



Weight... What? The Anthropology of Obesity

**Anthropology 30800, 40800, &
60801**

Fall 2023

Tuesday & Thursday – 11:00am-12:15pm

Corbett Family Hall E108

Dr. Cara Ocobock

Dr. Ocobock's Contact Info

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:30-
2:30 or by appointment

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Important Things to Know

- **This is a grade-less, test-less class, see details further in this syllabus**
- **I am NOT Mrs. Ocobock. I am Dr. Ocobock or Professor Ocobock or...Doc Oc**
- **I will not typically respond to email between the hours of 6pm-6am.**
- **BEFORE emailing me, please first check the syllabus for answers.**

Course Description & Objectives

Almost 40% of the world's population is overweight or has obesity. Obesity has become a central focus biological research as well as policy. Billions of dollars have been spent on public health interventions, biological interventions, diets, and exercise regimens. However, the obesity rate among adults and children has been steadily increasing globally. Why is this happening? How do we even define obesity? Does that definition truly reflect health? Why do we even have fat to begin with...actually what even is fat?!? Why are humans prone to obesity? These are just some of the questions we will address in this class. Using non-traditional methods and assignments, we will discuss adipose tissue and digestive physiology, the role evolution has played in the human propensity hold onto fat, diet and exercise, food insecurity, therapeutic interventions, as well as the physical and mental health consequences of having obesity. We will use this as a basis to investigate the biological and cultural factors including stigma, race, and gender that shape our perceptions of body image and health in the midst of the obesity epidemic. Finally, this course will include occasional laboratory exercises to familiarize you with the methods used to assess body mass, body composition, metabolic rate, and point of care measures of biomarkers like glucose and cholesterol. In this course you will gain an appreciation of the breadth and depth of human variation. You will engage with the material in both traditional and non-traditional ways in order to broaden your skillset and hone both your speaking and writing skills while also developing honest self-assessment skills.

This class has no grades or tests, but there will be a final grade

Why Grades Don't Work

- Listen to an interview here
- Grades make you think less
- Grades make you avoid taking risks
- Grades make you lose interest in learning
- Grades rarely reflect actual learning
- Grades do not reflect life

Why Tests Don't Work

- Tests really only test your cramming/short term memory
- Tests cannot take into account different learning styles
- Tests produce unnecessary anxiety that prohibit learning engagement

How This Will Work

- You will develop a goal and plan of action for this semester
 - You will state the grade you would like to receive and how you plan to achieve this grade throughout the semester
 - You will also describe any hurdles you expect to encounter and how you might overcome them
 - You will meet with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss this plan
- You will turn in regular writing assignments as well as 4 larger assignments throughout the semester
 - I will provide feedback on each of these assignments
 - But so will you, for each larger assignment, you will write a short assessment that includes the following:
 - what you learned
 - the challenges you faced completing this assignment
 - how you overcame those challenges (if you did)
 - how well you think you did the assignment
 - what you think you could have done better
- Mid-Semester Check-In – meet with me to discuss what you have done so far, what you are proud of, and what you could be doing better
- End of Semester Meeting – meet with me to assess the body of work you completed throughout the semester and together decide a final grade to be submitted to Notre Dame.

Academic Integrity

As a student of the University of Notre Dame, you are expected to abide by its honor code (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/>):

"As a member of the Notre Dame community, I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to learn and abide by principles of intellectual honesty and academic integrity, and therefore I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty."

When you are expected to work alone on an assignment, it will be clearly stated in the assignment guidelines.

Course Materials

- Most resources are links to articles on the web.
- Articles provided through Canvas
- A notebook
- Handful of colored pens or pencils (I like to write and draw on the board)

Class Behavior

- This class does cover some controversial topics. I expect each of you to respect your classmates' opinions. If you disagree, do so respectfully so that we can have a discussion about it. I want to promote diversity and inclusion in this classroom (<https://diversity.nd.edu/>)
- We will, therefore, take color conscious (rather than colorblind) approach. As Michelle Alexander states, color consciousness "places faith in our capacity as humans to show care and concern for others, even as we are full cognizant of race and possible racial differences." pg. 243 from *The New Jim Crow*

In Order to Succeed

You Need To:

1. Attend class regularly
2. Take notes in class – handwritten is better!
3. Actively participate
4. Maintain an open mind to my methods – this is the first time I have run a course like this (no grades or exams). There are likely to be bumps along the way, I would greatly appreciate your patience
5. Maintain an open mind to the topics covered
6. Be engaged and inquisitive
7. Give me feedback! If something works well, tell me. If something fails miserably, TELL ME!
8. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE! Cite everything you use to complete your work – here is a helpful resource on citations:
<http://library.williams.edu/citing/styles/chicago2.php>

COVID-19 & Honestly Any Illness Statement

- For no, masks are not required in class. However, I reserve the right to require them at anytime!
- These are unprecedented times. I will do my best to to approach this situation with flexibility, patience, and compassion. I ask you to do the same
- IF YOU ARE FEELING ILL, DO NOT COME TO CLASS! EMAIL ME AND LET ME KNOW!!!
- If more than 5 students test positive for COVID-19 at the same time, I will move the class online for a two week period.
- If your professor contracts COVID-19, I will move the class online for a two week period

Assignment Check List

Regular Reading Responses

- Regular reading responses to turn in each Monday via Google Doc
- These will consist of **Pre-Reading Questions** & **Post-Reading Questions**
- For **Pre-Reading** – I am trying to get you thinking about what you may or may not know about this material before reading about it.
- There is no right or wrong answer to all of this, it is just to get you thinking
- The **Post-Reading Questions** are to make sure you did the readings, and can meaningfully contribute during class.

Reading Response	Date	Done
1	8/28	
2	9/4	
3	9/11	
4	9/18	
5	9/25	
6	10/2	
7	10/9	
8	10/23	
9	10/30	
10	11/6	
11	11/20	
12	11/27	
13	12/4	
14	12/11	

Large Assignment	Date	Done
Chatgp-Obesity	9/14	
Popular vs. Peer Review	10/12	
Say the Quiet Part Out Loud	11/14	
Un-Essay	12/7	

Assignment Guidelines

- Guidelines will be provided to you for each assignment. If you do not understand the assignment guidelines, it is up to you to reach out to me for clarification!

Attendance and Participation

I like to run an interactive class which means there is give and take from me AND you. You cannot participate in class unless you are physically there. I am fully aware of and sensitive to University sanctioned events as well as life events that may conflict with class. It is your responsibility to discuss potential absences with me ahead of time if possible. If you cannot discuss it with me ahead of time, please make every effort to talk to me as soon as you can.

Schedule (1 of 5)

During the semester, I am allowing the class one "Not Having It" day. By majority vote, you the class can decide we ditch the original plan and watch a My 600lbs life episode and discuss.

I also reserve the right to declare one "Ocobock is Not Having It" day where we will either watch a My 600lbs Life episode or just cancel class all together.

Week 1: August 22 & 23 Introduction & What is Obesity Part 1

Readings 8/22:
NONE

No Assignments Due

Readings 8/24:
NONE

Reading Response #1 due 8/28

Week 2: August 29 & 31 What is Obesity Part 2 & BMI + Lab Time

Readings 8/29:

1. [WHO](#) - Read Overview, Complications, and Prevention & Control tabs
2. Kinlin et al. 2018 – pdf on Canvas
3. Omer 2020 – pdf on Canvas
4. [How America is Causing the Global Obesity Epidemic](#)

No Assignments Due

Readings 8/30:

1. [Measuring obesity](#)
2. [Problems with BMI](#)
3. [BMI Smack Down](#)

Reading Response #2 due 9/4

Week 3: September 5 & 7 Energy Balance & Metabolism Digestion & Absorption

Readings 9/5:

1. [Science of Energy Balance](#)
2. Power Chapter 6 – pdf on Canvas
3. Power Chapter 9 – pdf on Canvas

No Assignments Due

Readings 9/7:

1. Goodman 2010 – pdf on Canvas
2. [WHO Nutritional Guidelines](#)

Reading Response #3 due 9/11

Schedule (2 of 5)

Week 4: September 12 & 14 Adipose Tissue Biology and Evolution & Obesity

Readings 9/12:

1. Power Chapter 11 – pdf on Canvas
2. [New Obesity Tool](#)
3. [Supercharging Brown Fat](#)
4. Pond 1992 – pdf on Canvas

No Assignments Due

Readings 9/14:

1. Wells 2012 – pdf on Canvas
2. Trinkaus 2005 – pdf on Canvas
3. Wiley & Cullin – pdf on Canvas
4. [The Fattest Ape](#)

Reading Response #4 due 9/18

Chatgp-Obesity DUE

Week 5: September 19 & 21 Cultural Perceptions of Obesity and Obesogenic Environments

Readings 9/19:

1. Brewis et al. 2011 – pdf on Canvas
2. Carof 2017 – pdf on Canvas

No Assignments Due

Readings 9/21:

1. Power Chapter 5 – pdf on Canvas
2. Power Chapter 13 – pdf on Canvas

Reading Response #5 due 9/25

Week 6: September 26 & 28 Obesity Nutrition/Malnutrition

Readings 9/26:

1. Review Power Chapters 6 & 9 from Week #3
2. Popkin et al. 2020 – pdf on Canvas
3. Wells et al. 2020 – pdf on Canvas

No Assignments Due

Readings 9/28:

MOVIE DAY – AT HOME
Super Size Me

Reading Response #6 due 10/2

Schedule (3 of 5)

Week 7: October 3 & 5 Why Diet and Exercise Doesn't Always Work

Readings 10/3:

1. Fothergill et al. 2016 – pdf on Canvas
2. Casazza et al. 2013 – pdf on Canvas
3. [Why Dieting Doesn't Work](#)

No Assignments Due

Readings 10/5:

1. Luke & Cooper 2013 – pdf on Canvas
2. Malhotra et al. 2015 – pdf on Canvas
3. [Talking "Burn" podcast](#)

Reading Response #7 due 10/9

Week 8: October 10 & 12 Obesity during Childhood & Pregnancy and Obesity Epigenetics

Readings 10/10:

1. Larquè et al. 2019 – pdf on Canvas
2. Weihrauch-Blüher et al. 2019 – pdf on Canvas
3. Flanagan et al 2021 – pdf on Canvas

No Assignments Due

Readings 10/12:

1. Mahmoud 2022 – pdf on Canvas
2. [Legacy of Trauma](#)

Reading Response #8 due 10/23

POPULAR VS. PEER REVIEW DUE

Week 9: October 17 & 19 NO CLASS FALL BREAK

Week 10: October 24 & 26 Obesity, Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status

Readings 10/24:

1. Lovejoy et al. 2009– pdf on Canvas
2. [Provider Implicit Bias](#)
3. [Weight Bias Rooted in Racism is Hurting Us All](#)

No Assignments Due

Readings 10/26:

1. Volaco et al. 2018 – pdf on Canvas
2. Kjellberg et al. 2017 – pdf on Canvas
3. Hruschka 2012 – pdf on Canvas
4. [Food deserts of Memphis](#)

Reading Response #9 due 10/30

Schedule (4 of 5)

Week 11: October 31 & November 2 Fat & Fit

Readings 10/31:

1. Ortega et al. 2013 – pdf on Canvas
2. Ocobock & Niclou 2022 – pdf on Canvas
3. [Transforming obesity care](#)

No Assignments Due



Readings 11/2:

1. Patte et al. 2016 – pdf on Canvas
2. Thedinga et al. 2021 – pdf on Canvas
3. [Fat but Fit? The Controversy Continues](#)
4. [Exercise: Fat Buster or Belly Flop?](#)

Reading Response #10 due 11/6

Week 12: November 7 & 9 NO CLASS

 **OCOBOCK IN MEXICO...that's right, be jealous!** 

Week 13: November 14 & 16 Thin Ideals & Resistance and Mental Health & Stigma

Readings 11/14:

1. Klaczynski et al 2004 – pdf on Canvas
2. [From NY to Instagram: The History of the Body Positivity Movement](#)
3. [Consumer Culture Won't Lead to Body Positivism](#)

**SAY THE QUIET PART OUT LOUD
DUE**

Readings 11/16:

1. Wang et al 2004– pdf on Canvas
2. Schwartz & Brownell 2004 – pdf on Canvas
3. Cullin 2021 – pdf on Canvas
4. Sarwer & Polonsky 2016 – pdf on Canvas
5. [The World Hates Fat People](#)

Reading Response #11 due 11/20

Week 14: November 21 & 23

Readings 11/21:

MOVIE DAY AT HOME

Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead

No Assignments Due



Reading Response #12 due 11/27

Schedule (5 of 5)

Week 15: November 28 & 30 Obesity Interventions and Ozempic

Readings 11/28:

1. O'Brien et al. 2005 – pdf on Canvas
2. Deal et al. 2020 – pdf on Canvas
3. [NBC News Infant Obesity Research Pennington](#)
4. [Treatment Not Enough](#)

No Assignments Due

Readings 11/30:

1. Chamberlin & Dabbs 2019 – pdf on Canvas
2. [The New Yorker](#) – pdf on Canvas
3. [I lost 40lbs on Ozempic](#) – pdf on Canvas
4. [My Horrific Experience with Ozempic](#)

Reading Response #13 due 12/4

Week 13: December 5 & 7 The End is the Beginning

Readings 11/14:

NONE

No Assignments Due

Readings 11/16:

NONE

Reading Response #14 due 12/11

UNESSAY DUE

OCOBOCK DISCLAIMERS

1. **You should take some time and make friends in this class. I DO NOT give out my notes if you miss class. It is your responsibility to get notes from a friend.**
2. **As this class is not being run in a traditional way, I reserve the right to change this syllabus at any time. I will actively seek your feedback and include it as we move through the semester. As such, it would behoove you to give me that feedback so that I can improve this class and your learning experience along the way.**

CHATGPT STATEMENT

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DISABILITY SERVICES

Any student who has a documented disability and is registered with Disability Services should speak with the professor as soon as possible regarding accommodations. Students who are not registered should contact the Office of Disability Services - <https://sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu/>

PERSONAL NOTE

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing or faces a catastrophic event (death or illness in the family for example) and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Undergraduate Studies (574-631-7098) of University Health Services (574-631-7497) for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

Course materials (videos, assignments, problem sets, etc.) are for use in this course only. You may not upload them to external sites, share with any person outside of this course, or post them for public commentary without my written permission. We are recording class meetings to support remote students and to provide everyone in the class with useful study aids. These recordings will be available for review through Sakai. The University strictly prohibits anyone from duplicating, downloading, or sharing live class recordings with anyone outside of this course, for any reason.



Poppadom (black), Hecate (tortoise shell), and Fidgeward (orange) hope you have a purrfect semester!

This is an excellent example of the solid gold comedy you can expect from me...