

STUDENTS

To Juul or Not to Juul? Colleges Weigh the Breadth of Their Tobacco Bans

By *Andy Tsubasa Field* | NOVEMBER 21, 2018

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Steven Senne, AP Images

Colleges and universities are taking different tacks in deciding whether e-cigarettes like Juuls are or should be included in campuswide tobacco bans.

it's known — everywhere from parties to campus libraries. Kevin Fernandez, a University of Miami junior, said in a recent interview that, in his larger classes, classmates would smoke a Juul every session.

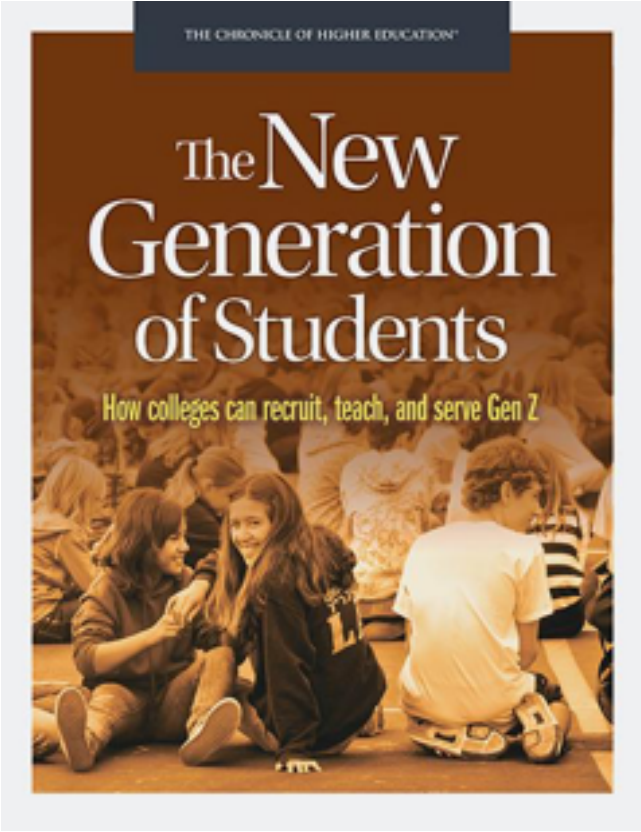
“You’ll see it everyday, or you’ll overhear a conversation where someone would ask, ‘Do you have a Juul?’” Fernandez said. “It’s really weird. They get passed around like candy.”

A Juul e-cigarette is discreet. It’s shaped like a USB flash drive, but longer. It’s charged by being plugged into a laptop — just like a high-tech component. Its smoke clouds are usually less visible than those of a traditional cigarette. The lingering scent is brief.

But the craze surrounding the device is anything but subtle. Twitter is filled with college students’ posts about seeing peers Juuling — or vaping, as

In September the Food and Drug Administration called Juul’s use among teenagers an “epidemic” and announced that it had issued more than 1,300 warning letters to retailers that had illegally sold the devices to minors. Last week Juul Labs, which makes the electronic cigarette, declared that it would stop selling flavored Juul pods — such as mango, fruit, creme, and cucumber — at more than 90,000 of its retail locations.

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But Juuling remains popular. And college and university administrators are finding themselves caught inside a national debate among smoking-cessation experts and tobacco-control advocates in deciding whether the devices, and other e-cigarettes, have a place on college campuses, years after many of them banned traditional tobacco smoking.

In April, Duke University's president, Vincent Price, announced that it would not include e-cigarettes and other vaping devices in its ban on combustible tobacco products.

Duke, which is named for a tobacco magnate whose son left the university a large bequest, said its decision was based partly on research by its smoking-cessation center. In a YouTube video explaining the decision, James Davis, the center's director, cites a 2014 study that found that approximately 60 percent of addicted smokers reported they had quit by using e-cigarettes. They showed better results than people who had tried to quit by sheer willpower or using cessation medicine, including nicotine patches or gum, the study found.

"If we were to ban e-cigarettes for those who have serious addictions, we are essentially taking away the primary means they will likely attempt to quit smoking," Davis says in the video.

The video also cites the American Cancer Society, which says e-cigarettes have been effective in helping addicted smokers quit. In February the society released a statement saying those addicted to smoking "should be encouraged to switch to the least-harmful form of tobacco possible; switching to the exclusive use of e-cigarettes is preferable to continuing to smoke combustible products."

According to a 2018 report by the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, at least 2,106 colleges and universities have banned all forms of smoking on their campuses. Among them, 1,686 (80 percent) also prohibit e-cigarette use.

Exposure to Nicotine

But some advocates are pushing for policies like Duke's to remain rare.

“If you can smoke off campus and you can smoke Juul on campus, that just expands your ability to expose yourself to nicotine,” said Dave Dobbins, chief operating officer of the Truth Initiative, a nonprofit group dedicated to eliminating teen smoking.

The organization's members have grown wary of Juuling on campuses because studies have found that e-cigarettes cause many young adults, who might otherwise not have smoked, to become addicted to nicotine — and turn to using combustible cigarettes.

The Truth Initiative's website cites a 2018 study, published in *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, that found 65 percent of young people who had used an e-cigarette during a 30-day period in 2015 reported that they had also used another tobacco product at the same time.

“It is sold as an alternative on an open market, without anything more,” said Dobbins. “These things are initiations to nicotine addiction for people who otherwise wouldn't have smoked.”

Since 2015 the group has awarded grants to 171 universities and colleges in an effort to ban the use of either electronic or combustible cigarettes on their campuses, said a Truth Initiative spokeswoman, Sarah Shank. Most of the grantees enroll a significant population of low-income, minority, and first-generation students — demographic groups whose members are more likely to smoke at a young age, the Truth Initiative says.

Amy Taylor, the group's senior vice president for youth and engagement, said it is now trying to get its grantees to ban e-cigarettes too. She said 91 (53 percent) of the grant-receiving institutions have prohibited students from using e-cigarettes and other vaping devices since 2015.

The University of Nebraska at Lincoln, a large public research institution, was not a grantee of the Truth Initiative. But this year it banned e-cigarettes and combustible cigarettes across its campus, not just in campus buildings.

Scott Schenkelberg, a Nebraska alumnus, helped propose the smoking ban to administrators last year after encountering combustible and e-cigarette smoke in the entrances and exits of campus buildings, he said in an email. While drafting the policy with faculty and staff members, he said, some people brought up the question of whether to include e-cigarettes.

“In the end,” Schenkelberg said, “we decided that since our policy is trying to improve the campus environment and safety, health, and well-being of our students, faculty, staff, and visitors, in order to accomplish that we needed to propose a smoke-, tobacco-, and vapor-free policy.”

At the time a student senator, he and the student government conducted a survey whose results showed that a majority of students favored “restrictive smoking policies.” Another survey, distributed to faculty members, had similar results, according to the university’s website. Administrators set the ban to go into effect last January.

The Question of Enforcement

But that was only months before Juuling became common on college campuses. And now some Nebraska students are testing the limits on how the ban is enforced.

One Twitter user described seeing Juul pods on the floor of a Nebraska library. Another described seeing students “ripping their Juul every chance they get.”

Libraries aren’t monitored by the campus police, said the assistant police chief, Hassan Ramzah. And the ban is considered a “peer-enforced policy” that relies on students to approach offenders and tell them they can’t smoke on campus, he said. His

department doesn't deal with smoking violations, he said, and his officers instruct those who call in to inform violators of the policy.

"It's not something that university police can cite or arrest someone for," he said.

Bans at Princeton University and Cornell University are also enforced by students.

Princeton's policy, set two years ago, requires tobacco smokers and e-cigarette users to stand at least 25 feet from university buildings. According to the university's website, people who see a violation are told to "politely and courteously remind the person of the smoking prohibitions outlined in 'Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities,'" a student handbook.

Cornell imposed a ban in 2016, its judicial administrator, Michelle Horvath, said in an email, and students are told to report violations to her office.

It remains unknown whether the popularity of Juuling will withstand the new FDA regulations or will persist even though flavored pods may no longer be readily available.

But some University of Miami students, including Kevin Fernandez and Alec Castillo, are taking steps to ensure that Juuling withstands the test of time. They've started a petition, only slightly tongue in cheek, that calls for the university's president to recommend that Miami's mascot, an ibis smoking a pipe, be changed to smoke a Juul instead. So far, the petition has collected 439 out of 500 signatures — a cap Fernandez said they set for "no reason at all."

"The University of Miami is a progressive institution that should reflect the changing cultural landscape that we live in today," the petition says. "We, the undersigned students of the University of Miami, advocate the Board of Directors to let our school mascot, Sebastian the Ibis, hit the Juul."

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