

# CORD

## NIH: Finding Friends to Fight the Freshman 15 lbs!!!

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*WASTE REPORT for October 19, 2015*

**NIH: Finding Friends to Fight the Freshman 15lbs!!!**

The “freshman 15” is an old legend around college campuses; the idea that new college students, away from home and confronted with a campus food service smorgasbord tend to put on a few extra pounds.

**Well the National Institutes for Health aims to get to the bottom of this with a \$380k grant to study how social relationships in college contribute to weight-related problems.**<sup>1</sup> Because it’s not the food you eat, it’s the friends you make.

The study being done at Arizona State University (ASU) **seeks to identify how the friendships freshman make in college contribute to weight-gain** and poor eating habits. In addition to collecting data on the types of friends college freshmen make, the study will, **“survey friends of participating students across an academic year to explore friends' potential impact on freshmen's weight-related outcomes.”**<sup>2</sup>

Nothing like asking your new friends about your eating habits. **“So, how many chili dogs did Tom really eat?” “So, how many of your sorority sisters skipped breakfast?”**

But there may be a wrinkle in this plan that makes it even more wasteful of tax dollars. **College weight gain might not even be a problem.** Numerous independent studies spanning decades have agreed that freshman **only gain around 2.7 to 3.5lbs over their entire freshman year.** It turns out it was Seventeen Magazine that arbitrarily put the number at 15 back in 1989.<sup>3</sup>

But even the 2 to 3lbs might not even be a problem. An Ohio State University (OSU) study comparing college freshman to their non-college peers and found only a discrepancy of about half a pound, attributing most of the weight gain at the tail end of growing to adult size. The OSU study concludes, **“Anti-obesity efforts directed specifically at college freshmen will likely have little impact on obesity prevalence among young adults.”**<sup>4</sup> Even ones aimed at your social weight gain?

To put it in perspective, with an in-state cost of attendance at about \$27k and out-of-state at \$42k, **these funds could have paid for 9 to 14 freshman’s first year at ASU, if not more critical research or reduce the federal deficit.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bruening, Meredith M, *The Role of Friendship Networks on BMI and Behaviors among College Freshman*, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ. NIH Award Number 5DP5OD017910-03 September 2015

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Breene, Sophia, *Why the ‘Freshman 15’ is a Lie*; Huffington Post via Greatist; New York, NY; September 2013

<sup>4</sup> Grabmeier, Jeff, *The Freshman Fifteen just a Myth, Nationwide Study Reveals*; Research News-Ohio State University; Columbus, OH October, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Calculated using cost attendance at ASU found at: <https://students.asu.edu/financialaid/coa>