

With little ceremony, signs throughout the Lorillard campus of the former New Hampshire State University were changed recently to reflect the school's new name, not to mention its new charter.

"New Hampshire *Smokers'* University provides a viable alternative to the radically smoke-free environment of the University of New Hampshire," says Siggie Littman, the school's newly appointed president and an enthusiastic smoker since the eighth grade. "Besides," he adds, "The 'State' in our name was really quite redundant. And by switching out 'State' with 'Smokers' no one's letter jacket becomes obsolete, yet all that it means to be a New Hampshire...sonian—live free or die and all—is fulfilled," says Littman glowing as proudly as the ember he flicks from the tip of his cigarette.

Long rivals in academics and sports, NHSU has finally managed to distinguish itself from UNH, by deciding not to extinguish its students' cigarettes. And taking its cause to the Class of 2007, it is actively marketing itself as 'The Smoke-Friendly College.' Littman confirms that since shedding all pretense of PC'edness, admission requests have rocketed.

"Thank God and Joe Camel," he utters, admitting for the first time publicly what was long rumored in the academic community—that NHSU had nearly been snuffed by a dwindling endowment, an endowment overly invested in ever so environmentally friendly tech and telecom company stocks if truth be told.

"True, we were down to our last pack, so to speak, until we stumbled upon an unfilled need, well addiction really, among today's entering freshman," says Littman, lighting up...literally and figuratively.

In fact, while UNH was busily banning smoking in dormitories, forcing students out into the New England cold to take their puffs, declaring a smoke-free perimeter of 20 feet around all campus-building doorways, looking into pushing that perimeter to 40 feet—making retractable tape measures key to campus survival—NHSU made a point of providing each of its enrolled students with a Smoke-Eaters ashtray, a year's supply of matches and two cases each of Dentyne and Halls Mentho-Lyptus drops, not to mention a 20 percent off coupon to Brite Smiles' Manchester office.

"The more they restricted, the more welcoming we became. We got to the point where declaring ourselves officially smoker-friendly just seemed right," said Morris Reynolds, NHSU's Dean of Students and the man behind the lapel pins a handful of students supported in commemoration of the name change: Give Our Vice a Voice.

Overall, acceptance of the name change has been unanimous to indifferent. At the schools' annual 'Strike a Match' mixer, students were seemingly unfazed by the new signage, though visibility was limited as they danced through the hazy union—where about a dozen students required treatment for flesh burns acquired from unintentional bumps into lit butts. The report of a cocktail dress igniting in the wee hours was true, but thankfully the coed to whom it belonged had shed it minutes before.

But not all NHSU students are thrilled with the freedom they've been given from the smoking bans and restrictions that characterize a growing number of other college campuses.

"The coughing was so distracting. Call me old-fashioned, but I think a library should be quiet. And the air should be clear enough to be able to read the book in front of your nose. Don't get me wrong, I find trails of smoke wafting through the air on a Saturday night as sexy as the next girl—and fashion-wise, there's no beating school

colors of yellow stain and ash and darned if Cammey the Camel wasn't the cutest mascot—but with all that snoring in my dorm, I just couldn't see my way to a decent grade, you know," says Ginny Toopak, who recently transferred to UNH. She claims the resultant weight gain is worth the GPA gain...at least that's what her parents say.

"For what I'm saving on dry cleaning, I've bought a house," says former NHSU English professor, Niles Marlboro, now an instructor at UNH. "Though, so far, I've not found a decent substitute for Friday nights at the Nicotina, NHSU's smokin'union."

Nor has he found a place he can go to light up the occasional cigarette in between lectures. In fact it was run-ins with the tobacco police that got his rank busted from professor to instructor.

"I do miss the freedom of NHSU where 'smoke 'em if you've got 'em' was an option not a mandate. Here, you have no choice. These students may end up living longer, but they are certainly not freer. Quitters are nuts to think that kicking the habit comes at no cost," he coughed, seemingly in doubt over his career move.

And freedom of choice is what it is all about, insists Littman. "You may live free and die coughing or live being treated like a criminal for grabbing a smoke now and again, or just live in a smoke-free environment but you will still die," he tries to explain. "The point is that once you reach a certain age, have heard umpteen public service messages, sat through personal health lectures and still choose to spend an outrageous portion of your budget on cigs, then by all means, you should be able to do so without the people you pay tens of thousands of dollars in tuition, room and board to saying you can't," huffs a clearly winded Littman.

It's a choice to be sure. That choice being the right to choose one's own vice. It was a choice underlined by the recent vandalism of a highway sign for the turnoff to UNH which now reads: University of Nannies and Freedom Hamperers.