



## It's Time

By Jen Dolan

The “academy” of higher education represents institutions that embody the pursuit of knowledge. Colleges and universities symbolize a higher echelon of intelligence in our society. Would an institution that is steeped in such intelligence allow an agent on its campus that is responsible for the deaths of 1,200 people every day? Of course not. Yet, academic institutions all across our nation allow the use of tobacco products on their campuses. When used as directed, tobacco kills its user and innocent bystanders at alarming rates. Most academic institutions have eliminated smoking inside their halls of higher education, but cancer causing cigarette smoke still clouds the outside campuses and often lurks in the doorways. If we want to access pearls of academic wisdom, we oftentimes have first to pass through a cloud of toxic smoke.

For some people secondhand smoke on college campuses denies them access to the college. For those among us who have asthma or other breathing ailments, the toxic clouds of smoke that linger at the entranceways are equivalent to having no entryway at all. It is just a matter of time before someone presents a lawsuit focusing on a lack of accessibility due to cigarette smoke.

Why is such a killer allowed on our campuses? There are a number of reasons beginning with the fact that the use of tobacco products is legal. Cocaine, which is responsible for only seven deaths per day, is not allowed on campuses because it is illegal. Heroin,

responsible for nine deaths per day, is also not allowed and is also illegal. Tobacco kills 1,200 individuals per day but it's legal!

Another reason the use of tobacco products is allowed on campuses is due to administrators' concerns about enrollment rates. Some fear that if smoking is banned, students will give their money to a neighboring institution. The restaurant industry has voiced this same fear, saying that revenue would decrease if smoking bans were put in place. This, as many of us know, has not been the case. Restaurants that do not allow smoking have, in fact, noticed increased sales.

I think most college administrators are smart enough to recognize that eliminating smoking on their campuses would create more congruency between the mission of the college and its actions. The problem lies in the effort needed to make it happen. Eliminating smoking might create controversy and enforcing the new policy might not be easy. So yes, completely eliminating smoking on our campuses might be a challenge.

There is pride in taking on and achieving a lofty goal and accomplishing what one has set out to do. Just ask any college administrator, returned Peace Corps volunteer, parent or others who take pride in their work, how challenging their job is and how proud they feel of the work they have accomplished.

I invite all of us who are involved in higher education to get into a new mindset. Let's adopt a mindset of not only



helping our students work toward the acquisition of degrees but also join together to work toward creating a climate that will allow our students to live long enough and to have the quality of life that will enable them to see the fruits of all of their hard academic labor. What is the point of earning a degree if the student is going to die of cigarette smoke in a few years, or one's health is so bad the individual is out of breath after walking up a flight of stairs.

Many of us baby boomers grew up in smoke-filled environments. This was part of our norm; it was part of our culture. Times have changed. Students of today are exposed to much lower

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levels of carcinogenic tobacco toxicity than baby boomers were as youth growing up.

As times change, so should the academy. Completely eliminating smoking on campuses all across our nation is an opportunity for academic institutions to stand tall and proud in the winds of controversy that might swirl around this issue. In our hearts we know eliminating smoking is the right thing to do and we know that it's time.

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