



# EMBEDDING WEIGHT SENSITIVITY IN THE NURSING CARE PRACTICUM



**VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY**

 Villanova, PA

*Nursing faculty and registered dietitian nutritionists with expertise in weight management designed and implemented a 14-week sensitivity training program to reduce weight bias among nursing students. The program could be integrated into any clinical practicum course where students gain repeated patient interactions over an extended period.*

## SCENARIO

There is growing recognition of the need for healthcare professionals to be more aware of the stigma experienced by persons with obesity, the negative impact weight bias has on health outcomes, and the role that providers play in perpetuating this problem. As the largest sector of health professionals in the United States, nurses have an unparalleled impact on obesity care and outcomes. Nursing students are an important target for weight sensitivity training that teaches about the complexities of obesity and imparts the skills to combat stigma in their future nursing practice.

Evidence suggests that skills related to preventing weight bias need to be identified and addressed early in the education continuum. Leaders from the M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing recognized the need to develop a weight sensitivity curriculum that could begin to fill the obesity knowledge gap and better prepare their students for career success as nursing professionals.

### Educational Objectives

*Program leaders prioritized obesity education within the nursing curriculum to position their trainees as competent, effective, and compassionate providers. Upon completion of the training, students will be able to:*

- ▶ identify personal bias towards individuals with obesity;
- ▶ articulate the importance of reducing obesity bias in healthcare for positive patient outcomes;
- ▶ discuss nursing strategies to reduce weight stigma while providing equal and excellent care; and
- ▶ explain healthcare providers' expanding role in weight management.

## About the Educators



**M. Louise Fitzpatrick**  
**College of Nursing**  
*Undergraduate Curriculum*

**MacDonald Center for  
Obesity Prevention and  
Education (COPE)**



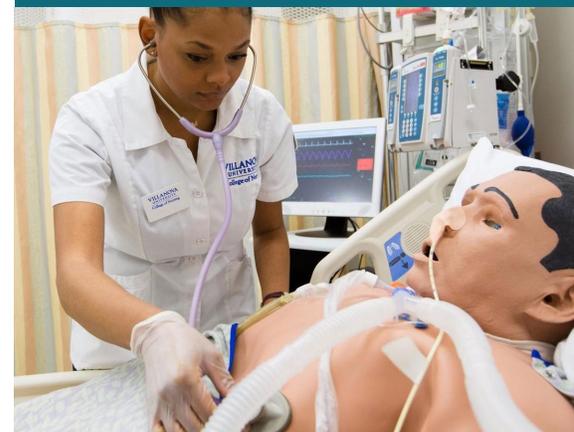
Tracy Oliver, PhD, RDN, LDN  
([tracy.oliver@villanova.edu](mailto:tracy.oliver@villanova.edu))

Rebecca Shenkman, MPH, RDN, LDN

Lisa K. Diewald, MS, RD, LDN

### KEY COMPETENCIES:

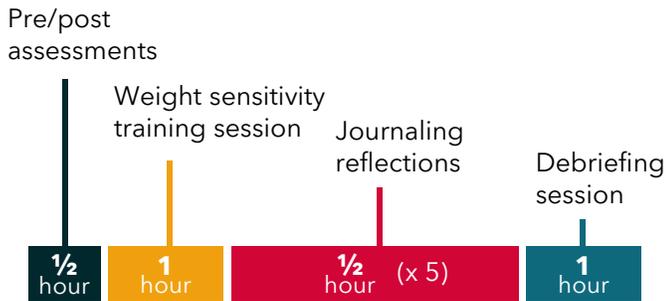
Weight Bias & Stigma  
Language for Obesity  
Strategies for Patient Care



# CURRICULUM

This 14-week program is embedded into the 144-hour Practicum in Nursing Care of Adults and Older Adults junior-level nursing student course curriculum. It focuses on weight bias sensitivity training and assesses and measures the change in students' attitudes and beliefs towards persons with obesity throughout the semester. Nursing faculty collaborated with registered dietitian nutritionists from the MacDonald Center for Obesity Prevention and Education (COPE) to design and implement the training.

✓ **5 hours** of weight sensitivity training:



Throughout the semester, students participated in a variety of weight sensitivity exercises, including:

- ✓ watching a weight sensitivity training video (*Weight Bias in Healthcare*, Rudd Center)
- ✓ participating in group discussions
- ✓ completing five journaling activities
- ✓ participating in an end-of-semester debriefing and educational session

## OUTCOMES

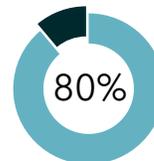
Weight bias questionnaires (ATOP + BAOP) were administered at the start of the first clinical class and again at the conclusion of the last clinical class, roughly 3 1/2 months apart.

This curriculum was embedded in the clinical practicum course (144 hours) where students' application of acquired skills and knowledge was observed during patient encounters but not formally assessed.

Methods of assessment:

- ✓ Pre/post Attitudes Toward Obese Persons Scale (ATOP)
- ✓ Pre/post Beliefs about Obese Persons Scale (BAOP)
- ✓ Qualitative journal reflections

» **200+** students have completed the sensitivity training program as of 2019



of learners demonstrated a reduction in weight bias after completing the training, as indicated by difference between pre/post ATOP scores



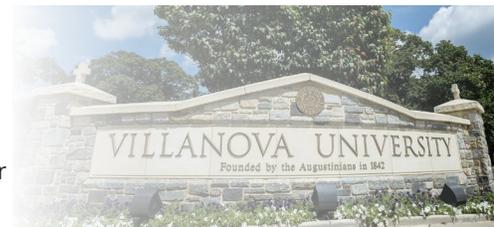
of learners believed that participating in the weight sensitivity training program was beneficial to their future conduct as a nurse

\*percentages based on initial pilot cohort (n = 125)



“Offering educational opportunities for all healthcare providers on the detrimental effects of weight bias provides a foundation to eradicate weight bias and will ensure all patients receive the equal and unbiased care they deserve.”

– **Dr. Tracy Oliver**, Associate Professor



The MacDonald Center for Obesity Prevention and Education (COPE) offers a one-hour weight bias sensitivity training tailored for the nursing profession. Please contact COPE's Director, Rebecca Shenkman ([rebecca.shenkman@villanova.edu](mailto:rebecca.shenkman@villanova.edu)), for more information and to schedule this training at your site.