

# An app to crack the teen exercise code

January 4 2017, by Andrea Rose Estey

---



Welcome to Camp Conquer. From this screen, players can buy new items for their avatar, battle with water balloons and see their health stats. Credit: University of Vermont

Pokémon GO has motivated its players to walk 2.8 billion miles. Now, a new mobile game from UVM researchers aims to encourage teens to exercise with similar virtual rewards.

The [game](#), called "Camp Conquer," is the brainchild of co-principal investigators Lizzy Pope, assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Science, and Bernice Garnett, assistant professor of

education in the College of Education and Social Services, both of the University of Vermont. The project is one of the first in the area of gamification and obesity, and will test launch with 100 Burlington High School students this month.

Here's how it works: Real-world physical activity, tracked by a Fitbit, translates into immediate rewards in the game, a capture-the-flag-style water balloon battle with fun, summer camp flair. Every step a player takes in the real world improves their strength, speed, and accuracy in the game. "For every hundred steps, you also get currency in the game to buy items like a special water balloon launcher or new sneakers for your avatar," says Pope.

## **Helping Schools Meet Mandates**

In 2014, Vermont established a requirement for students to get 30 minutes of [physical activity](#) during the school day (in addition to P.E. classes), a mark Pope says schools are struggling to hit. And it's not just Vermont; according to the CDC, only 27 percent of [high school students](#) nationwide hit recommended activity goals, and 34 percent of US teens are overweight or obese.

Camp Conquer is a promising solution. The idea struck after Pope and Garnett visited Burlington High School, where they saw students playing lots of games on school-provided Chromebook laptops. Pope and Garnett approached Kerry Swift in UVM's Office of Technology Commercialization for help. "I thought, if we're going to make a game, it's going to be legit," says Pope.

## **Where Public Meets Private**

The team is working with GameTheory, a local design studio whose

mission is to create games that drive change. Pope says forming these types of UVM/private business partnerships to create technology that can be commercialized is the whole point of UVM Ventures Funds, which partially support this project.

A key result of this public/private partnership, and of the cross-departmental collaboration between Pope and Garnett, was a methodology shift. Pope says it's less common for health behavior researchers to involve their target demographic in "intervention design." But Garnett, who has experience in community-based participatory research, and GameTheory, which commonly utilizes customer research, helped shift this. "Putting the experience of Bernice and GameTheory together, we came up with student focus groups to determine when they're active, why they're not, and what types of games they like to play," says Pope. She believes this student input has Camp Conquer poised for success. "It gave us a lot of good insight, and created game champions."

What does success look like? Pope says in her eyes, "it's all about exciting kids to move more." But another important aspect is the eventual commercialization of the app. "It could be widely disseminated at a very low cost. You could imagine a whole school district adopting the app," says Pope. She expects that if the January test shows promise, GameTheory will take the game forward into the marketplace, and continue to update and improve it. "There's definitely potential," says Pope.

Provided by University of Vermont

Citation: An app to crack the teen exercise code (2017, January 4) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-01-app-teen-code.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.