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Rutgers Student Assembly Members Consider Smoke-Free Campus Policy

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Students can be seen smoking cigarettes throughout Rutgers campuses, but some Rutgers University Student Assembly members are attempting to change this.

Zachary Borden, a Rutgers—Camden College of Arts and Sciences graduate school senator and a co-chair for the Student Affairs Committee at the Rutgers University Student Assembly, has been working to create a smoke-free campus at Rutgers.

His goal is to accomplish the charge given to him by the executive committee, to “examine the desirability, feasibility, impact and means of evolving into a smoke-free Rutgers,” he said. “We have looked at the current Rutgers smoking policy and issues with enforcement, the desire of the student body for a smoke-free campus, foreseeable problems with a smoke-free policy and possible alternatives to being completely smoke-free,” Borden said.

Because Borden is an ex-smoker, he said he sees both sides of the issue. He aims to give both non-smokers and smokers the proper consideration, but his goal is to recommend a solution that benefits the Rutgers community the most.

Borden has been conducting research regarding the health concern of vaping and other tobacco substitutes, which are not as well-documented as the effects of smoking. It has been “enlightening” to look into the recent data from foundational studies, he said.

An issue Borden has encountered is the polarization on the topic, which he said has divided students. It is also unlikely that students' opinions will be swayed after they have chosen a side.

Polarization was evident when the Camden Student Governing Association voted against supporting the smoke-free Rutgers proposal, despite student support expressed in a previous survey, Borden said.

“The vote was decided last semester by a tie-breaker by the president (of the association) after intense discussion,” he said. “I honestly anticipate similar acrimony during the senate discussion when the formal response is presented to the general body.”

But Borden said many of the obstacles initially considered are not as problematic as he thought. School of Nursing sophomore Pak Chau has been exceptionally energetic in developing the reply to the charge, Borden said.

“I have to give due credit to him for all of the recent accomplishments of the (association) in this matter,” he said. “He has been extremely dedicated to gathering information for the committee and almost all of the research done to inform our decision is a direct result of his efforts.”

Chau has also been active in the investigation of possible alternatives to going smoke-free. It is because of him that Borden and his committee members plan to compose their response for the Executive Committee before the end of the semester, Borden said.

Borden hopes the Rutgers smoking policy will be revised to have clear and enforceable rules that can be applied fairly.

“I recognize that having to leave campus to smoke is an inconvenience, and we have seriously considered alternatives with smokers in mind,” he said. “The simple truth is that a smoke-free policy is the easiest to implement and enforce.”

A smoke-free is less expensive to implement than constructing special smoking areas. It is also easier to enforce than the current rules and is overall the healthiest alternative, Borden said.

“Based on the campus survey and other information at our disposal, I anticipate Rutgers joining the growing number of smoke-free campuses across the United States,” he said.

<http://www.dailytargum.com/article/2016/02/rutgers-student-assembly-members-consider-smoke-free-campus-policy>