

Ohio Wesleyan University
PE 200.9
Obesity and Prevention in Italy and the United States: A Systemic Examination

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Course Description

This course is an extension of PE 114 - Personal Health and Exercise, and will serve as an opportunity for students to examine the variety of factors that influence obesity-preventing behaviors.

The Mediterranean Lifestyle (especially the Mediterranean Diet) is frequently promoted as one of the healthiest in the world. Obesity rates are on the rise worldwide, but adult obesity rates in Italy are among the lowest in Europe. Some ascribe this to an adherence to the Mediterranean Diet, while others view it more systemically, with influences operating on a host of social and environmental levels.

During this course, students will spend the spring semester on campus taking a systemic approach to examining factors that influence the performance of obesity-preventing behaviors (nutrition and physical activity) here in the United States, and will also have the opportunity to conduct readings and discussions related to systemic differences in these factors in Italy. Students will then have an opportunity travel to Italy for two weeks in May, where they will to share their experiences and observations of factors in the United States with students in two diverse sites (Torino and Cagliari), and they will also hear the results of a parallel project conducted by Italian students. Finally, students in this course will be given an opportunity to observe for themselves the varying factors that influence food and physical activity in Italy by observing the traditional *Passeggiata*, visiting markets and food sources, and seeing first-hand the process of (from farm to fork) and cultural values surrounding the production of traditional Italian food products in a three-day visit to the Emilia-Romagna region.

The systemic approach used in this course will be *ecological* in nature, thus examining behavioral influences on various levels. These include individual, social, community, institutional, and public policy factors. This approach will allow students to see the complex web of influences that operate in health behavior decision-making, and using Italy as a comparison point will allow students to see how these levels vary based on the social and physical environment, values, policies, and so on.

Course Objectives & Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Be able to identify the multiple levels of factors that influence obesity-preventing behaviors
2. Examine specific examples of these factors in their environmental context
3. Analyze the presence of and the magnitude with which these factors influence behavioral decision making on a personal level
4. Develop an increased ability to think systemically (ecologically), both in terms of causal factors and outcomes, about issues of global health concern, especially obesity.
5. Recognize and discuss how these systemic influences can vary globally, by context
6. Understand the history and components of the Mediterranean Diet.
7. Gain an initial understanding of the cultural context of eating and physical activity behavior decision making in Italy.
8. Experience, first-hand, these cultural and systemic factors and how they influence these behavioral decisions.
9. Successfully compare and contrast these with like factors in the United States.
10. Understand and be able to describe the concept of *Salutogenesis* as it applies to health behavior decision-making.
11. Disseminate their understanding in a forum with students of similar age in Italy.
12. Through the in-person experience, gain a greater appreciation for the cultural values surrounding traditional food production and physical activity in Italy

And perhaps most critically:

Students must demonstrate a *consistent* ability to conduct themselves properly as delegates of the program, University, and nation in an international setting. As such, faculty, co-travelers, hosts, guest speakers, students, and other individuals should be treated with courtesy and respect.

Course Assessments

Points earned in the course will be distributed as follows:

Item	Percentage
Homework & Reading Questions	25%
Project Proposal	20%
Final Presentation	25%
Participation (Presence, Engagement, Behavior)	30%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Plan

Grades will be awarded based on percentage earned for all course assessments

A+	98-100	C-	78-79.9
A	92-97.9	C	72-77.9
A-	90-91.9	C-	70-71.9
B+	88-89.9	D+	68-69.9
B	82-87.9	D+	62-67.9
B-	80-81.9	D-	60-61.9
		F	≤ 59.9

Description of Course Assessments

Homework and Reading Questions (25% total)

Course readings will be accompanied by a series of questions that all students will answer relative to their assignment. This will be due the following class period, typed, and will facilitate discussion among students. Other homework as assigned will be included in this category.

Project Proposal (20% total)

Working via email with a student partner (in Italy), students will develop a project topic that will be concurrently presented while in Italy. This proposal will take the form of a written abstract as well as a 10 minute presentation delivered to the class during the semester.

Final Presentation (25% total)

Students will deliver a cohesive set of presentations related to obesity preventing behaviors in the United States to our Italian partners during our time in Italy. Beforehand, this presentation will be delivered in class (and recorded for critique) during the second-to-last class period before departure.

Participation (30% total)

Students will be treated as delegates from the outset of the course. It is imperative that students conduct themselves as honorable representatives of this course, the Sagan program, and the University. The University is subsidizing these travel learning courses, and as such we all (instructor included) are being sent as true delegates to another country and culture. Clear behavioral guidelines will be provided at the outset of the term, and the expectation is that these will be adhered to throughout the semester and our trip to Italy.

As this course is an opportunity for which all enrolled students applied and were accepted, and it is expected that enthusiasm, engagement, and presence at course meetings will not be a

problem. Despite this, a travel learning course is by nature experiential and requires good preparation, and so a substantial portion of the course grade is tied to this category.

Attendance Policy

Missing a class meeting with no prior notice to the instructor will result in a warning, and a second such absence will result in removal from the course. Excused absences will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Work Due

1. Work is due on the day and time specified. Late work will be penalized. Work turned in later on the same date it was due will be assessed a 5% penalty. Work turned in the next day after the due date will be penalized 10%. After that you must discuss with the instructor if you can turn in work for partial credit.
2. Hand-written work will not be accepted, except where specified.

Readings and Assigned Work

Reading material and assigned class preparation work should be completed before each class period. This will result in students being prepared and ready to contribute to class discussions and activities.

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct of any kind is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. Any instance of this type of behavior can result in an immediate referral of the incident to the academic dean and the academic conduct review-board. If referred, remediation of the problem will come from this board and the academic dean. The bottom line is that students should do their own work and be honest.

Students With Special Needs

Students with learning disabilities or other special needs should make arrangements for appropriate accommodations. This discussion should take place with the instructor during the first week of the term.

Course Materials

Required Text:

Popkin, B. (2008). *The world is fat*. New York: Avery. ISBN 13: 978-1583333136, ISBN 10: 1583333134

Selected Sources Used for This Class:

Alexandratos, N. (2006). The Mediterranean diet in a world context. *Public Health Nutrition* Vol 9(1A):111-117.

Antonovsky, A. (1996). The salutogenic model as a theory to guide health promotion. *Health Promotion International*, 11(1), 11-18.

Bifulco M, Caruso M.G. (2007). From Gastronomic Revolution to the New Globesity Epidemic. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 12:2058-2060.

Brill, J. B. (2009). The Mediterranean diet and your health. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. 3(1): 44-56.

Crister, G. (2003). *Fat land: How Americans became the fattest people in the world*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. ISBN 13: 978-0618164721, ISBN 10: 0618164723

Gard, M. (2009). Friends, enemies and the cultural politics of critical obesity research. In *Biopolitics and the obesity epidemic: Governing bodies*. (p. 31). Taylor & Francis.

Gregson, J., Foerster, S. B., Orr, R., Jones, L., Benedict, J., Clarke, B., Zotz, K. (2001). System, environmental, and policy changes: Using the social-ecological model as a framework for evaluating nutrition education and social marketing programs with low-income audience. *Journal of Nutrition Education*, 33(S1), S4-S15.

Helstosky, C. (2006). *Garlic and oil: Food and politics in Italy*. New York: Berg. ISBN 13: 978-1859738900, ISBN 10: 1859738958

Helstosky, C. (2009). *Food culture in the Mediterranean*. Westport, CT: Greenwood: ISBN 13: 978-0313346262

Keys, A., Menotti, A., Karvonen, M. J., Aravanis, C., Blackburn, H., Buzina, R., et al. (1986). The diet and 15-year death rate in the seven countries study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 124 (6):903-915.

Lindstrom, B., & Eriksson, M. (2005). Salutogenesis. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 59(6), 440-442.

Lundy, T. (2010). A paradigm to guide health promotion into the 21st century: The integral idea whose time has come. *Global Health Promotion*, 17(3), 44.

Morgan, W. P. (2001). Prescription of physical activity: A paradigm shift. *Quest*. 53, 366-382.

Nestle, M. (2007). *Food politics: How the food industry influences nutrition and health*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. ISBN 13: 978-0520254039

Parasecoli, F. (2004). *Food culture in italy*. Greenwood Pub Group.

Petrini, C. (2007). *Slow food nation: Why our food should be good, clean, and fair*. Rizzoli Intl.

Rimer, B. K., Glanz, K., & (US), N. C. I. (2005). *Theory at a glance: A guide for health promotion practice*. US Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute.

Simopoulos, A. P., & Visioli, F. (2007). *More on mediterranean diets*. Basel ; New York: Karger.

Thistlewaite, R. (2010). Do you have the balls to really change the food system? Retrieved from <http://www.grist.org/article/food-do-you-have-the-balls-to-really-change-the-food-system/?ref=se>

Other readings as posted on Blackboard