

# Determining the Support for a Tobacco-Free Campus at Methodist University

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## Abstract

Many colleges and universities across the country have decided to become tobacco-free in an effort to improve the health of their students, faculty, and staff. The objective of this research project is to determine the feasibility of a making Methodist University a tobacco-free campus.

This research includes quantitative analysis of the attitudes of Methodist University students regarding the possibility of making Methodist a tobacco-free campus. Online surveys using Qualtrics analytic software collected data that was then analyzed to determine if there is support for a tobacco-free campus.

Based on the survey of 407 students, 43% are in favor of a tobacco-free campus while 57% are not. Of the students surveyed, 72 % stated that they would still attend Methodist University if it became tobacco-free while 28% would not. Data from other schools, however, suggests that there is generally strong support for tobacco-free campuses. Furthermore, tobacco-free schools enjoy financial benefits due to decreased health and property insurance costs and decreased maintenance costs.

## Introduction

Many colleges and universities across the United States have decided to become tobacco-free in an effort to improve the health of their students, faculty, and staff (Seserman, Sullivan, & Flury, 2013). Adopting a tobacco-free policy means that the use of cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars, and other tobacco products are banned on campus. Conducting a survey of students, the researchers found that Methodist University students are divided over the desirability of a tobacco ban and that a substantial minority indicate they would not enroll at a tobacco-free school. As discussed below, however, research at other institutions of higher education has found that a tobacco-free policy does not decrease college enrollment and that it brings

financial benefits in the form of decreased insurance and maintenance costs. Methodist University should consider adopting a tobacco-free policy; the researchers propose a program for introducing a ban on tobacco use at Methodist University.

The primary benefit of becoming a tobacco-free institution is the reduction of exposure to first- and second-hand smoke, which would make for a healthier campus population. Methodist University would also benefit from reduced insurance and maintenance costs, reduced risk of fire, and a cleaner environment (Seserman, Sullivan, & Flury, 2013).

Many potential disadvantages to banning tobacco have been shown to be unfounded. Perhaps the most feared negative consequence is the possibility of decreased enrollment due to students who choose not to attend a tobacco-free campus. However, a growing body of research shows that campuses that go tobacco-free do not suffer a decrease in enrollment. A study conducted among North Carolina private colleges and universities found no decrease in enrollment after tobacco-free policies were implemented (Miller et al., 2015). One factor of particular concern at Methodist University is the potential impact of tobacco-free policies on the enrollment of international students, who may be from countries where tobacco use is more commonplace.

College students deserve safe, clean air. Tobacco-free policies on campuses contribute to changing the social norm in the same way smoke-free restaurants and K-12 schools have in North Carolina. In addition, the American College Health Association recommends 100% tobacco-free buildings and grounds to support students in the development of healthy lifestyles and to protect students, faculty, and staff from the known harmful effects of secondhand smoke (Lee, Goldstein, Klein, Ranney, & Carver, 2012). Methodist University should consider setting an example for other colleges and universities throughout North Carolina by pursuing the adoption of a tobacco-free policy.

### **Effects of Tobacco**

Research carried out by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified many chronic health issues associated with the consumption of tobacco products such as cigarettes and cigars. Common health consequences include various types of cancers, lung disease, emphysema, bronchitis, and chronic airway obstructions (CDC, 2004). In addition, the leading cause of heart disease in the United States is smoking, including secondhand smoke (CDC, 1989; 1990).

Secondhand smoke can have many negative health effects on children, including severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections (lung issues), and ear infections; in extreme cases, secondhand smoke can lead to sudden infant death syndrome (CDC, 2006).

Smokeless tobacco includes various products, but the most well-known is chewable tobacco. This type of smokeless tobacco can lead to serious oral health problems, including cancer in the mouth and gums, periodontitis (inflammation of tissue), and tooth loss (CDC, 1989; 1990).

Tobacco, regardless of the form, is associated with extensive health damage that in many cases leads to death. The annual death toll related to the consumption of

tobacco products is an estimated 443,000 Americans (CDC, 2002). Aside from the grand scale of death, “tobacco use costs the U.S. \$193 billion annually,” and these costs are in direct correlation with “medical expenses and losses in productivity” (CDC, 2006).

### **Solution: Prevention**

The key to the prevention of negative health consequences is to prevent the consumption of tobacco itself. Prevention of tobacco consumption is a course of action that protects everyone’s health and well-being regardless of age or condition. According to the CDC, “Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States” (CDC, 2002). Preventing tobacco use is the primary protection that is both accessible and affordable to the American public. This course of action helps people avoid tobacco-related illnesses and possibly even death. Methodist University can play a part in helping people avoid these health problems by banning tobacco from campus grounds. Also, Methodist University would be able to save money by banning tobacco products, due to the consistent productivity and wellness of employees, uninterrupted by tobacco-related absences or illnesses.

Through a nationwide health initiative called *Healthy People 2020*, the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) of the CDC offers guidance for attaining the goal of ceasing the consumption of tobacco in the United States, thereby curing the nation of tobacco-related ailments (ODPHP, 2015). The objectives of the *Healthy People 2020* plan include the following:

- Fully funding tobacco control programs
  - Enacting comprehensive smoke-free policies
  - Controlling access to tobacco products
  - Reducing tobacco advertising and promotion
  - Implementing anti-tobacco media campaigns
  - Encouraging and assisting tobacco users to quit
- (ODPHP, 2015)

The next step is to take these objectives and organize them into three categories for optimum effectiveness. These objectives can help Methodist University reach tobacco-free goals. The first category as established by *Healthy People 2020* highlights the prevalence of tobacco use by “implementing policies to reduce tobacco use and initiation among youth and adults” (ODPHP, 2015). Methodist University can use tobacco-free policies to reduce the possibility of exposure to tobacco on campus. The second set of objectives involves changes in the health system, specifically, “adopting policies and strategies to increase access, affordability, and use of smoking cessation services and treatments” (ODPHP, 2015). Methodist University can increase the resources available to the Center for Personal Development since it already provides supportive services to students. The third, and final, group of objectives concerns changes in social and environmental structures. Methodist University can implement “policies to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke[,] restrict tobacco advertising, and reduce illegal sales to minors” (ODPHP, 2015). Between the year 2009 and the year 2010, the United States Food and Drug Administration was authorized to

“regulate the sales, advertising, and ingredient content of all tobacco products marketed in the United States” (Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, 2009). Methodist University can adopt policies that discourage the advertisement of tobacco products on campus.

Patterns of tobacco consumption differ between regions in the United States. These geographical disparities usually derive from variation among states as to “smoke-free protections, tobacco prices, and program funding for tobacco prevention” (ODPHP, 2015). The geographical location of Methodist University can provide a challenge because tobacco is a local cash crop.

### **Benefits of a Tobacco-Free Campus**

Tobacco-free policies for college campuses save maintenance costs. Maintenance workers spend much of their valuable time picking up cigarette butts and cleaning ash trays found on college campuses. Designated smoking spots do not solve the problem but simply move it; therefore, when a college bans smoking, it removes the maintenance problem (Smokefree Oregon, n.d.).

A ban on tobacco use also reduces the risk of fire on a campus. Some smokers may be careless and drop their lit cigarettes into bark, planting areas, and other places in the environment susceptible to fire hazards. If Methodist University became tobacco-free, the risk of fire and its associated costs would decline. This could lead to a reduction of fire and property insurance costs (Smokefree Oregon, n.d.).

Every year, cigarette manufacturers need to gain over 400,000 smokers in the United States in order to replace those who have died from smoking (CDC, 2002). A tobacco-free policy for Methodist University can help derail the process of tobacco initiation and addiction among students. Tobacco-free policies may be an effective method of reducing tobacco use for college students (Seserman, Sullivan, & Flury, 2013).

### **Tobacco-Free Colleges and Universities Across the United States**

In Minnesota, students at a four-year university and a technical college were asked, “What effect, if any, do you think a policy making this campus completely smoke-free would have on: student quality of life, student learning, and student enrollment?” About 31% of the students believed that the tobacco-free policy would have a positive impact on enrollment, while 41.2% stated that it would have a neutral affect (Miller et al., 2015).

At a university campus in Kentucky, attitudes toward a tobacco-free campus by faculty, staff, and students were documented, with 71% of the respondents being undergraduate students. Of the 2,914 people surveyed, 44% did not believe that a smoke-free campus would increase enrollment; however, 60% believed it would improve the quality of life of students on campus (Miller et al., 2015).

Three universities—Montana State University, Ohio State University, and the University of Rhode Island—found that student retention rates and new student application rates were not affected negatively due to smoke-free residence hall policies; in fact, the rates increased or remained approximately the same for these three universities. The study concluded that the smoke-free policies did not lead to negative consequences like resistance, costly enforcement, or loss of revenue (Miller et al., 2015).

## **Tobacco-Free Colleges and Universities in North Carolina**

All sixteen University of North Carolina campuses are smoke-free indoors, including student dormitories. Many private college and universities in the state have similar smoke-free policies. Many public and private colleges and universities have smoke-free, as well as tobacco-free, grounds or zones. All community colleges in North Carolina have the authority to ban smoking tobacco products on their grounds (Lee et al., 2012).

In North Carolina, about 25% of public and private colleges and universities are tobacco-free, and over half of community colleges are tobacco-free. Although many colleges and universities have adopted a tobacco-free campus policy, many are still reluctant due to fear that it will hurt student retention (Miller et al., 2015).

Miller et al. (2015) also conducted research to determine if there was a notable decrease in applications and enrollment for campuses in North Carolina that initiated tobacco-free policies compared with campuses that did not adopt tobacco-free policies. The researchers concluded that no significant evidence was found “to indicate fewer applications and lower enrollment at schools with policy implementation than without policy implementation” (Miller et al., 2015). On the following page, Table 1 reports the findings of Miller et al.

## **Impact on International Students**

A tobacco-free policy raises substantial concerns for the international student population compared to domestic students. International students make up an important part of universities throughout the United States. These students create diversity, bringing different cultures to the college lifestyle. These cultural differences, however, can sometimes create conflict due to different views on issues such as tobacco use. Nonetheless, although smoking tobacco may be commonplace in other cultures, there is not sufficient evidence that a tobacco-free policy will decrease international students’ interest in an enrollment at an American college or university (Lee et al., 2012).

In some other countries, smoking is seen as a “social norm” and adults have grown up smoking for their entire lives. In an opinion piece in *The Daily Trojan*, the campus newspaper of the University of Southern California (USC), student Sonali Seth makes the following argument:

As the university with the second-largest international population in the country, USC must also realize the cultural diversity of the students it houses. For many international students who smoke, the habit stems from cultural norms in a country in which smoking may carry less of a stigma. A comprehensive smoke-free policy could make it even more difficult for these students to adjust to life in Los Angeles. By imposing more of our own Western traditions and values on international students, we fail to accommodate ... students for whom smoking may be a cultural habit. (Seth, 2015)

Seth warns that, although USC would like to move forward in creating a tobacco-free campus and lifestyle, the university must research how such a ban will affect its

students. Most universities and colleges invest in sex education and alcohol awareness, and Seth recommends that just as much spending and effort be put into education about tobacco use and its negative health consequences (Seth, 2015).

**Table 1. Survey of North Carolina Colleges and Universities by Miller et al. (2015)**

<b>TABLE 3. Difference in Applications and Enrollment Between Institutions That Have Adopted Tobacco-Free Campus Policies and Those That Have Not, 2001–2010</b>			
Variable	Time range (years)	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i> after FDR adjustment
<b>Private institutions</b>			
IS enrollment	1	.39	.92
	2	.70	.92
	3	.64	.92
OS enrollment	1	.68	.92
	2	.52	.92
	3	.83	.92
Total enrollment	1	.74	.92
	2	.97	.97
	3	.80	.92
IS freshmen applications	1	.62	.92
	2	.46	.92
	3	.31	.92
OS freshmen applications	1	.52	.92
	2	.72	.92
	3	.59	.92
Total freshmen apps	1	.77	.92
	2	.87	.92
	3	.44	.92
IS transfer applications	1	.02	.55
	2	.28	.92
	3	.28	.92
OS transfer applications	1	.12	.88
	2	.08	.69
	3	.17	.92
Total transfer apps	1	.02	.55
	2	.06	.69
	3	.07	.69
<b>Community colleges</b>			
Curr fall enrollment	1	.40	.92
	2	.65	.92
	3	.85	.92
CE fall enrollment	1	.55	.92
	2	.44	.92
	3	.86	.92
Total fall enrollment	1	.46	.92
	2	.53	.92
	3	.95	.97
Curr spring enrollment	1	.28	.92
	2	.62	.92
	3	.86	.92
CE spring enrollment	1	.39	.92
	2	.30	.92
	3	.64	.92
Total spring enrollment	1	.16	.92
	2	.30	.92
	3	.88	.92

Note. FDR = false discovery rate; IS = in-state; OS = out-of-state; Curr = curricular programs; CE = continuing education programs. Because the window from schools with policy change is compared with all of the same-length time-period ranges in the study period (eg, all differences of 2-year averages) among institutions with no policy change, the *n* includes multiple time periods per comparison institution and exceeds the number of institutions. *Ns* for private policy adoption institutions have missing data and zeros for some outcome variables. Thus, the *n* for private institutions ranges between 7–9 and 121–135, 7–9 and 109–135, and 5–6 and 84–108, respectively, for policy and nonpolicy institutions in the 1-, 2-, and 3-year ranges. There were no zeros or missing data for community colleges. Thus, the *n* for community colleges is 28 and 120, 16 and 90, and 8 and 60, respectively, for policy and nonpolicy institutions in the 1-, 2-, and 3-year ranges. A *p* value of less than .05 provides evidence for the hypothesis that applications and enrollment outcomes decrease, and a *p* value of  $\geq .05$  indicates that there is not significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no difference.

Arguably, cultural norms have to be taken into account when deciding on whether a campus should change to tobacco-free. According to *The State News*, an on-campus news source for Michigan State University, “In 2013...MSU enrolled 4,283 Chinese students, 563 Korean students, and 276 Indian international students, which

are all countries that have far more permissive regulations when it comes to tobacco” (Wilbur, 2015). Siddharth Chandra, the director of the MSU Asian Studies Center, states, “I think that smoking in a lot of Asian countries is looked at very differently than how it is looked at in the U.S.... We [in the US] have regulated tobacco more firmly than a lot of countries in Asia, and so I think the prevalence of smoking is much higher in a country like China” (Wilbur, 2015). Chandra observes that the backgrounds of the international students are very different from those who were born in the United States (Wilbur, 2015). Smoking in the United States is seen as unhealthy and unattractive, whereas in other countries, such as China, it is seen as a social norm. Chandra explains that banning smoking, or even speaking negatively about it, can lead to a feeling of discomfort, exclusion, and negativity for foreign students. Chandra also states that there is “certainly a feeling like (Asian students) are judged. ... In the U.S. smoking is more stigmatized and we think more negatively [about] smoking, which isn’t really the case in Asia, and that cultural change can sometimes create a feeling of discomfort among Asian students” (Wilbur, 2015).

These international students, who have been raised to think that smoking is normal, are now being told that it is not acceptable and are beginning to feel unwelcome. A junior at MSU, Dongze Wang commented, “Most of my friends just stay with other international students, and we really only come to campus for class, but I don’t think people like us when we are smoking” (Wilbur, 2015). Another international student at MSU, David Wang, stated, “My only concern is that I would have to go off campus and somewhere far away just to smoke...I feel like it’s taking away our right...It’s only bad for the people who smoke” (Wilbur, 2015). International students at MSU and other universities throughout the U.S. feel as if they are looked down on or considered different because of their desire to smoke. They fear that, by smoking or wanting to smoke, they become unwanted or unimportant. However, as Chandra observes, “I think the university administration is very aware of the contribution our Asian students add to the culture and the intellectual life at the university.” He continues, “I think as the number of international students has grown, the university has also grown to embrace what it sees as its responsibility to ensure that Asian students are as much ... a part of our student body as anyone else from anywhere in the world.” (Wilbur, 2015).

Whether or not universities decide to go tobacco-free, they need to make the change gradually and look at what is going to affect the students both positively and negatively. International students have come from completely different backgrounds than students who have spent their entire lives in America, and are a vital part of any university’s community.

### **Student Survey**

The authors sent a survey to the students of Methodist University in order to gauge their opinions on the university’s becoming a tobacco-free campus. The survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed to the student population via the Methodist University email system. It included questions regarding the students’ demographics, use of tobacco products, and attitudes on current and potential university tobacco policies.

The survey questions are listed below:

1) What is your gender?
2) How old are you?
3) Are you an international student?
4) Do you live on campus?
5) Are you a military veteran or on active duty?
6) Do you use any tobacco products?
7) Do you agree with the 50 ft No-Smoking policy around buildings?
8) Do you think Methodist University should be a tobacco-free campus?
9) If Methodist University were a tobacco-free campus, would you still attend?
10) Which country are you from? ( <b>International Students Only</b> )
11) Did you start using tobacco products before or after attending Methodist University? ( <b>International Students Only</b> )
12) What types of tobacco do you use? Select all that apply. (Do not include e-cigs, Nicorette, patches, etc.) ( <b>Tobacco Users Only</b> )
13) How often do you use tobacco products? ( <b>Tobacco Users Only</b> )
14) How long have you been using tobacco products? ( <b>Tobacco Users Only</b> )
15) If the university provided resources to help you quit, would you use them? ( <b>Tobacco Users Only</b> )

### Survey Results

Methodist University has a student body of 2,416. Of these students, 407 answered the survey questions, approximately 17% of the student body. Of those who completed the survey, 75% were aged 17 to 25. Among total respondents, 32% said

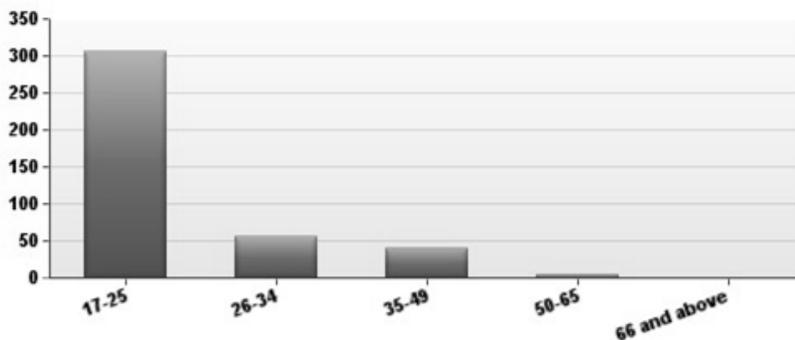
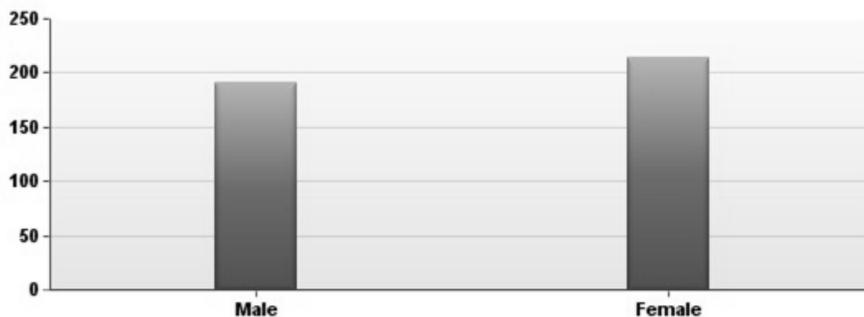


Figure 1. Age of Respondents

they use tobacco products (95% confidence interval (CI) [0.28, 0.37]). Based on the 407 responses, 43% are in favor of a tobacco-free campus (95% CI [0.38, 0.48]). The survey suggests that out of the 407 students, 72% would still attend Methodist University if it became tobacco-free, while 28% would not (95% CI [0.68, 0.77]).



**Figure 2. Responses to the question: “Do you think Methodist University should be a tobacco-free campus?”**



**Figure 3. Gender of Respondents**

There is a decisive split along gender lines regarding tobacco use and support for a tobacco-free campus. Of the respondents, 47% were male and 53% were female. Of the male respondents, 47.6% used tobacco products while only 18.6% of female respondents indicated tobacco use.

When asked whether they think Methodist University should be a tobacco-free campus, 30.9% of male respondents said that it should be (95% CI [0.24, 0.37]). Of the female respondents, 53.5% said that they think the campus should be tobacco-free (95% CI [0.47, 0.60]).

As previously mentioned, 32.3% of respondents indicated that they use some form of tobacco. Not surprisingly, only 8.4% of tobacco users thought that Methodist



**Figure 4. Responses to the question: “If Methodist University were a tobacco-free campus, would you still attend?”**

should go tobacco-free (95% CI [0.04, 0.13]), and 38.5% of tobacco users said that they would not attend Methodist if it were a tobacco-free campus (95% CI [0.30, 0.47]).

In contrast, 59.6% of the non-tobacco users support Methodist University going tobacco-free (95% CI [0.54, 0.65]). Around 88.8% of the non-tobacco users said that they would still attend if Methodist were tobacco-free (95% CI [0.85, 0.92]). The reason that 11.2% of non-tobacco users said they would not attend a tobacco-free campus is unknown.

Among the 59 international students who responded, 20.3% use tobacco products (95% CI [0.10, 0.31]). Among the international students who are tobacco users, about 9% started using tobacco after attending Methodist University (95% CI [-0.08, 0.26]).

### Study Limitations

The survey only measured the attitudes of students at Methodist University; the attitudes of faculty and staff were not evaluated. A future survey could be improved by sending the survey to Methodist University faculty and staff to determine their attitudes toward a tobacco-free campus. Further research should also be done on the attitudes of non-traditional students at Methodist University. In this context, non-traditional students are defined as those who are older than the typical college student age range of 18 to 22. They include many military members and veterans, and make up a sizeable minority population at Methodist University. It will be important to determine their attitudes toward a tobacco-free policy.

Due to the fact that the survey was voluntary, there could have been a response bias in which only those who had strong opinions on the issue responded. This bias could create a skewed perception of the attitudes of the students at Methodist University.

### Recommendations for Methodist University

Methodist University is committed to providing a healthy environment for students, staff, and faculty. Tobacco use is associated with many health risks for the users as well

as those exposed to secondhand smoke. As a leader, Methodist University can set an example for other colleges and universities statewide by banning the use of tobacco products on campus.

However, based on the results of the survey, student support for the policy is limited. The results indicate that a significant portion of campus tobacco users say they would not attend Methodist if it were a tobacco-free campus. Further, a small number of non-tobacco users also said they would not attend a tobacco-free campus.

These results must be weighed against the fact that many colleges that have gone tobacco-free have not seen a decrease in enrollment. However, they do suggest that Methodist University could possibly face a decrease in enrollment if it were to implement a tobacco-free policy, and care must therefore be taken to ensure that the policy can be implemented without affecting enrollment.

If the university decides to go tobacco-free, students could utilize the cessation programs on campus in order to quit the use of tobacco products. The Center for Personal Development on campus has addiction services for those who have problems with substance abuse. Health Services is another resource that can provide health education to students. In order to support students who wish to stop using tobacco, Health Services could provide prescription medication to combat nicotine addiction.

Many tobacco-free colleges and universities report that the people who violate the tobacco policies are visitors who are unaware of campus policy (Calfas, 2011). One recommendation is to add tobacco-free signs near the campus entrance in order to inform visitors of the ban on tobacco products on campus grounds. As a part of any implementation process, Methodist University should progressively inform the student body, as well as faculty and staff, of upcoming changes related to the tobacco-free policy on campus before the policy takes effect.

It is the recommendation of the authors that Methodist University should conduct further research on the issue and then move incrementally towards a tobacco-free environment. The restrictions should be phased in gradually over the next several years along with programs designed to educate the university community about tobacco-related health issues and to help users break their tobacco habit.

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