

Doing Right by Our People

**CBCF Anti-Smoking Initiative Aims to
Curb Smoking Habits at HBCUs**

By Lisa Fager Bediako and Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D.

Despite evidence that African-American college students smoke less than white students, smoking continues to be a major public health issue at the nation's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

A recent study noted that cigarette smoking increased in the 1990s among African-American youths after several years of decline. Studies also note that African Americans have the highest burden and morbidity of tobacco-related diseases.

The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) recently concluded its three-year Anti-Smoking Education Initiative (ASEI), a program aimed at providing an appropriate and focused response to the tobacco control needs of African-American college students. The program was based on student activism, peer health education and environmental strategies implemented at HBCUs in order to educate young African-American adults about tobacco control, encourage cessation and to advocate tobacco control policies on campuses.

The HBCU D.R.O.P. Squad – D.R.O.P. stands for Doing Right by Our People – has its own Web site, www.hbcudrop-squad.org, which was created to assist students with tobacco control resources and news updates.

Schools were chosen to participate in the initiative after submitting a proposal and completing a competitive selection process. CBCF received 78 proposals from the estimated 107 total HBCUs. Selected institutions received grants ranging from \$4,000 to \$20,000 to implement their student-led anti-smoking campaigns.

The 2005-2006 participants included Bethune-Cookman College, Coahoma Community College, Howard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Tougaloo College, University of the District of Columbia and University of Maryland-Eastern Shore.

The 2006-2007 participants included Bowie State University, Delaware State University, Fisk University, Fort Valley State University, Howard University, Meharry Medical College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Norfolk State University, North Carolina A&T State University and Virginia Union University.

Students implemented innovative and culturally relevant traditional and nontraditional approaches to health education. Examples include:

- The *Vanity Truth* campaign implemented by the Spelman College – Student Health Associates and Peer Educators (S.H.A.P.E.) used *Essence* magazine-type ads to counter-market the tobacco ad messages and to illustrate the harmful and aesthetic effects of smoking.

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- The Howard University Communications Capstone team's *21 Days to Kick a Habit* campaign included an on-campus exhibit of 1,200 trash bags, representing the 1,200 African Americans that die every day from tobacco-related diseases.

- The Fort Valley State University Broadcast Club's public service announcements for school media outlets which included the *Up In Smoke* concert featuring champion boxer Roy Jones Jr. and student artists promoting health and wellness.

- The Fisk University *Truth Crew* documentary on the dangers of smoking which included an interview with Kofi Lomotey, Ph.D., the university's provost and himself a former smoker. The documentary was broadcast on the campus television station.

- Meharry Medical School educating fellow medical students about smoking cessation intervention in primary health care.

In sum, most schools participated in advocating for a smoke-free campus and all participated in asking school administrators to enforce current smoke-free policies on campus that limit where on campus one could smoke. Several schools noted in their final report that student attitudes about going smoke-free were positive, while faculty, staff and university employees were the main objectors.

Evaluation objectives were to assess coalition schools' capability to:

- Train students to use a peer-to-peer education model to educate other students at HBCUs about tobacco control and intervention.

- Use the information gathered from surveys to develop better tobacco education materials.

- Decrease the prevalence of tobacco use among students at HBCUs.

- Advocate for tobacco control policies on HBCU campuses.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of peer-to-peer education as a strategy for affecting change of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors concerning tobacco products, and

- Modify and improve peer-to-peer education strategies for promoting tobacco prevention and control among college-age students.

Analysis of pre-assessment data indicated that smoking is a common, although not prevalent, experience among students at HBCUs. Less than half of the students surveyed acknowledged ever smoking and only 15 percent admitted to currently using tobacco products. Notably, 15 percent is a higher number than what is commonly cited in the literature. One interesting finding regarding the smoking-related behavior of black college students is that smoking preferences are giving to cigars over cigarettes. This is a novel finding not otherwise cited in the literature.

More than two-thirds of the students surveyed had friends who smoked, however, students' attitudes related to the enforcement of smoking policies tended to be more

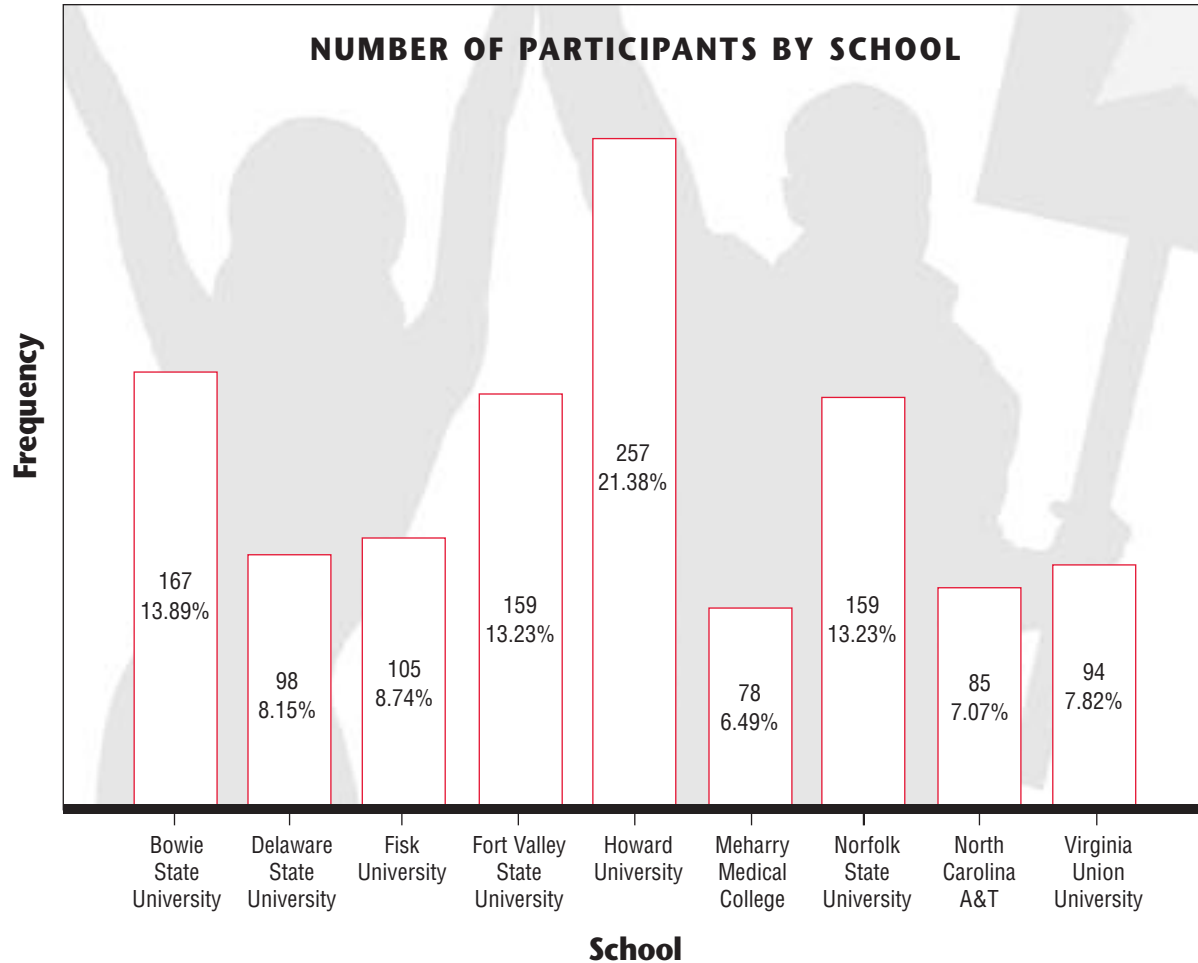
conservative, with most students preferring to have more strict smoking enforcement. Anti- and pro-smoking messages tended to be rare on college campuses. Males reported more smoking-related behaviors than females.

The previously scaled survey instrument appeared to have an adequate fit to the data. Factor loadings were logically arranged into four oblique components: Health Risk, Social Risk, Anxiety Risk and Body Image Risk. Analysis found that two of the four risk factors, health risk and anxiety risk, had a significant association with smoking among the students surveyed.

Students surveyed at post assessment reported more exposure to anti-smoking messages, indicating some basic effectiveness of the anti-smoking education programs. We also determined through multivariate analyses that students at participating universities experienced a collective change in some attitudes and beliefs that are associated with smoking.

Specifically, the programs appeared to be most successful in reducing the risk associated with having

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a poor understanding of the health consequences associated with smoking and associating smoking with desirable social outcomes.

Analysis of results by school indicated that some schools were significantly more effective in imparting health consequences, while most schools were equally effective at reducing social or peer-related risk factors. Schools like Meharry, which emphasized medicine and health education, were conceivably more effective at reducing health-associated risk factors. In addition, since one of the overall objectives of ASEI programs was to reduce

smoking through peer education, all schools were likely to reduce negative social influences.

When considering pre-assessment outcomes, we consider the coalition's collective success in imparting health outcomes to be consistent with the needs of students attending HBCUs. However, based on the pre-assessment data, risks associated with anxiety is an important factor that might contribute to increased tobacco usage among HBCU students. In the analysis of post-assessment data, anxiety-related risk factors did not significantly change as a result of ASEI programs.

Future implementations of these anti-smoking initiatives might include stress-reduction exercises as a strategy to enhance program effectiveness.

Funding for the initiative was made possible by a grant from the American Legacy Foundation. The grant was awarded to the African American Partners for a Tobacco-Free Society, a coalition comprised of six African-American organizations including CBCF, NAACP, National Urban League, National Conference of Black Mayors, National Newspaper Publishers Association and National Association of Neighborhoods. This

occasion marked the first time that prominent African-American organizations collaborated to address a major health concern in the African-American community.

This initiative demonstrates the feasibility of bringing together prominent African-American organizations to collaborate on efforts to address health concerns in African-American communities. ■

Lisa Fager Bediako served as program director for the Anti-Smoking Education Initiative.

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