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THEY SHALL RUN

and Not Be Weary, and They Shall Walk and Not Faint: 50
Years of the ORU Field Test

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Abstract

A history of the development and changes of ORU's field test over the last 50 years is presented followed by previously unpublished percentile values for N=14,076 recent pre-pandemic (2017–2019) field-test times for the distances for 1-mile, 1.5-mile, and 2-mile field tests for college students aged 18.9 years (N=2,198; 58.3% female), 19.1 years (N=1,574; 58.0% female), and 20.5 years (N=10,304;

57.3% female) respectively. The aim of this study is to establish an updated set of standard field test times that can serve as a valuable benchmark for assessing the cardiovascular fitness levels of college students.

Introduction

Physical fitness has always been a central aspect of the educational philosophy at Oral Roberts University (ORU). Since its inception, ORU has upheld a holistic approach to education that emphasizes the development of not only the mind and spirit but also the body (Oral Roberts University, 1965). The university has a longstanding tradition of promoting a healthy and active lifestyle for its students, which is reflected in its required aerobics program (Oral Roberts University, 2015). In the early days of ORU, the Health Performance Laboratory coordinated the aerobics program, and all incoming students underwent a comprehensive physical fitness assessment, including blood tests, body composition analysis, treadmill tests, O₂/CO₂ analysis, and ECGs (Lockfield, 1983).

The purpose of this study is to collect field test times as a direct measure of cardio-vascular fitness and create a new set of standard field test times. The research question that this study seeks to answer is “What are the revised field test times for assessing cardiovascular fitness of college students in the United States that align with the current level of physical fitness of incoming students?”

History of the ORU Field Test

The Health, Leisure, and Sport Sciences Department (HLSS) at ORU has been tasked with promoting physical fitness among its students, and it continues to be a critical aspect of the university’s curriculum. To this end, ORU has historically included a performance-based, cardio-respiratory assessment tool to measure the fitness level of its student body. The assessment tool originally adopted by the university was a timed distance run, known as a “field test,” which was designed to promote the benefits of sustained exercise for the heart,

lungs, and circulatory system as defined by Kenneth Cooper's Aerobic Exercise model (Cooper, 1968; Cooper, 1969; Farrell, 2018). The field test was developed by ORU health and physical exercise faculty in the 1970s, based on results from an 11-year longitudinal study conducted by researchers from Harding College, Southern Methodist University, Kerr Foundation of Oklahoma City, and the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research in Dallas, Texas (Brynteson, 1979; Cooper Center dedicated, 1974).

In the early days of ORU, the field test was mandatory for all full-time students and was a requirement for all freshman-level Health and Physical Exercise (HPE) classes. The field test consisted of a 1.5-mile run and was gradually increased to a 3-mile run for sophomore, junior, and senior level HPE classes. In the past, the field test was only offered as a running test, but over the years, alternative tests and standards, such as a 5-mile cycle and an 800-meter swim, have been developed to accommodate students who are unable to complete a running test. The current health fitness standards are in HPE syllabi, such as the one for Health Fitness II, available at <https://syllabi.oru.edu/?id=38150>. ORU athletic trainer and HLSS faculty member for over 40 years, Glenn Smith explains,

Students would pick up their field test cards at what is now the Concession Desk by the front entrance to the Aerobics Center and drop them off there for tabulation at the end of the week. Back in those days the field test was 3 miles and the Tulsa police would block off 81st street from east of the City of Faith to beyond the not-yet-built Casino on Riverside Drive . . . There would be at least 2,000 participants, and it was a great bonding time for all as students, faculty, and coaches would participate in a “fun run” that many would look forward to as they would consider it as part of their aerobic points requirement. (Smith, G.E., personal communication, March 9, 2022)

In the 1980s and 1990s, the level of fitness for incoming students at our institution declined, which matched the decline in fitness seen nationwide (National Center for Health Statistics, 2019), and an increasing number of students opted to complete their field test requirements by cycling. Adapting to this reality, ORU dropped its run requirement for its field test in 1997 and has since then allowed students to walk their field tests, which are assessed against ORU-developed walking standards (<https://syllabi.oru.edu/?id=38150>).

Additionally, students are no longer required to manually log aerobics points in a fitness journal as a part of their fitness program. All incoming students now have the option of tracking aerobics points and fitness through Fitbit wearable devices, and almost all students opt to do so. This innovation to ORU's aerobics program launched in the fall of 2015. The challenge for ORU's health instructors continues to be motivating a diverse and often reluctant student population to engage in physical fitness. A small percentage of the American population engages in exercise at least three times a week (Racette et al., 2005), and this lack of focus on fitness can result in resistance toward imposed exercise habits. To encourage a lifestyle of physical fitness, the HLSS Department at ORU decided to attach grade points to the field test results. The hope was that students would either be motivated by the national standards for cardio-respiratory fitness based on their field test finishing times or place more value on their fitness due to the implications on their final grade for each required semester activity course.

Currently, ORU students are awarded field test participation points for completing the field test, provided they engage in exercise as monitored by a Fitbit wearable fitness tracking device. If students lack motivation for regular aerobic exercise, they can decide to complete the field test to at least earn the participation points. This may be the reason why students choose to walk the field test and/or have very poor results. Observations within activity classes have shown that many students, especially after their freshman year, elect to complete a walking field test, perceiving it as easier or less taxing. The study findings indicate that many male students who choose to walk do so simply for the participation points and are often not aerobically conditioned

(and appear to not have prepared for the distance of our field test). Conversely, often female students express that they are motivated to achieve a higher grade and have prepared to power-walk the field test to the best of their ability. This focus on attaining a higher grade for the course may be the causal factor for females outperforming their male classmates on the walking field test.

Current State of the ORU Field Test

The most recent changes to ORU's field test requirements were made in 2015-2016 and coincided with the introduction of ORU's current university success course: GEN 150 Introduction to Whole Person Education. Currently, the freshman requirements include a 1-mile first semester field test, a 1.5-mile field test for the second semester, and a 2-mile field test for subsequent semesters. Students are now also encouraged to take 10,000 steps per day, with steps and heart rate data recorded automatically by Fitbits (Broaddus et al., 2021).

Although we have modified the length and format of the field test over the years, the criteria by which students are evaluated has remained unchanged. The existing field test times used for measuring cardiovascular fitness at ORU are outdated and in need of revision because they are based on outdated fitness standards from the 1960s and 1970s (Cooper, 1968; Cooper, 1969; Brynteson, 1979), so the purpose of this study is to collect field test times as a direct measure of cardio-vascular fitness and create a new set of standard field test times. The research question that this study seeks to answer is "What are the revised field test times for assessing cardio-vascular fitness of college students in the United States that align with the current level of physical fitness of incoming students?"

Methods

Each semester, HPE instructors administer a field test in their activity classes. The students can choose to walk or run the field test, and the HPE instructors monitor the field tests for accuracy and validity. After each student completes the field test, their time

is compared to the field test standard times used at ORU, which are based on research from the 1960s and 1970s (Brynteson, 1979; Cooper Center dedicated, 1974); the students earn points that correlate with their times (<https://syllabi.oru.edu/?id=38150>). In the spring semester of 2016, instructors started recording these field-test times electronically instead of using the traditional paper notecards.

The historical dataset consists of 14,076 field test times recorded from spring 2016 through the fall 2019, inclusive. We decided to not include the data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic (spring 2020 through spring 2022) as the implementation of the field test was modified during that time period to allow for virtual/hybrid learning and is therefore different in nature and ultimately less reliable. The initial dataset was pulled from ORU's institutional repository by a member of ORU's institutional research team and de-identified, as per our IRB requirement (IRB# F-14), before being given to our research team for analysis.

The initial dataset had N=15,901 field test times. A small population of students, for various reasons, cycled (N=16) or swam (N=129) instead of walking or running. These data were removed. We also removed data for students with ages under 17 years or greater than 25 years (N=850), leaving a dataset of N=14,906 students. We then removed any self-reported and all varsity sports values to leave a dataset consisting only of non-athlete students with instructor-monitored field test times. The final dataset consists of N=14,076 field test times, which are available as Open Data via figshare (Lang et al., 2022).

Results

The new set of field test times, which fulfills the purpose of this study, are presented below in tabular form. These results were derived from 14,076 field test results from spring 2016 through fall 2019. The average age for students with 1-mile, 1.5-mile, and 2-mile field test times was 18.9 years (N=2,198; 58.3% female), 19.1 years (N=1,574; 58.0% female), and 20.5 years (N=10,304; 57.3% female) respectively. Means and standard deviations (SD) for field test times by distance grouped by sex and walk/run mode are presented in Table 1.

Distance	Male		Female	
	Walk	Run	Walk	Run
1-mile	14:32 (2:30)	7:51 (1:54)	14:37 (2:15)	10:16 (2:15)
1.5-mile	19:56 (2:43)	11:26 (2:14)	21:10 (2:21)	13:42 (2:26)
2-mile	25:06 (3:18)	15:16 (2:40)	26:42 (3:18)	17:51 (2:48)

Table 1. Mean (SD) field test times (minutes:seconds) grouped by distance, sex, and walk/run mode, spring 2016—fall 2019 inclusive

Walk/Run Choice

Out of 14,076 students, 53% of the field tests were taken by students who opted to run. This is mainly skewed towards the 2-mile distance, where 73% of the data came from. The number of students who chose to run decreased from 79% (1-mile) in first semester to 66% (1.5-mile) in second semester, and 46% (2-mile) in later semesters. Males were more likely to run than females for all distances, with 85%, 83%, and 64% of male students choosing to run for 1-mile, 1.5-mile, and 2-mile distances respectively, compared to 75%, 53%, and 33% for females. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the walk/run statistics.

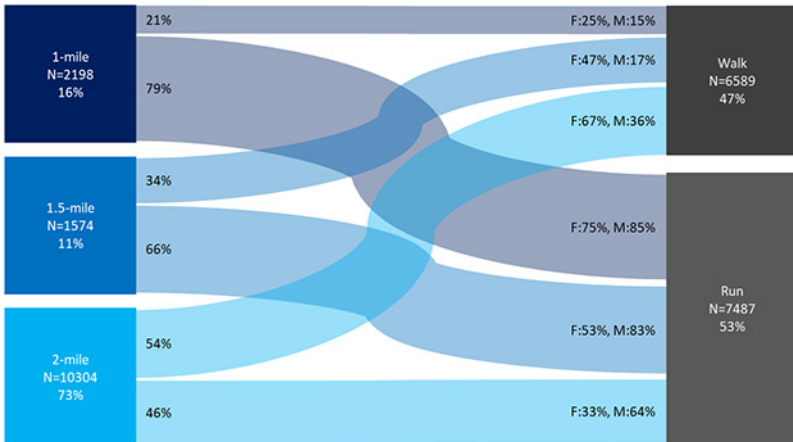


Figure 1. Field test walk/run mode choice by distance and sex, spring 2016—fall 2019 inclusive

Percentile Ranks

Field test times for ORU students are reported as minutes and seconds for each decile, plus the 95th and 99th percentiles for 1-mile, 1.5-mile, and 2-mile field tests are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

Percentile	Male		Female	
	Walk	Run	Walk	Run
99th	8:20	5:23	9:33	6:25
95th	10:23	5:44	11:02	7:13
90th	11:44	5:59	11:57	7:33
80th	12:37	6:21	12:41	8:18
70th	13:10	6:43	13:12	8:49
60th	13:43	7:03	14:09	9:20
50th	14:34	7:23	14:42	9:59
40th	15:00	7:47	15:20	10:34
30th	15:35	8:18	15:55	11:14
20th	16:40	9:01	16:38	12:01
10th	17:40	10:18	17:25	13:25

Table 2. *Percentile values for 1-mile field test times (minutes:seconds) by distance, sex, and walk/run mode, spring 2016–fall 2019 inclusive*

Percentile	Male		Female	
	Walk	Run	Walk	Run
99th	14:06	8:26	15:03	9:41
95th	15:56	8:58	17:50	10:26
90th	16:45	9:18	18:34	11:03
80th	17:42	9:43	19:15	11:42
70th	18:16	10:03	19:59	12:10
60th	19:13	10:26	20:27	12:49
50th	19:37	10:51	21:10	13:24
40th	20:10	11:28	21:37	13:57

	Male		Female	
Percentile	Walk	Run	Walk	Run
30th	21:08	11:56	22:05	14:30
20th	21:45	12:45	15:27	22:45
10th	23:19	14:11	24:16	16:53

Table 3. *Percentile values for 1.5-mile field test times (minutes:seconds) by distance, sex, and walk/run mode, spring 2016–fall 2019 inclusive*

	Male		Female	
Percentile	Walk	Run	Walk	Run
99th	16:44	9:48	18:04	11:50
95th	20:32	11:54	22:13	13:59
90th	21:42	12:39	23:23	15:01
80th	22:44	13:17	24:23	15:51
70th	23:25	13:49	25:08	16:26
60th	24:01	14:20	25:44	16:57
50th	24:42	14:48	26:19	17:27
40th	25:28	15:20	27:05	18:02
30th	26:27	16:02	27:51	18:48
20th	27:26	17:00	28:53	19:46
10th	29:17	18:40	30:41	21:15

Table 4. *Percentile values for 2-mile field test times (minutes:seconds) by distance, sex, and walk/run mode, spring 2016–fall 2019 inclusive*

Discussion

At Oral Roberts University, students in required Health and Physical Education (HPE) courses earn points based on their completion of field tests. These points are assigned based on their completion time compared to outdated standards that were established through research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s by Cooper and Brynteson. For instance, the sample in this study completed the 1.5-mile run in an average time of 11:26 for males and 13:42 for females, while the average times for males and females in 1979 were 10:01 and 11:13, respectively (unpublished results from an ongoing study at ORU).

The decline in the physical fitness of college students from the 1960s and 1970s to today can be attributed to a variety of factors. For example, there has been a rise in sedentary lifestyles due to the widespread use of technology. Additionally, schools have altered their physical education requirements, potentially reducing the amount of physical activity that students engage in. Furthermore, changes in society's diet, including the increased consumption of processed foods that are high in fat and sugar, may have contributed to lower fitness levels.

The purpose of this study was to collect contemporary data and create updated percentile rank tables for field test times. These tables can be used to revise the outdated standards used to assign points in HPE courses and provide up-to-date information for assessing the cardiovascular fitness of college students. These tables are unique to ORU; they were produced using the university's unique health and physical exercise requirements. They represent a novel contribution to the field, as there are currently no comparable tables available.

This study has also allowed us to quantify the number of students who choose to walk instead of run during the field test. We note that the walk option was not available to students in the early days of ORU. We hypothesize that contemporary students opt to walk because it is perceived as easier or less strenuous. Regardless, these findings have prompted ORU to reconsider the walk option and instead establish a walk/run protocol, where students who need to walk during the field test will be permitted to do so. Under this new system, students will be evaluated against a single standard, but with the additional requirement that their heart rate reach 140 beats per minute to encourage them to exert their best effort.

By adopting this new approach, ORU aims to improve the accuracy of its fitness assessments and encourage students to challenge themselves during the field test. Furthermore, by allowing students to walk when necessary, the university hopes to make the test more accessible to students who may not be able to run the full distance. Overall, this change represents a positive step toward promoting fitness and wellness among ORU students.

Conclusion

The results of this study represent a starting point for future research in this field and serve as a basis for the creation of new field test standards in ORU HPE courses that reflect the current state of physical fitness among college students in the United States.

Moving forward, ORU plans to utilize these percentile rank tables to revise its field test standards and better assess the cardio-vascular fitness of its students. By incorporating these new standards into HPE courses, ORU hopes to encourage students to prioritize their physical fitness and achieve a higher level of wellness. Furthermore, these new percentile rank data can contribute to the broader conversation around physical fitness and health in the United States and help inform policies and initiatives aimed at improving the general health of the population.

Overall, the implications of these findings are significant and suggest that there is much work to be done in this area. As such, future studies may focus on exploring the impact of various factors such as lifestyle choices, physical education requirements, and dietary habits on physical fitness, as well as identifying effective strategies for promoting healthy behaviors and improving overall wellness among college students. For example, one possible future study may involve utilizing these percentile scores to aid in detecting college students who may be prone to chronic diseases in their later years.

The ORU field test is an important part of ORU's history and an essential part of its future. As we continue as an institution to value whole person education—to educate students spirit, mind, and body—the field test, as an integral part of ORU's aerobics program, supports the development of an attitude of lifelong wellness.

Due to a society that is witnessing the effects of a lack of focus on healthy lifestyles along with the ever-increasing number of obese citizens with heart disease, cancers, Type 2 Diabetes, and other debilitating illness/disease (Sarma et al., 2021), it is vitally important that Oral Roberts University continues *fighting the good fight* in its indefatigable efforts to educate our future *whole leaders for the whole world*.

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Dr. Todd Farmer is a professor of sports management and the chair of the Health, Leisure, and Sport Science Department at ORU. He has taught at ORU since 2020 and been awarded the Teaching and Academic Excellence Award. Dr. Farmer earned his doctorate in educational leadership from University of Phoenix, his M.S. in Education from Linfield University in Oregon, and a B.S. in Physical Education and Health from George Fox University, also in Oregon. He can be reached at tfarmer@oru.edu.

Dr. Fritz G. Huber served as chair of the Health, Leisure, and Sport Sciences Department at Oral Roberts University from 1998 to 2019. He has been a contributor to several fitness magazines, coauthored three books, and is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. Dr. Huber earned his doctorate in physiological kinesiology from University of Northern Colorado, his M.S. from the University of Oklahoma, and his B.Ed. from University of Toledo. He can be reached at fhuber@oru.edu.

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Scarlet Jost, assistant professor, has been a faculty member at Oral Roberts University since 1975 and has served ORU students at all levels by teaching introductory fitness classes as well as senior capstone classes for the pre-medicine and pre-physical therapy majors. She also oversees student internship experiences both in and out of state and has served as the faculty advisor and editor on over 200 student research projects, many of which

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Dr. Andrew S.I.D. Lang is a senior professor of mathematics and the chair in the Computing and Mathematics Department at Oral Roberts University. He has taught at ORU since 1998 and has often been honored for both teaching and academic excellence, including three times being recognized as Scholar of the Year. Dr. Lang earned a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Missouri, an M.S. in Applied Mathematics from the University of Tulsa, and a B.Sc. in Mathematical Physics from the University of Kent, U.K. He can be reached at alang@oru.edu.

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Glenn E. Smith, known as “Smitty” by many of the faculty and students on campus, has been working at Oral Roberts University as both an athletic trainer and professor in the Health, Leisure, and Sport Sciences Department since 1972. Smith earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Oklahoma State University. He was a 2010 ORU Hall of Fame inductee, and in 2013 he was inducted into the Oklahoma Athletic Trainer Association Hall of Fame. Smith has been named the head trainer for the Oklahoma All-State Football Game 24 times. He can be reached at gsmith@oru.edu.

Dr. Angela L. Watson holds a B.S.E. in Secondary English, an M.A. in Public School Administration, and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology. She is a professor of psychology at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and she has authored or co-authored several peer-reviewed publications. Research interests include measurement, spirituality, diversity, and education Dr. Watson can be reached at awatson@oru.edu.