Reviewer's report

Title: Weight and health behaviour related correlates of academic performance in first year university students

Version: 1 Date: 26 September 2013

Reviewer: Cindy Shearer

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript examines associations between health related variables and academic performance. This is an important area to explore, as the authors suggest, both to inform efforts to improve university performance, and because this construct relates to professional success and satisfaction later life. Overall, the manuscript is clearly written and easy to understand. This reviewer’s primary concerns are with the overall conceptualization of the research question. Attention to this concern, listed under Major Compulsory Revisions, will improve the paper and clarify its contribution to the existing literature.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Although the paper is exploratory in nature, there needs to be greater justification for the variables included. This reviewer suggests that the authors provide more detailed information on each of the variables they have included in the analysis as well as how they might relate to academic performance and related outcomes from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint. Otherwise, the sense given is more of a “fishing expedition” (where a variety of measures are tossed into a statistical analysis with the hopes that significant associations will emerge) than a well devised, theoretically based research question.

2. In the review of extant literature, more focus has been applied to highlighting where significant associations have occurred between health related variables and academic performance than providing a full picture of what work has been done in this area, and how the current manuscripts contributes to this literature.

3. Defining academic success as attending all course exams is somewhat troublesome, particularly because attendance at course exams could indeed be related to health. Was any information collected to verify whether those who did not “carry through” did so for academic reasons, and not reasons related to health? If so, this should be explained in the methods section. If not, the authors should consider this possible confound in their interpretation of findings.

4. Greater attention should be devoted in the discussion to highlighting the alcohol use and dieting status, as these emerged as the strongest predictors once other variables were controlled.

Minor Compulsory Revisions
1. Editing for grammar (tense switching, consistency in lists, etc.)

2. Clarification of language. For instance, in the following sentence it is difficult to discern the relationship between constructs because the association is described as negative and academic achievement is described as lower. Omission of either descriptor clarifies the message, as in “Overweight status is negatively associated with academic achievement”; or “overweight status is associated with lower academic achievement.”

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests, as detailed above.