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: 15 June 2009

Reviewer: Sherrie Delinsky

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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. 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. 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?

(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)

(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?
(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).

(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 . . .”

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

(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).

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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