

Catholic colleges, universities make efforts to go tobacco-free

WASHINGTON - When students and teachers return to college this fall, they might notice that something is missing: tobacco smoke.

More Catholic colleges and universities are starting to toughen up their no-smoking policies, and among them are several Jesuit-run universities.

On July 1, Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., went completely smoke-free. Smoking is not only prohibited in campus buildings, it is now prohibited on all campus grounds and property.

The University of San Francisco is creating two designated smoking areas on campus, which will be in effect when the fall semester begins Aug. 28. The new policy calls for a review in two years to determine if the campus can be completely smoke-free.

“A restrictive environment helps (smokers) to quit smoking,” Kamal Harb, director of health promotion services at the university, said in an interview with Catholic News Service.

Other schools, such as Loyola College in Maryland, have policies that do not permit smoking inside campus buildings. The policy at Loyola allows for smoking on campus grounds but smokers have to be at least 30 feet away from buildings.

This type of policy seems to be rapidly becoming the norm on college campuses, with slight variations on the number of feet a smoker needs to be away from a building.

One of the key concerns in creating smoke-free policies is that students, faculty and staff would have to leave campus to smoke. Forcing individuals off campus could place them in some danger, if crime is a concern in the surrounding neighborhood.

At St. Louis University, for example, the student organization Smoke Free SLU submitted a policy proposal to make the campus smoke-free, but currently the plan is on hold because of concerns about safety off campus, as well as policy enforcement.

The current policy at St. Louis University is similar to the policy at Loyola, but requires smokers to be 25 feet away from the buildings.

In addition to adopting or preparing to adopt new policies that restrict smoking on campus, Catholic universities also are offering a variety of cessation programs to help students quit smoking.