

## HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

### **Mobile MyPlate: Using Texting to Provide Nutrition Education to College Students**

Student researcher: Lauren O'Connor, Senior

For many young adults, college life represents the first opportunity to be fully responsible for their own dietary choices. Since most college students are uneducated about the health complications caused by poor eating habits, this is a crucial time for implementing dietary interventions. An important part of any intervention is its acceptability to the population targeted. College students appreciate the unobtrusive convenience and low cost of texting and use it in daily life for multiple reasons. Currently, 95% of 18- to 29-year-olds send and receive text messages daily. Using text messaging as a medium to change health behaviors allows for repetition without annoyance; moderate repetition leads to greater understanding of the context that is being conveyed. Mobile MyPlate utilized text messages as an innovative and convenient way of educating undergraduate students about the USDA's Dietary Guidelines (DGs). The purpose

of Mobile MyPlate was to determine whether receiving text messages increases knowledge and awareness of the MyPlate icon and the DGs. For 7 weeks, the intervention group received biweekly text messages consisting of a dietary guideline fact and the MyPlate icon. The control group received the same information all at once in a mailed brochure. A pre- and post-survey assessed the students' knowledge of the MyPlate icon, DGs, and eating behaviors. The intervention group showed a greater change in knowledge in the recognition of the MyPlate food groups. Mobile MyPlate has the potential to determine if texting is an applicable and efficient way to disseminate nutrition health messages to college students.

*Research advisor Onikia Brown-Esters writes, "Lauren has been instrumental in the development and delivery of the Mobile MyPlate intervention. She was an asset to the success of this social marketing campaign. Lauren has a great foundation for conducting research, which will enhance her studies and career goals. It was a pleasure working with her."*