

The UCLA Tobacco Control Program

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SYNOPSIS

Tobacco use, the most preventable cause of death in our society and a growing international epidemic, should be well understood by all students preparing to enter the field of public health. Despite its importance, however, tobacco does not always enjoy the prominence it deserves in public health education. We report here on efforts to expand the focus on tobacco in the University of California Los Angeles School of Public Health through a program supported by the Association of Schools of Public Health/American Legacy Foundation's Scholarship, Training, and Education Program for Tobacco Use Prevention funding mechanism. We describe steps to increase tobacco content in required and elective courses; offer elective courses on tobacco; implement a pre-doctoral scholarship program featuring coursework, fieldwork, and exposure to tobacco issues at national meetings; and establish a tobacco-focused workshop series. We outline program successes, structural barriers to achieving some programmatic goals, and the program's early termination.

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Tobacco use is the most preventable cause of death in our society and a growing international epidemic.¹⁻³ As such, it is a problem that should be well understood by all students as they prepare to enter the field of public health. However, despite its importance, and the growing focus on this problem in other graduate programs, such as dentistry and medicine,^{4,5} tobacco does not always enjoy the prominence it merits in public health education and training. In the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Public Health (SPH), emphasis on tobacco in the curriculum has been limited. Few students at the masters or doctoral level elect to focus on tobacco in their studies or dissertations or select this as a field for future professional work.⁶

To address this issue, a committed faculty group sought to strengthen the focus on tobacco in the school's curriculum through a multi-faceted program supported by two grants from the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH)/American Legacy Foundation's Scholarship, Training, and Education Program for Tobacco Use Prevention (STEP UP) project. Our group considered the STEP UP initiative an opportunity through which our students could deepen their understanding of the tobacco problem, consider this an exciting arena in which to work, obtain a sound foundation for further work, and, whatever their areas of interest, gain insight into the many lessons this problem has for understanding and addressing a wide range of public health issues.

PROGRAM GOALS

Our group began its curriculum-building efforts by developing a three-year school-wide plan for change, beginning in 2002–2003. In crafting our approach, we sought to work through the existing educational structure in ways that would not only enrich current curricular and extra-curricular programming, but that could, realistically, be maintained and expanded over time. Our plan included:

- Integrating tobacco-related modules into required (for departmental majors and non-majors) and elective courses in the school's five departments (Biostatistics, Community Health Sciences, Environmental Health Sciences, Epidemiology, and Health Services);
- Providing tobacco-related resources and materials for use by interested faculty;
- Strengthening and drawing attention to the school's only tobacco-focused course and introducing new elective courses in tobacco;
- Implementing a mentored scholarship program for pre-doctoral SPH students; and
- Establishing a tobacco-focused workshop to stimulate inter-disciplinary interest in tobacco campus-wide.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Expanding the tobacco focus in existing courses

Our first step in implementing the program was to meet with chairs and senior faculty to identify strategies for incorporating tobacco-related content into required and elective courses. Through these meetings it became clear that our initial plan—to create a module for inclusion in the required courses in each department—was not an acceptable approach. In some instances, faculty members declined to make changes in course content, noting that tobacco was already sufficiently included. Where faculty expressed interest in increasing the focus on tobacco, varied strategies were considered feasible or acceptable, requiring that we work individually with course instructors. Some faculty agreed to independently expand the emphasis on tobacco, in the process requesting our assistance in obtaining needed materials and information (e.g., literature references, tobacco-related data sets, etc.). In some instances, members of the program faculty and other speakers were invited to participate as guest lecturers in required introductory courses (e.g., Biostatistics, Health Services) and in elective courses such as “Women, Health and Aging: Policy Issues,” “Politics of Health Policy,” “Women and Health Care in the United States,” and “Ethical Issues in Public Health.” After a multi-year effort, we persuaded the UCLA Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library to subscribe to *Tobacco Control*, a valuable resource for students in light of this expanded tobacco curriculum. With an eye to sustaining the program in the post-funding period, we also initiated efforts to make available a catalogue of tobacco-related case studies, modules, and data sets for use by faculty members in the SPH and the David Geffen School of Medicine.

Strengthening tobacco course offerings

As part of our program we succeeded in obtaining cross listing in two departments (Health Services and Community Health Sciences) for the school's existing tobacco course, entitled “Tobacco: Prevention, Use and Public Policy” and by publicizing the course, increased its undergraduate and graduate student enrollment. The course, currently under consideration for inclusion in UCLA's recently established undergraduate Public Health minor, includes an introduction and historical

overview; discussion of tobacco use trends and patterns (prevalence, public knowledge and opinions, initiation, cessation, addiction), consequences of tobacco use (health, economic), and tobacco control strategies (prevention, cessation, harm reduction, comprehensive programs and public policy, legislation, litigation); and consideration of tobacco from an international perspective.

We also gained approval for a seminar course, "The Tobacco Epidemic and Public Policy: A Seminar" offered by program faculty, a community activist, and guest lecturers through the Department of Health Services and the Department of Community Health Sciences. The course includes an introduction to the tobacco epidemic, a detailed consideration of tobacco control strategies and priorities (anti-tobacco campaigns, communication, taxes, cessation), and a discussion of youth smoking and environmental tobacco smoke exposure. Efforts to gain administrative approval for a second course focusing on health-related lifestyle patterns were not successful due to concerns that the content would overlap other courses already offered in the school, although this did not relate to the tobacco content, specifically.

Student scholarships

In our first year, we also established a faculty-mentored scholarship program for students. Our aim was to stimulate interest in tobacco-related research and advocacy through a program that was feasible within the students' overall course of study, and which could, in time, stimulate demand for further tobacco-related programming in the school. Pre-doctoral (PhD, DrPH) students in all SPH departments were eligible to apply for this support during our first year. In our second year, with ASPH approval, we expanded eligibility to also include masters-level students (MPH, MSPH). The scholarship program was widely publicized by the program leadership, the SPH Office of the Dean, and the Office of Student Affairs. In our first year we awarded two \$12,000 scholarships. In the second year we made two \$10,000 awards and one \$4,000 award. All award decisions were made by the program faculty. Faculty volunteers served as mentors based on the students' areas of interest.

We required that our scholarship recipients complete two tobacco-related courses, including one of the two tobacco-focused courses noted above, as well as "Health Related Lifestyles: Theories and Applications in Health Psychology," a course offered through the Psychology Department (and jointly listed in the SPH), and/or a directed reading course. We also required students to attend a national meeting with a focus on

tobacco and make a brown-bag presentation describing this experience. Scholarship recipients attended the 2002 National Conference on Tobacco OR Health, tobacco-related sessions at the 2003 American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition, or the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco.

Scholarship recipients were also required to attend the tobacco-related workshop established as part of the STEP UP initiative, and to complete 100 hours of volunteer work relating to tobacco control. Students identified community placements of interest, with mentor and program leadership approval. One first-year recipient participated in an American Cancer Society (ACS) survey of Asian college students, made presentations regarding tobacco in the Asian community and on college campuses, and developed a targeted tobacco-prevention intervention for college students. Our second recipient worked in the UCLA Health and Media Research Center evaluating an American Lung Association Los Angeles media advocacy intervention focused on reducing depiction of smoking in Hollywood films. This student attended the Tobacco, Ethics and Society Writers Forum hosted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the American Film Institute (Los Angeles) and also participated in the ACS media campaign to reduce tobacco use among UCLA students. Our awardees made joint presentations on tobacco-industry targeting of Asian American and Pacific Islanders at the Asian American Pacific Islander Health Conference (May 2003) and at the Fourth Annual Asian American Network for Cancer Awareness, Research and Training (AANCART) Academy: Confluence of Culture and Science—Cancer in America's Asian Communities (October 2003).

In the second program year, one scholarship recipient participated in health promotion and tobacco control education activities in conjunction with the Mexican Consulate, working with the Los Angeles County Health Department and Health Consumer Center, and with The Village, a social action group in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. As part of this work, she helped conduct a grassroots recruitment of UCLA student advocates and other community volunteers to support a tobacco initiative, a smoke-free outdoor ordinance in West Hollywood, California. She also developed a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation exploring tobacco industry marketing strategies and presented it to UCLA Policy and Management students and a tobacco policy group, then gave it to The Village for use in their youth groups. A second student worked through the UCLA Public Health Student Association in the University of

California Total Divestment from Tobacco Campaign, holding meetings with and making presentations to the University of California Regents, the Associated Students UCLA Board of Directors, the UCLA Graduate Student Association, the UC Student Association, California legislators, and others as part of this effort. As part of her doctoral dissertation research, our third scholarship recipient is working with the African American population at King Drew Medical Center in Los Angeles. Her study is designed to elucidate the role of certain biological markers and the risk of oral pre-malignant lesions in African Americans, as well as to investigate the interactions between the markers and certain known risk factors, such as tobacco use, on pre-malignant lesions.

Workshops

The program faculty viewed a tobacco-focused workshop series as an important element of the program through which students and faculty school-wide could gain exposure to the tobacco problem. However, given the already full array of curricular and extra-curricular programs in which students and faculty are involved, and the many lecture and workshop series available on campus, we feared a separate series would result in low attendance. Instead, we decided to integrate presentations into existing lecture series in the SPH and the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control Research/SPH/Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center. Presentations included:

- "Tobacco Control in the Deaf Community";
- "ETS Exposure Among Children with Asthma";
- "Legislative Action for Tobacco Control";
- "Nurses and Smoking: Professional and Workplace Issues";
- "Quality of Life in Lung Cancer Survivors";
- "Highlights from the National Tobacco Conference";
- "Tobacco Wars: The California Story";
- "Hot Issues in Tobacco Control"; and
- "Using Research to Change National Policy: Tobacco Control Within the Veteran's Health Administration."

PROGRAM LOGISTICS

Throughout the two years the program was in operation, the leadership actively publicized and promoted the elements of the program via word-of-mouth among colleagues and students; announcements at departmental faculty meetings; e-mails from the SPH Office of the

Dean to all faculty and students; distribution of flyers to faculty and students; description of the program (and scholarship opportunities) at the orientation sessions conducted for incoming students; and ongoing one-on-one meetings with faculty and department chairs. While initially anticipating monthly meetings of the program faculty to review these efforts, we quickly realized that this was not feasible and depended instead on telephone, e-mail, and in-person interaction to address specific problems and issues as they emerged.

The program was formally evaluated by the program faculty as a group at its meetings at the end of the first program year and mid-way through the second year. Drs. Berman and Kominski presented a summary of program activities which were discussed by the faculty. Faculty recommendations from the first-year meeting were incorporated into the second-year program. Plans for external program review at the end of the second year of funding were cancelled due to the early termination of the program. Dr. Berman participated as a member of the ASPH/Legacy STEP UP Grant Review Committee and the STEP UP Workshop Planning Committee, and presented a poster describing the UCLA program at the ASPH/Legacy STEP UP Workshop in St. Louis in April 2004.

PROGRAM TERMINATION

Mid-way through the second year of the program, we were notified that our support was in jeopardy because the University of California found a funding agency requirement to be unacceptable. Clause 12 of the American Legacy Foundation's standard grant contract, which states that no tobacco industry-sponsored research be accepted by the university, was considered to be an infringement on academic freedom. As a result, UCLA terminated the STEP UP project at the end of the second program year (May 31, 2004).

DISCUSSION

We were able to achieve a number of goals as part of our two-year program. We infused a tobacco focus into required and elective courses during the life of the program; established a new course on tobacco policy which has had excellent acceptance; increased acceptance of the school's existing tobacco-related course as measured by growth in enrollment and enrollment by a greater number of undergraduate students; increased exposure to tobacco-related issues through a workshop series that was available to all faculty and students; and provided financial support for five SPH students who had an interest in tobacco as an area of study.

Of considerable importance, our work in developing and administering this program brought together a group of interested faculty, all of whom, prior to the program, had been working independently on various aspects of the tobacco problem. The shared commitment to strengthening tobacco education in the SPH that evolved through STEP UP has been sustained following termination of the program. Under Dr. Ruth Roemer's leadership, we received support for a year-long continuation of some program elements from the Kaiser Permanente Health Plan and Hospitals of Southern California.

We also learned important lessons from this programmatic initiative, particularly with respect to structural barriers to change in a complex educational system. First, the public health curriculum is extremely full, and important health issues often vie for placement in required and elective courses. Despite faculty "champions" for our program in virtually every department, our inroads in the curriculum were limited. While faculty members were generally supportive of our overall goals, this did not always translate into a willingness to alter the content of their own courses. This was mitigated to some extent by our provision of requested materials that could be readily adapted for use by course instructors. Publicizing the program and gaining support for curriculum change proved to be an ongoing, labor-intensive effort. Realizing sustainable change is a slow-going process that requires considerable resources. Our curriculum-building efforts, supported by STEP UP funds, were truncated due to the early and unexpected termination of the program. Our initiative with the Medical School, plans for a workshop in partnership with the entertainment industry focusing on tobacco in the movies, efforts to gain approval for a second course, and preliminary steps in establishing a mini-course focusing on molecular epidemiology relating to tobacco were all set aside. Two years was not sufficient time to bring about all the changes we had hoped to make.

Second, when faculty members were willing to make a change in course content, in many instances they were less likely to revise and incorporate materials into lectures that were already being taught, and more likely to invite guest speakers, supported through our program, to make separate presentations. While these lectures have continued in some courses during the post-program period, the overall unintended consequence of this strategy is likely to be a reduction in permanent curriculum change. Our core faculty members remain committed to sustaining a focus on tobacco through guest lectures, workshops, and other presentations, but it is unclear if this participation and

level of involvement will continue on a volunteer basis across a broad number of courses in the future.

Third, gaining approval for a new course is a multi-step, slow process. There are already many elective courses and considerable concern about course additions that might overlap in content with existing courses and reduce enrollment in existing elective courses. Once approval is obtained, it is not always convenient for faculty to participate, given other commitments and obligations made during the protracted approval period. Although we had set out to do more, we were gratified to have gained approval for one new course. Considering these challenges and despite the difficulties we faced, the best strategy for curriculum building may be to continue to work toward inclusion of tobacco content in existing elective courses, rather than attempt to introduce new courses into the curriculum.

Finally, our program raised difficult issues for our faculty regarding acceptance of tobacco industry funding and academic freedom. After extensive discussion, SPH faculty adopted a resolution supporting the University of California position that academic freedom precludes preventing a faculty member from accepting funding from any entity, including the tobacco industry. Based on our experience, we recommend that every effort be made at the outset of a proposed program to clarify grant requirements and contract conditions that must be observed when accepting funding for a curriculum-building or other initiative such as STEP UP. Considerable time and effort go into establishing a program, particularly since one size does not fit all when addressing the needs of diverse departments and faculty members. Organizational change requires time to take hold and become institutionalized. Word of possible early termination can have a chilling impact on programmatic efforts well before the actual end, with negative impact on many aspects of work in progress.

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