Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating Active U: An internet-mediated physical activity program

Version: 1 Date: 9 May 2009

Reviewer: Joseph Ciccolo

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. As it currently stands, the main results of this study focus on the efficacy of the program, and therefore are not obviously significant for the field given the lack of using 1) a control group; 2) validated physical activity questionnaires; or 3) an objective physical activity or fitness measure. Despite this, there is a great potential for the information gained from this research to inform the literature on how an Internet-based physical activity program is disseminated throughout a large university during the winter months (i.e., reach). Specifically, this manuscript would be considerably enhanced if it were to reframe this paper to include a dissemination-based theoretical background (e.g., RE-AIM) that would provide the reader with a more sophisticated understanding of how this Internet program spread throughout the university; and what specific factors and processes predicted engagement and adherence to the program. As such, it appears that the true strength of this manuscript can come from it being used as an example of how an Internet-based health behavior program naturally disseminates through a university environment.

2. There is a disconnect between what was intended to be researched (i.e., the reach of the program) and what was actually researched (i.e., the efficacy of the program, as defined by meeting goals). Specifically, the purpose of the study was “to evaluate the reach of the Active U program within the target population, as well as to describe the distribution of individual participation and adherence to the program;” however, the primary outcome listed on p. 10 is “the number of weeks an individual met his or her goal out of eight possible weeks.” – a factor that delineates the efficacy, not the reach of the program.

3. Please clarify the reasoning for the cutoff points for height (<48 inches), weight (>600 lbs.), or minutes of activity (<10 or >600), as it is unclear why these specific numbers were chosen, and it seems arbitrary.

4. How are the authors defining the winter months? What is the exact time period? Was winter break included? This is important information for understanding dissemination.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Does this journal require references to be listed as [1-3] as opposed to [1] [2] [3]?
Discretionary Revisions

1. The first sentence in the first paragraph under the Methods on p. 5 is very similar to the first sentence of the Active U description on p. 6, making it sound redundant.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.