

**For Release: Jan. 23, 2007**

Contact: Nancy Solomon

Phone: (314) 977-8017

e-mail: solomonn@slu.edu

## **SLU Doctoral Student Captures National Award for Research on Factors Linked to Obesity**

*Study Is First to Look at Relationship Between Attitudes, Urban Design*

ST. LOUIS — Corinne Joshu, a doctoral student from Saint Louis University School of Public Health, has won first place for her research poster on obesity that was presented at the 2006 American Public Health Association conference in November. This meeting is the oldest and largest gathering of public health professionals in the world.

“I was really surprised,” Joshu said. “I wasn’t fully aware of the competition. I didn’t realize when I was speaking to the judges that they were judging me.”

This is the first time a Saint Louis University public health student captured first place for an environmental presentation. A total of nine posters were entered in the student category, and Joshu won a cash prize of \$150.

Joshu examined the relationship between three factors that contribute to obesity:

- Personal barriers, such as feeling that you don’t have time to exercise, dislike activity or are concerned about injuries.
- Neighborhood environment, such as high traffic, sidewalks, litter on the road or streetlights.
- Urban sprawl or communities that primarily have single family homes located on streets that dead-end in cul de sacs and don’t interconnect.

“If we can get an idea of how these things inter-relate, we can start thinking about how to allocate resources to really help people in the fight against obesity,” Joshu said. “We can use this knowledge to design public health programs that work.”

Joshu found that personal barriers remain the strongest indicator of obesity; if people have an aversion to exercise, they are more likely to be heavy.

“That increase is even larger when you’re in a more sprawling area as opposed to a more compact area,” she said.

The characteristics of a community, such as not having sidewalks or streetlights, also were correlated with obesity, she added.

Joshu wasn’t surprised by the outcome of her preliminary research: obesity is a complicated problem. “Our findings were consistent with what others have found,” she said, adding that the subject begs more research.

“But this is the first time to our knowledge that people have looked at personal barriers, community barriers and urban sprawl all at once. It potentially could have some impact in how we look at different elements in our community.”

Saint Louis University School of Public Health is one of only 37 fully accredited schools of public health in the United States and the nation's only School of Public Health sponsored by a Jesuit university. It offers master's degrees and doctoral programs in six public health disciplines and a number of joint degrees involving business, law, medicine, nursing and social work. It is home to 12 nationally recognized research centers and draws students from across the United States and from 21 foreign countries.

###

*Editor’s Note: To arrange an interview with Corinne Joshu, call Nancy Solomon, Saint Louis University medical center media relations, at (314) 977-8017.*