

Wellness Beyond Campus Walls: How Walking Worldwide Brought One Institution Together

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ABSTRACT

Background: Investment in campus recreation has well-documented benefits, and the need for improved health and wellness also extends beyond students. Creating a campus culture that values health and well-being can be transformative for the health of the overall community.

Aim: This study aimed to understand the impact of an institution-wide, 42-day virtual fitness initiative that included faculty, staff, students, and graduates.

Methods: Participants were invited to complete two surveys (pre-and-post) consisting of questions about physical fitness, goal setting, and connection to the college community. Throughout the duration of the program, participants logged their physical activity (e.g., step counts) through a web-based platform.

Results: Survey respondents reported exercising a greater number of days each week during the program and were more likely to set and achieve their fitness goals. The leading unexpected benefit of participation in the program, especially among our graduates, was developing social connections with other participants.

Conclusions: Institution-wide fitness programs can promote health awareness and motivate faculty, staff, students, and graduates to improve fitness and connect socially.

Submitted 5 October 2023; accepted 11 December 2023

Keywords: virtual, gamified fitness, alumni, higher education, community



BACKGROUND

Collegiate recreational sports departments, facilities, and programs are charged by their institutions to provide programs, services, and initiatives that enhance the student experience. Modern campus facilities have been designed to provide more than just access to fitness equipment and recreation areas; they are increasingly becoming a destination for fitness, health, wellness, academics, and social connection (Bogar, 2008; Wilson et al., 2020). This investment in campus recreation has well-documented benefits that extend beyond health and fitness to student retention, academic performance, stress reduction, social connections and community, and self-confidence (Das et al., 2021; Forrester, 2015; Litwiller et al., 2021; Makubuya et al., 2020; Milton et al., 2020; Sanderson et al., 2018; Soria et al., 2022; Zegre et al., 2022).

The need for improved health and wellness in higher education also extends beyond students, as campus recreation departments are increasingly tasked with creating inclusive programming that promotes wellness for faculty and staff too (Amaya et al., 2019). This shift is not surprising, as integrating health and fitness endeavors into the workplace has been a trend over the last several decades, with evidence of a range of positive outcomes for employers and employees (Abdin et al., 2018). While the push for recreational programming that supports all campus community members is growing (Hill-Mey et al., 2015; Tay, 2021), many colleges and universities struggle in these efforts due to limitations in cost, staffing, facilities, and interest (Hartman et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2003). Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic created an additional challenge for recreational departments, as they needed to continue to provide programs, services, and initiatives that support health and well-being in the community where there were significant restrictions on how community members could gather, participate, and otherwise access these resources and facilities (Powers et al., 2022).

Given these challenges, collegiate recreation departments have worked to provide creative solutions to continue meeting their institutional needs relating to fitness, health, and wellness. Due in part to the challenges presented during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual, gamified fitness has become increasingly popular (Cotton & Patel, 2019; Culos-Reed et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2022). Virtual options allow people to participate without having to visit any particular facility, and gamification elements, or the use of game-like features in non-game situations (Deterding et al., 2011), can help encourage participation and continued engagement with fitness regimens. Gamification refers to a range of tactics that can be categorized broadly into these categories: social influence, competition, challenges, and incentives, and includes things like badges, points, levels, collaboration, and leaderboards where ordinarily these features would be absent (Neupane et al., 2021). A review of the literature suggests that gamification in physical activity can positively impact a wide range of outcomes, including physical health and activity levels (Johnson et al., 2016). Moreover, while they identified some mixed results concerning gamification, especially with cognitive outcomes, Johnson et al. (2016) did not identify any studies with exclusively negative results. A recent meta-analysis of randomized control studies confirms the positive impact of gamification on physical activity outcomes (Mazeas et al., 2022).

Aim

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits of a 42-day virtual, gamified wellness program implemented at a private women's college in the Northeast United States. The wellness program, Walktober, is one of the Health Enhancement Systems™ (HES) virtual programs that focuses on participants making walking a

priority in daily life. The program runs from October 1st through mid-November and rewards participants by providing fun incentives, team connection, and beautiful global landscapes. This program was selected due to its ease of administration and social connectedness platform.

This program was first introduced to the institution in 2012 as a component of an Employee Faculty and Staff Wellness program. After a brief hiatus, the Walktober program was reinstated at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. At that time, the College was required to de-densify campus, permitting on-campus housing for only 50% of the student population while international students and other students studied remotely. Because of the on-campus residence limitations, there was an acute need to develop an outreach program that spanned across the globe to reach our full undergraduate population. With students located all around the world, the goals of the HES Walktober program aligned well with the health and wellness goals of the institution, especially in the areas of promoting health and social connections. Typically, the Recreation department's fitness and wellness initiatives are geared toward the undergraduate student population, but in 2020, the outreach effort included graduates for the first time. By expanding beyond just the currently enrolled undergraduate student population, this Walktober program was a broader, community-wide outreach initiative that aimed to serve all college constituencies: current undergraduate students, graduates (i.e., students who have already earned their degrees from the institution), faculty, and staff.

The Recreation department used several gamification tactics during program registration to encourage participation. The first approach involved the College's class colors. As an institution, there is a history of assigning each graduating class a color, and these colors repeat every four years. These colors create a camp-like, color-war mentality that unites graduates and current students across generations. A competitive trend among the four class colors was noted during the registration period with color leads changing often to reflect bragging rights for the highest participation, a class color pride point. Another motivating registration gamification tactic included bar graphs demonstrating graduating years. The graduation year graph added to the ongoing friendly competition and encouraged participation from current students and some of the most experienced graduates. Finally, the tactic of a global heat map visually represented where participants were walking worldwide. These creative visual representations motivated and encouraged intergenerational, class color, and location-based participation in the United States and internationally.

There were additional gamification elements throughout the 42-day program that motivated participants. Walktober encourages individuals to form teams of four or five people to provide support as well as accountability for the team members. Furthermore, participation was encouraged through the use of badges, three different colored leaves that indicate the number of daily steps achieved (with 10,000 steps being the maximum recognized daily achievement), and a weekly thrive fitness tip. These recognitions and incentives are designed to motivate the participants to realize the benefits of daily exercise. Throughout the program, participants are motivated by small accountability incentives and opportunities for social dialogue. Specific social program components include an interactive wall feature where individuals can post photos, like other people's photos, and post comments. Participants can also invite other participants as friends to view and support their progress.

During the 2020 Walktober program, 2,590 graduates, students, faculty, and staff participated; 84% of the participants were graduates. Due to program participation success, Walktober was continued in 2021. The widespread popularity of the program and the overwhelming positive anecdotal feedback from participants prompted us to design a survey for the 2021 implementation of Walktober in order to learn more specifically how the program impacted those who participated and their health outcomes.

METHODS

Participants

All students, faculty, staff, and graduates who registered for Walktober were invited to participate in this exploratory research study. A total of 2,892 people registered, and 499 completed the pre- and post-program surveys and consented to share their participation data (a response rate of 17%). The majority of survey respondents were graduates (87%), with graduating class years ranging from 1957 to 2021. To understand how this study sample compared to the other program participants who chose not to complete the surveys, total logged steps were used as an indicator of engagement, and found that those who completed both surveys were more actively engaged participants (i.e., logged a greater total number of steps). This trend should be considered as we present results, as the findings may be more representative of the more engaged participants.

Measures

Surveys

Walktober participants were invited to participate in two surveys, one at the start of the program, and one at the end. These surveys were designed by the authors and HES. The surveys were not standardized instruments for measuring physical activity. The surveys asked participants 9-10 questions about their exercise frequency, physical activity goal setting and achievement, awareness of changes as a result of physical activity, unexpected rewards or benefits from physical activity, challenges with physical activity, things they are proud of relating to physical activity, feelings of connection with the college, and any other thoughts they wanted to share about fitness, physical activity or wellness in general. The questions were similar on both surveys. However, the survey at the start of the program asked about their typical, current, or prior physical activity habits and experiences, and the survey at the end asked about their experiences during the 42 days of the program. For example, on the pre-program survey participants were asked, “during a typical week (before Walktober), how many days did you exercise 30 minutes at moderate intensity (e.g., elevated heart rate)?” The post-program survey question was changed to seek input specifically related to their Walktober experiences, “During a typical Walktober week, how many days did you exercise 30 minutes at moderate intensity (e.g., elevated heart rate)?” The question about days of physical activity was based on HES program design and evaluation. The Walktober program encourages reaching at least 6,000 steps, and to do this, typically participants need to go on a dedicated 30-minute walk (or other activity) to achieve this physical activity benchmark. This aligns with the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation of 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week, or 30 minutes a day, for 5 days per week.

Physical Activity Log

In addition to survey data, participants logged their daily physical activity by entering the steps they completed. Participants counted their steps using devices or conversion charts to translate other activities into approximate step counts. For the analyses, we used the total steps logged by each participant during the program.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated as appropriate for the closed-ended, quantitative survey questions and physical activity data logged by participants. Open-ended responses were read and thematically coded by the research team. The thematic codes were created using both inductive and deductive methods. The third and fourth authors each reviewed and coded a subset of the participant responses for each question, and the fifth author reviewed their work for agreement and consistency. For any theme where the agreement between the two coders was below 85%, the fifth author reviewed all responses, settled disagreements, and made final coding decisions (this occurred for only 12 of the 124 thematic codes, and overall agreement was very high, 94% on average across all codes).

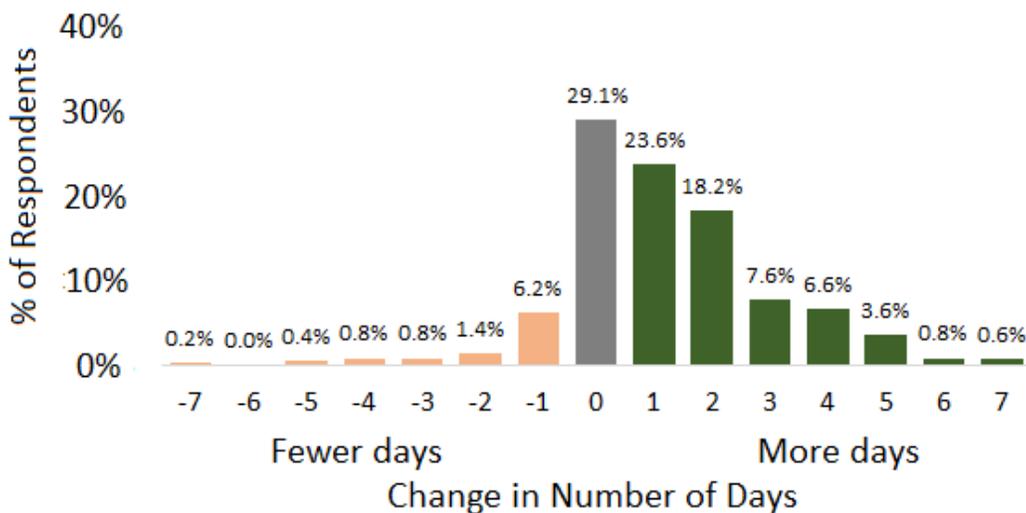
RESULTS

Days of Exercise

See Figure 1 for an overview of the changes in self-reported days of physical activity. Compared to their prior, typical activity levels ($M = 4.22$ days, $SD = 2.01$), survey respondents reported more days with moderate exercise during Walktober ($M = 5.39$ days, $SD = 1.88$), $t(497) = -14.49$, $p < .001$. For each participant, we also subtracted their estimated days of exercise at the beginning of the program from their response at the end of the program to determine how their number of exercise days may have changed. While many were consistent (29.1% did not change their number of exercise days), the majority (61%) reported one or more additional exercise days during the week. At the start of Walktober just about half of survey respondents reported 5 or more moderate-intensity activity days each week, and at the end of the program this increased to 74%.

Figure 1

Change in Days with 30 Minutes or More of Moderate Intensity Exercise During Walktober



Physical Activity Goal Setting and Achievement

Walktober had a positive impact on goal setting and achievement. Only 48% of respondents reported that they typically set physical activity goals for themselves, but the majority (79%) did set specific physical activity goals during the program. Not only were respondents more likely to set physical activity goals during Walktober, the majority (65%) reported that they felt like they achieved their goals *always* or *most of the time*. Even more striking, respondents were more likely to report *always* achieving their physical activity goals during the program as compared to their typical physical activity goals (30% of the time for Walktober goals vs. 4% of the time for typical physical activity goals; Figure 2).

Figure 2

Physical Activity Goal Achievement



Note. This figure shows the extent to which respondents felt they achieved the physical activity goals they set for themselves.

Participants were also invited to share their specific Walktober goals on the pre- and post-program surveys. The analysis revealed that participants expressed a wide range of goals, though perhaps unsurprisingly, the most prominent goal (mentioned in 62% of respondent comments) was to achieve a specific number of steps per day, “I would like to achieve >10,000 steps/day at least 6 days per week.” Almost all step goals were made according to the goal benchmarks from the program. Specifically, many participants set their goals as 6k, 8k, and 10k steps, pointing to the influence of suggested goals. However, it was also clear that Walktober had a broader appeal as far as physical activity goal setting was concerned, as many participants expressed goals reaching beyond step counts. Other frequently endorsed goals included: practicing a specific type of physical activity (36%), exercising for specific amounts of time (14%), and increasing their activity level (13%). Some participants even had multiple goals. For example, “Continue my 2x/week aquarobics but add 3000-4000 steps each day, increasing them as possible.” Some participants (12%) were also motivated by Walktober-specific incentives that were built into the program (e.g. earning virtual leaves or

the team leaderboard) and set goals with these in mind. For example, one participant said their goal was “To contribute to a good outcome for my team; i.e. exercise at least 5 days a week to get a leaf.”

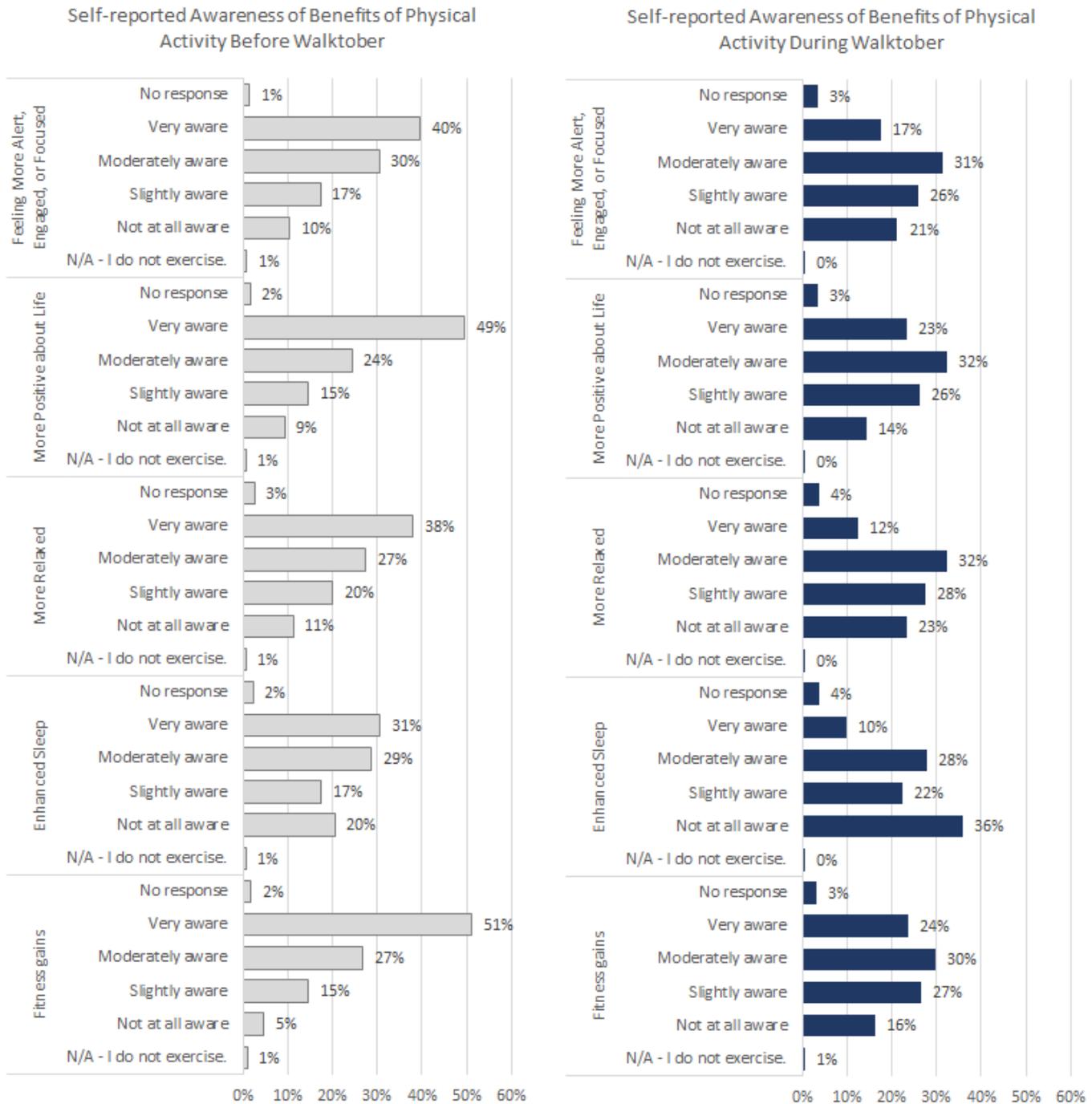
In the post-program survey, participants were asked to share their Walktober goals in the event they added new goals or their goals changed. Overall, the types of goals mentioned were similar to those noted at the beginning of the program. Again, overwhelmingly, step goals were the most popular response, mentioned by 59% of respondents. The next most popular goals were pertaining to practicing a specific type of physical activity (31%), Walktober-specific incentives such as earning leaves (17%), increasing activity level (11%), and exercising for specific amounts of time (9%).

Awareness of Physical Activity Benefits

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with physical activity and indicate the extent to which they were aware of experiencing several specific benefits as a result of being physically active, before and during the program. At the start, participants reported a range of awareness when it came to experiencing benefits of physical activity in the past, but most were *very aware* of experiencing benefits in fitness gains, feeling more relaxed, more positive about life, and feeling more alert. Respondents were more mixed in their awareness of experiencing enhanced sleep, though roughly one third (31%) of respondents were *very aware* of experiencing this benefit. Reflecting on their Walktober experiences, most respondents reported being at least *moderately* aware of experiencing the benefits that we asked about. Enhanced sleep remained the holdout, with the majority (36%) saying that they were *not at all aware* of experiencing this benefit. Figure 3 shows these changes in awareness.

Figure 3

Awareness of Physical Activity Benefits Before and During Walktober



Participants were given the opportunity to share their own perspectives on the benefits of exercise, by asking them to share any unexpected benefits or rewards that they experienced, in the past and during Walktober. Respondents reported a range of benefits from past physical activity, including improved body image (20%), fitness

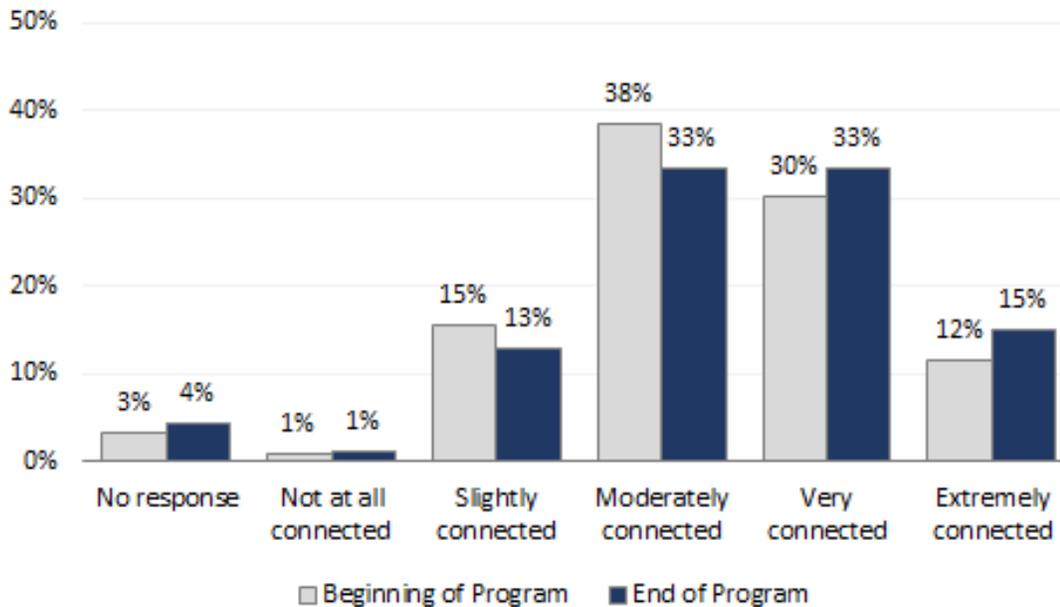
gains (15%), mood (15%), mental health (15%), energy (13%), healing (12%) and more. At the end of the program, creating social connections was the unexpected benefit mentioned most frequently (37%). In relation to gaining social connections, participants also pointed to the benefits of the fun and enjoyment that came with the Walktober program (21%). Participants enjoyed the sense of virtual connection, or more specifically, the team aspect of the program, “I enjoyed sharing the experience with other Walktober participants.” Participants even pointed to their teams being a source of motivation and accountability, stating, “I did more on my very busy days than I normally would have because I wanted to keep up with my team.” Respondents also noted positive experiences with the outdoors (10%), enjoying the excuse to be outside more frequently and finding new walking paths and natural places to explore.

A large number of survey respondents and program participants were graduates, and a recurring theme expressed by this group centered on their ability to use this opportunity to reconnect with the college community, “I enjoyed occasional texts with team members: several of which were alumnae that I hadn’t connected with in ages.” An important feature of this fitness initiative is that it creates a virtual space for people to connect, even when they are geographically distant from one another. This helped graduates in different states and countries reconnect, and in some cases helped counteract feelings of isolation experienced during the pandemic. For example, one participant mentioned, “It was fun to check in virtually with the other participants. COVID has made in person group fitness more complicated, so this was a nice way to do something ‘together while apart.’”

In addition to the social and emotional benefits of the program, some participants reported unexpected fitness gains because of their physical activity during the 42-day initiative (10%). Not only did participants find that they were fitter than they had thought themselves to be, but they were also able to see improvements in their physical abilities, even in a few short weeks, “I discovered endurance I did not know I had!” Likewise, from another respondent, “Finding out I can achieve this goal regularly. Didn't think that was going to be so doable.”

Feeling Connected

Participants were asked to rate how connected they felt to the institution before and after the program to see if interacting in the virtual Walktober space would change their feelings. Overall, ratings of connection to the institution remained largely consistent from the beginning to the end of the program (Figure 4). Most participants reported feeling *moderately connected* before and after Walktober (38% and 33% respectively).

Figure 4*Self-Reported Feelings of Connection at the Beginning and End of the Walktober Program*

Team Membership and Program Engagement

Walktober participants had the option of signing up as individuals or on a team. To understand how team membership impacted engagement, total logged steps were analyzed for those on teams compared to individual participants. A linear mixed effects model was used to account for the hierarchical structure of the data (i.e., participants on teams), as model fitting revealed significant variation in intercepts across teams, $SD = 72878.26$, (95% CI [48673.43, 109119.90], $\chi^2(1) = 44.27$, $p < .0001$). The effect of team membership on step count was not statistically significant, $t(233) = 1.53$, $p = .13$, indicating that there was no statistically significant difference in total steps for people who opted to participate on teams compared to those who did not.

Challenges with Physical Activity

Before Walktober, the leading challenge (expressed by 40% of respondents) was finding time in busy schedules due to work and family responsibilities. For example, one comment that reflected the sense of many, “My biggest challenge is finding time to work out daily, because I have two young children and a very demanding job.” The next most frequently mentioned challenge was physical health, mentioned by 22% of respondents. In these comments, respondents noted injuries, surgeries, and chronic pain as barriers to frequent exercise. Finding energy and motivation to exercise (17%) was another commonly reported challenge. Some didn’t enjoy exercise and were not motivated to do it, while others have been lacking energy, as one respondent shared, “I just find that I am way more tired in general. If I don’t exercise while at work, I’m not going to do it.”

Reflecting on their experience at the end of the program, over a third of our survey respondents (38%) reported no challenges in establishing a physical activity regimen. For those that did mention one or more challenges, finding time to exercise during a day filled with competing responsibilities of work, taking care of family, and school was again most commonly mentioned (30%). Physical health also remained a common challenge, with 18% of respondents sharing personal challenges with injuries or sickness. The weather, seasonal changes, and natural disasters moved up into the top three challenges mentioned (13% noting this issue). With the progression of the fall season, our Northern Hemisphere participants found it difficult to walk outside as the sun began setting earlier. Others experienced challenges with changing weather conditions or extreme weather.

Pride with Respect to Physical Activity

Despite the expressed challenges with finding time and maintaining a routine, at the end of the program, about half (49%) of respondents were most proud of their consistency. Many found that the motivation from setting goals kept them moving, and the daily exercise became a routine, for example:

I met my goal of hitting 6000 steps a day, 6 days a week, even though my work keeps me planted in a chair for a lot of the day. I came to look forward to ‘getting in steps’ and consciously strategized around getting them every day, even if it meant parking in the furthest spot in the supermarket parking lot or using the stairs at the library instead of the elevator. It's a little too early to tell, but I think this may be a habit that sticks.

Setting and achieving goals was the next highest source of pride for respondents (25%), and fitness gains rounded out the top three (21%). When talking about fitness gains and consistency, step goals and leaves were often mentioned in conjunction, as people seemed to be proud of setting and achieving Walktober-specific fitness goals. Overall, motivating factors such as step goals and leaves, along with the social aspects of the program, contributed to participants taking pride in the progress they were able to make on their health journey during Walktober.

Final Respondent Thoughts about Fitness, Physical Activity, Wellness, or Walktober

On both surveys, participants were asked to share their final thoughts and elaborate on the survey topics if they wished. The majority of these comments were about Walktober participation, in the past, or anticipation for the coming weeks (91%), and a large number shared positive and uplifting perspectives, “The Walktober project is an excellent way for people to reconnect while doing something that is good for all involved.” Other participants shared suggestions for program improvement (45%), like increasing the duration, “I appreciate the opportunity to do this, but wish it weren't for just six weeks.” Others asked for changes in program incentives, “I find it frustrating that you don't get more leaves for more than 10,000 steps.” Others noted that it would be helpful to have an expanded activity conversion chart, “I notice that the step conversion table used in the Walktober application does not include many things that I do, such as water aerobics, cooking, grocery shopping. Probably more geared to students and young

alums, but we senior alums would appreciate a broader step conversion chart.” Lastly, many expressed gratitude or enthusiasm for the opportunity to participate in the program (41%).

At the end of the program, comments about participation (32%) and gratitude (25%) were again the most common themes. Walktober incentives added an element of satisfaction to exercise by providing leaves and points as rewards for meeting fitness goals, as well as fun competition for the participants. One respondent shared, “I was chagrined to find that I was ridiculously pleased to get badges and leaves every day -- I'd like to think I'm too sophisticated for that, but that goofy cyber reward system was an effective carrot to get me out the door (and sometimes walking up and down my long driveway late at night).” Expressing their gratitude, one respondent shared,

This was a very good experience. Gave me some structure and incentive to get outside more and get some good weight-bearing, cardio exercise (good for bones and heart, too... and I need help in both of those departments!) Kept me in touch with several friends on my team. Got to see lots of beautiful photos of autumn color. It really hit a lot of positive notes for me. Thanks much for organizing Walktober!

The theme of connection rounded out the top three, as some participants mentioned how they were able to use this opportunity to connect with the college while also having a fun experience with exercise. For example, one participant said,

The chance to connect with classmates (my teammates) and also a few others on the Wall, looking at the pictures on the Wall and trying to take beautiful shots on my walks to post myself, and the motivation to get out and walk that the program provides.

While largely positive, the survey comments also included some conflicting feedback amongst participants who either felt that the competitiveness was too stressful or felt that the program was not competitive enough. For example, one participant shared,

Walktober has been a really fun experience, but it also has made me more competitive about my fitness as someone who is moving around a great deal during the day. It's disappointing that I get a lot of steps in a day which will get me five points no matter what (e.g., someone hits 10,000 steps vs. me hitting 20,000 steps on any given day).

For some participants, especially those who were already physically active prior to the Walktober program, the step goals were not rigorous enough for the rewards to have the same effects as those for whom 6,000 steps was a challenge. Some participants suggested goals linked to one's age, ability, or prior fitness level to address this issue,

Perhaps there should be different levels for current students or young alums, senior citizens and those in between since there are team results listed. My class members are 78 or 79 and just may have to put a lot more effort into 6,000 steps than young alums.

DISCUSSION

As a result of participating in this 42-day fitness initiative, the following key outcomes were observed: an increase in self-reported activity levels, an increased likelihood of setting and meeting program goals, and pride with respect to exercise consistency. Evidence of appreciation for social connections and camaraderie among participants, and notably, high levels of program participation from graduates was also observed. In comparison to CDC figures (Elgaddal et al., 2022), participants in this program were about as active as the adult US population at the start of the program (49% of our program participants meeting or exceeding the guidelines for aerobic activity, compared to 46.9% of US adults). At the end of the program the majority of our respondents met or exceeded the CDC and ACSM guidelines for aerobic activity (74% meeting or exceeding the guidelines).

Gamification and the ease of using the technology platform are contributing factors to these successful outcomes, and this is consistent with an increasing amount of research on how gamification of physical activity positively impacts health and well-being (Johnson et al., 2016; Mazeas et al., 2022). Participants reported that being engaged in this program, no matter where they were in the world, provided an enhanced sense of connection, competition, accountability, and results. The Walktober program was specifically chosen due to its technology features, which includes mobile, computer, and fitness technology step tracking; a step conversion feature that converts myriad activities into steps; the wall feature that enables participants to message with photos of various landscapes while exercising; the ability to participate in teams of four or five; and the capacity to connect participants worldwide. Feedback from our participants highlights some of the powerful ways that these features of gamification can promote fitness and connection.

Graduates were the largest group of participants. These results were surprising and encouraging. There is virtually no current literature that explored academic institutional fitness programs with alumni, which points to the high potential for further research in this area. One study of alumni physical activity found that many alumni expressed enjoyment of exercise, but few actually engaged in physical activity at the recommended levels for optimal health (Sparling & Snow, 2002). Creating opportunities for alumni participation with virtual, gamified fitness initiatives could help with this issue. It was clear from the high levels of participation in the program and the survey feedback that alumni appreciated the opportunity to participate and reconnect with each other. Initiatives like this not only connect alumni to their alma maters and former classmates, but also improve their physical fitness, and more research should be done to explore the potential health and social benefits more completely.

While participants did note relationships and social connections in their open-response comments, no compelling patterns were observed among the self-reported institution connection ratings and our study variables. The survey question asked about connection to the institution, but the changes in connection that participants described were often interpersonal. Even if the connections made during the program were among other graduates or other members of the community, the sense of connection that people felt might be better captured by a question that asks about connection to other people rather than the institution itself. It is also worth noting that our graduates are typically highly invested and involved with the institution and we did not see enhanced connections on the post-program survey. Other institutions with goals of improving alumni connections with each other and the institution might observe changes here.

Many participants were disappointed when the 42-day fitness program was completed, suggesting that periodic fitness programs be implemented in the winter and spring seasons of the year. However, more frequent programming

would tap resources and overwhelm staff. To accommodate these challenges, campus partnerships could be formed to provide additional program implementation and oversight. Evidence demonstrates that collaborative work is the heart of advancing well-being across a community (Fullerton, 2011; Hartman et al., 2018). Going forward, a point person in the recreation department, alumnae office, human resource office, and student wellness office are all important partnership resources for outreach programs to be successful and sustainable.

The limitations imposed on gathering in person during the pandemic required creative, strategic ways to promote wellness in our community, and this virtual, 42-day initiative met and exceeded our participation goals of physical activity and the power of social connection in assisting team members to realize their personal health and well-being achievements. Community wellness is always important, and during the pandemic, finding ways to connect and stay healthy were even more challenging and important than ever (Amaya et al., 2019). Now that many of the pandemic restrictions on gathering in public and indoor are behind us, it is important to remember the lessons learned, particularly the value of connection with one another and our health. While a fitness initiative like Walktober may not be the right fit for every setting, it works for the current community, across generations and fitness levels, and many benefits, including increased physical activity. What started as a practical way to engage the community and meet the needs in a time of crisis has become a cornerstone of fitness programming offerings, and hope that other institutions benefit as well.

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Author's Note

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.