Input sought for president search

Members of the Urbana campus will have the opportunity on June 25 to offer comments to a committee leading the national search for the U of I’s new president.

The meeting will begin at 1 p.m. in the auditorium of the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology. The open-microphone forum will give faculty and staff members, students, alumni and community members an opportunity to share their thoughts to help guide the search – from the challenges that a new president will face to the personal qualities needed for the position.

Similar meetings are scheduled this month at the two other U of I campuses.

Several members of the presidential search committee will attend each of the meetings, and input from the three forums will be presented to the full committee.

The U of I Board of Trustees began the presidential search in March, appointing a 19-member committee that will develop job qualifications, and then identify and screen potential candidates to replace President Bob Easter, who will retire when his term ends June 30, 2015.

The committee will recommend finalists to the board, which intends to name a replacement by late July to ensure a smooth transition before Easter leaves office. Easter became the university’s 19th president July 1, 2012, after 36 years as a faculty member and top administrator on the Urbana campus.

Drones give farmers eyes in the sky to check on crop progress

By Sharita Forrest
News Editor

As the growing season for corn is underway, crop researchers at the University of Illinois are experimenting with unmanned aerial vehicles – on the university’s South Farms.

Dennis Bowman, a crop sciences educator with U of I Extension, is using two drones to take aerial pictures of crops growing in research plots on the farm. Bowman intentionally made mistakes on one test plot – areas where he didn’t apply enough nitrogen fertilizer, where we simulated mistakes in the applicator, where we shut the boom off for a short period of time or plugged it up and ran for a while,” he said.

“With the dodging of crops, we can detect those areas sooner than we could visually from the ground. We’re also looking at doing some scans over our herbicide studies to see if the drone photography can help us identify where crops are stressed by postemergence herbicide applications.”

For farmers, aerial photographs taken by drones offer a quick and easy way to check on the progress of crops and determine where they may need to replant or direct pesticide applications.

“I spent two summers as a commercial crop scout before I went into Extension, and walking through tasseling corn in the heat of summer is not a pleasant task,” Bowman said. “The odds of actually getting to the far end of that field on foot to see what’s going on are pretty slim. To get a bird’s-eye view of your crop, the drones offer a handy way to do it.”

Both drones Bowman is using are multicopter helicopters, or quadcopters. Bowman bought the first drone last fall. It’s a remote-controlled Phantom, manufactured by the company Dji. This spring, he bought a second aircraft, an A.R. Drone 2.0 with GPS produced by the French wireless electronics manufacturer Parrot.

Using rechargeable lithium polymer batteries, each drone can make flights of about 10 to 15 minutes. The computers in the drones are similar to those used in smartphones.

The Phantom, which cost about $500, was a ready-to-fly model equipped with a mount for a GoPro camera. With the addition of a second camera and a gimbal to keep the camera level, Bowman’s total investment was about $1,000.

When the Phantom is turned on, its computer starts the GPS, the satellites, the Phantom drone control system to orient itself with the satellites, the Phantom drone will return to within 1 meter of its home position when the operator turns the transmitter off.

The Parrot drone, which cost about $250, can be controlled with a smartphone or tablet using Apple or Android operating systems and Wi-Fi signals. The Parrot Sky DRONES, P.6

Where there’s smoke Above left, a firefighter uses a chainsaw to practice horizontal ventilation, a technique used to clear smoke from a structure to get better vision inside. Above, firefighters run through ladder training wearing bunker gear and carrying self-contained breathing apparatus units on their backs.

Firefighters hone skills at 90th fire college

A round 600 firefighters and fire service instructors from 68 Illinois counties and Wisconsin were in Champaign-Urbana June 5-6 for the Illinois Fire Service Institute’s 90th Annual Fire College.

The fire college, held on the institute’s Champaign campus and this year at a location in Rantoul as well, is the oldest event of its kind in the United States.

During the four-day fire college, firefighters were taught various skills, from the fundamentals in basic fire fighting to more advanced skills in “advanced auto extrication.” A special leadership track also was offered this year. The institute, the statutory fire academy for the state of Illinois, offers online classes and conducts and sponsors training throughout the state at regional training centers and local fire stations.

For more information go to www.fsi.illinois.edu.

Ready to fly Extension educator and crop science researcher Dennis Bowman is exploring aerial photography and drones.

Survey pranksters A U. of I. researcher has developed a way to screen out “mischievous responders” – those who intentionally provide untruthful answers on questionnaires.

Obesity trends Everything you think you know about the causes of rising obesity in the U.S. might be wrong, researchers say in a new report. PAGE 8

INDEX

ACHIEVEMENTS 7
BRIEF NOTES 7
DEATHS 3
FROM THE ARCHIVES 7
HOME AWAY FROM HOME 4

Inside Illinois
June 19, 2014
Vol. 33, No. 23
For Faculty and Staff, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Henderson to be next chief information officer at Illinois

Mark D. Henderson, the interim vice president and chief information officer for information technology and educational services at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, has been named chief information officer of the U. of I. His appointment, pending approval of the university’s board of trustees, becomes effective Aug. 16.

“I am confident Mark will bring strong leadership to CITIES (Campus Information Technologies and Educational Services) and the campus, will foster forward thinking in information technology and will enhance communication across campus,” said Ilesanmi Adesida, the vice chancellor for academic affairs and provost. “I look forward to having him on the leadership team at Illinois. Henderson will succeed Paul Hixson, who has been chief information officer at Illinois for three years and is retiring Aug. 15. Ilesanmi Adesida, who has held his interim position at Case Western since July 2013, currently leads an office responsible for creating the vision and strategy that enable delivery of technology solutions that support education, research and the day-to-day functions of the university. He has more than 30 years’ experience in higher education and the private sector in positions of increasing responsibilities.

“I am very happy to be joining the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as the chief information officer,” Henderson said. “This is a great opportunity to join an institution with a rich history of technological innovation. I am excited to be able to contribute toward the university’s goals and objectives.”

Under his leadership, Case Western’s Information Technology Services Division embarked on an organizational transformation, abandoning traditional IT organizational models in favor of a “design, build, run” model, supported by processes that allow agility in serving the needs of the university.

Prior to assuming his interim position, Henderson was associate vice president and chief operating officer at Case Western (from January 2010 to June 2013). Previously, he worked as leader of the Global Shops IT Operations for GE Aircraft Engines, Aviation Service, in Cincinnati (April 2009-September 2009), leader, Global Network Operations for GE Infrastructure, Technology Services Group in Cincinnati (August 2004-April 2006); and as interim vice president and chief information officer for the University of Maryland, College Park (May 2003-July 2004). Henderson held other positions at Maryland, as well as at the University of Cincinnati, where he was the director of infrastructure services and the associate director of network operations. He also worked for Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, and for Procter & Gamble Co. in Cincinnati. He earned a bachelor of science degree at Xavier University in Cincinnati in business administration with a concentration in information systems.

Drasgow named LER dean

Fritz Drasgow has been named the dean of the School of Labor and Employment Relations, pending approval by the U. of I. Board of Trustees.

A member of the Illinois faculty since 1982, Drasgow is a professor of labor and employment relations on the Urbana campus. He was appointed interim dean last August. He succeeds Joseph Martocchio, who returned to the faculty after serving as interim dean.

“Dean Drasgow has worked to better the financial condition of the college, to develop a team of leaders with a shared vision for the future and to improve student support services,” said Ilesanmi Adesida, the vice chancellor for academic affairs and provost of the Urbana campus.


From 1996-2004, he was a co-director of the Center for Human Resources Management on the Urbana campus. He earned his master’s and doctoral degrees in psychology, and his bachelor’s from State University of New York at Albany.

Interim GSLIS dean named dean of the school

Allen H. Renear, a professor in the U. of I. Graduate School of Library and Information Science, has been named the dean of the school. His appointment becomes effective Aug. 16, pending approval of the university’s board of trustees.

“Dean Drasgow has worked diligently to improve the financial condition of the school, made critical hires in strategic areas of faculty strength and is working with faculty on a shared vision that will ensure GSLIS remains the top information school in the 21st century,” said Ilesanmi Adesida, the vice chancellor for academic affairs and provost for the Urbana campus.

Renear earned his bachelor’s degree at Bowdoin College and his master’s and doctorate at Brown University. Prior to coming to Illinois in 2001, Renear directed the Scholarly Technology Group at Brown. Renear also has served as associate dean for research for GSLIS and has a faculty appointment in the department of philosophy.

Renear’s work focuses on the development of formal ontologies for scientific and cultural objects, and the use of those ontologies in information system design, scholarly publishing and data curation in the sciences and the humanities.

His research has been supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Science Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Analytic method uncovers those who tamper with surveys

By Sharita Forrest
Education Editor

Self-administered surveys are a vital tool for researchers who gather data on youth. But young people who provide untruthful answers on questionnaires as pranks have the potential to throw off researchers’ findings. Robinson-Cimpian has described a four-step method that identifies such respondents.

Robinson-Cimpian, who works with data collected from more than 11,800 students, selected several low-frequency responses—such as answering that they had parented two or more children. She then screened out respondents who provided three or more of these types of responses. But when Robinson-Cimpian examined response patterns by sexual orientation, she found striking differences: 11.7 percent of respondents who claimed to be LGBQ provided low-frequency responses, as did 1.5 percent of participants who said that they were heterosexual. Among sexual-minority teens frequently considered suicide, compared to 1.2 percent of their peers.

Because some prior studies of adolescents have suggested that up to 12 percent of young people provide untruthful answers on surveys, removing the top 2 percent—or as much as the top 5 percent—of extreme responders does not seem overly conservative.

A video of Robinson-Cimpian discussing his work is available. The American Educational Research Association produced the video.

Deaths

Dean K. Bonnell, 81, died June 10 at Pves- ence Covenant Medical Center, Urbana. He was on the U. of I. fire department for 28 years, retiring in 1987 as a fire engine driver. Memorial: First Presbyterian Church, 309 E. Vine, Tolono, IL 61880, tolon presbyterian.org, or PACE Inc. Center for Independent Living, 1317 E. Florida, Urbana, IL 61801, www.pacecil.org.


Mary Ann “M&M” Martin died June 6 at her Urbana home. She worked at the U. of I. for 31 years, retiring in 2012 as an office manager. Memorial: First Presbyterian Church, 104 E. Vine, Tolono, IL 61880, tolon presbyterian.org, or PACE Inc. Center for Independent Living, 1317 E. Florida, Urbana, IL 61801, www.pacecil.org.

Glenda “Kathy” Moore, 61, died June 6 in Champaign. She worked at the U. of I. for 12 years, retiring in 2002 as an office manager at the Center for South Asian Research. Memorial: To benefit her sons, Wyatt and Walker, may be made to the Joshua J. Norman Trust, c/o State Bank of Bement, Bement, IL 61813.


Subscribe
Online video

ONLINE VIDEO

go.illinois.edu/survey_pranksters

Survey pranksters. Educational psychologist Joseph Robinson-Cimpian’s sensitivity analysis helps researchers identify potential mischievous responders—teens who intentionally provide false information on questionnaires as a prank.

DATE FOR BRIEFS DEADLINE

PAGE 3

Insidellinois

Summer 2014 Publication Schedule

PUBLICATION

DATE

DEADLINE

FOR BRIEFS

ADVERTISING DEADLINE

May 15

May 31

May 9

June 19

June 30

June 17

July 3

July 25

July 21

Aug. 7

July 30

July 21

Aug. 21

Aug. 13

Aug. 14

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as the senior event services manager for the Illini Union, Marsha Daniels understands the importance of balance. Balance is a requirement when you’re coordinating an event with 1,000 people, and it’s a core value of the office space on the main floor of the Illini Union as well.

“This job can be quite hectic at times and requires following up on a lot of details,” she said. “I started decorating my office space as a way to keep my stress level down and create an inviting space to meet with clients.” Daniels has been in her position for three years after working a similar job for six years at the Lewis Center.

Her office isn’t decked out with an extensive collection of knickknacks and the wall isn’t filled with baubles, cute cartoon cutouts or wise sayings. Instead, with just a handful of items placed throughout the white room, she has created a gallery feel.

“I’ve brought in a few of my favorite things because I’d rather have them here where I can see them and be surrounded by them than be content. I collect just a little at a time,” he said. “It requires following up on a lot of details,” she said when she’s coordinating an event at the Illini Union.

“I think having a diverse background has made me more effective,” she said. Other pieces, like her office’s impressive memorabilia trips or vacations, like the shells kept inside a clear lamp base that were collected on an East Coast jaunt, or the silk scarf overlay that was picked up in a “dream” trip to Egypt in 2012, or the large segmented photos of penguins and geese that have been nailed to look like paintings.

“Each piece is connected to a good memory. The perk is I get to see off the things I’ve created.”

Daniels is no ordinary amateur doodler, with a bachelor of fine arts degree in studio arts from the U. of I. and a master’s of fine arts degree from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, where she majored in ceramics. The degrees followed a 13-year banking career she had started after high school.

“After being denied a promotion, I realized that I need a college degree and was ready to make a change,” she said. “I want-ed to do something more creative.”

That merging of business acumen and art has made her a more well-rounded employee and helps when she’s coordinating an event at the Illini Union.

“Like a gallery, the office exhibition is nothing like the Darth Vader character that he collects models and memorabilia of. Overmier, a nice man with no apparent intentions of rulant the universe with an evil hand, has collected all things Lord Vader since the “Star Wars” movie was released in 1977. Most of his collection, which includes a Darth Vader nutcracker, equals up entire wall of his office.

But as the collection grew in size, his wife’s patience for keeping it at home diminished. She finally asked if he might banish the collection to a galaxy far, far away.

“She was getting to the point where the collection was just sitting in boxes anyway,” he said. “Darth Vader” memorabilia isn’t the only thing Overmier collects. His office also boasts a formidable collection of coffee cups that he has picked up over the years at trade shows, and at home he has more than 1,000 Hot Wheels cars.

“I don’t buy anything too expensive and I collect just a little at a time,” he said. “It just accumulates and before you know it you have a thousand little cars.”

The advantage of having toys at work is that children love to come to his office.

“I let them play with everything,” he said. “It’s great except for a few items that still are in original packaging and kept out of reach.

“Most days I spend more time here than I do at home, so why not make it fun and comfortable?” he said.
The research was an international effort involving scientists, divers and technicians from more than a dozen institutions. It brought together diverse and complementary natural traps, as researchers described the sinkhole. The team used radiocarbon dating and analyzed chemical signatures in bones and in flowerlike crystals that grew on the bones to determine how long ago the girl lived. Scientists have long debated the origins of the first Americans. Most accept – and numerous genetic analyses support the view – that the original immigrants crossed over a land bridge that once connected northeast Asia to present-day Alaska.

The most ancient remains have baffled scientists, however, because the skulls are narrow and have other measurable different features than those of Native Americans. Some researchers hypothesize that these individuals came to the Americas from as far away as Australia or Southeast Asia. The girl who fell into the sinkhole had a skull with the unambiguous features of the initial peopling of the Americas. The Kennebec Man remains were found in the Yucatan.

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concert features Illinois history, Canadian Brass

By Dusty Rhodes Arts and Humanities Editor

W ill-known TV and radio newscaster Dave Shaul, a "proud alumnus" of the U. of I. Band, will ence "The History of Illinois Through Its Music," the first concert of the Illinois Summer Band's annual Twilight Concerts on the Quad beginning at 7 p.m. June 19.

The program will feature music written specifically for Illinois bands and music that has become closely associated with Illinois bands, including "By Thy Rivers Gently Flowing, Illinois," performed by the Illinois Glee and Mandolin Club in 1897; long before it became the official state song; "Illinois Loyalty," first performed in 1906 and one of the oldest collegiate fight songs; "Illinois March," by Edwin Franko Goldman, and "March of the Illini," commissioned by Illinois band director Albert Austin Harding in 1922; and "University of Illinois March," by John Philip Sousa.

Linda Moorehouse, a music professor and the interim director of bands, will share the podium with a half-dozen guest conductors. Robert Hindsley, the retired director of bands at Homewood-Flossmoor High School in suburban Chicago and the son of Mark H. Hindsley, who was the assistant director and then the director of Illinois bands from 1934 till 1970, will conduct the father's transcription of Wagner's "Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral." William Kissing, the retired associate director of Purdue University's "All American" marching band and the son of Everett D. Kisinger, who was the director of the Marching Illini from 1948 until 1976, will conduct two of his father's favorites, "Glory of the Gridiron" and "Revelation March."

Mark Duker, the head of the fine arts program at U. Waukegan Valley High School in Aurora, Illinois, and the grandson of Guy M. Duker, the director of Illinois bands from 1953 through 1978, will conduct "Illinois March," by Edwin Franko Goldman, and "Barnum & Bailey's Favorite," by Karl King. The Marching Illini traditionally sing the trio portion of "Illinois March" using lyrics written by Guy Duker.

Other guest conductors are Gary Smith and Tom Caneva, both former directors of the Marching Illini, and Barry Houser, the current director of Illinois Athletic Bands (including the Marching Illini). As always, music fans are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and picnic suppers to enjoy along with the concert on the Quad, just south of the Illini Union.

The second concert in the series, "Ice Cream and Independence," will move indoors, to the Virginia Theatre in downtown Champaign. The July 3 concert, sponsored by TCBY, will feature the Champaign-Urbana Civic Wind Band along with the world-famous Canadian Brass, which includes U. of I. French horn professor Bernhard Scully. Ronald Romm, a trumpet professor at Illinois, is also a former member of Canadian Brass.

Frozen yogurt will be served beginning at 5 p.m., the show begins at 7 p.m. Tickets are $12 and available by phone at 217-333-0603, online at www.champaignu.org or at the theater box office, 203 W. Park Ave. VIP packages, which include front-row seats and the opportunity to meet members of Canadian Brass backstage, are $40.

The final Twilight concert will take place on the Quad on July 17 at 7 p.m. •

DRONES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

came with a protective polystyrene hull for use indoors, and Bowman has demonstrated it during meetings with area farmers.

"When I'm running the Parrot drone during a conference, I pick somebody that looks scared when I pull it out, and I take the iPad over to them and tell them I'm going to have them launch it for me," Bowman said. "You press the screen where it says 'take off' and the drone pops up 3 feet in the air, hovers and waits for you to take over flying it."

"Standard pictures and video taken with drones can tell us a lot," Bowman said. "But what we’re looking to give us even more information is multispectral cameras that can give us imagery in other wavelengths, such as near-infrared, to help us identify areas of crop stress. It probably isn't going to replace the canopy, we may see some of those weeds show up in the imagery as well to identify where there are hot spots and problems," Bowman said.

Commercial use of unmanned aerial vehicles in U.S. airspace was banned by the Federal Aviation Administration in 2007, although growing numbers of hobbyists have been toying with the use of drones, particularly for aerial photography.

However, facing mounting pressure from agribusiness, retail and other industries, the FAA is expected to release new policies by 2015 that will enable businesses to integrate drones into their operations. The agriculture industry is expected to be one of the largest market segments for drone usage.

"If the FAA rules come through, and the price of the technology comes down, it doesn't seem all that far-fetched to me," Bowman said. "And one of the first things he could do at the beginning of the day is sit down and scan his fields to see if anything has happened that needs his attention." •

Insideillinois
June 19, 2014

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achievements

A report on honors, awards, appointments and other outstanding achievements of faculty and staff members

Jesse C. Thompson Jr., the assistant dean for academic programs for the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, received the 2014 Ebony Excellence Award for Excellence in STEM Education. Thompson was honored by the Illinois Black Alumni Network, the U. of I.’s Bruce Nelson African American Cultural Center for his work as the longtime director of the Research Apprentice Program in the college. The award was presented by Ashley Davis, a RAP alumnus, who is now the assistant director of the Nesbitt Center. Thompson was honored for 25 years of fostering the collegiate and career success of talented students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Long-distance adviser Physics professor Anthony J. Leggett (front, right, second from right) was among five “foreign experts” who met with and addressed Chinese President Xi Jinping (front, second from left) on May 22 in Shanghai. The topic of their meeting was “attracting overseas experts to build on innovative China.”

PhD Ferreira, the Tungchao Julia Lu Professor and head of the department of mechanical science and engineering, received the William T. Einnor Manufacturing Technology Award from the American Society of Mechanical Engineers for his contributions to innovative manufacturing technologies. Ferreira’s work has led to significant economic benefits in the industrial sector. For example, new composite materials, such as nanoscale manufacturing is creating opportunities for sustained economic growth. The department of mechanical science and engineering offers undergraduate and graduate programs in mechanical engineering and biomedical engineering, as well as a PhD program.

Randy Ewoldt, a professor of mechanical science and engineering, was named one of 10 faculty members from around the world to the DuPont 2014 Class of Young Professors. Ewoldt’s research focuses on fluid mechanics and the rheology of complex fluids. Over the next three years, DuPont will provide $50,000 to sponsor their work in advancing basic science to meet global challenges in food, energy and the environment. Additionally, each grant recipient is invited to present a seminar on his or her work to the DuPont research community.

Audiology Clinic Screenings, hearing aid demos offered

The Audiology Clinic offers free hearing screenings and demonstrations with the latest digital hearing aid technology June 23-24. To schedule an appointment, call 217-333-2230. (Appointments are available by email.)

The clinic educates and trains students in the doctor of audiology program to provide clinical diagnostic, consultative and treatment services for individuals with communication impairments. The clinic is housed in the department of speech and hearing science, which is accredited by the Council for Academic Accreditation of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

The clinic is open to the public to provide diagnostic hearing assessments, industrial hearing evaluations and amplification services; prescriptive aid fitting, dispensing and repairs, and assistive listening devices. Any person who is interested in hearing assessment, hearing protection or management of hearing problems can make an appointment. No referral is needed. The clinic is an out-of-network provider for some state of Illinois employee health insurance.

Clinical hours are Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. For more information, call 217-333-2230.

from the archives

ON THE WEB

Photo series: illinois.edu/blog/view/1561

University Archives: archives.library.illinois.edu
Intuitions about the causes of rising obesity are often wrong

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

E
teverything you think you know about the causes of rising obesity in the U.S. might be wrong, researchers say in a new report.

Contrary to popular belief, people are exercising more today, have more leisure time and better access to fresh, affordable food – including fruits and vegetables – than they did in past decades. And while troubling disparities exist among various groups, most economic, educational, and racial or ethnic groups have seen their obesity levels rise at similar rates since the mid-1980s, the researchers report.

The new analysis appears in CA: Cancer Journal for Clinicians.

Obesity rates in the U.S. have been going up for decades, said U. of I. kinesiology and community health professor Ruopeng An, who led the new analysis with Roland Sturm, of the RAND Corp. in Santa Monica, California.

"Many factors have been suggested as causes," the researchers wrote. Snack food, fast food, automobile use, time spent viewing television or looking at computer screens, the ubiquity of vending machines, suburban sprawl, increasing portion sizes, the percent of disposable income spent on food, while today people spend much longer and watching 15 more minutes. The notion that people are getting fatter because they have less access to affordable, healthy foods also contradicts the data, An said.

"The percent of disposable income spent on food fell quite a bit from 1970 to 2010," he said. "And in fact in the 1930s American people spent one-third of their disposable income on food, while today people spend less than one-tenth. So it's hard to argue that food has become more expensive in general."

The price of fruits and vegetables has not increased over time, as some have argued, but has gone down more than 20 percent since 1970, the researchers report.

"The price of fruits and vegetables is decreasing – but not as rapidly as the cost of junk food," An said.

"A common misbelief is that the obesity epidemic reflects increasing social disparities and that the largest weight gains are concentrated in groups identifiable by race, ethnicity, income, education or geography," he said. "And it's true that if you look at the national data for any one point in time, it's not hard to figure out, for example, that the people with the lowest education tend to have the highest obesity rate. Everyone buys this argument. But what is less obvious is how surprisingly similar the obesity trend is for all groups."

A look at graphs of obesity over time offers a more universal view of what is going on, An said. Obesity is higher for blacks than for whites, but both groups are getting heavier at almost the same rate over time. The same disparity is seen in people who never finished high school versus those with a college degree, or those with lower versus higher incomes. The trend lines vary somewhat – the gap between white men and black men has recently narrowed, for example, while the gap for black and white women has widened – but obesity is going up in all these groups at about the same rate, An said.

"The gap between groups is secondary to the increase that all groups experience over time," he said. "So a reversal of the obesity epidemic would need universal intuitions rather than a focus on certain groups."

Some common explanations for the upward surge in obesity are simply wrong, An said. For example, the idea that longer workdays or less leisure time are to blame is not supported by the data. Americans are working fewer hours and have more leisure time than they did in the 1960s, he said. People are spending less time on household chores and caring for dependents than they did decades ago, and they have more free time than ever, he said.

"The notion that people are getting fatter because they have less access to affordable, healthy foods also contradicts the data, An said. "The percent of disposable income spent on food fell quite a bit from 1970 to 2010," he said. "And in fact in the 1930s American people spent one-third of their disposable income on food, while today people spend less than one-tenth. So it's hard to argue that food has become more expensive in general."

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Overall, food is more accessible and affordable than ever in the United States, and this may be an important factor in the dramatic rise in obesity, he said.

The data on exercise and physical activity also are muddier than some people like to admit, An said. American participants in the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey reported in 2012 that they were exercising on average four minutes more a day than reported in 2003. But they also reported sleeping 10 minutes longer and watching 15 more minutes of TV.

"Self-reported exercise increases over time, and the total sedentary time also increases over time," An said. "So we are kind of in a dilemma trying to figure out what really contributes to the obesity epidemic. We have a lot of hypotheses but we really don't have much data to support them at this stage."