

Equity, Vaping, and Smoking

UASU Perks survey, September 1-13, 2023 (n=1,997)

Prepared by: UASU Department of Research and Advocacy

Context

In 2018, based on public health concerns and reputational worries connected to the upcoming legalization of marijuana in Alberta, the General Faculties Council (GFC) passed a motion directing University administration to prepare a Clean Air Strategy. In following years, peaking in 2021, there was significant disagreement over what form this strategy would take, whether appropriate consultation took place, and who would be impacted if the strategy did not appropriately address a wide range of equity concerns. Administration eventually determined that the Clean Air Strategy would take the form of a total ban on recreational smoking and vaping.

Following the lead of the Aboriginal Student Council (now the Indigenous Students' Union (ISU)), the UASU strongly supported a designated areas approach and rejected a total ban on recreational smoking and vaping. The ban proposal stalled in 2021 when a major student survey found overwhelming support for designated areas.¹ In 2023, it became clear that the ban proposal would come forward again, and that this time the designated areas approach was no longer on the table for reasons that remain unclear.²

The UASU's 2023 survey, as explored in this report, asked students not only which of the University's three options they support (total ban, status quo, or designated areas), but which of the first two they prefer if designated areas are no longer an option. The survey explored attitudes and intersections across several relevant demographics: Indigenous students, students with mobility needs, daily tobacco/marijuana users, students who live in residence, and students who are especially impacted by secondhand smoke.

Our findings validate the consistent stance of the UASU and the ISU that a designated areas approach is strongly preferable, that many or most students oppose a ban even if the designated areas approach is off the table, and that Indigenous students have a special investment in the University finding an equitable solution.

¹ See Appendix A for a detailed governance timeline.

² As of October 2022, [public Board of Governors minutes](#) indicate that the University had contracted Ernst & Young in connection with the development of its new space management plan. Subsequent public meetings have confirmed that the plan's objective is to significantly reduce the building footprint of North Campus. This appears more likely than not to be interrelated with the designated areas approach ceasing to be feasible.

Survey Overview

This survey was collected through UASU Perks, a gamified student engagement platform. It reached 1,997 unique users, overwhelmingly current undergraduate students, plus a small number of recent graduates and graduate students. This is approximately a 26% response rate based on the number of unique Perks users active between September 1 and September 13.

Key Statistics and Demographics

- First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit (FMNI) students: 4.5% (consistent with enrolment).
 - Abbreviated throughout as *FNMI students*.
- Students who live in campus residence: 15%.
- Students with mobility needs, conditions, or disabilities that would make it challenging or dangerous to leave campus for a brief errand or task: 3.1%.
 - Abbreviated throughout as *students with mobility needs*.
- Students with conditions that make secondhand smoke especially hazardous: 20%.
 - Abbreviated throughout as *smoke-vulnerable students*, with the caveat that secondhand smoke is of course a health concern for all students.
- Students who visit their campus at least three times a week: 95%.
- Students who smoked cigarettes at least daily in each of the last 30 days: 1.8%.
- Students who vaped tobacco at least daily in each of the last 30 days: 4.6%.
- Students who smoked or vaped marijuana at least daily in each of the last 30 days: 5.6%.
- Composite measure: students who smoked and/or vaped tobacco and/or marijuana at least daily in each of the last 30 days: 8.1%.
 - Abbreviated throughout as *daily users*.

> Convenience sample collected through UASU Perks, a gamified student engagement platform.

> 1,997 responses with a 26% response rate.

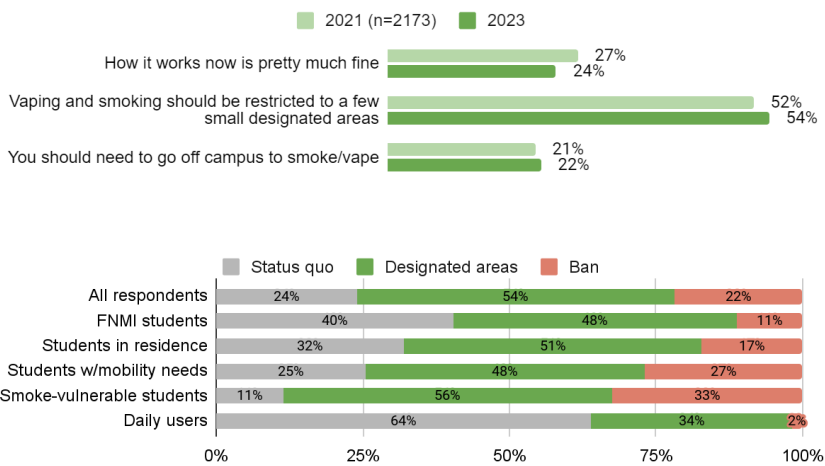
> Primarily undergraduate students, well distributed across faculties and years of study.

> Captured responses from students with mobility needs, students at special risk from secondhand smoke, Indigenous students, tobacco/marijuana users, and students in residence.

Overview: Support Among Three Options

"The University is considering whether to change its policies around vaping and smoking. The UASU is in discussions with the Indigenous Students' Union and other stakeholders. We hope this survey will help us better understand students' diverse needs and priorities right now."

"How should the University handle vaping and smoking on campus (other than Indigenous cultural practices like smudging)? Pick the answer that comes closest to your opinion."



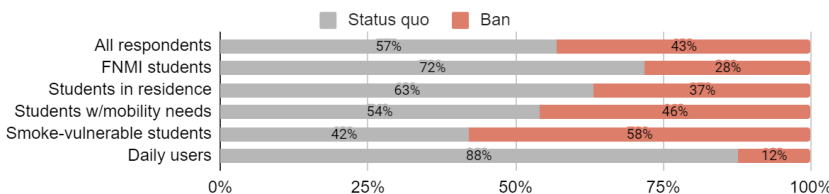
> When given the same choice that GFC faced in 2021, students overwhelmingly support designated areas. Around 1 in 5 support a ban.

> 9 out of 10 FNMI students, 3 out of 4 students with mobility needs, and 2 out of 3 smoke-vulnerable students choose options other than a ban.

> 1 out of 3 daily users support designated areas.

Overview: Support Among Two Options

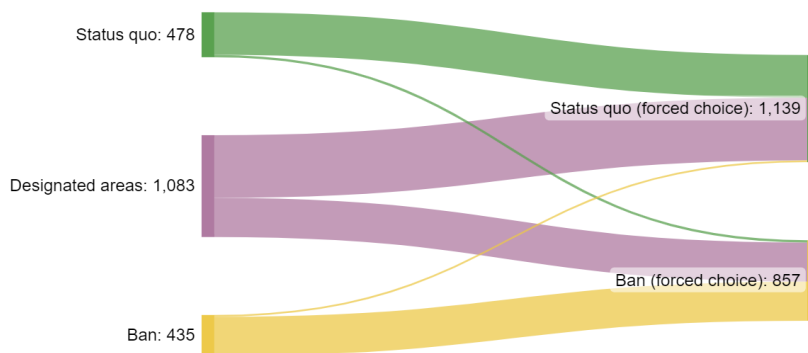
"The UASU and the Indigenous Students' Union have often advocated for a designated areas approach to this public health issue, as a recreational vaping and smoking ban can have inequitable impacts and safety issues for some marginalized students. In your opinion, how should the University handle vaping and smoking on campus (other than Indigenous cultural practices like smudging) if the designated areas approach becomes impossible?"



> When the designated areas approach is removed and equity issues are simply flagged, students are split between status quo and ban, but largely favor status quo. 3 out of 4 FNMI students and 2 out of 5 smoke-vulnerable students would choose the status quo.

Conversion from 3-option to 2-option		
	Status quo	Ban
Status quo	5%	95%
Designated areas	62%	38%
Ban	4%	96%

> When the designated areas approach is removed, 62% of those respondents break toward the status quo as their preference. A small number change their minds between ban and status quo.



Cross-Tabulation: Tobacco and Marijuana Use

See Appendix D for detailed statistics. In simplest terms:

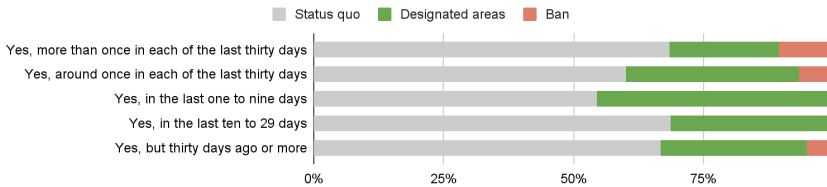
- 1.8% have smoked cigarettes at least once in each of the last 30 days, compared to 5.1% in the 2019 Canada NCHA data.
- 3.2% have smoked cigarettes at some point in the last 29 days, comparable to 3.5% (30 days) in the NCHA.
- 4.6% have vaped tobacco at least once in each of the last 30 days, compared to 3.1% in the NCHA.
- 7.0% have vaped tobacco at some point in the last 29 days, comparable to 10.7% (30 days) in the NCHA.
- 5.6% have smoked or vaped marijuana (edibles explicitly excluded) at least once in each of the last 30 days, comparable to 3.9% (all marijuana use) in the NHCA.
- 10.6% have smoked or vaped marijuana (edibles explicitly excluded) at some point in the last 29 days, comparable to 24.7% (30 days, all use) in the NCHA.

> Compared to 2019 NCHA data, frequent cigarette use is down, frequently vaping tobacco is up, frequent marijuana use is up, and casual marijuana and tobacco vape use are down.

Any amount of cigarette smoking (except for 'occasionally in the past') correlates strongly to support for the status quo; however, a large minority of cigarette smokers (30%) support a designated-areas approach.

> 30% of frequent and infrequent smokers support designated areas. Virtually none support a ban.

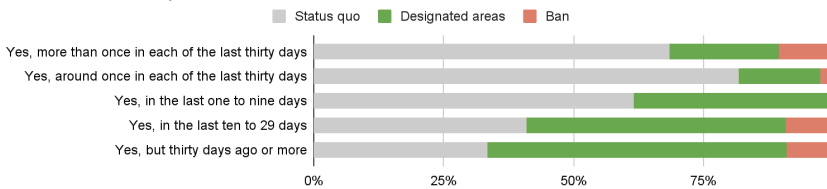
Cigarette smokers



Vaping tobacco is much more common than cigarette smoking, and infrequent users are more likely to prefer a designated areas approach.

> 38% of frequent and infrequent vape users support designated areas, rising to 50-60% for infrequent users. Virtually none support a ban.

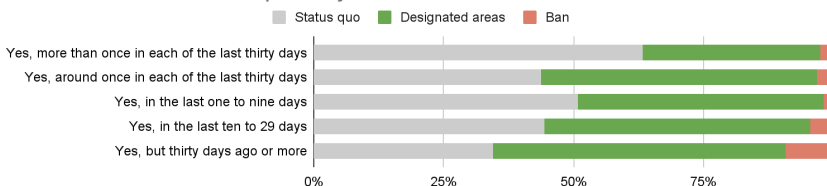
Students who vape tobacco



Marijuana users (edibles excluded) are much more likely than tobacco users to support designated areas and less likely to support the status quo.

> 50% of frequent and infrequent marijuana users support designated areas, even a large portion of daily users. Virtually none support a ban.

Students who smoke or vape marijuana



Cross-Tabulation: Smoke-Vulnerable Students

Again, secondhand smoke is a public health concern for all students; however, some students are especially vulnerable.

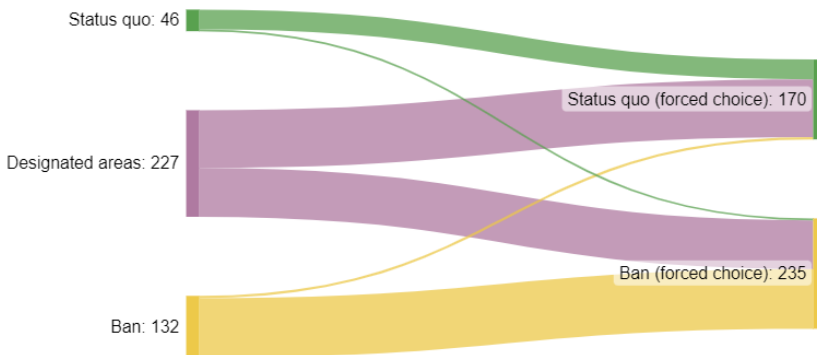
"When an issue can have equity-related impacts we often ask a few relevant demographic questions. Like the rest of this survey, and all Perks surveys, your responses are anonymous. We have heard in past years' consultations that the question of banning vaping/smoking on campus can have a variety of ramifications for students who have distinct needs. Do you have any conditions that make secondhand smoke especially hazardous for you?"

20% of respondents answered 'yes,' proportionally representative of roughly 7,000 undergraduates.

As noted above, these students tend to prefer designated areas. When that option is removed, the second choice is an even split. In the end, 58% support a ban and 42% support the status quo.

> 20% of students face special hazards from secondhand smoke for one reason or another.

> Smoke-vulnerable students support a designated areas approach. When that option is removed, 58% support a ban and 42% support the status quo.



Cross-Tabulation: Indigenous Students

The most committed and consistent voices of opposition to a ban on recreational tobacco use have been Indigenous student leaders. See Appendices B and C for the full text of two relevant statements. In the interest of supporting Indigenous students' advocacy and self-determination, this survey offers an opportunity to learn more about Indigenous students' tobacco use and attitudes.

> Indigenous students, even those at special risk from secondhand smoke, are unlikely to support a ban.

As noted above, First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit students (at least within our sample) are highly unlikely to support a ban.



Note that, of the 23 FNMI students who are also smoke-vulnerable, 57% support the status quo when designated areas are no longer an option, compared to 72% of all FNMI respondents and 42% of all smoke-vulnerable respondents.

In our sample, FNMI students were more likely to smoke cigarettes daily (11% versus 1.3%) or at some point in the last thirty days (12% versus 2.6%) than other students. To a lesser degree, FNMI were also likely to vape and use marijuana. 29% of the respondents who smoke cigarettes at least daily were FNMI, supporting Indigenous student leaders' longstanding concerns about exposure to inequitable enforcement. Please see Appendices B and C for vital context.

> Indigenous students are much more likely to smoke cigarettes than other students, with disproportionate enforcement risks.

Cross-Tabulation: Students with Mobility Needs

"Do you have any mobility needs, conditions, or disabilities that would make it challenging or dangerous to leave campus for a brief errand or task?"

> Students with mobility needs prefer designated areas; absent that option, they are divided but generally prefer the status quo.

As noted above, this group produced almost identical responses to the student body in general: a very strong preference for designated areas, and a roughly even split favoring the status quo once the designated areas option is removed.

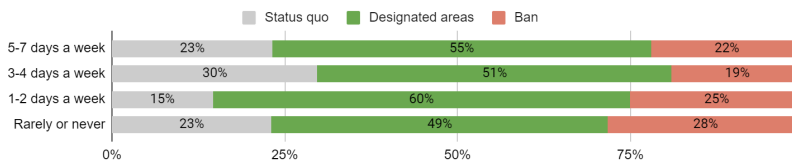
The relatively low number of respondents with mobility needs (63) prevented reliable cross-tabulation beyond this point. In general, however, the 20+ daily users who also have mobility needs had identical responses to other daily users.

Cross-Tabulation: Frequency of Visiting Campus

> Frequency of visiting campus did not have a noteworthy impact.

- 5-7 days a week: 82% of respondents
- 3-4 days a week: 14% of respondents
- 1-2 days a week: 2% of respondents
- Rarely or never: 2% of respondents

There was no clear relationship between this metric and opinions on the question at hand; regardless of frequency of visiting their campus, students overwhelmingly support designated areas.



APPENDIX A: Clean Air Strategy Timeline

- [March 2018](#) GFC: Concurrent with governance discussions about the October 2018 legalization of marijuana in Alberta, a GFC member from the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry brought forward a motion to "direct administration to develop a clean air strategy to minimize student, staff, and faculty exposure to smoke from cigarettes, inhaled cannabis, vapes and hookah pipes." The motion passed. Points of discussion included public health, reputational concerns, and designated smoking areas.
- [September 2018](#) GFC: During the final report of the Cannabis Working Group, Risk Management spoke to the ongoing development of a strategy in response to GFC's motion. Protection for smudging ceremonies was discussed.
- [May 2019](#) GFC: Risk Management reported that a draft strategy would be available in Fall 2019.
- [November 2019](#) GFC: Administration reported that the draft strategy was now expected in Spring 2020; "there were three options under consideration: keep the smoking and vaping rules as they were; ban all smoking and vaping; or significantly limit where people could smoke or vape."
- [February 2021](#) GFC: Facilities and Operations, Risk Management, and Student Services administration presented a "recommendation that the University of Alberta prohibit smoking and vaping of all products on all campuses effective September 1, 2021. Although the prohibition would apply to university residences, there would be exemptions for ceremonial use." The UASU and Indigenous student leaders took the joint stance that a complete ban on recreational vaping and smoking would be unacceptable. The UASU representatives and other student members of GFC raised concerns about disproportionate impacts and risks for Indigenous students and students with mobility challenges. A letter was read from the Aboriginal Students' Council (now Indigenous Students' Union) Executive team. (See Appendix B.)
- [January 2021](#) GFC Exec: "Members discussed the effects of a total ban on those who live in residence or have mobility issues and concerns that a total ban would be difficult to enforce and result in more rule breaking."
- [June 2021](#) GFC: GFC held an extended discussion, leading toward a decision planned for September. However, after the discussion made it clear there was

significant EDI-based opposition to the proposal for a total ban, GFC did not make a collective recommendation. From the minutes:

Members asked questions and expressed comments including but not limited to:

- *that a complete ban would disproportionately affect black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), disabled students, and those living on campus;*
 - *that survey results were mixed and that they did not account for the positions of marginalized people;*
 - *that many opinions had changed since the survey results were gathered because of education related to these concerns;*
 - *that more consultation was needed, especially with Indigenous students and neighboring community leagues;*
 - *that enforcement could be problematic;*
 - *that mental health and addiction supports were needed and should be invested in;*
 - *whether designated smoking areas were feasible;*
 - *that the data showed that second hand smoke was harmful and that social norms would be changed by a total ban;*
 - *the university's participation in The Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting University and Colleges;*
 - *total bans at other U15 institutions; and*
 - *whether this was an academic matter that should be discussed by GFC.*
- The meeting materials (the substance of the proposal) were a 2.5-page point-form summary of the three options (ban, status quo, or designated areas). Regarding the ban option, the summary included a partial list of community concerns and a list of responses. Student representatives believed these responses were insufficient. The complete list of responses to all equity concerns:
 - *Administration, including UAPS and Dean of Students, work with student associations and groups to better understand and address safety concerns as well as those of marginalized students*
 - *Work with Human Resource Services (HRS) and Dean of Students on issues related to mobility and getting to a smoking/vaping location*
 - *Clarify, with HRS and Dean of Students, when it is appropriate to accommodate users, such as for medical use of cannabis or cases of severe addiction*
 - *Develop a communications campaign that addresses the change and educates about community expectations*
 - *Ensure there is significant advance notice prior to the change*

- *Promote supports and cessation programs for people who want to quit*
- [September 2021](#) GFC Exec: "Members expressed concern that there had not been enough direct consultation with student groups and that many were opposed to a complete ban because of equity, safety, and mental health concerns. Members discussed whether the proposal was ready to come forward for decision, the potential to have an alternative of designated smoking areas, clarity about consultation and levels, and clarity on the materials."
 - Shortly before this meeting, the UASU ran a [survey](#) (n=2173) that demonstrated overwhelming support for designated areas and a general rejection of a ban. The report strongly recommended additional consultation with Indigenous students.
- [April 2023](#) GFC: "Members asked about the Clean Air Strategy, whether it could be moved forward, and why it was taking so long. Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) Andrew Sharman explained that it was too late for it to be implemented for September but that the Board would like to hear a recommendation from GFC."
- In 2023, administration signalled that the designated-areas approach was off the table and that a total ban would be sought in Fall 2023. At time of writing, it does not appear that there is any difference between the upcoming proposal and the proposed ban that failed to find support in 2021. The ISU released a statement; see Appendix C.

APPENDIX B: Aboriginal Student Council Statement (2021)

The following statement from the leaders of the Aboriginal Student Council (now the Indigenous Students' Union) was presented at General Faculties Council on February 22, 2021.

Indigenous Peoples have a long and storied history of the use of tobacco. Tobacco is one of the sacred plants that the Creator has endowed upon us; considered to be a sacred medicine, it has been used in ceremonies by our peoples across Turtle Island long before contact with Europeans. We hold the belief that tobacco establishes a direct communication link between a person and the spiritual world with our Creator. Tobacco is a traditional gift that we exchange when we gift our knowledge to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

While it is important to note the difference between traditional and non-traditional tobacco usage, a complete blanket ban of “smoking and vaping of all products on all campuses” has the potential to harm Indigenous students at a disproportionate level. We recognize and understand that this proposal is given with the public health of students and everyone on campus in mind. We ask you to consider the historical context where settler peoples created an environment where Indigenous Peoples have turned to addictive substances to cope with generational trauma. We also share some security concerns for our students, particularly Indigenous students who identify as women and Two-Spirited peoples, who would be forced to leave campus for nicotine usage.

Ceremony is important to Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous students, and we frequently use tobacco for such purposes. We strongly urge the General Faculties Council to consider the unique situation that Indigenous students face in relation to tobacco usage on campus. Furthermore we also urge this committee to consider the impacts on Indigenous students and to pursue alternative avenues of approach to fix this important health issue. We recommend that the General Faculties Council vote for two of the proposed options; that being that (a) Nothing changes or (b) That tobacco usage be permitted in certain areas.

The Aboriginal Student Council is not afraid to use its political capital in order to stand up and represent our students' needs and views wherever and whatever they may be.

APPENDIX C: Indigenous Students' Union Statement (2023)



Indigenous Students' Union

Executive Committee 2023–24

$\llcorner\Gamma^{\circ}b^{\circ}\dot{\iota}^{\circ}b^{\circ}\Delta b^{\circ}$ | *Treaty No.6 Territory* | *Homeland of the Métis Nation*

tân'si kahkiyaw / Hello everyone,

In 2021, the Indigenous Students' Union (ISU), previously called the Aboriginal Student Council, rejected the *Clean Air Strategy* proposed to the General Faculties Council (GFC). The ISU's mandate is to represent and create a safe space for Indigenous undergraduate students. To honour our mandate, the ISU Executive Committee will speak up for Indigenous students who will be impacted disproportionately if the *Clean Air Strategy* is passed.

We continue to be cognizant of the health impacts of nicotine and encourage the University of Alberta to pursue culturally sensitive angles in tackling nicotine usage. However, harassing students who utilize nicotine and pressuring them to spend time away from their campus is not an appropriate method of addressing nicotine addiction. Tobacco is the first medicine given to us by creator. Traditional protocols and ceremonies often involve tobacco. Regardless of intent, this strategy will continue stigmatizing of our sacred medicine and ceremonies and directly opposes reconciliation.

As the University of Alberta attempts to decolonize its institution and attempts to reconcile with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, they must incorporate this goal into all policies. For Indigenous students, Nicotine usage remains a contentious issue. The ISU maintains a policy of harm reduction and destigmatization of nicotine products in its spaces. As we outlined in our 2021 letter, the settler colonial state has inflicted great violence on Indigenous peoples, resulting in traumatic wounds that span generations. Wounds that might look like smoking cigarettes and vaping from battery-operated devices. We believe it is not the University of Alberta's place to decide how individuals on campus cope with the intergenerational effects of colonization in what is now Canada.

These concerns lead to other questions that have yet to be adequately resolved. How will the University enforce this rule? Who is paying for these costs? Will this policy be enforced on construction workers and facility operators? Who has the UofA consulted with? Is the UofA prepared for an outcome where bathrooms and stairwells become unofficial spaces to smoke? The UofA has yet to consult students on this policy adequately. We would also like to remind interested parties that a great deal of work remains to be done in healing the complicated relationship between First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students and settler-colonial law enforcement. Students continue to report concerns about racial/ethnic discrimination by UAPS, with nearly 50 percent of Indigenous students stating they had personally suffered from it, watched strangers or their friends suffer from it, or heard of specific racial discrimination.

The efficacy of the ban is also present in our minds. We are concerned that this ban does not target gasoline-fueled vehicles and certainly does not help the four million gigajoules of natural gas the university annually burns³. This proposed policy is deceitful because it is called the “*Clean Air Strategy*” but focuses on a small percentage of people who smoke outside on campus instead of focusing on factors that significantly contribute to air pollution.

This smoking ban is sorely disappointing as it would mean that the University of Alberta is more concerned about smoking than they are concerned over the emissions they use to run their facilities. The GFC must consider their priorities and do better.

The Indigenous Students’ Union Executive Committee once again recommends that the General Faculties Council reject the *Clean Air Strategy* both in the interest of equity and channelling its energy towards more important issues. If the General Faculties Council is uninterested in rejecting the policy, we continue to recommend the creation of designated smoking areas as a compromise solution.

Sincerely,

Executive Committee 2023-2024
Indigenous Students’ Union

³ <https://www.ualberta.ca/facilities-operations/projects-initiatives/utilities-behind-the-scenes.html>

APPENDIX D: Tobacco/Marijuana Usage

CIGARETTES	2023 (UASU)	2019 Canada NCHA (where equivalent)
Yes, more than once in each of the last thirty days	1.0%	5.1%
Yes, around once in each of the last thirty days	0.8%	
Yes, in the last one to nine days	0.6%	
Yes, in the last ten to 29 days	0.8%	
Yes, but thirty days ago or more	2.0%	
Never used, or occasionally in the past	92.5%	
Prefer not to say	2.5%	

VAPE TOBACCO	2023 (UASU)	2019 Canada NCHA (where equivalent)
Yes, more than once in each of the last thirty days	3.9%	3.1%
Yes, around once in each of the last thirty days	0.7%	
Yes, in the last one to nine days	1.3%	
Yes, in the last ten to 29 days	1.1%	
Yes, but thirty days ago or more	4.5%	
Never used, or occasionally in the past	86.1%	
Prefer not to say	2.4%	

VAPE/SMOKE MARIJUANA	2023 (UASU)	2019 Canada NCHA (where equivalent)
Yes, more than once in each of the last thirty days	4.0%	3.9%
Yes, around once in each of the last thirty days	1.6%	
Yes, in the last one to nine days	2.8%	
Yes, in the last ten to 29 days	2.3%	
Yes, but thirty days ago or more	9.3%	
Never used, or occasionally in the past	77.8%	
Prefer not to say	2.3%	