

Smoking out trouble: Problems and solutions to the on-campus smoking problem

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Abstract

This article investigates some of the reasons students at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University (TBGU) continue to smoke outside of designated areas and litter the campus. It also makes some suggestions to overcome the problems.

Background

Smoking and its associated litter is a problem in and around the campus at TBGU. Repeatedly, 'no smoking' and other anti-smoking literature has been placed around the campus. However, regular campus clean-ups pick up over 400 cigarette butts littered around on a weekly basis. It is clear that the literature is having no positive effect.

Three points must be borne in mind: 1/ It is illegal under Japanese law for persons under 20 to smoke, 2/ TBGU cannot impose a financial penalty on offenders and 3/ a sizable number of academic staff do not feel able (for various reasons) to reprimand offenders.

Issue Investigated

Anti-smoking campaigns are varied in their effectiveness in adolescents. La Torre et al. report that the rate of decline in smoking patterns ranges between 5% and 60% over 1 – 4 years after youths have been exposed to smoking prevention lectures (2005). These campaigns are directed at potential and already habitual smokers, while they make no comment on the effectiveness of the lectures on the attitudes of those who have no intention of smoking. Studies that examine non-smoker adolescent attitudes are equally ambivalent. King et al. contend that "Secondhand-smoke media campaigns can positively affect smokers' knowledge of the dangers

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of secondhand smoke” (2003). Halpern-Felsher and Rubinstein (2004) argue that “adolescents who smoke or intend to smoke were more likely to perceive the risks from exposure to secondhand smoke as lower than did adolescents who had never smoked or had no intentions to smoke.” It seems that there is an inconsistency between educators’ perceived target audience and those who take the lessons more seriously: Youths may learn about the dangers of passive smoking from lessons about secondhand smoke, but those who take the lesson to heart most are those who have no intention of smoking in the first place. This view is supported by Glantz and Jamieson who conclude that “the only statistically significant predictor of planning to stop smoking or having actually stopped was believing that secondhand smoke harmed nonsmokers”. Their finding that “nonsmokers were twice as likely to consider secondhand smoke dangerous than smokers” (2000) suggests that programmes designed to educate adolescents need to be devised very carefully as to the actual purpose and audience involved.

Options

At TBGU, there are a number of options that staff must consider for the academic year 2006-7*. The first relates to the purpose of anti-smoking policies. Some key questions include:

- i) Is it the desire of TBGU to reduce the smoking habit among the student population?
- ii) Does TBGU wish to eliminate the negative effect on the health of the non-smoking overall population of TBGU of nuisance (or passive) smoking and which adds to the rubbish problem in the campus?
- iii) Is TBGU worried about the legal aspect of appearing to condone the illegal activity of underage smoking?

Answers to these questions form a basis upon which principled decisions and actions may be conducted.

Let us consider each question in more depth against a framework of ethics and practicality. The first issue implies that a university is able, in terms of resources and influence, to affect the habits that are outside the university’s academic control of its student population. One may question an individual institution’s authority to affect a society-wide phenomenon. The implied proposition

*From the academic year 2007 onwards, TBGU plans to implement a university-wide ban on smoking. Should on-campus smoking continue to be an issue, other measures are required.

that a university can direct the adult smoking habits of people who would be considered adult, or virtually adult, in many other environments may seem unsupportable to many. The related issues of why, or should, a university attempt to do so must also be considered. Legally, anyone over 20 years of age may smoke. This fact prohibits a university from *carte-blanche* banning the act of smoking amongst its student population as far as smoking outside the campus boundaries is concerned. Inside the campus and in the case of TBGU, provision for smoking is currently made for smoking in designated areas. This explicitly permits the act of smoking and negates any university-wide banning of smoking either inside or outside the campus. (As of April 2007, smoking will be banned in campus, thereby allowing this issue to be reopened.) It may be said that, theoretically, TBGU has no intention of prohibiting the act of smoking amongst its student population.

The primary incentive underlying question two is unclear as it is related to location and cost, as well as to ethics, or the appearance of ethics. Smoking in non-designated areas is problematic for at least three reasons: Students flaunt disrespect for university rules; the effects of passive smoking (from the area of Kunimi station to within the campus) are felt by non-smokers, university and non-university alike; and the physical appearance of smoking students is unappealing to many non-smokers. To this, we may add that the cost of cleaning up cigarette butts must be considered in terms of both student job hours and in loss of class contact time (through the use of *Kiso Zemi* class time to tidy up cigarette butts).

This issue is complex. The first part of the problem is endosocial, that is, pertaining to issues within a contained social environment, i.e. the university. The question TBGU must ask is: To what extent does the university wish to impose its position of autonomy and authority onto its student population? Authority has at least three categorisations: i) Authority by rule enforceable by a system of punishments, ii) authority by respect enforceable by mutual need and iii) authority by reward enforceable through giving benefits to those who uphold the system. Each of these categories implies its own manner of implementation. The first sees students who act according to the rules as normal and only abhorrent behaviour is punishable. If smoking is seen to be an abhorrent behaviour, negative reinforcement of the rule is required. This must include penalising offenders. Indeed, the terminology of 'offender' is based on this view. The second sees smokers having a right and the authorities working with both smokers and non-smokers to overcome the problems faced by both. Smoking, in this view, is not seen as an abhorrent behaviour: neither is smoking in non-permitted areas. This is seen as a lack of adaptation to a need of a sub-community within the university. The third category of authority reverses the first and rewards those who do what is expected without punishing those who do not. In another view, the punishment of any offence comes from the offender not receiving any benefit.

The legal issue itself raises a number of concerns. The most immediate is that if smoking is observed in or around the university by non-TBGU people, TBGU may be subject to a legal suit. This may be taken further. If it becomes clear that TBGU staff do not actively prohibit smoking, the anti-claim that TBGU passively supports underage smoking becomes a possibility. TBGU authorities need to decide the seriousness of this threat and create measures and policies accordingly. One implication of this threat is that teachers may become empowered to act whereas before they might have been intimidated by the idea of confronting a student on a non-academic issue.

The three initial questions may be summarised as follows: Question 1 cannot be considered under the present climate, but questions 2 and 3 suggest some concrete actions. It is to these suggestions that we must turn to now.

Suggestions

In this section, a framework for selection is outlined. This framework mainly refers to the second question above and is based on the tripartite division of authority.

Authority by rule

The basic principle behind this concept is that the university is empowered to impose rules and that those rules must be followed by duty. The keyword for this section is ‘punishment’, that is, those who fail in their duty are penalised.

It is suggested that offenders (i.e. those caught smoking in non-designated areas) must show their student card. The authority to demand the card is held by the university. Once the card number is recorded, various steps become possible. A database of offenders is maintained. Numbers of offences are recorded. Here are some suggestions showing how ‘authority by rule’ may be implemented. Before doing so, the various pros and cons of each suggestion need to be discussed at a committee level.

<i>Offence Number</i>	<i>Penalty</i>
First-time offences	‘Reflection Essay / Hanseisho’ Rubbish collection duty Reading test requirement Anti-smoking lecture
Second-time offences	Letter to parents Extra cleaning duties Photograph placed on ‘Board of Offenders’

Extra academic work assignment

Third-time offences Loss of academic credit

Note.

Reading test comprising a text about the nuisance of rule breaking, the dangers of passive smoking and the danger to the person of active smoking

Authority by respect

Under this category, different groups are seen as having their own interests. In this case, smokers and non-smokers form two separate groups. They select representatives who meet to discuss common issues, problems and solutions. It is hypothesised that if interest groups work together, both groups' interests will be maintained more effectively. Smokers become the enforcers of smoking policy because they will work towards their needs.

Presently, it may be assumed that the needs and wishes of smokers are being ignored. This may be assumed because a great many smokers do not use the designated facilities. The causes for this are unknown, but may be due to the positioning of those places in relation to the uses of smokers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest solutions as those solutions should come from a focus group consisting of smokers and non-smokers. However, the following hypothetical table may be of use.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Reason for use/ non use</i>
Location 1	Designated area	too far from classes given time gap between classes
Location 2	utilised area 1	convenient for class gaps
Location 3	utilised area 2	near other frequently used facilities
Location 4	utilised area 3	on the path to the station/ bike area/ etc
Location 5	utilised area 4	undercover
Location 6	utilised area 5	free from draughts

Assuming that the given reasons are accurate, solutions to the passive smoking problem may be:

- i) increase the break between classes (unlikely)
- ii) create enclosed smoking areas near presently utilised areas
- iii) install extractor fans and rubbish bins near those areas
- iv) provide the smoking areas with a roof
- v) provide the smoking areas with an attractive wind breaker

These suggestions are hypothetical because they are based on the author's imagination. It is far better to ask the smoker group about their needs and respond to those needs directly.

Authority by reward

This does not offer any immediate suggestions for improvement.

Other suggestions

The programme reported by Dunbar (2004) offers another route to enhancing the problem of passive smoking. “Members of Phi Theta Kappa were offering free lollipops in exchange for a cigarette on Thursday as part of the Great American Smokeout. They also passed out information on the dangers of smoking.” TBGU volunteers could hand out chocolate (accompanied with a pamphlet) to smokers in return for their cigarette. The pamphlet would contain information about the dangers of passive smoking, and the action might reinforce in the minds of the smokers the degree of negative feeling that non-smokers hold towards their actions. Other ‘positive’ campaigns are possible.

Anti-smoking campaigns need to be publicised to parents in any university newsletter, such as *Kunimi dayori*. Accompanying this campaign must be photographs of students picking up cigarette butts and information about what TGBU is doing towards the problem.

The final issue is about which step TBGU needs to take to avoid legal issues of underage smoking on university premises. The ultimate action must be that of sending repeated offenders names to the police. Under no circumstance must TBGU be associated with the protection of nationwide-law breaking offenders, however this step should be reserved as a final one. Prior to this, repeated underage offenders could be breath tested or body searched as the last step. It is hoped that the publication of the possibility of these steps acts will act as a sufficient deterrent, and that such actions never need occur.

What must occur, though, is stronger action on the part of every teacher. If nothing else works, the threat of legal action against TBGU may be an adequate base upon which teachers may derive the power to reprimand offenders.

In Conclusion

This short report has highlighted some of the key issues surrounding the problem of passive smoking at TBGU. The issue is not clear cut: there are deep factors underlying the actions of both perpetrator and administrator. Both sides need to be taken under consideration, and so does the reality of education into passive smoking. It is clear that those who smoke simply do not consider their actions that offensive, serious, or harmful. They do not consider their littering actions as being noteworthy despite the evidence from Chapman in the USA who noted that cigarette “butts are easily the single most common form of litter, with one analysis showing they constitute 39% by weight of all litter” (2006). Both forceful and non-forceful methods are

possible, and both types need to be considered before fruitful actions can be taken.

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