University of Wisconsin-Madison
GWS 539: Framing Fatness: Gender, Size, Constructing Health
3 credit course

Special Topics Course
Examination in depth of specific topics in the area of gender and health. Exploration of relevant health issues in social, economic, and cultural contexts, including public health and policy, and how they relate to gender, race, sexuality, disability, and class.
Enrollment Requirement: Sophomore standing

Spring 2020
Class Time: Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 - 10:45 a.m.
Sterling 1333
Face-to-face instruction

Canvas URL:
https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/191799

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Instructor: Katherine Phelps, University of Wisconsin - Madison, Gender and Women’s Studies
Email: kphelps@wisc.edu
Office Hours: By appointment/virtual/phone (I have a newborn this spring semester, so office hours will need to be flexible!)
Office: 3323 Sterling Hall

Course Description

This course explores various aspects of identity politics and body politics such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and citizenship status as they relate to and intersect with body size, and constructions of fatness. We begin by understanding how fatness has been conceptualized over time, the formation of the thin feminine ideal, and the proliferation of obesity rhetoric. We investigate how fat individuals experience the social world, in particular related to arenas such as the American health care system, and other societal institutions such as education, social welfare, immigration, and media. We will investigate and interrogate how the obesity epidemic came to be, how it is framed in the United States, and
how it intersects with other systems like big pharma, the food industry, beauty industry, globalization, neoliberalism, and consumerism. This class takes a critical approach in understanding fatness and body size as dimensions of difference that inform experiences of privilege and oppression.

Requisites:
GWS 101 or 102, a course in a related discipline; or instructor consent.

Some Course Discussion Themes:
Fat studies
Body politics
Gender disparities and healthcare
History and evolutions of health/medicine
Privilege, power, and social capital
Systemic and individual discrimination
Race and color
Motherhood/pregnancy
Citizenship
Intersectionality/intersecting identities
Social movements, activism, and body resistance

Learning Objectives:
At the completion of this course you will be able to:

• Critically analyze and provide concrete examples of how fatness has been socially constructed in various institutions such as healthcare, medicine, beauty, and media, and how the meanings of fatness have changed over time and across identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.)
• Articulate various theoretical frameworks (fat studies, feminist theories, disability studies, queer theory, etc.) as they relate to fatness, embodiment, gender, and discrimination, and use them in application of concrete ideas
• Think, observe, and write critically and analytically and engage thoughtfully in analytic (rather than simply opinionated!) discussions
• Understand and engage in the process of conducting a literature review and in-depth interviews, and complete a clear, well organized, and thoughtful academic paper that explores a particular area of scholarship related to fat embodiment

Graduate students taking this course need to meet with me at the start of the semester to discuss expectations and adjusted course assignments/assessments.

Required Texts:
All class readings are available in PDF form on Canvas.

Assignments and Grading:
Participation (25% of overall grade): In this class, participation is crucial if you want to do well. That means accessing course readings, completing assigned readings on time, coming to class with questions and ideas related to the concepts we are discussing that day, and participating on Canvas discussions when they are assigned. Anticipate between 60 to 80 pages of reading each week, sometimes more, sometimes less. I do not have an attendance policy for this class, but bear in mind that participation is a substantial part of your final grade, thus, you will be required to be in class and required to participate during class discussions and activities. This is a discussion-based course; I want to hear what YOU have to say!

Media Literacy Response (10% of overall grade): You will submit a short paper that explores representations of fatness in popular or news media and analyze those representations in reference to the theories and frameworks we discuss in class. This paper should focus on one or two representations (in film, television, social media, news media, print media, etc.) and provide critical analysis of how fatness is constructed in those spaces. What are the meanings being promoted? How is fatness framed and how does it intersect with other identities being represented? I encourage you to be creative in your selection of media for this paper! This must be between 3-4 pages double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, and must cite at least two readings from the course in addition to other academic sources.

Reading Quizzes (15% of overall grade): Over the course of the semester, you will be given 6 reading quizzes. These quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, but you will not know ahead of time when the quizzes will be. Each quiz will have two or three broad based questions on the readings for that week. You are allowed to use notes you have taken for these quizzes, but no readings, and NO LAPTOPS or OTHER DEVICES. I will drop your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester, so only 5 of the 6 quizzes will be counted towards your final grade. Each quiz is worth a total of 3 points, resulting in 15 points, or 15% of your overall grade in the class.

Annotated Bibliography and Interview Guide (20% of overall grade):

- Annotated Bibliography: (10% of overall grade) - Partway through the semester you will be asked to submit an annotated bibliography that lists sources you plan to use in your final paper. These sources must be academic or scholarly sources, ideally from peer reviewed journals or published texts. You must give the proper ASA citation format for the source, provide a summary of the article/book, and then provide an explanation of how you plan to apply the source in your final paper analysis. I want to see you drawing connections between these sources and your paper topic and show me why they are relevant to your analysis/argument. This annotated bibliography should have a minimum of three sources from outside the class syllabus.
- Interview Guide: (10% of overall grade): In the seventh week of the term, you will submit your interview guide (or set of interview questions) that you plan to use in conducting your in-depth interviews which you will use for your final paper. The interview guide should be organized into themes and based on the topic you are focused on for the final paper. For example, if you are interested in writing your
paper on gender, body size, and health care disparities, your interview guide should have questions focused on experiences with health care providers. The interview guide should be structured so that interviews last about 30 to 45 minutes. Plan to interview between 3 and 6 people for your final paper analysis. You will be shown examples and given sample interview guides towards the beginning of the term to help model your own interview guide.

**Final Paper (30% of overall grade):** At the end of the term, you will submit a paper on the topic of your choosing related to the course material. Perhaps you want to look at fatness in a context of the workplace, weight bias in cross cultural perspective, health care disparities, queer conceptualizations of fatness, fatness and narratives of health, or fatness and performance or representation. Draw inspiration from units in the class that speak to you. The paper must use critical thinking and theoretical frameworks explored in class in the analysis, as well as analysis and findings from the interviews you conduct during the semester. You must use relevant readings from the class for your analysis (at least three readings from the class) and additionally cite at least FIVE external academic sources in your paper. Papers will be 10 - 12 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font, ASA citation format.

All written assignments will be submitted on Canvas with the exception of the reading quizzes, which will be taken at the beginning of class.

**Course Grading Scale:**

- A = 93-100
- AB = 87-92
- B = 83-86
- BC = 77-82
- C = 70-76
- D = 60-69
- F = below 60

**Policy on Late or Missed Assignments:**

For every week that an assignment is late, you will incur a penalty of 10% off your total grade for that assignment. If you have a valid reason to turn in an assignment late or do a quiz on a different day, you must talk to me before the due date if that's possible. Assignments submitted more than two weeks past the original due date will be considered a zero. The final paper needs to be submitted on the last day of class - no late work will be considered past the last day of the semester.

**RULES, RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- See the Guide’s to [Rules, Rights and Responsibilities](#)

**Academic Integrity:**
By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

**McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement**: “The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities are a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” [http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php](http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php)

Resources for Academic Assistance:

- The UW Writing Center: [http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html)
- Tutoring and Learning Support Services - [https://advising.wisc.edu/content/tutoring-learning-support-resources](https://advising.wisc.edu/content/tutoring-learning-support-resources)

Diversity and Inclusion

**Institutional statement on diversity**: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background - people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” [https://diversity.wisc.edu/](https://diversity.wisc.edu/)

Important Notes:
1. This syllabus is to act as a rough guide for the semester; it is not set in stone. Certain due
dates for assignments may shift slightly - but I will do everything I can to make sure
people are fully aware of changes well in advance. Each group of students moves at a
different pace and gets fascinated by certain topics. I will try to honor this and we may
find ourselves spending more time on certain topics and less time on others. As such, by
choosing to remain in this course, you agree to all of the above requirements and
stipulations. I reserve the right to alter this syllabus at any time, but with fair and
appropriate warning.

2. You may use laptops for note taking in class, but if these become a distraction or a
problem, you will be asked to put them away. Please also bear in mind that you cannot
use laptops for quizzes, but you can use notes, so plan accordingly. I respectfully ask you
to please put your phones away during class. If you plan to take notes on your phone,
please plan to use an alternative device or get a notebook. If I see you answering your
phone or text messaging, you will be asked to put it away. If it is a recurring problem, I
will ask you to leave the classroom. Thank you!

3. I will attempt to respond to student emails as promptly as I am I will generally check and
respond to email between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. I will always try to get you a
response within 24 hours. Also, please send me emails from either your student email
address, or another email address that readily identifies you.

A Final Thought:

This course is designed to be interactive, fun, and open. All of you bring your own unique
perspectives and experiences to this material, and I absolutely encourage that. That said,
many of the topics we will cover and explore can become personal, controversial, and at
times, difficult. You will never be required to share something you are not comfortable
sharing. However, this does not mean you are exempt from participation. You must find ways
to make your voice heard. I want you to feel safe in this classroom to discuss experiences and
opinions on any and all topics we cover. Whatever is said or written in this class stays in this
class. No one should feel oppressed or stifled because of size, gender, race, creed, class,
ability, age, sexual orientation, or citizenship status. The success of this class is a community
effort!

Class/Reading Schedule

(Listed readings and assignments are due THAT DAY for class!)

Week One: Situating Fat

Tuesday 1/21: Course introduction, syllabus overview

Thursday 1/23: Gender and the thin ideal, fat as a feminist issue

Readings due:
  of California Press. p. 185-212.
Week Two: History of the Diet Industry and the Formation of “Obesity”

Tuesday 1/28:
Readings due:

Thursday 1/30:
Readings due:
- Boero, Natalie. 2007. “All the News that’s Fat to Print: The American ‘Obesity’ Epidemic and the Media.” *Qualitative Sociology* 30: 41-60.

Week Three: Diagnosis Fat – The Medical Gaze and “Fixing” Fatness

Tuesday 2/4:
Readings due:
https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/everything-you-know-about-obesity-is-wrong/

Thursday 2/6:
Readings due:

Week Four: Policing Size: Race, Class, and Gender

Tuesday 2/11:
Readings Due:

Thursday 2/13:
Readings Due:
https://centerfordiscovery.com/blog/truth-hurts-lizzo-black-women-weight-stigma/
Week Five: Socioeconomic status, food insecurity, and the feminization of poverty

Tuesday 2/18:
Readings Due:

Thursday 2/20: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY due at MIDNIGHT
Readings Due:

Week Six: Blaming Mothers - Policing pregnancy, childhood obesity, and fat parenting

Tuesday 2/25:
Readings due:
- Parker, George and Pause, Cat. 2018. Pregnant with possibility: Negotiating fat maternal subjectivity in the “War on Obesity”, Fat Studies, 7:2, 124-134.

Thursday 2/27:
Readings Due:

Week Seven: Sensationalizing Fat - Where Medicine Meets Media

Tuesday 3/3:
Readings due:

Thursday 3/5: INTERVIEW GUIDE due at MIDNIGHT
Readings Due:

**Week Eight: Fatness and Sexualities/Sexual Health**

Tuesday 3/10:
Readings Due:

Thursday 3/12:
Readings due:

**Week Nine: SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS**

**Week Ten: Fatness as Disability/The “Good Fatty” Paradigm**

Tuesday 3/24:
Readings due:

Thursday 3/26:
Readings due:

**Week Eleven: Violence Against Fat Bodies**

Tuesday 3/31:
Readings due:
Thursday 4/2: MEDIA LITERACY PAPER due at MIDNIGHT
Readings due:
- Pearson, Catherine. 2018. “Employers are Discriminating Against Overweight Women - And It’s Totally Legal.” [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/employer-weight-discrimination-women_n_5bd755d7e4b017e5bfd4a12a](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/employer-weight-discrimination-women_n_5bd755d7e4b017e5bfd4a12a).

**Week Twelve: The “Obesity Pandemic” - Fatness, Culture, and Globalization**

Tuesday 4/7:
Readings due:

Thursday 4/9:
Readings due:

**Week Thirteen: Fatness, Adolescence, and Education**

Tuesday 4/14:
Readings Due:

Thursday 4/16:
Readings due:

**Week Fourteen: Fat Exclusion - Immigration, Access, and the “Ideal” Citizen**

Tuesday 4/21:
Readings due:
Thursday 4/23: Home Flavored documentary
Readings due:

Week Fifteen: Fat Activism

Tuesday 4/28
Readings due:

Thursday 4/30: Last day of class. Course reflections!
FINAL PAPER due at MIDNIGHT