

“Ready to Quit!” Marketing Campaign: Using student ambassadors to encourage more students on campus to stop smoking

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Introduction

Founded in 1898, Northeastern University is a large urban university with its main campus located in Boston and expanding satellite campuses in Burlington, Charlotte, and Seattle. Northeastern is renowned for our cooperative/experiential education program, integrating academic study with professional experience. Turning ideas into reality is at the core of academic student life at Northeastern. Although Northeastern is often recognized for their large urban campus and student population - comprising of approximately 16,000 undergraduates, and 3,500 graduate students, Northeastern is also well known for their intimate and strong close-knit community. The student body is diverse; students come from 50 states and 139 countries. About 30% of the undergraduates are students of color, and 20% are international students.

Northeastern was among the first Boston area universities to become a smoke-free campus (in the summer of 2012). By January 2013, through their University Health and Counseling Services (UHCS), it became the first to launch a multi-component evidence-based intervention program for students at no cost. The program, “Ready to Quit!” (RTQ), is an innovative and comprehensive smoking and tobacco cessation program developed for students at Northeastern. RTQ consists of an initial meeting with a certified tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) to develop a partnership with the student and discuss a personalized tobacco cessation plan. A TTS may be either a medical provider (e.g., nurse practitioner) or a registered nurse. The treatment plan may include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), such as nicotine patches, gum or lozenges, and/or medications, including Varenicline (Chantix). Meetings with the TTS, consultations with other medical or behavioral health staff, and smoking cessation aids are all offered free of charge to students in the program.

Students enrolled in RTQ have weekly follow-up and coaching meetings with a TTS. Students are text messaged positive words of encouragement one to three times per week and receive follow-up phone calls at least once a week to provide support to remain tobacco-free. Students also have the option to meet with behavioral health practitioners for concerns regarding smoking cessation, if desired. To evaluate satisfaction and effectiveness of RTQ, students are asked to complete an assessment at four weeks after enrollment and at the end of the program (12 or more weeks). Following the completion of NRT and/or medications, and/or counseling, students will continue to be followed for smoking and tobacco cessation maintenance. Students receive a phone call and/or email once a week for 4 weeks, then monthly thereafter for six months.

Already the RTQ program has had many successes, steady participant enrollment (averaging about six new participants per month), positive feedback from students, and most importantly has helped students with smoking cessation. With RTQ’s solid foundation and achievements, we realize there is still a lot of work to do. One area of focus is to increase marketing efforts to recruit more participants to help more students stop smoking. In the

upcoming academic year (2014-2015), UHCS plans to expand the RTQ program by adding new components such as a Facebook page, and a virtual student support group. We also plan to add a marketing campaign using student ambassadors and are seeking resources from the New England College Health Association (NECHA) to support this endeavor so that more students can benefit from this important resource. NECHA funds would aid in the implementation of a marketing campaign by hiring two students as RTQ ambassadors to reach out to Northeastern students and market RTQ. These students will be charged with educating their peers on campus through social media, tabling, speaking in classrooms, and presenting to student organizations and gatherings. The RTQ ambassadors would extend the reach of RTQ, informing and educating more students on campus about RTQ with hopes of increasing participant enrollment, and more critically, continue to encourage and support more students to stop smoking.

Statement of Purpose

The NECHA award of \$2,500, if granted to Northeastern University's RTQ program, will support a marketing campaign funding two RTQ ambassadors to assist in marketing RTQ with the goal of increasing enrollment and participation. The use of ambassadors is an innovative peer led strategy of disseminating information, and recruiting students to enroll and participate in RTQ. Ambassadors have similar roles to peer leaders - providing support and help to their peers, acting as role models, and may have positive influences on behavior change, however ambassadors have a more formal designation^{1,2}. This method is advantageous in that many students have a natural tendency to rely on their peers for information and education within their social setting^{1,2}. Furthermore, students perceive their peers to be more accessible than staff or faculty, they facilitate a type of communication and social support that may not otherwise be developed with staff or faculty, and ambassadors are an economic way to deliver health information and education compared to staff or faculty^{1,2}.

Hiring RTQ ambassadors will not only benefit RTQ participants and the RTQ program, ambassadors themselves will benefit in several ways. They will have the opportunity to learn from their own peers, learn from TTS and colleagues, and gain professional experience through acquiring skills in communication, organization, leadership, and management. This is consistent with Northeastern's mission on experiential learning, helping ambassadors gain real world experiences.

Additions of RTQ ambassadors will augment the RTQ program and reach more students to further the goal of the program - help more students with smoking cessation, thereby decreasing smoking rates and ultimately eradicate smoking and tobacco use among Northeastern students. The American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) from Spring 2012 revealed 16.3% of Northeastern students reported cigarette smoking (any use within the last 30 days)³. An estimated 4.3% reported daily use (used all 30 days)³. By Spring 2014 cigarette smoking rates on campus have decreased substantially with students reporting any use within the last 30 days at 12.3%, and 1.8% reported use all 30 days⁴. It is evident that the initiation of the smoke-free policy on campus and launch of RTQ had an impact, and are working. However, we cannot rest. We must remain proactive with positive momentum. Smoking cessation at Northeastern remains a top priority, and a priority of the Healthy Campus 2020.

Cigarette smoking still contributes to more than 440,000 deaths per year in the United States, and is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability and premature death⁵. Approximately 8 million people are living with a chronic illness related to smoking or, suffering from heart, and pulmonary disease⁶. Moreover, secondhand smoke is directly linked to an additional 49,000 deaths annually, individuals dying of heart disease and lung cancer⁷. Cigarette smoking and second hand smoke combined are the leading causes of lung cancer contributing to

90% of deaths in males and 80% of deaths in females⁸. The economic burden of smoking contributes to \$96 billion in direct medical costs per year, and an additional \$97 billion due to loss of productivity⁵.

Although rates of cigarette smoking have decreased in the past decade, rates continue to be unacceptably high and most smokers begin smoking as adolescents⁵. Approximately 80% of daily adult smokers begin smoking by the time they turn 18, and almost all daily smokers (99%) begin before the age of 26⁵. Approximately 16% of college students reported cigarette smoking (any use within the last 30 days) in Spring 2010⁹. Nearly 5.2% reported daily use (used all 30 days)⁹. Despite the decrease in smoking rates over the past 10 years among adults 18 years and above (22.6% in 2001 to 19.0% in 2011), the rate has slowed compared to previous decades¹⁰. The Healthy Campus 2020 goal is to reduce cigarette smoking among college students to 14.4%¹¹.

Overarching Program Goal

The program goal will be to increase RTQ marketing campaign efforts, hire and train two RTQ ambassadors and extend the reach of the RTQ program to inform, educate and recruit more students to enroll and participate in RTQ, subsequently support more students with smoking cessation.

Behavior Goals and Objectives

- Inform, educate and discuss RTQ with students.
- Enroll eligible students in RTQ.
- Educate and discuss with students risks and consequences of smoking and tobacco use.
 - Educate and discuss smoking and tobacco use dependence.
 - Educate and discuss norms and perceived norms with smoking and tobacco use.
- Empower, discuss and work with students on lifestyle modifications regarding smoking cessation (i.e., changing habits and routines).
 - Educate, discuss and work with students on adopting a healthier lifestyle (i.e., regular physical activity, appropriate nutritional intake, appropriate sleep hygiene practices, time management strategies, stress reduction, and maintaining healthy emotional wellbeing).
- Educate, discuss and work with students on implementation of coping skills for triggers related to smoking and tobacco use.
- Educate and provide resources on smoking cessation.
 - Discuss safe and approved treatment options for cessation.
- Educate and discuss with students benefits of smoking cessation.
 - Discuss possible barriers and challenges on smoking cessation, and maintenance.
 - Educate and discuss tips and strategies with smoking cessation, and maintenance.
- Educate and discuss process of cessation (i.e., short-term and long-term challenges and strategies).
 - Describe strategies for coping with lapses and relapses.

Program Design

UHCS plans to increase and implement RTQ marketing campaign efforts by hiring two RTQ student ambassadors from Northeastern's Bouvé College of Health Sciences (i.e., School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, School of Psychology, etc.). Hiring ambassadors from Bouvé is a natural fit, as these students have a vested interest and stake in health sciences. This further

exemplifies Northeastern's commitment to cooperative/experiential education. The expected learning objectives for ambassadors would include but are not limited to:

- Health education and prevention
- Health promotion
- Working with a team
- Time management skills
- Leaderships skills
- Communication skills
- Organizational skills

Job postings will be placed on bulletin boards at Bouvé College of Health Sciences, and high foot volume areas on campus (i.e., main student center, library, etc.). We will also work closely with our Health Promotion Coordinator for online postings via social media. We will conduct interviews with student ambassadors before official hire. Once hired, there will be two - eight hour training sessions for ambassadors. They will be trained by TTS (e.g., nurse practitioner and/or registered nurse) on smoking cessation, and RTQ programmatic recruitment. Following, each RTQ ambassador will team up with a TTS at various scheduled dates and times to attend events on campus to market RTQ through social media, tabling, student clubs, classrooms, etc. RTQ ambassadors will be responsible for:

- 1) Informing and educating students about RTQ and smoking cessation (see “Behavior Goals and Objectives” above).
- 2) Informing students how to access resources for smoking cessation.
- 3) Helping recruit and enroll students contemplating and/or “Ready to Quit” smoking.
- 4) Updating and monitoring the RTQ Facebook page by posting statuses, monitoring assessment forms of interested participants via Facebook.
- 5) Posting tweets on Twitter.
- 6) Committing approximately 6 to 8 hours per week.

Students interested in RTQ can be referred by an RTQ ambassador or self refer by visiting the UHCS website or call UHCS for an appointment. In addition, students are referred by medical and behavioral health providers who have screened students for smoking and tobacco use during routine visits. This multidisciplinary approach is consistent with findings and recommendations put forward by the Clinical Practice Guidelines for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence updated in 2008 proposing “Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange,” known as the 5 A's¹².”

Students interested in RTQ initially meet with a certified tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) for an assessment. A TTS may be either a medical provider (e.g., nurse practitioner) or a registered nurse. Students who decide to enroll in RTQ partner with their TTS to develop a personalized tobacco cessation program. The program may include (1) nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) (i.e., patch, gum or lozenge), (2) medication (i.e., Varenicline) free of charge, and/or (3) counseling services. There is clear evidence that the combination of NRT and/or medication and counseling has been proven to be more effective than either treatment alone¹²⁻¹⁴. Once enrolled, students meet with a TTS once a week. Meeting with a TTS or counselor has shown to increase quit rates, and the more frequent face-to-face time with individuals attempting to quit may increase quit rates further^{12,13,15,16}.

RTQ student participants are sent text messages with words of encouragement one to three times per week, and receive follow-up phone calls at least once a week. Text messaging provides reassurance, support and motivation to students trying to quit smoking. This method of

intervention has demonstrated effectiveness in helping individuals with smoking cessation¹⁷⁻²⁰. Additionally, phone counseling, such as follow-up calls after a visit, one to few times per week may provide further support for students, also avoiding relapse, subsequently increase the rate of quitting^{12,15,17}.

Evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness of marketing campaign efforts and whether RTQ ambassadors had an impact on RTQ education and enrollment, RTQ will create new questions and answer options on the existing assessment form for new RTQ enrollees. Questions include:

- 1) How did you learn about RTQ? (Circle one or all that apply)
 - A) Flyer/poster on campus.
 - B) Event with RTQ ambassador (e.g., tabling, class, presentation, club, etc.)
 - C) UHCS website/social media
 - D) UHCS provider
 - E) Friend
 - F) Other, describe: _____

- 2) Were RTQ ambassadors helpful?
 - A) Yes, please describe how: _____
 - B) No, why: _____
 - C) Not applicable, I did not interact with a RTQ ambassador _____

- 3) Were RTQ ambassadors informative?
 - A) Yes, please describe how: _____
 - B) No, why: _____
 - C) Not applicable, I did not interact with a RTQ ambassador _____

Data will be collected, analyzed, and reported. Furthermore, RTQ will track the number of referrals by RTQ ambassadors each month to assess and evaluate if there has been an increase of new participants.

RTQ will also continue to execute the existing overall program evaluation for satisfaction and effectiveness. Student participants are asked to complete an assessment (12 question survey) at four weeks after enrollment, and at the end of the program (12 or more weeks). The survey employs a 5-level Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). Examples of questions include: 1) "Meeting with medical providers weekly is/was helpful," 2) "Receiving text messages is/was helpful," and 3) "Follow-up phone calls are/were helpful."

Following the completion of NRT and/or medications, and/or counseling, students will continue to be followed for smoking and tobacco cessation maintenance. Students receive a phone call and/or email once a week for 4 weeks, then monthly thereafter for six months. The outcome and success of smoking cessation is evidenced by the number of students who remain smoke-free at six months.

Sustainability after the grant

While the requested award will not fund RTQ entirely, it will support an innovative and essential new component of the RTQ program. The RTQ ambassadors will help boost RTQ enrollment and participation, extend the reach of the RTQ program, and help motivate students contemplating or "Ready to Quit!" smoking. Along with helping their peers, RTQ ambassadors

will also be helping themselves, through this journey they will be learning from others (i.e., peers, UHCS staff, etc.) and from their own experiences as an ambassador. Once RTQ ambassadors role have been established, the hope is to identify and enlist other enthusiastic students (i.e., classmates, friends) interested in the health sciences to sustain RTQ's ambassador program. Students who completed RTQ in its entirety may also be inspired to become ambassadors themselves. This would endure the positive momentum and sustain RTQ's ambassador program each academic year.

Leading the way for other colleges and campuses

Although there has been an abundance of research on smoking cessation, and a growing number of smoking initiatives on college campuses, few interventions have been evaluated, and few have been disseminated widely²¹. Moreover, few smoking and tobacco cessation interventions and programs have shown sustainability²¹. The smoking cessation intervention practice gap on college and university campuses is clear based on the literature. Bridging and strengthening research into practice needs to be the focal point and at the forefront of clinical practice choices. Using past and current evidence-based programs as a spring-board to develop new and improved smoking cessation interventions is the starting point; but, sustainability is key.

RTQ continues to aspire to be an innovative, successful comprehensive smoking cessation intervention program for Northeastern students and the model for other universities and the college age population. The move to a smoke-free campus, collaborative efforts with various stakeholders, partnerships with other disciplines, UHCS financial support for RTQ, UHCS cutting-edge programming, and support from students demonstrate Northeastern's commitment to the health and well-being of students.

Relevance to College Health

College is an important milestone. It is a time of transition, and transformation, and an advantageous period to encourage positive behavior change²². A college campus presents an environment of opportunity to offer smoking and tobacco prevention education for non-smokers/non-users, and smoking cessation programs for those who already smoke.

An ecological and multi-component approach to smoking cessation intervention has had success on the state and community level^{5,22}. However, a literature review conducted by Rodgers²² found that few colleges and universities had implemented smoking cessation intervention programs having multiple components. Further, Rodgers²² concluded there are five components necessary for successful smoking cessation intervention programs: a) a tobacco-free environment, b) a ban on sales, advertising, and promotion of tobacco products, c) strictly enforced tobacco rules and policies, d) education and prevention of tobacco use, and e) the availability of tobacco cessation programs for students.

Implementation of an innovative, fully-supported ecological and multi-component program approach such as RTQ, and the proposed RTQ ambassador component is well positioned to be successful for the college age population. RTQ has seen consistent enrollment since its launch. Furthermore, Northeastern has shown a reduction in cigarette smoking with their students. Additional funding can and will impact student lives and support the sustainability of this young program. Together, the NECHA award and UHCS at Northeastern will allow RTQ to continue to offer students innovative, comprehensive and personalized tobacco cessation programming. It will be remarkably beneficial to students who are thinking about and/or "Ready to Quit" smoking and stop using tobacco. With the aid of NECHA, Northeastern would contribute to the advancement of the Healthy Campus 2020 target (14.4%), and further reduce the national smoking rate¹¹.

Budget

University Health and Counseling Services (UHCS) at Northeastern University is requesting an award of Two Thousand Five Hundred dollars (\$2,500) from the New England College Health Association. These funds would extend the reach of the “Ready to Quit!” program through RTQ ambassadors and marketing thereby benefiting students participating in the RTQ program. The goals of RTQ are to assist students in quitting smoking, decrease smoking rates and ultimately eradicate smoking and tobacco use among Northeastern students. Monies will be used to fund RTQ ambassadors 6 to 8 hours per week during the academic year (September 2014 – May 2015) (See table 1).

Table 1.

Description	NECHA	UHCS
RTQ ambassadors (Ten dollars per hour) (6 – 8 hours/week) (Sept. 2014 – May 2015)	\$2,500	\$380
Total	\$2,500	\$380

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