

The Switch

## Fitbits now mandatory for students at this Oklahoma university

By **Todd C. Frankel** February 2 at 7:00 AM

They take exercise seriously at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa.

All students are required to meet strict fitness goals. And they are graded on how they do.

For years, this meant Oral Roberts students had to quantify fitness levels. They used tables and charts to figure out the value of a jog or a game of pickup basketball or even cutting the grass with a push mower. They had to remember to check their heart rates. And then they had to translate that activity using a point system. For example, running a 10-minute mile was worth about 3-1/2 points. And they needed to score 30-50 points a week. The system was complicated and cumbersome.

"The paper and pen method was not very accurate," said professor Fritz Huber of the Health, Leisure and Sports Sciences Department.

Now, all 900 freshmen are required to use Fitbits, the wearable fitness monitors. It's part of a new college requirement that began last fall and will be rolled out with each incoming class until all students are using them.

Huber said Oral Roberts studied the fitness monitors for a couple of years before deciding to implement the new mandatory program. The only complaints Huber said he has received have been about the cost.

The \$150 [Fitbit Charge HR](#) records a range of data, including movement and even how well a person sleeps.

At Oral Roberts, the student Fitbits wirelessly report only the number of steps and heart rate information to a school computer, which logs the data.

No other personal information is recorded by the school, Huber said.

Provost Kathaleen Reid-Martinez said the school was sensitive to privacy concerns. She said the data are limited and fit with the school's mission of "whole person education."

"I have not heard any complaints at this point," Reid-Martinez said.

Students are required to average 10,000 steps per day and 150 minutes of intense activity (as measured by heart rate) each week. The data comprise a portion of their grade in health and physical education classes.

Many corporate wellness programs push the benefits of wearable health monitors, such as Fitbits, Jawbones or Garmin's Vivosmarts. Last year, retailer Target announced it was offering a basic Fitbit for free to its 335,000 U.S. employees.

But Oral Roberts appears to be alone — or very close to it — in requiring the use of these devices.

The students at Oral Roberts are not your typical college crowd: The religious school of 3,500 students is named after its founder, the late evangelist Oral Roberts. Students — along with faculty and staff — are not permitted to smoke or drink. Premarital sex is also against the rules.

Huber said the Fitbit program was going well so far. And he pointed out that the school stops collecting Fitbit data at the end of each semester.

At least then students can relax.

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Todd C. Frankel is a reporter covering people and policy. You can follow him on Twitter: [@tcfrankel](https://twitter.com/tcfrankel).

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