



Bison Hill Starts Academic Year Tobacco-Free

August 9, 2010

On Aug. 1, OBU became a tobacco-free campus as a new policy approved by the university's board of trustees last spring became the standard for Bison Hill.

"This tobacco-free policy will improve health conditions for all members of our community," said OBU President David W. Whitlock.

University officials said the board of trustees ratified the tobacco policy after OBU had established a plan to provide tobacco cessation assistance for faculty, staff and students.

The policy states: "In keeping with the mission and purpose of the University, and in order to encourage a clean and healthy environment, the use of tobacco by anyone in any form, including simulated tobacco products, is expressly forbidden 24 hours a day, seven days a week on all OBU campuses in/on University buildings, grounds, vehicles, and at University-sponsored events on or off campus."

"OBU is joining a growing list of tobacco-free higher education campuses," said Amy Dunn, program director for tobacco use prevention with Shawnee's Gateway to Prevention and Recovery. "Over the last two years, in excess of 15 Oklahoma college and university campuses and career centers have enacted policies to provide a tobacco-free environment to students, faculty, staff and visitors. Many other schools are considering the change and working to develop comprehensive tobacco bans on their campuses."

"OBU has had a no-smoking policy in campus facilities for many years," said Bobby Canty, the university's dean of students. "By expanding our policy, we are providing a better campus environment. At the same time, we want to provide support for those within our community who currently use tobacco. By offering a collection of resources, we are addressing that concern in a pro-active manner."

Much of the initial work to establish assistance and communicate the policy change is funded through a grant administered by the Pottawatomie Alliance Toward Community Health (PATCH).

Through a Communities of Excellence Grant funded by the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, three OBU staff members have been trained in leading tobacco cessation courses for faculty, staff and students. Along with the course offerings, OBU is encouraging individuals to call the Oklahoma Tobacco Free Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or consider other tobacco cessation resources available online.

Dunn has worked to help the university communicate the new policy on the campus. Signage touting a tobacco-free environment will be posted around the campus before students and faculty return for the start of the fall semester in mid-August. Start-of-the-school-year meetings for OBU personnel will begin Aug. 20, and new students move into campus housing on Aug. 21.

Dunn said the need for a strong tobacco-free message cannot be overstated.

"About 33 percent of college students nationwide use tobacco or smoke, and Oklahoma is no different," she said. "Three out of four adult smokers in Oklahoma want to quit smoking, and an estimated 4,700 Oklahomans become addicted to tobacco products each year."

Colleges which embrace tobacco-free standards can help to counter-act industry marketing efforts, Dunn said.

“The tobacco industry continues to market its products to youth and is now engaged in highly aggressive efforts to addict new, ‘replacement smokers’ in Oklahoma through use of free samples, direct mail promotions and other give-aways targeting young adults,” she said.

“Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable death, killing more than 6,200 Oklahomans each year, or an average of 16 per day,” Dunn continued. “Tobacco use costs Oklahomans an estimated \$2.7 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity each year, or an average of about \$750 per Oklahoman per year. In looking at so much loss, implementing a comprehensive tobacco-free campus policy was the right thing to do for everyone.”

For more information about tobacco cessation efforts at OBU, contact Amy Riggins, OBU’s Recreation and Wellness Center director, at (405) 585-5221 or at amy.riggins@okbu.edu (mail to: amy.riggins@okbu.edu).

“Many other businesses are beginning to see tobacco-free policies as a way to create a healthier environment for everyone,” Dunn said. “Tobacco use, specifically second-hand smoke, can have a devastating effect on the health of a business.”

For more information on tobacco-free workplaces, contact Dunn at (405) 275-3391.