Author's response to reviews

Title: Change in diet, physical activity, and body weight among young-adults during the transition from high school to college.

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor and Referees;

Thank you for your very careful and thoughtful review of our manuscript. We have responded to the referees comments and suggestions and believe our manuscript has been significantly strengthen by doing so. We very much hope that the current version of the manuscript is accepted for publication but would be happy to provide additional drafts if necessary.

Detailed responses to the second set of referees comments on version 2 follow:

Reviewer's report
Title: Change in diet, physical activity, and body weight among young-adults during the transition from high school to college.
Version: 2 Date: 29 June 2009
Reviewer: Elizabeth E Richardson
Reviewer's report:
The authors have done a very nice job of responding to the reviewers' comments. I particularly appreciate the clarifications made throughout the methods and results, as well as the streamlining of the discussion section. I think the manuscript is significantly strengthened, and hope the authors feel this to be the case as well.
I have no additional suggestions, although I do note that there are several minor spelling errors throughout the manuscript (e.g., p. 13) that should be corrected.

The spelling errors were corrected. Thank you for your very helpful suggestions.

Reviewer's report
Title: Change in diet, physical activity, and body weight among young-adults during the transition from high school to college.
Reviewer's report:

Change in diet, physical activity, and body weight among young-adults during the transition from high school to college.

The revised manuscript is an improvement over the original version. The authors have largely addressed the reviewer's critiques. Additional issues are considered minor or discretionary revisions:

(1) The primary conclusion of the manuscript is that weight gain during this time frame is significant and likely associated with increased caloric intake consequent to environmental changes such as all you can eat meals in the dining hall. Supporting this theory is the notion that participants who gained weight ate an average of 2 more meals per week in the dining hall. However, it is a major problem that estimated caloric intake from the FHQ seems to have decreased significantly from time 1 to time 2. The authors attempt to account for the decreased overall caloric intake by saying it might be a methodological problem (am I reading it correctly that they imply that the second data point is more reliable than the first?) I don’t quite understand this, given that both time points ask about behavior for the previous 6 months (is this what you mean about “difficulty using the same FFQ to describe different time points?) I thought a FFQ was filled out at each time point.

Response: The first FFQ asked participants to report about usual dietary intake during the last six months of high school, which was three to nine months in the past and did not include the summer months. The first FFQ was thus more retrospective in nature than the second and this may have made it more difficult for participants to report accurate estimates of usual intake. The paragraph describing the limitations of the dietary assessment method now includes a clearer description of the reference time for the FFQs. (page 12, paragraph 3)

Also, the sentence describing the Maruti study is a bit confusing, as I am not sure if they are trying to make a point about adolescent versus adult recall.

Response: The sentence about the Maruti study was reworded to provide clarification. This study provides evidence that young adults can accurately report about usual dietary intake in the not so recent past using FFQs. (page 12, paragraph 3)

It is helpful that the authors describe similar patterns of FFQ with multiple time points in other studies (Butler and Jung). Do the authors think the reported caloric decrease is plausible, esp in light of weight
gain, or are there other explanations?

Response: We believe that some of the difference in total energy intake may be explained by differences in energy expenditure due to difference in energy expenditure. This paragraph now includes a sentence stating that our findings are consistent with Butler and Jung who found that decreased physical activity was associated with weight gain, despite reported overall decreasing in total energy intake. In addition, some of the difference in observed energy intake may be explained by measurement error and is now discussed in more detail in the paragraph about the limitations of the dietary assessment method in the discussion section. (page 13, paragraph 2)

(2) The other curious finding that weight gainers were more likely to eat breakfast . . .much better now that is couched in contrast to other reports in the literature (i.e., breakfast skipping associated with overweight), but should also include the limitations of how this question was asked (assuming the item was worded as it is stated in the Tables; i.e., at least 4x per week)

Response: A sentence disclosing how the breakfast consumption question was asked was added to the paragraph describing the observed association. (page 11, last sentence paragraph 2)

(3) The sample seems unusual in that alcohol consumption decreased during college (yes, differentially across weight gain groups) but also as a whole and likely in contrast to national statistics for college students? Did the authors look at alcohol consumption are likelihood of dropping out from the study?

Response: Yes, we did looked at this. Alcohol consumption (in high school) was not associated with the likelihood of dropping out of the study. Yes, we agree that our rates of alcohol consumption are less than reported nationally, but are representative of the reported percent of freshmen consuming alcohol at USU and were not significantly associated with either baseline BMI or risk of weight gain during the first semester of college.

(4) Delete the second paragraph of the background section, “The phenomenon of gaining weight . . .is familiar to most college students.” This is not supported by the data (i.e., 77% did NOT gain weight).

Response: The point here is that college students have heard about this phenomenon – commonly referred to as the freshmen-15 and we would argue that although the research does not support a gain of 15 pounds, it does provide evidence that a smaller amount of weight gain is common in at least a segment of first year college students. We respectively have opted to keep this sentence and believe that it provides necessary background to understand the impact of this study.
(5) The request to include the time frame of the FFQ was aimed at finding out whether there is a sampling period that the questionnaire is eliciting (typing a 24-hr recall or 1 wk-recall). It seems clear from the description of the FFQ this is not the case; therefore the statement including the 6 month period of retrospective recall is redundant and unnecessary, as it has been mentioned in the paragraph stating “Participants were assessed during two data collection periods . . .”

Response: The paragraph describing limitations of the diet assessment method in the discussion section has been reworded. (pages 12-13)

(6) On page 8, change to “78th percentile”

Response: This change was made.

(7) I’m still confused by the wording in the description of the Hovel finding (that “average weight gain returned to near baseline levels”—does this mean the weight returned to baseline or the weight gain leveled off? (Next sentence after that stating that the accelerated weight gain did not continue” is an improvement).

Response: This sentence was reworded for clarity. (page 10, paragraph 3)