



A Healthier Feather River College Campus



INTRODUCTION

In July 2021, Feather River College adopted a 100% smoke- and tobacco-free policy for the Plumas County campus. This successful policy effort was led by the Smoke Free High Country (SFHC) project, a division of the California Health Collaborative.

ON-CAMPUS ADVOCATES

A critical first step for SFHC was building a workgroup to help advocate for the policy on campus. Luckily, the project team quickly identified and connected with an administrator who had been assigned a similar policy effort in years prior. This relationship opened the door for SFHC to host events on campus to recruit students, faculty, and administrators to the Tobacco-Free Workgroup.

After training the workgroup on smoke- and tobacco-free policy advocacy, SFHC approached the college’s Academic Senate with the proposed policy. Members of the Senate expressed two main concerns after reviewing the policy: 1) an increased fire risk (i.e., Senate members were concerned the policy would cause people to smoke in the woods off campus); and 2) a less welcoming environment for those who use tobacco as a coping mechanism. In response to concerns about increased fire

risk, the workgroup referenced fire mitigation activities on campus and explained that cigarettes are responsible for less than 2% of the state’s wildfires. To combat concerns about making students feel unwelcome, the workgroup reassured the Senate that the policy would create opportunities to help students find healthier coping strategies and help them quit. At every opportunity, the team refocused the discussion on cessation support, as opposed to enforcing consequences for policy violations.

AN UNEXPECTED VOTE

Ultimately the Senate’s concerns were too great and they voted not to pass the policy. Although this was discouraging, the workgroup stayed engaged with the Senate hoping it would reconsider the policy in the future. Instead, the Senate advised the workgroup that the college’s Cabinet (which includes representatives from administration, the student body, and unions) could bypass the Senate vote and escalate the policy to the Board of Trustees. The workgroup followed this advice, and the Board passed the policy with unanimous support!

Although the opposition to this policy seemed impossible to overcome at first, the workgroup kept the conversation going with stakeholders. This effort, along with SFHC’s focus on the wellness of students in every step of their process, was ultimately what was needed to make Feather River College a healthier place for all.