Final Paper Assignment

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IS 340: Project Management

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May 15, 2025

NextUp: A Mobile App Concept for College Students

Background

College students often juggle intense academic pressures and strict routines, leading many of them to feel bored, burnt out, or stuck in a rut. Finding a new hobby can be a powerful outlet to relieve stress and spark excitement outside of academics. By putting energy into enjoyable activities, students can reclaim a sense of balance and personal identity beyond the demand of classes. A mobile app dedicated especially to hobby discovery could serve as a supportive guide that helps students explore interests and improve their well-being in an accessible, intuitive way tailored to their lifestyle.

Purpose

The purpose of NextUp is to offer students an easy and accessible way to explore new hobbies that fit into their busy lives. By curating a tailored list of activities based on each student's preferences, available time, and resources, the app ensures that the recommended hobbies are both relevant and practical. This personalized approach simplifies the process of discovering new hobbies, making it easier for students to find activities that resonate with them. Beyond relaxation and personal growth, NextUp also focuses on mental wellness and building a community. The app fosters a sense of belonging by offering hobby-related groups where students can share progress, connect with others, and engage in both personal and social interactions. Through this combination of personalized recommendations and community engagement, NextUp enhances students' overall well-being while helping them manage stress in a more meaningful way.

Key Features

Some key features of this app include:

- Personalized hobby discovery: Based on personal interests, time availability, and budget, students receive tailored hobby suggestions.
- Activity Challenges: Students can join weekly challenges and track their progress through small, manageable goals.
- Community Engagement: Connect with other students who share similar interests.

- Progress Tracking: Visualize progress and gain encouragement as students develop their skills in new hobbies.

Target Audience

The target audience for this app are college students between the ages of 18-24. Ideally, these students would be living on a college campus with access to campus resources. This app targets students who are looking for new hobbies or ways to spend their time.

Project Workflow and Tools Used
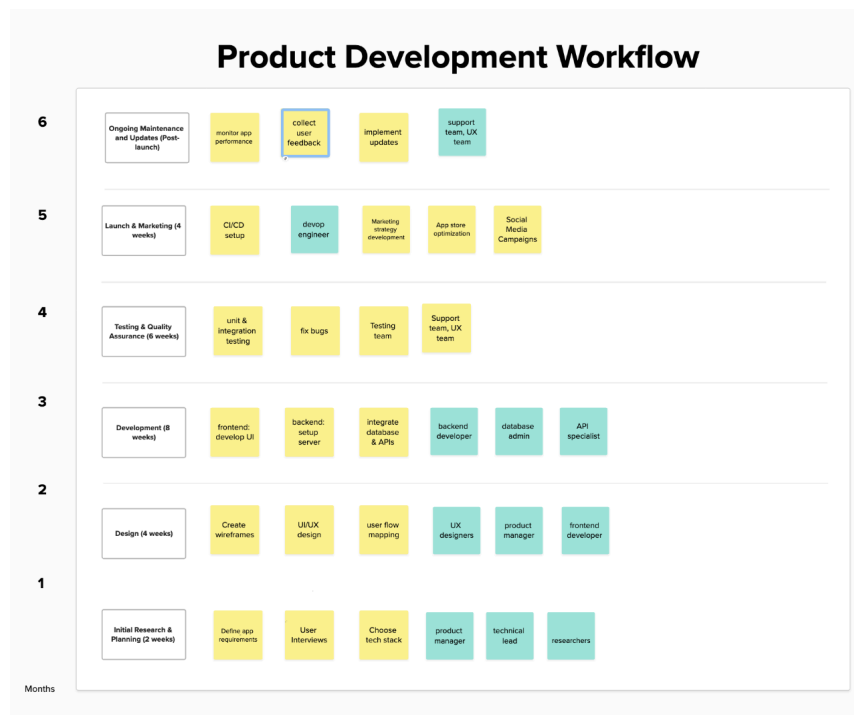
To ensure the app development runs smoothly, the project will follow an agile workflow, with weekly sprints, clear milestones, and set communication processes. This will help keep everything on track and allow for adjustments as needed. The team will be made up of several key roles: a Project Manager, who will keep the team organized and ensure deadlines are met, UI/UX Designers, who will be responsible for designing the app's frontend design and ensuring a positive user experience, App Developers, who will build the app's core features and connect the backend sysmtes with the front end, and a Quality Assurnace team, who will test the app to

make sure it works correctly and meets usability standards. Also, the Marketing and Community Engagement team will focus on strategies for attracting users, building a community, and promoting the app. For communication, we'll use Slack as our main communication channel, and we'll manage tasks through Kanban boards to stay organized. We will use a platform called Figma to aid in UI/UX design. We will hold regular weekly meetings to check on progress, address any challenges, and adjust priorities to keep everything moving smoothly.

Project Timeline

The development timeline for NextUp will span six months. In Phase 1, which is the Initial Research and Planning phase, will take two weeks, and the focus will be on researching student needs and preferences for hobbies. During this phase, we will create the initial project plan, including resource allocation and budgeting, while also finalizing the app's core features and functionalities. In Phase 2, which is the Design and Prototyping phase, will take 4 weeks, and user research will be conducted to better understand pain points and define user personas. We will begin the UI/UX design process here, which consists of creating wireframes and designs that align with user needs. Also, an initial app prototype will be created for feedback and testing to help make sure that we're heading in the best direction. In Phase 3, which is the Development phase, will last 8 weeks, and will focus on coding the app's core functionality, including both frontend and backend development. This phase will also involve integrating the community features, activity challenges, and tools for tracking progress. We'll also conduct small group testing to gather feedback and make any necessary adjustments from here. In Phase 4, which is the Testing and Quality Assurance phase, will last 6 weeks, we will do usability testing with a group of college students to ensure that the app is user-friendly and works as intended. We'll also do performance testing to make sure the app runs smoothly and is crash-free. In Phase 5, which is the Launch and Marketing phase, which will take 4 weeks, we will implement a marketing strategy that includes outreach to students and social media campaigns to generate interest. The official app launch will take place on all platforms, followed by post-launch monitoring. Finally, in Phase 6, which is the Ongoing Maintenance and Updates, will be an ongoing stage, where the app will be monitored for usage patterns and any other bugs will be addressed as soon as possible. The app will continue to be updated based on user feedback, with new features added as the app evolves over time.

Project Strategy

The strategy for the NextUp project focuses on finding a balance between technical development and user-centered design. To ensure the app meets students' needs, we will prioritize user feedback and iteration by releasing beta versions to gather insights and refine the user experience. The app will be designed with simplicity and accessibility in mind, ensuring students can easily navigate and learn to use the platform without unnecessary complexity. Additionally, fostering a sense of community within the app will be an important focus. The app will include features like hobby-based challenges and user-generated content to promote social interaction and create a space where users feel connected. To drive engagement, we will implement a tailored marketing strategy targeting college students, with an emphasis on organic growth through word of mouth and social media, encouraging students to download and actively participate in the app's community.

Community

The concept of community is a key element in the growth of NextUp, and I wanted to use multiple strategies to be able to build a collaborative environment. GitHub will play a central role in building the community by enabling users to actively participate in the app's development. Through open-source code collaboration, students can contribute by submitting feature requests, tracking bugs, and making contributions to the code. GitHub's issue tracking and discussion forums will allow for communication and collaboration, allowing users to engage with the development process, making them feel more connected to the app's growth. This open approach not only supports the technical development of the app, but also creates a sense of shared ownership among users.

Additionally, user feedback will also be a vital component in building community engagement. Users' voices will be heard through channels that are available for students to share their experiences, suggestions, and challenges with NextUp. We'll use methods like surveys, in-app feedback forms, and discussion forums to allow us to listen to user input and show users that their opinions are valued. Incorporating this feedback into app updates will not only improve the app but will also strengthen the relationship between users and the app. The goal is to create an environment where users feel empowered, engaged, and invested in the app's ongoing

development and success, as well as an environment where people feel comfortable enough to grow and thrive.

Partners

Partnerships will have an important role in the success and reach of NextUp by connecting the app with community partners that can support its promotion. Collaborating with campus wellness centers is a great way to promote the app directly to students. These centers can help tailor the app's features to better serve the student population by providing expert guidance! In addition, we also plan to form partnerships with local businesses that offer hobby-realted products or services, like bookstores, sports equipment shops, or art supply stores, to enhance the app's appeal by offering students exclusive deals. These incentives encourage app usage and create a tangible connection between the app and students' real-world interests.

We also hope to partner with RSOs that focus on hobbies, wellness, or extracurricular activities. These groups can provide access to a wide audience of students who are already interested in certain hobbies, facilitating true growth through peer reocommendations. We also hope to secure partnerships with corporate sponsors or organizations that provide grants related to mental health, student wellness, or educational technology. These collaborations can provide funding but also credibility and resources.

Important Project Management Aspects

The minimum viable community for NextUp consists of a small group of engaged college students who provide valuable feedback on the app's features and help generate initial user-driven content. This early community will foster engagement and promote word of mouth growth. In this way, a continuous feedback loop will be established through in-app surveys, reviews, and direct user interactions to refine features, improve the user experience, and keep the app aligned with students' changing needs. Community guidelines will focus on respect, inclusivity, and positivity, encouraging users to share experiences and support each other in a judgment-free environment. The app is designed to scale easily, allowing for growth in user numbers, new features, and expanded campus networks. As NextUp grows, it will introduce

more hobby categories and enhanced community tools to reach and engage a wider student audience.

Managing Technical Debt

To effectively manage technical debt, the project team will prioritize regular refactoring by dedicating time in each sprint to clean up and improve the codebase in order to prevent future problems. We will use SonarQube in the build process to automatically detect code quality issues and highlight areas where technical debt might be accumulating. Automated unit and integration testing will be used to catch bugs early on and make sure that new features do not negatively impact the app's performance or stability. Also, we will use Jira to help manage and prioritize refactoring tasks alongside feature development and bug fixes, keeping the project organized and balanced.

Post Launch Strategies

NextUp will offer frequent updates and ongoing support to fix bugs, add new features, and maintain a smooth UX. We will provide dedicated help channels to assist users. User feedback will be continuously gathered and integrated to guide improvements and the development of new features, making sure the app stays aligned with evolving user needs. To handle growth, the app's backend will be built on scalable cloud services like AWS, so that it can manage more users and data.

Conclusion and What I Learned

I came across some challenges throughout this project, with one of them being maintaining user engagement even after students have discovered a hobby. Additionally, balancing privacy and data security with the need for features like location services and personalized recommendations requires a lot of attention. Personally, I faced the challenge of limited technical expertise, so this was an interesting project for me where I could learn a lot about streamlining the project management process.

In conclusion, NextUp is designed to help college students relieve stress and enhance their well-being by providing a personalized platform for discovering new hobbies. The app combines tailored activity recommendations, engaging challenges, and a supportive community

to create a meaningful experience. Going forward, continuous user feedback and a focus on scalability will be essential to ensure the app evolves to meet the changing needs of students. By creating a user-friendly app with a focus on simplicity, social interaction, and community building, this project will help students unwind, discover new interests, and ultimately improve their well-being. With a clear project timeline, efficient organizational structure, and ongoing marketing strategy, the development of NextUp will be an exciting and impactful endeavor that prioritizes mental health and engagement for students across the campus.

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