

Texas Universities Address Wellness, Weight Gain



Eliminating the “Freshman 15” on Campus

By Tracey Lamphere and Michael Castellon

Weight gain during the first year of college is a perennial problem that Texas colleges and universities want to prevent.

Research and clinical studies are still attempting to understand the dreaded onset of the “Freshman 15,” a first-year weight gain resulting largely from the availability of junk food, all-you-can-eat dining halls, alcohol consumption and academic stress. In fact, the “Freshman 15” probably overstates the issue; participants in a 2009 [National Institutes of Health study](#) gained an average of 7.7 pounds during their freshman year. The study also concluded, however, that the freshman and sophomore years serve as “a critical developmental window for establishing weight gain prevention.”

The causes and development of obesity and related illnesses are complex. Researchers, however, are attempting to better understand how to combat the issue in schools and universities. In Texas, the issue is one of critical importance. According to the Texas Comptroller’s 2011 report [Gaining Costs, Losing Time](#), 66.7 percent of adult Texans are overweight or obese, up from 64.1 percent in 2005.

More students than ever are arriving on campus already obese.



Visit ReshapingTexas.org to learn more about the causes and development of obesity and related illnesses.



Texas State University students Alaina Hallmark and Mackenzie Cicero prepare a healthy salad for dinner in the kitchen of their off-campus housing.

Today, more than 20 percent of Texas children aged 10 to 17 are obese, compared to 16.4 percent of U.S. children.



According to the NIH study, habits traditionally associated with college life — inadequate sleep, overeating, stress and a lack of exercise — can lay the groundwork for obesity later in life.

The study found that most weight gain comes during the first semester of college, and that men are more likely to continue gaining weight in their sophomore year.

“It’s hard to be healthy in college,” says Layney Walker, a Texas State University student. “As a freshman, you eat the food in the cafeterias and it’s not healthy, and then once you move off campus you don’t have the money or the time. All the healthy food is way too expensive, so it’s easier, faster and cheaper to go to a fast food drive-through — and there are so many around college.”

Alaina Hallmark, another Texas State student, agrees. “You’re used to your mom or dad planning and preparing most of the meals,” she says. “So when that responsibility is put on your shoulders, it’s much easier to just grab fast food.”

A survey of Texas A&M University freshmen during the 2008-09 school year found that 31 percent of students gained weight; of those, 18 percent gained 15 or more pounds. In all, the average weight gain was about 10.5 pounds.

Wellness at Angelo State

Angelo State University established its wellness program in 2008, to comply with the requirements of 2007’s House Bill 1297, which called for the establishment of state employee wellness programs.

“Although HB 1297 was targeted at employees we made a conscious decision to have our program include students, employees, and the regional community,” says Bill Cullins, program manager for ASUFit, ASU’s student and employee fitness program. The program coordinates and promotes physical activities throughout the university community. Events include the communitywide Turkey Trot 5K and Fun Run, departmental fitness challenges and trail bike races on the Angelo State campus.

“Since 60 to 70 percent of our students live off-campus, we felt that targeting both the internal and external university community would yield the best long-term results,” he says.

The university formed a comprehensive steering committee that



Texas State University freshman Andrew Meaux takes advantage of his school’s exercise facilities to stay fit.



“Our strategy over the past five years has been to ‘incubate’ our program independent of university recreation so as to be as collaborative as possible.”

— **Bill Cullins,**
program manager for ASUFit

included the university's human resources department, university recreation, health clinic, academic departments such as nursing, kinesiology, and physical therapy, student groups, local medical centers and organizations such as student cycling and running clubs.

"Unlike most universities, the program isn't directly affiliated with or managed by the university recreation center," Cullins says. "Our strategy over the past five years has been to 'incubate' our program independent of university recreation so as to be as collaborative as possible."

Lifelong Lessons at TWU

Like many other colleges and universities, Texas Woman's University requires its first- and second-year students to live on campus or at home. For students who live on campus, it's the first time they've had to decide what they are going to eat, how to budget their time and how they spend their money.

"We spend a lot of time focusing on encouraging the life skills they already have," says Michelle Reeves, assistant director for fitness and recreation at Texas Woman's University.

Reeves inaugurated TWU's Commit2Fit program, which challenges students to be physically active at least three times a week.

"A lot of students walk in the door who are not fit," Reeves says. "They may even look weight-appropriate on the outside, but it's not uncommon to see 20-year-olds with type II diabetes or high cholesterol. We try to tell them these chronic diseases are no longer your mom's or grandmother's problems."

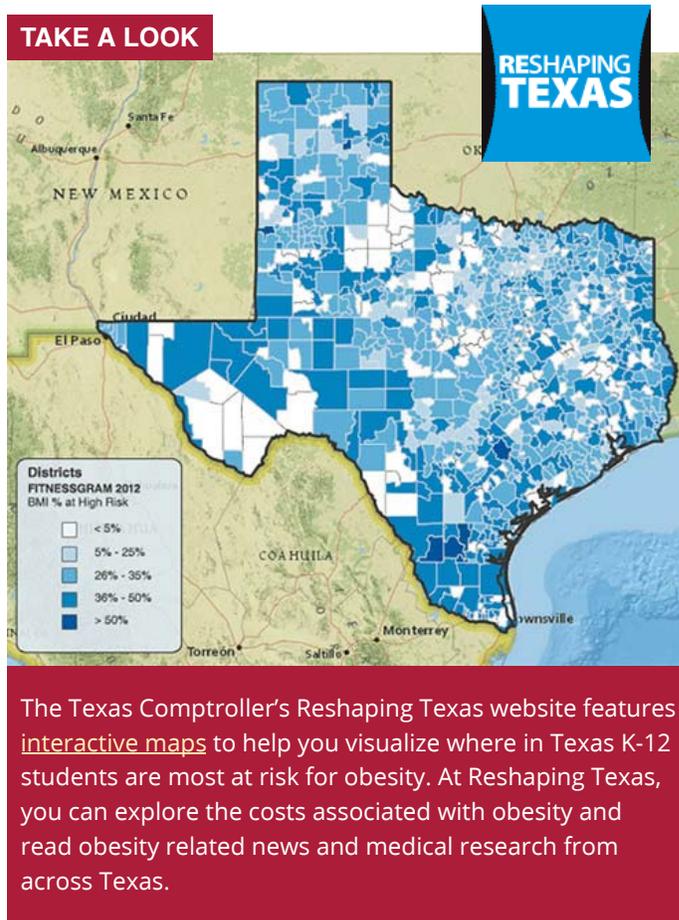
Reeves works with graduate students in the university's nutritional studies program and hosts "Lunch & Learns" that promote healthy eating.

Texas Tech's Smart Choices program publishes nutritional information of all food offered on its Lubbock campus. Healthy eating can go beyond having a salad, says Ali Pohlmeier, a nutritionist for the program.



"A lot of students walk in the door who are not fit."

— Michelle Reeves,
assistant director for Fitness
and Recreation at Texas
Woman's University



“Over the years, we’ve tried to increase the number of alternative choices,” she says. Vegetarian and gluten-free items are offered throughout campus, and students are encouraged to modify their food choices toward optimal nutrition. **FN**

The Texas Comptroller's [Reshaping Texas](#) resource is your one stop for news, information and resources on obesity, wellness and their economic effects.

Read the Comptroller's 2011 report [Gaining Costs, Losing Time](#), which looks at the economic and social impact of obesity on Texas.

Published May 1, 2013.