counter-demonstrations, and the counter-demonstration activities. Information in the news articles was coded as “personal” stream of influences when the information in news articles included quotes from protesters and counter-demonstrators that indicated personal influence: biological aspects (e.g. nicotine addiction), personality traits (e.g. extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), and a person's perception of themselves (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy).

In terms of the study's third research question, the authors also created a coding scheme to gauge the protests' level of severity in terms of threat posed toward the campus community. The codes were binary, allowing the authors to measure protest activity as being either disruptive or non-disruptive. Protests were coded as disruptive when protesters elicited a response from campus police or defaced campus property. On the other hand, protests were coded as non-disruptive when protesters voiced their opinions in a respectful manner that did not provoke the actions of police or did not cause damage to the campus environment.

Results

Cultural-environmental stream of influence

The authors retrieved a total of 22 articles that described 21 campus protests within different cultural-environmental streams of influence, including differences in time, location, size, and policy. The protests took place from 1992 to 2013; however, it should be noted that almost all of the protests happened since 2007. Protests were held on campuses that were located in each region of the USA and on campuses that varied in enrollment, ranging from 3,674 to 73,373. In terms of tobacco policy, 12 protests were against newly implemented policies and nine were against policies that had only been proposed by administrators, students, or state legislators. Protests were also held against a variety of tobacco policies: entire smoke-free campuses, smoke-free building perimeters, smoke-free park areas, increased penalties for violating an existing policy, tobacco-free campuses with the exception of designated areas for tobacco use, and entire tobacco-free campuses.

Social stream of influence

Each protest consisted of students; however, the protest at Clarion University (Schackner, 2008) also included an employee union and the protest at the University of Kentucky (Antonetti, 2011) also included faculty, staff, and local Libertarian politicians. Only ten of the articles specified the number of people who participated in the protest, which ranged anywhere from 1 to 100 people (Table I).

Table I. Description of protests within the TTI streams of influence

| Cultural-environment | Social | Personal |
|---|---|---|
| Fall of 1992 at Brookhaven College during a newly | One student retrieved 1,000 signatures to protest the smoking | “We have reached a compromise [...] I am happy this amendment |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| implemented policy to prohibit smoking on the entire campus, with the exception of parking lots. Student enrollment of 9,000 | policy. The president of the college met with some of the protesters and compromised to allow smoking on half of the campus (Desplaces, 1992) | to the new smoking policy acknowledges that there are still a few smokers around here” – Geology major, protest leader |
| Fall of 2007 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during a newly implemented smoking policy that prohibited smoking within 100 feet of campus buildings. Student enrollment of 28,136 | Nearly a dozen students met at the center of campus to smoke and offer other students free cigarettes. Students coughed and chanted: “What do we want? Smoker’s rights!” (Matchar, 2007) | “We just basically feel smoking is our right” – English major |
| Fall of 2008 at Clarion University when the Chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education interpreted the Clean Indoor Act to include the outdoors, prohibiting smoking on state university campuses (which was later rescinded). Student enrollment of 7,111 | A group of 60 students met at the student center, marched to the library, smoked tobacco products, and were issued yellow warning cards by campus police. One week after the protest, students in favor of the ban stood at the same spot of the original protest and collected 500 signatures to show support of the policy. An employee union formed a statement of disagreement with the policy (Intelligencer Journal, 2008; Schackner, 2008) ^a | “It would have been better if there were more warning given and a chance to put in our own ideas.” – Freshman, smoker “A majority of the people do not appreciate having to deal with second-hand smoke and the dangers that come with it” – Senior, counterdemonstration leader |
| Fall of 2008 at Miami University during a newly implemented policy that prohibited smoking on campus. Student enrollment of 21,394 | A group of students known as “Hodge’s Smokers” met and walked across campus with lit cigarettes. Afterwards, students created a Facebook page and a petition to gain support against the policy (Reinbolt, 2008) | “I enjoy smoking at this time in my life, especially before or after classes and tests” – Senior, Hodge’s Smokers leader |
| Fall of 2009 at Columbia University during a proposed policy that would prohibit smoking on the entire campus. Student enrollment of 26,399 | Students held a “hookah rally” on the steps of the campus library (Karni, 2009) | “I understand that it’s not healthy, but as a stressed-out, underpaid PhD student, I want to have a damn cigarette in front of the library” – Graduate student, music major |

In terms of protest behaviors, protesters typically worked collaboratively in social groups. Most groups were organized in an informal and sociable manner; however, seven protests were organized by recognized student clubs which were politically conservative in nature. In 11 of the protests, tobacco users and non-users alike met as a unified group at a visible place on campus to smoke tobacco products (e.g. cigarettes, cigars, pipes, hookah) in order to make a public statement of their disagreement with the smoking policy (Table I, Plate 1). In eight of the protests, free tobacco products were given away by protesters in order to gain support of fellow students against the smoking policy. In 12 of the protests, a petition against the smoking policy

was created and protesters asked fellow students to sign it in order to provide evidence to administrators that students disapprove of the policy.

PICTURE IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Plate 1. Students smoking in protest near a newly erected sign at the University of Kentucky that states, “Welcome to our tobacco-free campus: A healthy place to live, work and learn”

There were three protests that sparked counter-demonstrations, in which campus and local community members who approved of a tobacco policy openly challenged the protesters. At Clarion University, students in favor of a smoking policy held a rally one week after the original protest and collected 500 signatures in support of a smoke-free campus (Schackner, 2008). Students in favor of a smoking policy at the University of Oregon organized a demonstration immediately after the original protest and held signs that supported a comprehensive smoking policy (Bains, 2010). At Indiana University Southeast, local community members attended the protest to speak with protesters regarding the value of a smoke-free policy (Meyer, 2009).

Personal stream of influence

In each news article, protesters and counter-demonstrators were interviewed regarding their opinions and behaviors toward of the tobacco policy. These quotes reflected a personal stream of influence in terms of their protest behavior (Table I). Quotes ranged in content from biological aspects, personality traits, and people's belief in themselves. In terms of biological aspects, certain quotes indicated that students acknowledged the physiological and psychological relief that tobacco use gave them, implying that they recognized addiction and pleasure from consuming nicotine. One graduate student stated, “I enjoy smoking at this time in my life, especially before or after classes and tests.” Another student said, “I understand that it's not healthy, but as a stressed-out, underpaid PhD student, I want to have a damn cigarette in front of the library.” Counter-demonstrators also reflected biological influence of their behaviors, not rooted in addiction, but toward wanting to avoid negative biological aspects of tobacco. For instance, during an interview, a counter-demonstrator said, “A majority of the people do not appreciate having to deal with second-hand smoke and the dangers that come with it.”

In terms of personality traits (e.g. extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) and peoples' perception of themselves (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy), quotes from protester and counter-demonstrators indicated a sense of extraversion and confidence in themselves, what they believe, and that they can make a difference in the tobacco policy. A student protester said, “What are they going to do? Tell me that I can't smoke? I'm not going to stand idly by while the university tells me that I can't do something because it makes them look better on a national scale.” Another student boldly said, “We don't want our current rights encroached on. They don't enforce the current policy. They can't stop us.”

Disruptive and non-disruptive protest

Of the 21 protests, the authors only considered four as being disruptive (Table I). In terms of disruptive protests, two protests included defacing college property by littering cigarette butts and by placing smoldering cigarettes in the mouth of a well-known statue located on campus. There were two protests that required the intervention of campus police, which resulted in protesters being formally warned that smoking was prohibited. In terms of non-disruptive protests, protesters acted respectfully. For instance, at Indiana University, students were so polite as to formally notify their campus administrators of their intentions to hold a protest (Meyer, 2009).

Of all the protests, only one resulted in a policy change in favor of tobacco use. In 1992, a student at Brookhaven College collected 1,000 signatures to indicate disapproval with a smoking policy. After viewing the petition, the college's president decided to change the policy by allowing smoking on half of the campus. During an interview, the president said, "This has been an education for the students in how to properly voice displeasure and to seek changes within the system" (Desplaces, 1992).

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that ecological "streams" (cultural-environmental, social, and personal) may play a role in the protest of tobacco policies. Interestingly, in terms of the cultural-environmental stream of influence, protests were organized against tobacco policies that were simply being proposed or newly implemented on small and large campuses in several regions of the USA. Moreover, protests did not take place only against the most restrictive policies, but also against policies that varied in stringency. This finding suggests that there is not a specific type of cultural-environmental stream that has consistently inspired protest.

In terms of the social stream of influence, the study's findings indicate that protest behavior against tobacco policies are usually in the form of group collaboration. Although most groups were informally developed, it is worth noting that organized student political groups had also planned protests. The social influence guided protest behaviors, such as chanting, marching, smoking as a group, and collecting signatures. It is possible that the act of protest may have strengthened the social bonds between protesters and enhanced their normative beliefs in terms of tobacco use behavior among one's peers. On the other hand, it is exciting that the social stream of influence was also related to counter-demonstrations in favor of tobacco policies. The presence of counter-demonstrations could also strengthen normative beliefs in terms of the majority of students typically being in favor of restrictions on tobacco use.

The study's findings also suggest that one's personal traits may act to influence protest behaviors. It appeared from their statements to the press that protesters tended to be extraverted and secure in their beliefs regarding "smoker's rights" and their choice to consume tobacco products. It is possible that people who were introverted supported protest behaviors without participating themselves. The TTI biological aspects in the personal stream of influence fit well with the

concept of addiction playing a role in protesting campus tobacco policies. Student quotes in the news articles reflected that a strong dependency on tobacco products may motivate tobacco users to voice their concerns against being restricted from using nicotine.

The results of this study indicate that campus opposition against smoke-free policies are few and far between and involve a relatively small number of protesters. The authors located articles describing 21 protests on college campuses. This is a relatively small number of protests considering that over 1,000 colleges in the USA have implemented smoke-free and tobacco-free policies (American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2014). However, it is important to note that protests may have possibly taken place at other colleges, but were not reported on by local or campus newspapers. If so, then it may be assumed that these protests did not elicit a large enough response to be considered newsworthy. This study's results also indicate that a small number of people participated in protests against smoke-free campus policies. The analysis shows that the number of protesters ranged from 1 to 100. Although 100 protesters may seem like a large crowd, this protest came from the University of Kentucky, which had an enrollment of over 27,000 students during the time of the protest (University of Kentucky, 2012).

In terms of study's third research question, the historical analysis found that the protests against tobacco policies were relatively peaceful. The extent of disruptive behavior included littering and police involvement. Even when protesters aroused the action of campus police, the protesters were compliant to warnings and requests to extinguish tobacco products. It is also noteworthy that protest toward smoking policies stirred the emotions of those in favor of tobacco policies. For instance, the protests at Clarion University, the University of Oregon, and Indiana University Southeast inspired student and community-led counter-demonstrations that actively contested the original protesters. By voicing their support of a smoke-free policy, these counter-demonstrators may have strengthened the campus community's perceptions about the benefits of implementing a tobacco policy.

Implications

This historical analysis has a number of practical implications for stakeholders in tobacco policies, such as health professionals, advocates, and college administrators. First, stakeholders should be prepared that members from the campus community may protest, regardless of how comprehensive the tobacco policy may be and regardless of how big or small the college is.

Second, stakeholders considering a change in tobacco policy should be aware that a major component of the TTI's social stream of influence is social normative beliefs. During the proposal or implementation phase of the policy, stakeholders may want to survey the campus and inform the community about the survey's findings through media and educational campaigns. It is likely that the survey would show a majority of people support tobacco policies. By changing social normative beliefs, negative opinion and protest behavior may be less likely.

Third, given that a portion of students on a college campus may be addicted to nicotine, and that physiological addiction within the personal stream of influence may influence behavior, stakeholders may also want to educate the campus community that nicotine replacement therapies are available as a means of tobacco use cessation. Providing alternatives to tobacco use may help users to recognize that or motivate users to attempt to stop using tobacco products entirely and not feel the need to protest new policy.

Fourth, stakeholders should be aware that it is likely that students who are politically motivated, extraverted, and convinced of the right to use tobacco may be attending their college. The authors suggest that stakeholders purposely give a formal space for these students to air their concerns over new tobacco policies. Perhaps by making an effort to listen to these students, there will not be a need for them to stage protests and create petitions.

Finally, this analysis may be used as a resource by stakeholders to educate others about the relative harmlessness and low turn-out of past campus protests toward tobacco policies. Doing so may reduce inhibitions that administrators and other stakeholders may have about a negative campus reaction toward new tobacco regulations.

Limitations

This study has limitations. The search terms used in this study may not have located all news reports of protests toward campus tobacco policies. In addition, it is possible that not all protests were reported by campus or community news outlets. Therefore, the articles used in this study may not be representative of all protests toward campus smoking policies. Also, because campus and community news reports are not peer reviewed, the articles included in this study may be subject to bias of news reporters.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that students, faculty, staff, and local community members may protest about tobacco policies that have been either implemented or proposed on college campuses. However, the small number of articles found in this study suggests that protests against campus tobacco policies are infrequent. Our study also shows that, for the most part, the protests were non-disruptive demonstrations that generated relatively small numbers of protesters. Therefore, from this historical assessment, college administrators considering the implementation of a smoke-free policy should be aware that smokers on campus may protest, but that a heightened concern of a protest's effect on the campus community or a potential policy may be unfounded.

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About the authors

Dr Christopher M. Seitz is an Assistant Professor at the Montana State University. His research interests include tobacco use prevention and photovoice methods. Dr Christopher M. Seitz is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: christopher.seitz@montana.edu

Dr Robert W. Strack is an Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His research interests include photovoice methods, teen pregnancy prevention, and tobacco use prevention.

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