Social Determinants of Nutrition and Health
Course Syllabus

Day & Time: Tuesday and Thursday 1-2:50 pm
Place: CHS 61-262
Instructor: May Wang, DrPH
Tel: (310) 206-5306. Email: maywang@ucla.edu
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10am-12pm
Units: 4

Course description
Health promotion strategies aimed at reducing chronic disease risk through lifestyle changes have not been particularly successful in addressing the needs of socio-economically disadvantaged groups. This course will provide an overview of the literature supporting the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and food-related health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and osteoporosis. More importantly, it will critically examine plausible pathways from the perspectives of multi-disciplines such as agriculture, economics, nutrition, and sociology. It will especially focus on the linkages between the social and physical environment (including the built environment) and food equity and access, and discuss how food may be a catalyst for improving social capital and health. Because social capital has been defined differently by various disciplines, we will examine and compare its definition by well known social scientists (Coleman, Bordieu, Putnam and Fukuyama), and discuss implications for measurement, and for the interpretation of studies linking social capital to health. Case studies of local and international efforts aiming to improve access to healthy foods, and/or limit access to unhealthy foods will be presented. An opportunity will be provided to students to explore methods for assessing social capital and food-related aspects of neighborhood environments.

Course objectives:
Students will be able to:
1. Describe those aspects of the social and physical environment that affect food access and consequently, nutrition;
2. Critically discuss seminal studies on the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and nutrition and health;
3. Understand the contributions of social factors to food-related health conditions;
4. Define social capital and explain the linkages among social capital, food equity and access, and health;
5. Become familiar with case studies of interventions and policies aiming to address social inequities in nutrition;
6. Describe and apply methods for assessing social capital and neighborhood food environments.

This course will provide an opportunity to partially master the following competencies:
   a) Understand the influence of social factors on nutrition and health.
   b) Evaluate nutrition research and interpret the implications for public health policies and programs
   c) Evaluate the nutrition component of health services, programs, and projects
   d) Critically analyze issues in public health nutrition

Class format
2-hour seminar/student presentation/discussion (twice per week)

Readings
Books, articles and references materials relevant to this course will be listed on the course website. Books will be available at the reference desk in the library.

Reference text books (not required):

**Grading and Assignments**

Applied activities 60%
Group project (debate) 20%
Participation in discussions/in-class activities 20%

**Applied activities**

You are required to submit the following three activities. Activities submitted late will receive a 10% deduction in points for each day late.

1. Select two television shows that air food commercials. Watch them. Note when they air and think about who the target audience might be. What messages are the commercials trying to communicate? (Pay attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues.) How effective do you think the commercials are in promoting their products? Critically discuss the potential impact of the messages on a young audience from preschool-aged children to high school teens. Your evaluation should consider the influences of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, primary language spoken by parents/guardians, migrant status, and socioeconomic status.

Your report must not be longer than 3 pages (1” margins, single-spaced on 8.5”X11” paper). [Due 10/11]

2. Food Stamp recipients receive Food Stamp benefits based on USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan.

Part 1: Determine the amount of benefits you would get for a month based on the number of members in your current household (see [http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCost-Home.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCost-Home.htm)). For example, if you are single and a female aged 19-50 years old, you can expect to receive $34.60 (based on July’s figures) per week. Use your knowledge of food costs in your neighborhood and the knowledge you have acquired regarding healthy foods to develop a food purchasing plan for the week that will not cost more than your Food Stamp allowance. Provide an analysis of how well your plan meets the recommendations of “mypyramid.gov”. [Due 10/18 –please submit by email]

Part 2: For the week of 10/17, try to follow the food purchasing plan that you developed. In 3 pages or less (single-spaced), report on your efforts and discuss how easy or difficult it was to follow your plan. Also, keep a record of all your food purchases for the week including food you eat in a restaurant (please submit as an appendix to your report – no page limit). How would your lifestyle be affected if you had to abide by the Thrifty Food Plan? [Due 10/25]

3. Define your neighborhood. What do you perceive as the boundaries of your neighborhood? Describe your neighborhood’s physical and social environments as they relate to food availability, accessibility, and acceptability.

   **Physical environment:**
   a) Use the yellow pages or other data sources to determine the number of retail food stores (supermarkets, specialty markets, convenience markets, corner stores, etc.), and fast food restaurants that are in your neighborhood. Which stores do you frequent? Why do you shop at these stores? How far are they from where you live? How do you usually get to these stores?

   b) Using any one of USDA’s four Food plans

Wang Fall 2011 2
(http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodPlansCostofFood.htm) develop a ‘basket’ of foods that you would realistically consume. Select two grocery stores in your neighborhood, one that you shop at frequently, and one that you do not usually shop at (or have never shopped at). Determine if you are able to purchase all the foods in your basket and the cost of those foods (in your basket) that are available at these two stores. Are the food prices comparable at both stores? Describe the approach you used for making the comparison.

**Social environment:**
What factors would you consider in describing the social environment of your neighborhood as it affects nutrition-related behaviors and outcomes? What sociological or other theoretical framework supports your consideration of these factors? How would you obtain information that will provide a meaningful assessment of these factors?

Your paper must be no longer than 6 pages (1.5 spacing, 12 font, 1” margins, not including the reference list, and maps). Be prepared to share your findings in a 10 minute presentation with the class. [Due 12/2]

**Class Debate**
The purpose of this assignment is to help students examine a problem from different perspectives, and develop coherent and convincing arguments to support a particular perspective based on evidence. Students will be assigned to teams of 4-5 depending on the size of the class. Topics will be selected at the beginning of the quarter. Following the debate, each team is required to submit a group paper, no longer than 5 pages single-spaced, outlining their arguments; a bibliography to support arguments is also expected (This paper is due within a week of the debates on 11/3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assigned readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Introduction &amp; Overview: Trends in diet and diet-related health conditions</td>
<td>Popkin, 2007; Dunton, 2009; Wallinga, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>What are healthy and unhealthy diets?</td>
<td>Arvaniti, 2008; Guenther, 2008; Young, 2007; Belin 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>Determinants of eating behavior and obesity risk</td>
<td>Lynch, 1997; Swinburn, 1999; Eertmans, 2001; Pelto, 2003; Astrup, 2005; Popkin, 2005; Navarro-Allende, 2008; Lawrence, 2009; Babey, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>Review of first four sessions</td>
<td>Alaimo, 2001; Gorton, 2010; [Rossi is a good reference text]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>Agriculture, food supply and diet</td>
<td>Elinder, 2005; Wallinga, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>The economics of food production and distribution</td>
<td>Blaylock, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>The food environment: Historical trends</td>
<td>Rodolfo, 1999; Troutt 1992; Pothukuchi, 2005; Tang-Peronard, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/25</td>
<td>Measuring the built environment</td>
<td>Giskes, 2007; Coulton, 2001; DeJoy 2008; Raja 2008; Lytle, 2009; Sharkey, 2009; Krukowski, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>APHA (no class)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3</td>
<td>Social determinants of nutrition and health – social norms, social capital, collective efficacy</td>
<td>Diez-Roux, 1999; Dubowitz, 2007; Wall, 1998; Kawachi, 1999; Pearce, 2003; Gee, 2004; MacIntyre, 2003; Cohen 2006; Kipke 2007; Greiner, 2004; James 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/8</td>
<td>The social environment</td>
<td>IOM, 2006 (book); Nestle, 2002 (book); Nestle 2003; Dixon 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>Measuring the social environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/22</td>
<td>Student presentations (Assignment #3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/29</td>
<td>Framing the issues</td>
<td>Cummins, 2002; MacIntyre, 2003; Brug 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/2</td>
<td>Assignment #3 (paper)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recommended readings**


*Ford PB, Dzewaltowski DA. Limited Supermarket Availability Is Not Associated With Obesity Risk Among Participants in the Kansas WIC Program. Obesity (Silver Spring). 2010 Jan 7 [Epub ahead of print].


*Wang MC, Kim S, Gonzalez AA, MacLeod KE, Winkleby MA. Socioeconomic and food-related physical characteristics of the
Wang, M.C., Cubbin, C., Ahn, D., Winkleby, M.A. Changes in Neighborhood Food Store Environment, Food Behavior and
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=6574392&jid=&volumeId=&issueId=12&aid=6574384&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=
Wrigley N, Warm D, & Margetts. (2002). Deprivation, Diet and Food Retail Access: Findings from the Leeds ‘Food Deserts’
Study. Environment and Planning A 34