Course: Supersized Nation: Understanding and Managing America’s Obesity Epidemic

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Day/Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 2:30-4:00 PM

Course Overview

This course will examine the multiple causes and consequences of obesity, at both an individual and societal level. Basic mechanisms of body weight regulation will first be considered, along with wide-scale changes in diet, eating habits, and physical activity that have contributed to our nation’s epidemic of obesity. The benefits, challenges, and potential harms of weight reduction will be reviewed, as will specific therapies to help individuals lose weight (including diet, physical activity, behavior therapy, medication, and surgery). The alarming increases in child and adolescent obesity will be examined, in conjunction with efforts to prevent and treat these conditions. Two other disorders that affect primarily youth – anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa – will be briefly discussed (i.e., one class). The course will conclude with a consideration of innovative approaches, rooted in public health and social policy, which are needed to reverse the current epidemic of obesity that threatens the health of both individuals and our nation.

The course is appropriate for psychology majors (and other students) who are interested in clinical applications of psychology (and other health sciences) to the problem of obesity. Students should have taken introductory psychology and have a basic understanding of how randomized controlled trials are used to test the effectiveness of different interventions.

Texts

Required:

Grilo CG. *Eating and Weight Disorders*. New York: Psychology Press, 2006. (Students do not need to purchase this book. A copy of the book will be on reserve at the library, and readings will be in the course pack.)

Kopelman PG, Caterson ID, Dietz WH. *Clinical Obesity in Adults and Children*; Third Edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. (Students should not purchase this book. A copy will be on reserve at the library, and readings will be in the course pack.)

A supplementary course pack of readings (and PDFs), consisting principally of journal articles, will be provided to students at no cost.

**Useful Websites**

- www.niddk.nih.gov/
  - WIN (Weight Information Network)
  - www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob_home.htm
  - www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/practgde.htm
- www.yaleruddcenter.org/
- www.med.upenn.edu/weight

**Course Requirements**

This course will be taught principally as a seminar (with some Power Point presentations to underscore major points). Thus, its success will depend upon students’ active class participation and leadership. During the semester, students will be asked to write 6 “reaction” papers of 600-750 words in which they respond to a topic provided (on 5 occasions) or to a topic of their choice (1 occasion). Reaction papers will account for 60% of the final grade. A term paper (10-15 pages, excluding references) on a topic of the student’s choice will count for 40% of the final grade. An outline of the paper must be approved in advance.

Class readings listed below should be completed on the date that they appear. For example, students should read the articles by Dart et al and Runge before class on January 19th (and be prepared to discuss them in class on the 19th).

**Class Schedule**

**Jan 17**  
“Overview of the Course and of the Obesity Epidemic: Part I”  
Obesity: definitions; epidemiology; health and economic consequences

**Readings:**

Articles by Mitchell et al and Ogden et al in course pack.
Jan 19  “Overview of the Course and of the Obesity Epidemic: Part II”

Readings:

Dart et al and Runge in course pack.

Jan 24  “The Biology of Body Weight Regulation: Part I”
Energy expenditure and balance; body composition; control of food intake; genetic factors

Readings:

Article by Dulloo (pp 67-73; the remainder of the chapter is optional).

Article by Faulconbridge et al in course pack.

Jan 26  “The Biology of Body Weight Regulation: Part II”

Readings:

Article by Farooqi (pp. 82-83, 86-91; the remainder of the chapter is optional).

Articles by Hill et al, Murtagh et al, and Stunkard et al in course pack.

Jan 31  “Behavioral, Dietary, and Environmental Contributors to Obesity: Part I”
Diet; sugar-sweetened beverages; portion size

Readings:

Food Fight: pp 3-19, 21-51, 161-78,179-97


Thought Paper Due (all students)

Feb 2  “Behavioral, Dietary, and Environmental Contributors to Obesity: Part II”

Readings:

Articles by Kaiser et al and Hu et al in course pack

Optional readings: Articles by Rolls et al (2009) and Bray et al.
Feb 7  “Behavioral, Dietary, and Environmental Contributors to Obesity: Part III”
Physical activity, culture, environment

Readings:


Optional readings: Articles by Prentice et al, Keith et al in course pack.

Thought Paper Due (all students)

Feb 9  “Behavioral, Dietary, and Environmental Contributors to Obesity: Part IV”

Readings:

Food Fight: pp 69-96; 97-127
Article by Christakis et al in course pack

Feb 14  “Obesity and Psycho-social Status: Part I”
Obesity and stigmatization

Readings:


Feb 16  “Obesity and Psycho-social Status: Part II”
Obesity, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders

Readings:

Articles by Berkowitz et al, pp. 747-56; Stunkard, pp. 765-71 in course pack


Optional readings: Jones-Corneille et al in course pack.
Feb 21  “Obesity: A disease, psychiatric disorder, or lifestyle problem? Part I”  
Health complications of obesity; defining disease; addiction

Readings


Thought Paper Due (All Students)

Feb 23  “Obesity: A disease, psychiatric disorder, or lifestyle problem? Part II”

Readings


Feb 28  Losing Weight: Benefits, Challenges, and Potential Harms Part I  
Health and quality of life; weight regain; restrained (and disordered) eating

Readings


Mar 2  Losing Weight: Benefits, Challenges, and Potential Harms Part II

Readings

Knowler et al, Rubin et al, and Wing et al,

Thought Paper Due (choice #1)

Mar 7 and 9  Spring Break

Mar 14  “Weight Management: Diet and Exercise Part I”  
Calories count; macronutrient composition; types of physical activity  
Supplementary readings from course pack

Mar 16  “Weight Management: Diet and Exercise Part II”  
Supplementary readings from course pack
Behavior therapy; FDA-approved medications; surgery (gastric bypass)
Supplementary readings from course pack

Thought Paper Due (all students)

Mar 23  “Weight Management: Lifestyle Modification, Pharmacotherapy, and Surgery Part II”
Supplementary readings from course pack

Mar 28  “Eating Disorders in Youth and Young Adults: Part I”
Anorexia nervosa; bulimia nervosa; body image disturbance

Readings
Supplementary readings from course pack
Eating and Weight Disorders: pp 1-17, 27-38, 41-53, 67-85, 95-118

Mar 30 “Eating Disorders in Youth and Young Adults: Part II”

Thought Paper Due (choice #2)

Apr 4 “Obesity in Children and Adolescents: Part I”
Diagnosis; causes; health and psychosocial consequences
Supplementary readings from course pack

Apr 6 “Obesity in Children and Adolescents: Part II”
Supplementary readings from course pack

Apr 11 “Prevention and Treatment of Obesity in Youth: Part I”
School-based prevention efforts; lifestyle modification; medication; surgery
Supplementary readings from course pack

Apr 13 “Prevention and Treatment of Obesity in Youth: Part II”
Supplementary readings from course pack

Thought Paper Due (all students)
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<th>Date</th>
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| Apr 18 | “Obesity Prevention: What’s Preventing the U.S. from Preventing Obesity?”  
Part I  
Multi-factorial problem; roles of academia, government, and industry | **Readings**  
Food Fight: 199-239, 243-281 |
| Apr 20 | “Obesity Prevention: What’s Preventing the U.S. from Preventing Obesity?”  
Part II | Supplementary readings from course pack |
Public health vs medical model; food taxes and restrictions; nudges | **Readings**  
Supplementary readings from course pack  
Food Fight: 283-307, 313 |
| Apr 27 | “Obesity Prevention: New Directions in Public Health and Policy Part II” | Supplementary readings from course pack |
| TBD    | Term Paper Due (in class, April 27th)                                  |               |