

PRD: UniCircle

Spring 2025

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Vision

For international students at Northeastern University who must live away from home and tackle the challenge of establishing a social or friends circle in a foreign place, our product is a new digital mobile application that provides a platform to connect people with shared interests and a need to make new friends and open up an avenue to foster meaningful relationships. Unlike current solutions like Meetup, Eventbrite, Facebook groups and other applications that provide a platform which are broad, non-exclusive, and often lack authenticity, we offer a solution that is safe, exclusive, and affordable, tailored specifically for Northeastern University students and enables students with an easy way to connect and enhance their social lives on campus.

Motivation

Customer Segments

The primary target segment for UniCircle is Northeastern University students, who find it difficult to form meaningful social connections in a large, diverse campus environment. The segment is further divided into two main groups: Students (Undergraduate and Graduate students) and Students Working part-time at NEU (TAs, RAs, and On-campus Employees). Both groups possess distinct social behaviours, challenges, and needs, which UniCircle will cater to.

A. University Students (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

1. **Detailed Profile:** This segment consists of graduate and undergraduate Northeastern University students who want to form authentic social connections. These students

attend regular university events, engage in sports, participate in clubs, and seek networking opportunities but cannot create lasting friendships beyond initial interaction. The majority of students find it difficult to gain acceptance in established social networks, maintain consistent connections, or meet new people outside the classroom or extracurricular setting.

2. **Hypotheses:** We believe that university students need a structured yet natural way to meet like-minded peers. Current social platforms either lack a university-specific focus or require too much effort to sustain engagement. By offering an integrated platform that helps students connect based on shared interests and campus activities, we can make socializing more effortless, enjoyable, and lasting.
3. **Interviews:** We conducted 25 semi-structured interviews, and the majority of interviewees were full-time students. Most interviewees found it difficult to maintain friendships at a level beyond the casual one, and considered available solutions too broad (Meetup, Facebook) or too impersonal(Eventbrite). From the interviews, we learned about information related to social activities, attending events, and interest in using digital solutions to establish and develop connections. The findings highlight the probable requirement for a university-focused, shared-interest-based socializing tool.

4. Early Adopters and Mainstream Users

- **Early Adopters:** Students who actively seek out new social opportunities, frequently attend campus events, and are looking for an easy way to meet similar people through structured interactions.
- **Mainstream Users:** Students who are not actively seeking connections as early adopters but are open to meeting people in low-effort, convenient contexts. They are looking to use platforms that have some proven value and prefer an experience that seamlessly integrates into their academic and extracurricular activity schedules.

5. Personas:

- **Campus Connector Rahul:** A 26-year-old Northeastern graduate student who enjoys sports and fitness. He is a frequent basketball player and goes to the gym, but has difficulty getting regular workout buddies. He prefers to meet others while doing activities, rather than small talk.
- **Event Explorer Maya:** A 21-year-old Northeastern undergraduate who likes attending university events. While she makes new friends at these events, she can't hold on to them for the long term after the first encounter. She wants an easier way to reconnect with people whom she encounters at campus events.

B. University Students Working Part-time on Campus (TAs, RAs, On-campus Employees)

- 1. Detailed Profile:** This segment includes Northeastern University part-time student employees, such as Teaching Assistants (TAs), Research Assistants (RAs), and on-campus employees. Due to work and academic demands, these students find it challenging to socialise at a time that is convenient for them. Their daily interactions are primarily professional, and friendships are not easy to build beyond classroom and workplace conversations. Part-time student employees are largely socially disconnected because their timetables are not always aligned with large university activities or traditional networking opportunities.
- 2. Hypotheses:** We believe that part-time students need convenient, socializing opportunities that fit within their schedules. Unlike full-time students, they cannot always attend major campus events and require a platform that provides more socializing opportunities and an easy way to connect with people from different backgrounds without disrupting their work and academic responsibilities.
- 3. Interviews:** Our interviews with some NEU part-time students employees revealed a common struggle between work, learning, and social life. Many expressed concerns about missing out on social experiences and having a poor social life due to time constraints and the lack of established platforms that respond to their specific needs.
- 4. Early Adopters & Mainstream Users:**
 - **Early Adopters:** Students who recognize their social limitations and actively seek structured, convenient ways of making new friends. These are usually very outgoing people who are enthusiastic about making new friends through different means. Examples of these could be students who are active members of a club or committee, students who regularly hit the gym and are looking for new partners to workout with, students who want to explore music and enjoy new people to jam with every week, etc.
 - **Mainstream Users:** Students who want to make new friends and connections, but are not as active and outgoing as the early adopters. They are generally people looking to see some proven value from using the product. These are usually students who hesitate to strike a conversation with anyone because of different cultural and social norm barriers.
- 5. Personas:**
 - **Busy Professional Riya:** A 26-year-old Northeastern graduate student and Teaching Assistant. She spends most of her time juggling coursework and work, with few opportunities for socializing. She seeks low-effort, safe, and easy ways

of staying in touch with others without disrupting her work pattern.

- **Late-Night Hustler Jake:** A 24-year-old grad student and library assistant at Northeastern. He's a late-night worker and finds it hard to meet people due to his unusual schedule. He's seeking a way to meet students who are also available at non-traditional hours.

NOTE: While the customer segments that we have both include Northeastern students seeking social connections, full time university students often struggle with breaking into the existing social circles despite having the time to attend the events, whereas the second customer segment part-time employees (like TAs, RAs, or on-campus workers) face time constraints and have conflicts in their schedules, limiting them with the ability to participate in campus life. Their challenges are very much rooted not just in social friction but in logistical barriers to engagement.

Unmet Needs

We believe that our target segments have some challenges in making connections as well as engaging in campus life. The following are some important unmet needs that we have identified from research.

A. University Students:

- Limited structured opportunities to meet new people beyond existing social circles, classrooms and ethnic groups, making it difficult to form new diverse connections.
- No single platform for students to interact, meet and connect in person through common academic, hobbies, and extracurricular activities.
- Inefficient event discovery on campus, leading to missed opportunities for social engagement.

Explanation and Pain scale: University students struggle to expand friend networks since there are not enough structured opportunities beyond their friend circle. 40% have experienced difficulties in initiating conversations and 50% use class or club contacts but are unpredictable (data research is mentioned in the appendix). Even though 80% go out to events and clubs at university, 28% have difficulties in sustaining relationships later and there is a need for a centralized platform for structured conversations and events in order to prevent opportunities being lost.

B. University Students Working Part-time on Campus (TAs, RAs, On-Campus Employees):

- Difficulty participating in campus social life due to conflicting work and class schedules.
- Insufficient flexibility in networking that supports both professional development as well as social connections.
- No specialized platform to interact with students with similar academic, as well as

work-based challenges.

- Struggles in expanding social circles beyond work and academic settings.

Explanation and Pain scale: Part-time students are severely disadvantaged in being able to engage in social events because of competing schedules, and 60% are missing out on campus events and are out of touch with university life (data research is mentioned in the appendix). The primary interactions are in a work or academic context, but 50% report them being too professional and not sufficiently social. Moreover, 40% like meeting in small, casual meetups, but they have no established method for meeting like-schedule peers, making it apparent there is a need for a flexible networking tool suited to their limitations.

Existing Solutions

Meetup

Primary Function: Interest-based community meetups and events.

Pros ✓	Cons ✗
✓ Strong community-building through shared-interest groups and recurring events.	✗ Not university-specific; lacks student-exclusive features.
✓ Event management tools, including scheduling, RSVPs, and group coordination.	✗ Privacy concerns, as many events are open to the public.
✓ Large active user base, making it easy to find a variety of meetups.	✗ Discoverability for smaller, niche, or campus-based events is limited.

Eventbrite

Primary Function: Event discovery, ticketing, and promotion platform.

Pros ✓	Cons ✗
✓ Comprehensive event management tools for organizers, including ticketing and analytics.	✗ Primarily event-focused, lacking social or ongoing community engagement features.
✓ High discoverability with a large public event directory.	✗ No university-specific features or student networking options.
✓ Scalable for events of any size, from meetups to large conferences.	✗ Costs for organizers; fees apply to ticket sales, making it less budget-friendly for students.

Discord

Primary Function: Real-time chat and community platform (text, voice, video).

Pros ✓	Cons ✗
✓ Excellent for real-time engagement and group communication.	✗ Not location-based; primarily online interactions.
✓ Free and feature-rich, widely used among student groups.	✗ Limited event tools; lacks built-in event scheduling and RSVPs.
✓ Fosters tight-knit online communities for clubs and hobbies.	✗ Privacy concerns; moderation varies, and anonymity can lead to trust issues.

Facebook Groups

Primary Function: Facebook-hosted communities for shared interests or affiliations.

Pros ✓	Cons ✗
✓ Large user base with diverse group options, including student organizations.	✗ Declining youth engagement; many students prefer other platforms.
✓ Built-in event hosting and engagement features.	✗ Not specialized for university life; lacks student-specific tools.
✓ Privacy controls allow groups to be public, private, or secret.	✗ Privacy and data concerns; users must use personal Facebook profiles.

Partiful

Primary Function: Casual event invitation and planning (popular for parties and social gatherings).

Pros ✓	Cons ✗
✓ User-friendly event invitations with visually appealing pages.	✗ Limited discoverability; events are typically invite-only.
✓ Mobile & SMS emphasis aligns with student communication habits.	✗ Lacks feature depth compared to larger platforms.
✓ Modern design with strong Gen Z appeal.	✗ Still an emerging platform with a smaller user base.

Differentiation

UniCircle is a social network for Northeastern University students based on campus. It's a secure, student-only platform where individuals connect through shared activities and events. Unlike generic platforms like Meetup, Eventbrite, or Discord, UniCircle integrates event discovery, connection tracking, and engagement specific to campus life. These are the standout features and key differentiators from the competitors.

- **Exclusive to NEU Students:** Requires @northeastern.edu email verification, ensuring trust, credibility, and a focused student community.
- **Personalized Event & Activity Recommendations:** Uses an algorithm to suggest customized events based on student profiles, interests, majors, and clubs, unlike Meetup and Eventbrite, where one must search manually.
- **Event Creation & Management for Students:** Allows students, clubs, committees, and individuals with NEU credentials to host events with RSVP tracking and confirmation, something other sites do not offer to mainly public audiences.
- **Connection Strength Indicators:** This provides a quantified measure of connections within the UniCircle platform, evolving based on shared activities and ratings. Additionally, a mutual connections list with strength indicators will encourage more meaningful engagement and foster more trust and confidence in meeting new people.
- **Real-Time Communication & Engagement:** Unlike Meetup or Eventbrite, which are event listing sites with no interaction, UniCircle offers event-specific chat features and reconnection tools that enable students to stay connected after an event. The event-specific conversation starter carousels are effective tools for encouraging users to break the ice even before the event starts.
- **Designed for Student Schedules:** Unlike Discord or Facebook Groups, which are focused on online communities, UniCircle focuses on real-life, university-based connections that align with students' academic and work schedules.

Why Now?

Today's students want secure, community-driven experiences that go beyond generic event platforms. UniCircle meets this need by offering a reliable, university-exclusive platform that allows students to safely participate in campus activities and make meaningful connections. For several reasons, now is the best time to launch UniCircle.

- 1. Increasing Demand for Campus-Centric Social Platforms:** University students are increasingly looking for a safe, authentic place to connect with their peers outside of class. Existing platforms such as Meetup and Eventbrite do not cater specifically to university students, resulting in a need for a dedicated platform that promotes secure, verified interactions among students.
- 2. Shift Toward Personalized Campus Engagement:** As universities emphasize holistic student development, students are actively looking for social and extracurricular opportunities. UniCircle streamlines event discovery, making it effortless for students to participate in sports, study groups, and social events that match their interests.
- 3. Advances in Campus Technology and Networking:** As smartphones and digital networking grow more common, students expect real-time, user-friendly solutions for finding and RSVP to events. UniCircle employs a simple approach to make campus participation simple, tailored, and effective.
- 4. Greater Need for Social Interaction and Community Building:** University life can be isolating, especially for international students or those new to campus and in a foreign environment. UniCircle combats loneliness by promoting peer connections through recreational activities, making students feel engaged and included in campus life.
- 5. Post-Pandemic Social Rebuilding:** During the pandemic, the transition to virtual and hybrid learning impacted students' social lives and mental health. As students return to in-person engagement, there is a tremendous demand for structured, safe, and effective ways to reconnect. UniCircle provides a structured and secure way to rebuild student communities.

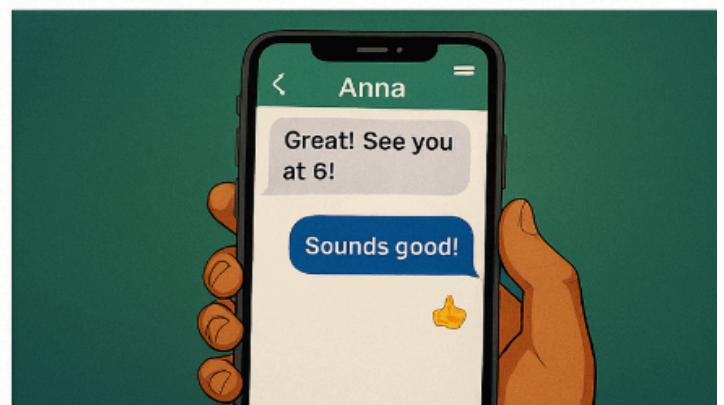
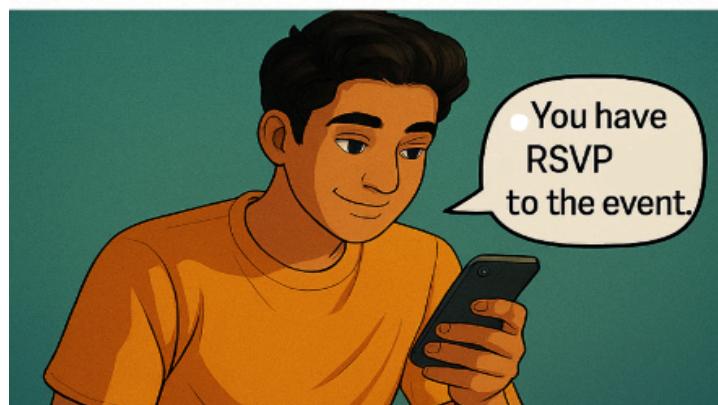
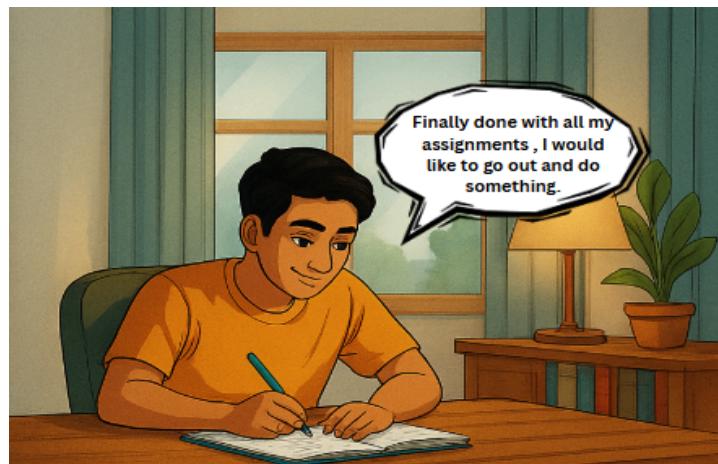
This is the ideal time to launch UniCircle, capitalizing on students' desire for a safe, engaging, and technologically advanced campus social experience. UniCircle bridges the gap between students and campus activities, making it easier than ever to make new friends, find events, and stay active.

Verbal/Visual Walkthrough of Use Cases

Use case 1: Find something to do

Persona: Campus Connector Rahul (Graduate Student)

Pain-point: Finding someone to hang out and do something with



Use Case 2: Discover an Interest Group

Persona: Event Explorer Maya (Undergraduate Student)

Pain-point: Struggling to find like-minded people who share her interests



Use Case 3: Communicate and Coordinate

Persona: Campus Connector Rahul (Graduate Student)

Pain-point: Wants to communicate and coordinate with other attendees before an event



Use Case 4: Strengthen Connection

Persona: Event Explorer Maya (Undergraduate Student & Part-time dance club secretary)

Pain-point: Hesitant to join activities with people she doesn't know well



Use case 5: Create an activity on behalf of a Club/Committee

Persona: Event Explorer Maya (Undergraduate Student & Part-time dance club secretary)

Pain Point: Organize official club events with facility access and get more attendance



Use Case 6: Inviting a past connection, reconnecting with them

Persona: Riya (Graduate Student/Teaching Assistant)

Pain-point: Struggles to maintain social connections due to a busy schedule.



Use Case 7 : Signing up for a coding workshop

Persona: Late night hustler Jake (Graduate student)

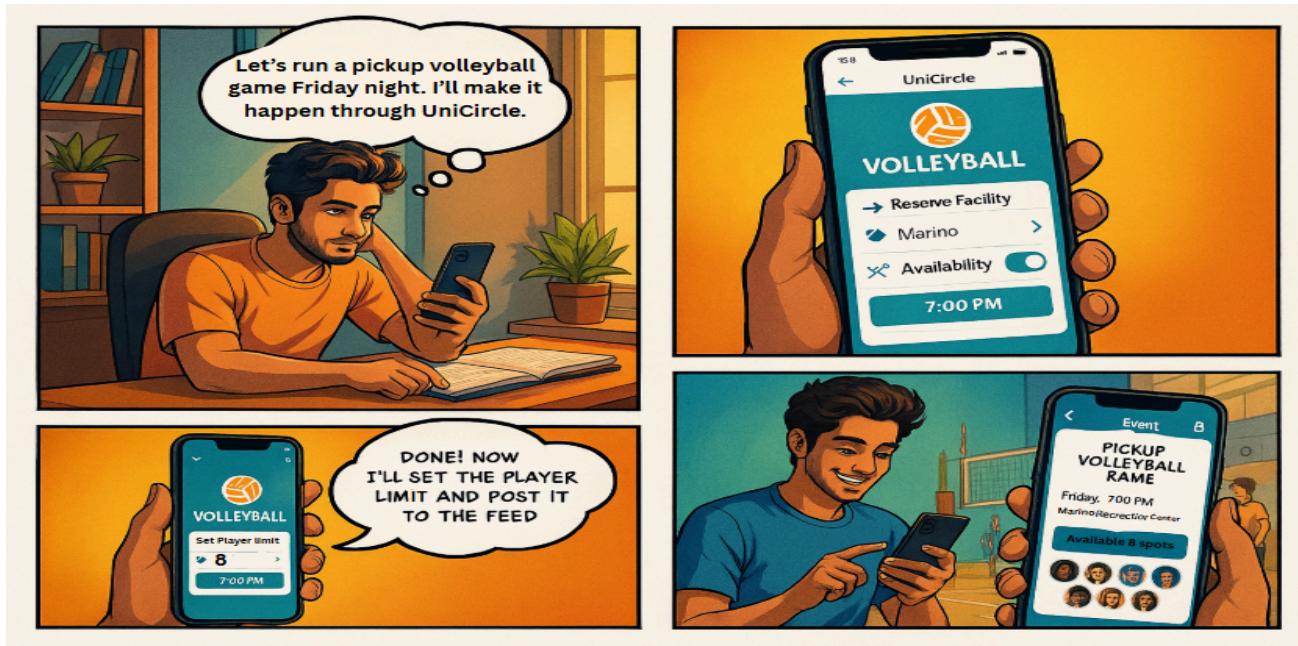
Pain Point: Breaking the ice



Use case 8: Create an activity as an individual

Persona: Campus Connector Rahul

Pain Point: Securing a venue for an activity and gathering people for a pickup game



Detailed Design & Features Description

Design Principles

1. **Student-Centered Design:** The app is built exclusively for university students, with features and flows tailored to campus life, social dynamics, and student needs.
2. **Simple & Actionable Interface:** Every screen is focused on clear actions such as RSVP, Create, Chat, minimizing confusion and encouraging participation with just a few taps.
3. **Connection-Oriented Interactions:** Designs emphasize shared experiences and relationships, integrating connection strength meters, mutual friends, and post-event ratings into the UI.
4. **Unified Event Experience:** Whether attending or hosting, users follow a consistent and intuitive journey, from discovering to RSVPing, chatting, and reconnecting.
5. **Minimal Friction, Maximum Engagement:** Navigation is quick and clean, with minimal screens and smart defaults.
6. **Playful, Warm Visual Language:** Visuals use soft tones and friendly typography to encourage inclusivity and make the platform feel welcoming and familiar.
7. **Consistent Brand Identity:** Icons, colors, and layouts reinforce UniCircle's brand and align with Northeastern's student lifestyle and campus culture.

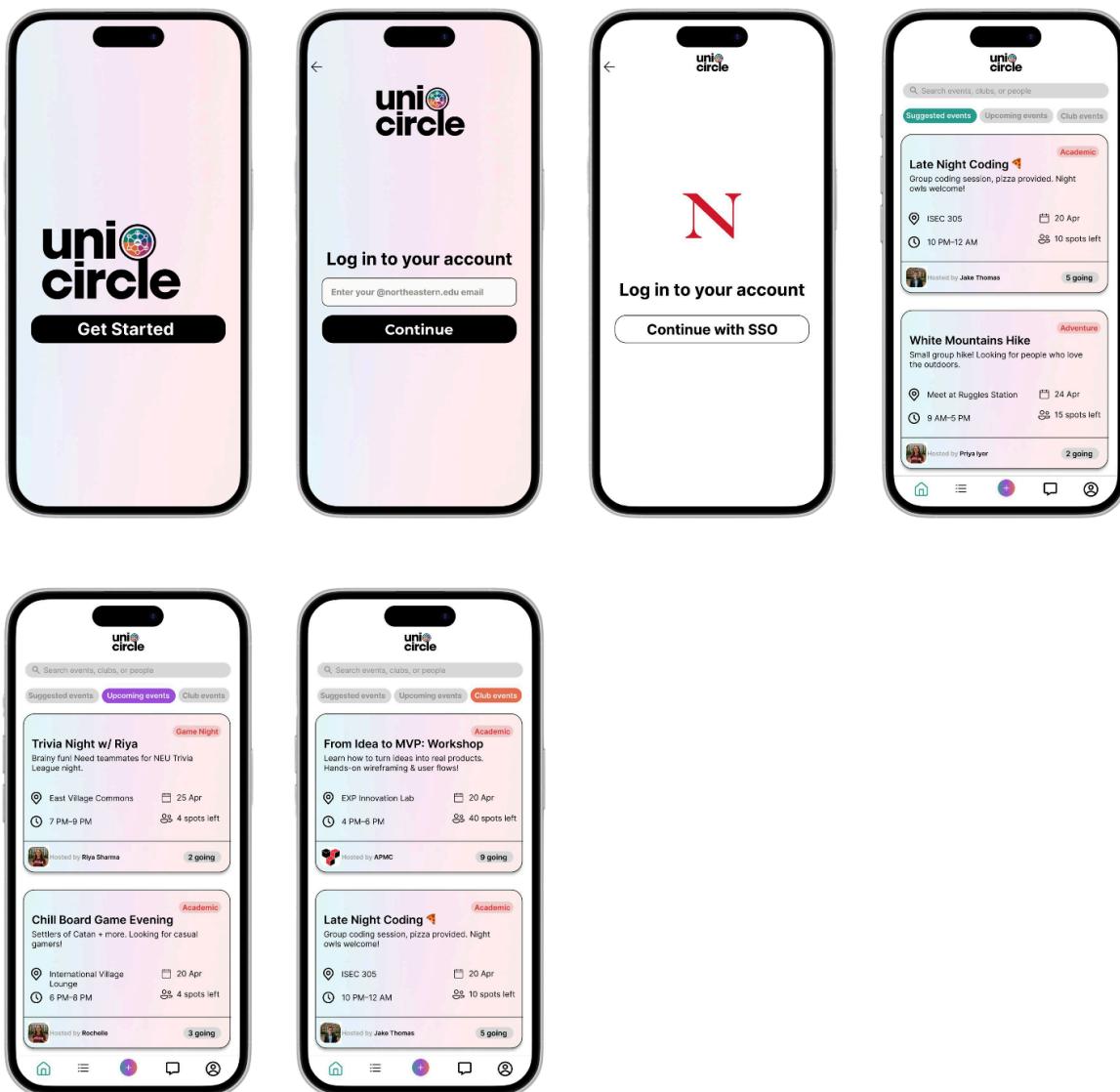
Features/information architecture

To support the detailed feature descriptions above, we have created a high-fidelity prototype of UniCircle using Figma. The following screens provide a visual walkthrough of key user flows, showcasing how students interact with the app from login through event discovery, RSVP, creation, messaging, and connection-building. Each screen sequence highlights the user experience design choices and core functionality, aligning closely with our product's goals of fostering student engagement and social connection on campus.

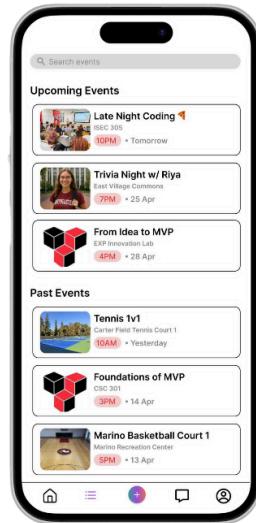
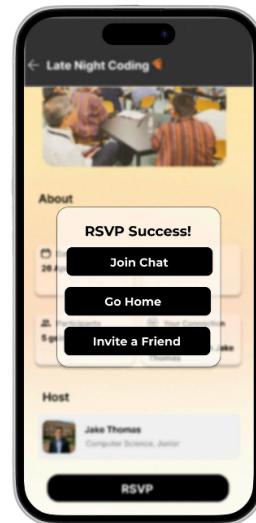
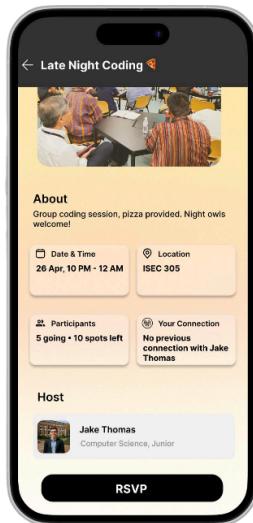
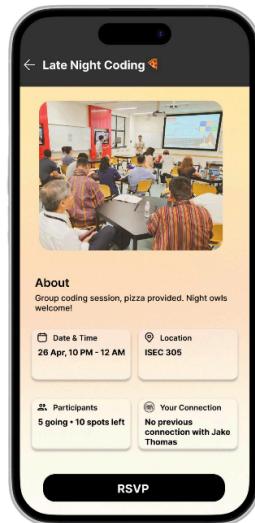
[Figma Prototype Link](#)

Prototype Screens using Figma Software

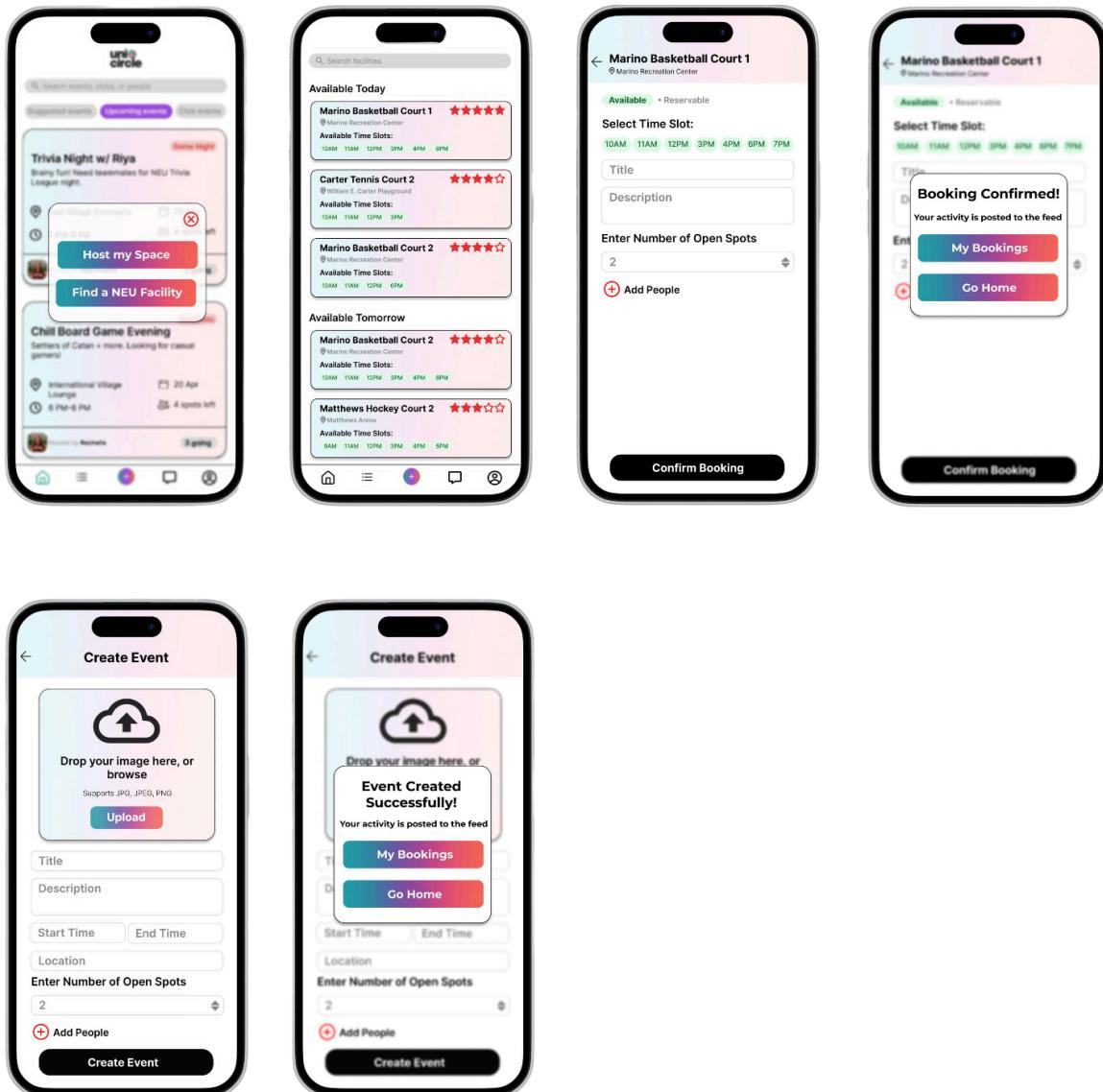
This screen flow showcases the users journey from login to the explore feed. After signing in with their NEU credentials via SSO, users land on the home screen where they can browse Suggested, Upcoming, and Club Events. The bottom navigation bar includes Home, My Bookings, Create, Messages, and Profile, providing quick access to core app features.



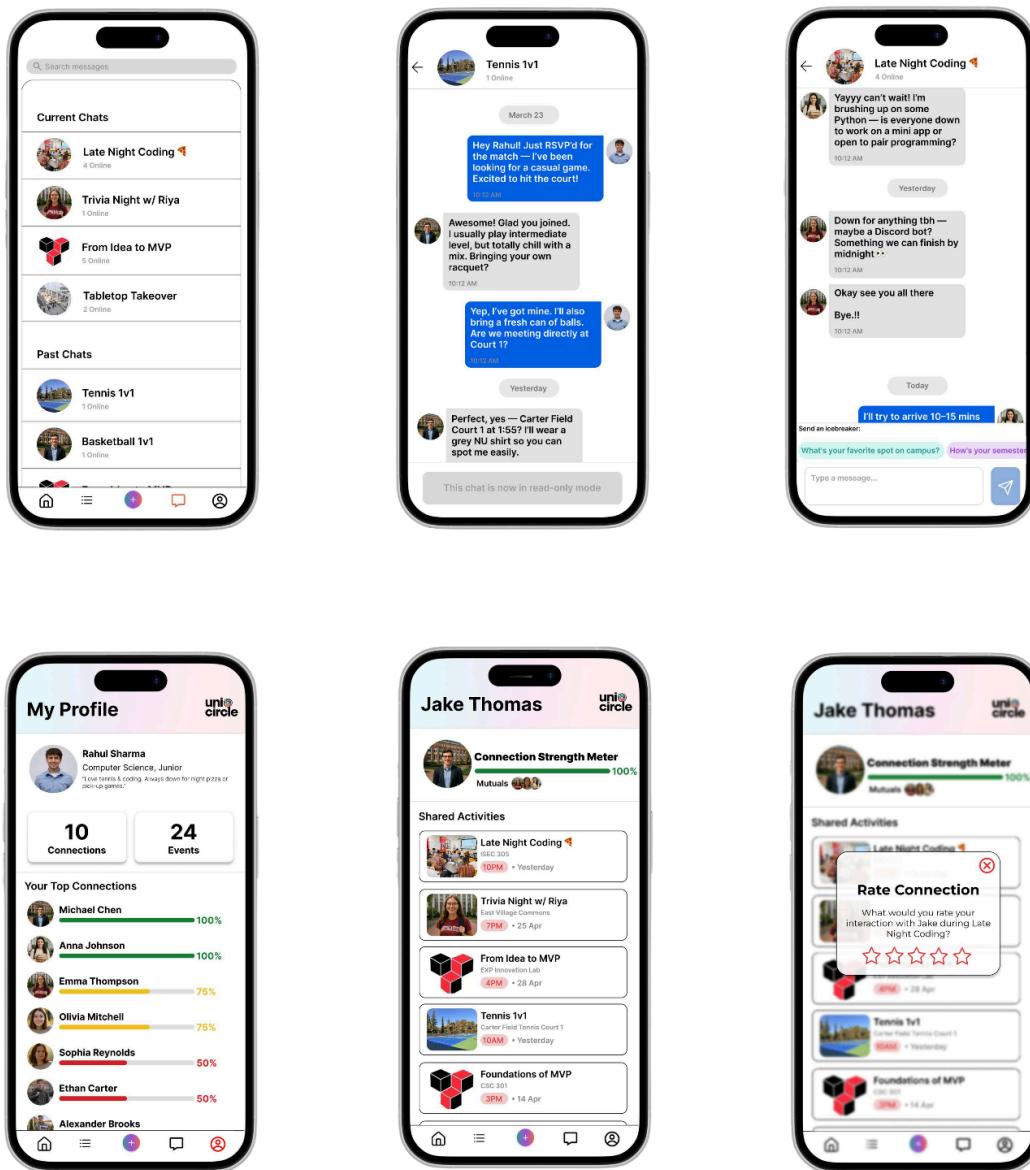
This screen flow shows the user's journey after clicking on a suggested event. The user is taken to the event details page, where they can view the event description, host information, date, time, location, participant count, and their connection strength with the host. Upon tapping "RSVP", the user receives a confirmation with options to join the event chat, return home, or invite a friend. Once RSVP'd, the event appears under the user's "My Bookings" section, helping them track both upcoming and past events easily.



This screen flow demonstrates the event creation process in UniCircle. When users tap the “Create” button, they are given two options: Host My Space or Find a NEU Facility. Choosing Find a NEU Facility displays a list of available university venues with time slots. Users can select a location, enter event details, and confirm the booking. If they select Host My Space, they can upload an image, add a description, specify the number of spots, and create a personalized event at their own place. Once an event is successfully created, it’s posted to the feed.



This screen flow highlights the event chat and profile features in UniCircle. Users can join group chats after RSVPing to an event, where they can initiate conversations using ice-breaker prompts to connect before the event begins. Chats from past events become read-only, allowing users to revisit conversations without sending new messages. The profile section displays the user's top connections, total events attended, and overall activity. After participating in an event, users can rate their connection with others, which updates the Connection Strength Meter shown on individual profiles along with a history of shared activities.



Sr. No.	Feature Name	Description	Dependencies
1	Login with NEU SSO	Users log in using their Northeastern email credentials via SSO, ensuring secure and exclusive access for NEU students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEU SSO (OAuth 2.0) Token management Email verification system
2	Explore Feed	The home screen displays a personalized feed of upcoming events, categorized into Suggested Events, Upcoming Events, and Club Events. Users can view event details, RSVP, and join chats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event database Interest tags Personalization engine
3	Create Event – NEU Facility Booking	Users can book university venues (e.g., Marino, Carter Field) in real time. Available time slots are shown, and users must authenticate with their NUID to confirm bookings. Events are auto-posted to the feed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEU facility API integration Availability engine Auto-post logic
4	Create Event – Host My Space	Students can host casual events at their dorm or apartment. They can upload an image, add a description, set event tags, time, open spots, and other details.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event form builder Host verification Image upload system
5	RSVP to Event	Tapping “RSVP” adds the user to the event and opens access to the group chat. It also saves the event under My Bookings. Event participation is capped based on host-defined limits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSVP logic Notifications & reminders Calendar sync
6	Live Event Chat	Each event has a dedicated chat for RSVPed users. The chat supports messages, reactions, and host-pinned messages. Past event chats become read-only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chat backend Event access control Push notifications

7	Conversation Starter Carousel	Pre-event chat includes rotating ice-breaker prompts based on event type (e.g., games, sports, study). Prompts encourage engagement before the event starts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt database • Tag-based prompt mapping • Chat integration
8	Connection Strength Meter	Displays a connection score (0–100%) between users, calculated from shared activities, messages, ratings, and mutual friends. Updates dynamically after events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction log • Scoring algorithm • Event history
9	User Profile View	Each profile includes name, photo, program, class year, events joined, top connections, and connection strength. Mutual connections are also shown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile DB • Connection graph logic • Event participation DB
10	Invite a Friend to Event	When RSVPing, users can invite friends from their past connections. Invitees get a notification and can see shared history with the inviter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification engine • Connection data access • Invite workflow
11	Rate Connection Post-Event	After each event, users can rate their connection with other participants (1–5 stars). These ratings influence the connection strength score.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rating DB • Triggered survey logic • Score updater
12	Bookings Dashboard	The My Bookings section shows all upcoming, past, and hosted events. Users can view event details, cancel RSVP, or access the chat directly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event DB • RSVP & host tracking • Date-based sorting

v1 aka Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Priority 0

1. Login with NEU SSO
2. Create Event (Host My Space – Basic)
3. RSVP to Event
4. Explore Feed
5. Event Chat (Basic)
6. Bookings Dashboard (My Events)
7. Basic User Profile (Name, Major, Picture)
8. Push Notifications (for RSVP & Chat)
9. Feedback Collection (Post-event form)

vNext - Priority 1

1. Strength Connection Meter
2. Conversation Starters Carousel
3. Host My Space (Enhanced version with group size, stability handling)
4. Reconnection Suggestions
5. Event Rating System (Rate your connection)

v longterm - Priority 2

1. Community & Club Forums
2. Event Analytics for Clubs
3. Gamification (Badges, Streaks, Leaderboard)
4. Cross-University Expansion (email domain verification & scaling)

Roadmap / Timing

To ensure a successful rollout of UniCircle, we have developed a phased roadmap that aligns technical development with user engagement strategies. The roadmap outlines the journey from internal development to full launch, along with feature prioritization and timing. This section combines both our planned release milestones and the scenarios for introducing the service to different student populations.

Our product development officially begins in May 2025. Given UniCircle's need for robust integration with Northeastern University systems such as NEU Single Sign-On (SSO), facility booking APIs, and secure student identity verification, we anticipate a 10-month development timeline leading up to the MVP release. The internal development phase will also include multiple internal demos and testing rounds (starting as early as Q4 2025) to validate system performance, refine UI/UX, and troubleshoot potential edge cases.

The Minimum Viable Product (MVP) will launch in April 2026 (Q1 2026). This version will include core features such as SSO login, event creation using NEU facilities, RSVP, a personalized explore feed, and basic group chat. The MVP will be released to a pilot group of 100–150 Northeastern students. This Alpha phase will allow us to validate the core experience in a controlled setting, gather detailed feedback, and iterate rapidly.

By mid-Q2 2026, we will expand into a Beta release, allowing access to a broader group of 500+ NEU students. During this phase, we will release key social engagement features including the Connection Strength Meter, Conversation Starters, and an improved event chat experience. We will also track engagement data and refine onboarding flows based on behavioral analytics.

In Q3 2026, we will initiate a full public launch within NEU, opening access to the entire student population. This release will include features such as Host My Space, Community & Club Forums, and Event Analytics for Clubs. This stage is critical for validating retention strategies, adoption by student organizations, and performance at scale. Reassessment checkpoints will occur at the end of each quarter to evaluate platform readiness for future milestones.

By Q4 2026, we will begin strategic planning for multi-campus expansion. During this time, we will implement Gamification features (badges, streaks, milestones), initiate brand-building campaigns, and begin discussions with stakeholders at five target universities. We will also ensure technical readiness for cross-campus growth by supporting domain-based login and optimizing backend performance.



Scenarios for Service Introduction

Our service rollout is intentionally staged to maximize feedback, ensure stability, and create meaningful network effects at each stage:

- **Alpha Launch (Q1 2026):** Limited to 100–150 pilot users for early validation of core flows. We considered launching publicly at MVP but opted for a controlled group to manage feedback loops more effectively.
- **Beta Launch (Q2 2026):** Expanded to 500+ students to test social features and performance at scale. This allows us to optimize UI/UX before reaching the full NEU audience.
- **Full Launch (Q3 2026):** This stage is available to all Northeastern students and includes major social and organizational features. It focuses on product-market fit, community growth, and retention strategies.
- **Expansion Planning (Q4 2026 – Q1 2027):** Focused on growth beyond NEU. Strategic meetings, technical prep, and stakeholder engagement will drive readiness for UniCircle to scale to new campuses.

This phased service introduction ensures that each release is purposeful, measured, and aligned with user feedback. By proving value on a single campus first, we build a replicable foundation for multi-campus success.

Metrics

Metric	Description	Success Criteria	How to Compute?
User Retention Rate	Measures how frequently users return to the app over time. Indicates long-term satisfaction and sustained engagement.	High – Users consistently return to use the app	(Returning users in a given period / Total users in that period) × 100
Event Participation Rate	Tracks the percentage of users who RSVP and actually attend events. Reflects real engagement with offline experiences.	High – Strong correlation between RSVP and attendance	(Number of attendees / Number of RSVPs) × 100
Average Connections per User	Indicates how many new connections users are making each month. Reflects social impact and networking success.	High – More connections suggest stronger engagement	Total number of new connections / Total active users (monthly)
Daily, Weekly, Monthly Active Users (DAU/WAU/MAU)	Measures active user count over time. Reflects the app's reach and engagement.	High – Growth in active users over time	Track unique logins over 1 day / 7 days / 30 days
Search Quality / Long Clicks	Measures how engaged users are with search results (event listings, profiles). Longer time indicates content relevance.	High – Longer average time spent on viewed content	Track average time spent on viewed posts/events, and number of revisits

Average Session Duration	Indicates how long users stay active on the app per session. Suggests app stickiness and usability.	High – More time spent = more user interest	(Total time spent in app / Number of sessions)
Pages per Session	Tracks how many screens/pages a user navigates per session. Reflects app exploration.	High – More pages = better discovery	Average number of unique screens visited per session
User Activity Rate	Measures actions such as creating events, RSVPing, sending messages, and rating connections. Reflects engagement depth.	High – More actions = better user involvement	(Total number of actions / Total users) × 100
Bounce Rate	Indicates the percentage of users who leave the app after viewing only one screen. Highlights usability or interest issues.	Low – Lower bounce rates are better	(Single-screen visits / Total sessions) × 100
Connection Rating Completion	Tracks how many users rate others after events. Reflects follow-through on social feedback and helps power connection scoring.	High – More ratings = stronger connection feedback	Number of ratings completed / Number of attended events

International

The internationalization strategy adapts a local-first approach. Before going international, the model will be expanded and validated across multiple universities within Boston and Massachusetts. This leverages the rich and diverse student population here. The key local targets worked by Boston University, Tufts, MIT, Harvard, Amherst, Brandeis. The team should start locally to leverage a manageable geographic and operational scope, easier partnerships, and feedback feedback-gathering process. The international diversity and density within Massachusetts present a perfect opportunity to validate and build an effective model. After establishing a proven model in Massachusetts, the plan involves expanding to universities across the other states in the United States. The broader rollout allows us to have more reach and test the product and its adoption on a bigger scale.

8 to 12 months after the success across the United States, the product will have a soft launch in other English-speaking countries like Canada, the UK and Australia. The reason for this is that these regions present lower language barriers, and partnering with universities becomes easier, along with other operational aspects. 12 to 24 months after the validation, momentum and success in these markets, too, the team would carefully expand into non-English speaking regions based on the app analytics user demand and international reach.

One of the key objectives of UniCircle is to encourage diversity and foster connections. By having a strategic approach to expansion into international markets and increasing scalability, the team aims to build a platform that is meaningful and enhances the social lives of students on campus. UniCircle strives to become the social hub for all universities by leveraging the power of making connections through shared interests, no matter what part of the globe the user is from.

Tricky Internationalization issues

There are a handful of issues that will be encountered while trying to internationalize UniCircle. Below are the issues and the mitigation plan

- **Data Privacy, Security & Legal Regulations:** Moving outside the US means navigating different compliance and laws, such as the GDPR in the EU and UK, PIPEDA in Canada and Australian privacy principles. Each of these guidelines may require data localization and explicit consent processes.
- **University buy-in and administration alignment:** Gaining trust and partnership from universities isn't always guaranteed, as they have their concerns in regard to protecting student data despite compliance with standard guidelines. Some universities may have

lengthy review processes, and stakeholder decision-making may be slow.

- **Integration with university database:** The universities across different countries will want UniCircle to comply with their own internal IT security protocols. This will require additional engineering efforts and may sometimes get complex and tricky.
- **Language Barriers:** When expanding to non-English speaking countries, it is not only the UI that needs to be translated and localized, but the business development and partnership-building process also needs to be taken care of. All interactions and artifacts need to stop being translated accurately. Poor translations or tone-deaf languages can lead to misunderstandings about UniCircle value proposition and may prove to be disastrous.

Projected Costs

The UniCircle application development project will be executed through five phases: Initiation, Planning, Execution, Testing & Deployment, and Closure. The duration and the scope for each phase are given in the table below.

Phase	Duration	Scope
Initiation	1 month	Stakeholder engagement, Team formations, Approvals and kick-off
Planning	1 month	Roadmapping, risk planning, budgeting, and building a marketing strategy.
Execution	5 months	UI/UX, front-end and backend development, Ongoing testing
Testing & Deployment	2 months	User Acceptance testing, Beta Testing, Full-scale deployment
Closure	1 month	Documentations, final reporting and handover
Total Duration	10 months	

The table below outlines the project resources along with their estimated compensations. Since UniCircle is a university-centered initiative without an immediate revenue model, we plan to leverage co-op students from Northeastern University to support the development. This approach not only helps minimize costs but also creates meaningful co-op opportunities for students in product, design, engineering, and marketing roles.

Resource	Units	Cost per year	Projected Compensation for 10 months (0.83 years)
Product Manager	1	\$74,000	\$61,667
UI/UX Designer	2	\$62,000	\$51,667
Full Stack Developer	2	\$132,000	\$110,000
QA Engineer	2	\$100,000	\$83,333
DevOps Engineer	2	\$78,000	\$65,000
Marketer	2	\$60,000	\$50,000
Laptops	11	\$1,000	\$11,000
MongoDB Database	1	\$684	\$684
AWS Servers	2	\$25,000	\$50,000
App Store Fees	1	\$5,000	\$5,000
Contingency (10%)			\$48,835
Total projected cost			\$537,186

Operational Needs

To ensure the smooth operation and long-term sustainability of UniCircle, various key support and operational components will be required, with a mix of finite and ongoing commitments.

A dedicated User Support System will be necessary to handle authentication issues, RSVP failures, and general troubleshooting. This will also include in-app support, email-based queries and comprehensive help center. While initial setup of these systems may be finite, maintenance and user interaction handling will be ongoing throughout the app's lifecycle.

A Moderation framework will also be very essential to ensure the safety and inclusivity within the platform. This also includes mechanisms to report abuse, review inappropriate content, enforce community guidelines. Lastly, Moderation efforts will remain ongoing, particularly due to the real time and social nature of the application.

On the technical operations side, a finite commitment will be needed to set up backend monitoring, error tracking and alert systems during development. Post-launch, these systems will require oversight to maintain server health, optimize performance, and deploy critical bug fixes or updates.

Product operations will play a continuous role, focusing on analyzing user engagement, connection strength metrics and the event participation. These insights will inform data-driven feature enhancements and retention strategies. Regular app updates will also be scheduled for performance improvements, UI enhancements, and new feature rollouts in sync with user needs and seasons; student activity cycles.

To support the content flow and for user onboarding, UniCircle will rely on a structured Campus Ambassador Program. These student leaders and clubs will promote the platform on campus, curate events in collaboration with clubs, and gather feedback. Their contribution will be ongoing and central to long-lasting engagement.

Lastly, initial support from university IT and facilities teams (finite commitment) will be needed for system integration, especially for NEU login and room booking APIs. Continuous collaboration with student organizations, however, will remain critical to ensure UniCircle reflects the dynamic, evolving needs of the Northeastern community.

Addressing Caveats/risks

Risk	Description	Mitigation Strategy
User Privacy	<p>UniCircle collects sensitive user data including profiles, event participation, and connections. This poses risks of data breaches, especially with .edu login systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement strong encryption and secure token-based authentication Offer granular privacy controls for users Conduct regular security audits and penetration tests Provide real-time support to address privacy concerns
Legal Issues	<p>Intellectual property risks may arise due to platform features or integration with NEU's internal systems without appropriate permissions or licenses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct legal reviews and secure proper licenses for third-party tools and APIs Draft clear Terms of Service to protect UniCircle from liability Ensure all integrations with NEU comply with institutional guidelines
Pirated Content / Fake Events	<p>Students may create spammy or misleading events that erode trust in the platform.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrict event creation to verified NEU students Include moderation tools and flagging mechanisms Use automated event validation (e.g., identity checks, participant thresholds) Empower student moderators or ambassadors to oversee flagged events
Dependence on Internal University Systems	<p>Heavy reliance on systems like NEU SSO, student databases, and facility booking APIs could disrupt operations if services are down or integrations fail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop standalone backups (e.g., student ID upload verification) Maintain manual submission for backup facility booking Establish API health monitoring and NEU partnership support channels

Availability of Third-Party Services	Features like chat, notifications, and hosting depend on external APIs (e.g., cloud platforms, messaging SDKs). Downtime or vendor limits can affect app reliability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use redundant cloud providers and fallback services • Establish Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with vendors • Build graceful error handling and fallback messages for users
User Adoption & Network Effect	Platform success hinges on active student engagement. Low initial adoption may result in reduced value for users due to limited events or connections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch with club-driven ambassadors and early adopters • Provide exclusive benefits for initial users (e.g., early access, hosting perks) • Host activation campaigns through clubs and student leaders • Use feedback loops and community shoutouts to drive organic participation
Scalability & Performance	The platform must scale to support thousands of users (especially during peak event hours).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use cloud-native architecture and horizontal scaling • Conduct load testing before full launch • Optimize backend queries and chat/message services • Prioritize performance tuning during Q3 (preparation for scale)
Cross-Campus Compatibility	As the platform expands, it must adapt to various university systems, policies, and email domains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design modular login/authentication systems to support multiple .edu domains • Build admin tools for university-specific onboarding • Conduct stakeholder interviews and tech audits during Q4 before expansion

Appendix

Interview questions asked for each customer segment:

Questions for Segment 1 (Students – Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

Q1: Can you tell me about a recent meaningful connection you made with someone new? What made it meaningful, and how did it happen?

Q2: What challenges have you faced while trying to make new friends in a new environment?

Q3: What have you been doing to meet new people and make connections, and how effective has it been for you?

Questions for Segment 2 (Part-time Students Working at NEU – TAs, RAs, On-campus Employees)

Q1: Can you tell me about a recent meaningful connection you made with someone new? What made it meaningful, and how did it happen?

Q2: How do you usually spend your time socially when you are not studying, working, or focused on other responsibilities?

Q3: What have you been doing to meet new people and make connections, and how effective has it been for you?

SUMMARY

We interviewed 25 participants, both full-time university students and part-time students working at NEU. The interviews provided us with the most critical information regarding the challenges students face in forming and sustaining social relationships. The biggest challenges were getting into friend groups, sustaining relationships after first meetings, and having little social time due to work and study commitments.

Our results emphasized that although university events, sports, and networking activities are available, students continued to struggle with regular and substantial involvement. Part-time student employees, specifically, reported a challenge in coordinating their work schedules with traditional social events.

We also conducted surveys of participants to learn more about user pain points and preferences. We asked them about their social habits, pain points, and openness to digital solutions for creating connections.

The responses helped to emphasize the key pain points, user behaviours, and gaps in existing solutions, guiding UniCircle's mission to provide a university-specific, shared-interest-based community for meaningful social interaction.

User Survey Analysis	
Q1: Can you tell me about a recent meaningful connection you made with someone new? What made it meaningful, and how did it happen?	
Attended university-organized events and met new people	20
Participated in shared-interest activities (sports and gym activities)	15
Happened organically in study groups or academic settings	12
Socialized in informal gatherings (parties, dorm hangouts or casual meetups)	11
Connected through networking sessions	7
Q2: What challenges have you faced while trying to make new friends in a new environment?	
Struggling to start conversations and break the initial ice with new people	6
Facing cultural differences and social norms	4
Difficulty in maintaining new connections after the first meeting	3
Social anxiety or difficulty in approaching new people	1
Q3: What have you been doing to meet new people and make connections, and how effective has it been for you?	
Attending university events (but struggling to sustain connections)	10
Engaging in sports, clubs, or shared-interest activities	7
Networking through academic/work-related settings	5
Using social media or online platforms (but finding it impersonal)	3
Q4: How do you usually spend your time socially when you are not studying, working, or focused on other responsibilities?	
Prefer small, casual meetups with close friends rather than large events	4
Engage in hobbies or fitness activities (gym, running, reading)	3
Rarely socialize due to busy schedule and fatigue from work	3
Attend networking or career-related events in free time	1

Table 4: Quantifies Data Responses from UniCircle User Interviews

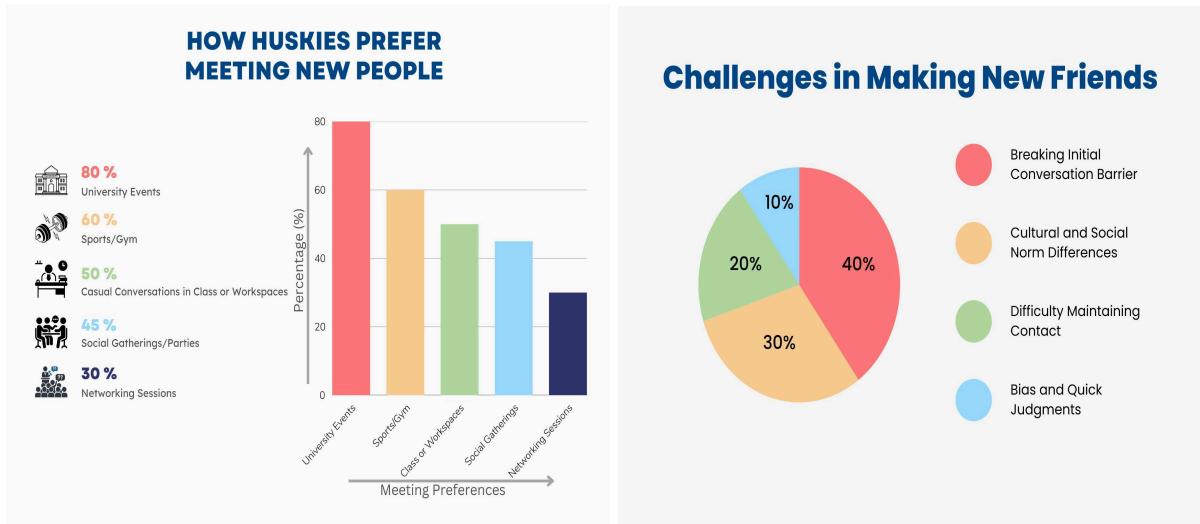


Figure 2: Social Interaction Preferences and Challenges Among Huskies

Preferred Ways to Meet People:

- **University Events and Clubs (80%)**: The most common way through which students try to network. However, most said they found it difficult to follow up after meeting new people.
- **Sports and gym (60%)**: Students who engage in physical activities prefer to meet like-minded individuals through shared hobbies.
- **Casual Conversations in Class/Workspaces (50%)**: Many students rely on organic, everyday interactions but find them unpredictable.
- **Social Gatherings and Parties (45%)**: Informal settings provide opportunities, but it is challenging to maintain those connections.
- **Networking Sessions (30%)**: While effective for professional relationships, many students find them too formal for building friendships.

Challenges in Making Connections:

- **Breaking the Initial Conversation Barrier**: 40% of respondents expressed difficulty in starting conversations with new people.
- **Cultural and Social Norm Differences**: 30% found it challenging to adapt to different social norms, making it harder to form connections.
- **Difficulty Maintaining Contact**: 20% of respondents struggled to keep in touch after meeting someone at an event or activity.
- **Bias and Quick Judgments**: 10% felt they were judged too quickly or had difficulty finding people they truly connected with.

Feature Prioritization:

- **Easy Reconnection:** Many students mentioned the need for an easy way to reconnect with people they meet at events.
- **Interest-Based Meetups:** Students want structured yet low-effort ways to meet like-minded peers.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** Part-time students emphasized the need for an option that fits within their busy schedules.

Interview Notes

Segment 1: University Students (Undergraduate & Graduate Students)

Key Findings:

- **Struggles with Making Lasting Friendships:** Many students attend university events but fail to maintain connections beyond the first meeting.
- **Social Barriers:** Students, particularly newcomers, find it difficult to approach established groups.
- **Busy Schedules Affect Social Life:** While students want to socialize, academic commitments limit their availability to attend meetups.

Segment 2: University Students Working Part-time on Campus (TAs, RAs, On-campus Employees)

Key Findings:

- **Limited Time for Socializing:** Part-time students struggle to balance work, studies, and social life, leaving them with few opportunities to meet new people.
- **Professional vs. Social Interactions:** Many of their interactions are work-related, making it difficult to form personal friendships outside their job roles.

Overall Insights

Common Pain Points:

- Students struggle to initiate conversations and maintain connections.
- Part-time students feel socially isolated due to busy schedules and work commitments.
- Existing platforms like Meetup and Facebook Groups are not tailored to university-specific networking needs.

Market Gap & Opportunity:

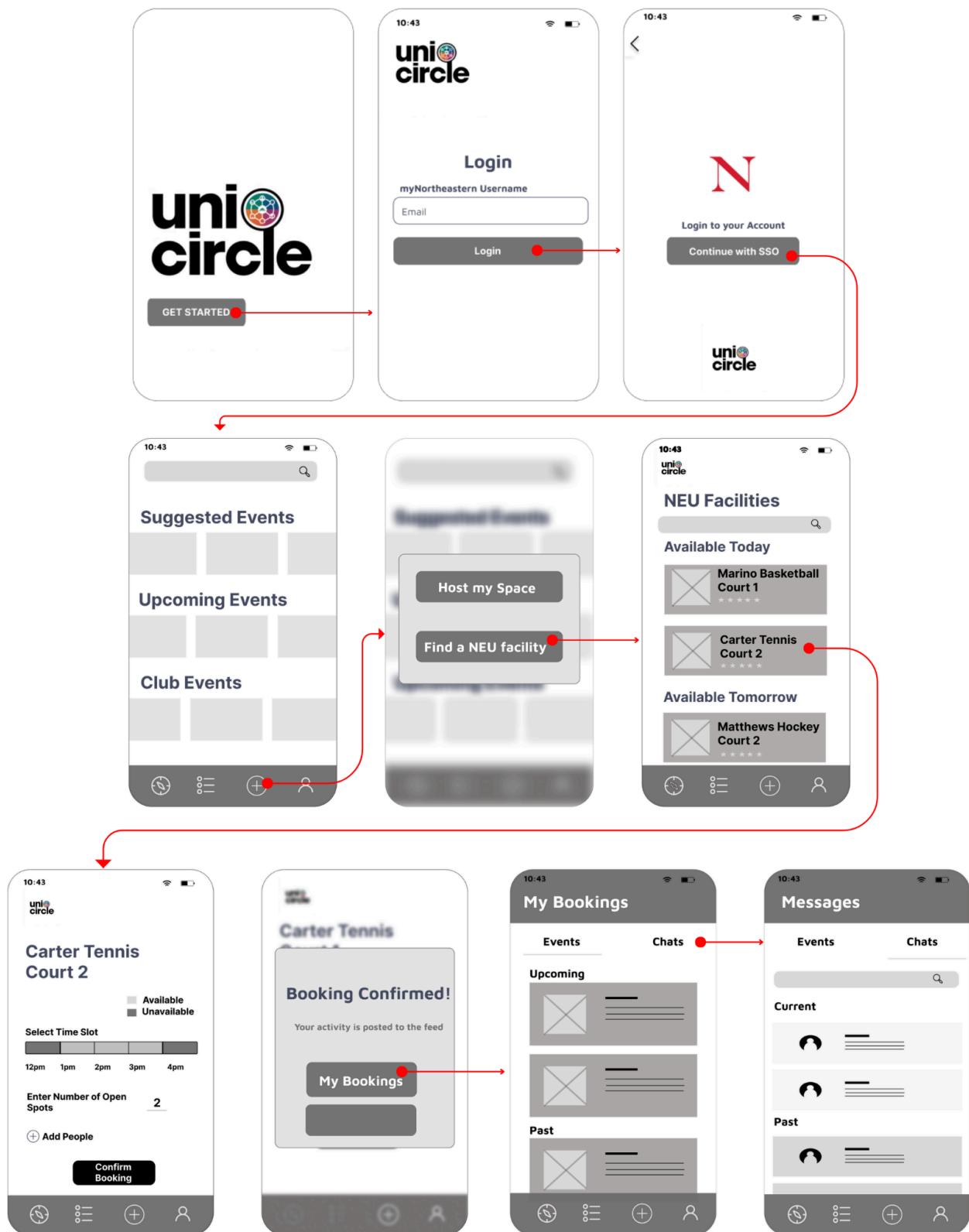
- There is a clear demand for an interest-based, university-specific platform that helps

students reconnect after meeting.

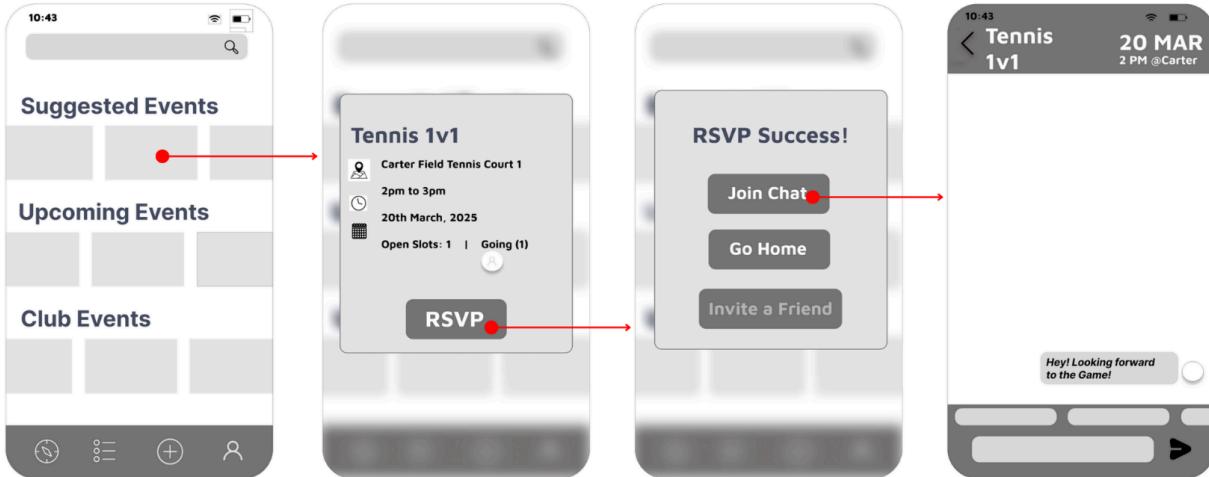
- A structured yet casual way to make friends through shared activities and events would solve many existing issues.
- Flexible social opportunities that fit into the schedules of part-time students would be highly valuable.

Storyboard

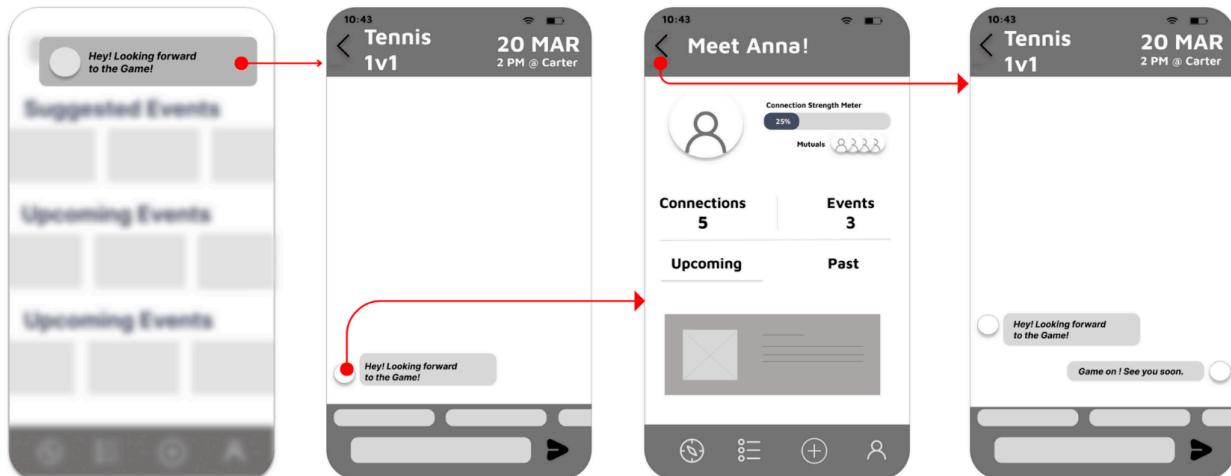
After a long day of assignments and project work, Rahul wants to go out and do something fun. It's been a while since he played his favourite sport, Tennis. However, he does not have a partner because he is pretty new to Boston and NEU, and he hardly knows anyone. He decides to log in to the UniCircle app, create an event by booking a tennis court at Carter fields and find a partner to play with. Rahul logs in using his NEU credentials and on the home page he taps on the icon to create an event. He taps on "Find a NEU facility" and he is taken to a page where he is able to see that court 2 on Carter field is available among all other listings. He taps on it, and he is taken to a screen where he gets to choose the time slot and add the number of open slots for the game. Once he does that, he confirms the booking and sees a message that tells him that the booking is confirmed. Rahul's event gets posted on the feed where other people can see and RSVP. Rahul then taps on my bookings and sees a screen that shows all his past and upcoming bookings. When he toggles to chat he is then able to see all his past and current chats.



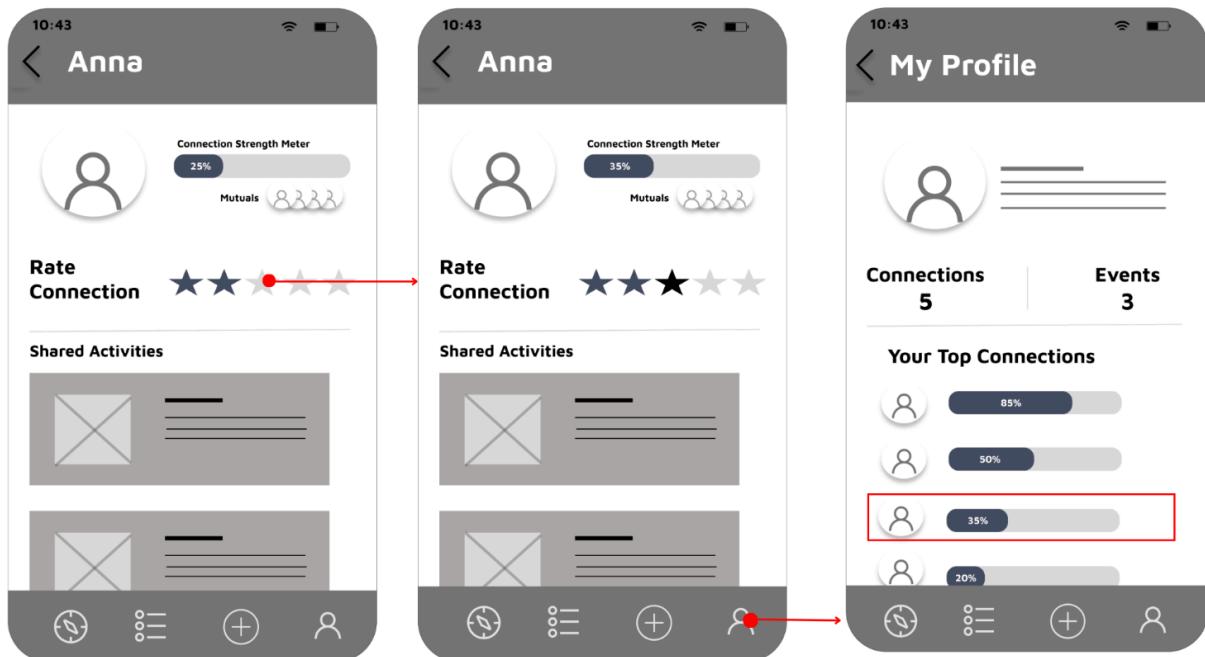
Anna has been looking for a partner to play with. As she scrolls through her feed, she sees that Rahul's event perfectly aligns with her schedule. She taps on the event and RSVPs the event. She joins the activity chat by tapping on "join Chat" and sends a message to Rahul saying that she is looking forward to the game.



Rahul gets a notification of Anna's message. He taps on the message banner, and he is taken to the chat screen with Anna's message. Rahul decides to check her profile before responding to her, and taps on her profile icon on the chat screen next to her message. Anna's profile opens up where Rahul is able to see a connection strength meter that shows a 25% connection strength along with all the mutual connections they have. Rahul is also able to see the past activities with her as well as Anna's all upcoming activities she has RSVPed. Knowing that Anna and him already share a certain level of connection and a few mutual connections, Rahul feels more comfortable and goes back to the chat by tapping the back icon and responds to her saying that he will see her soon at the court.

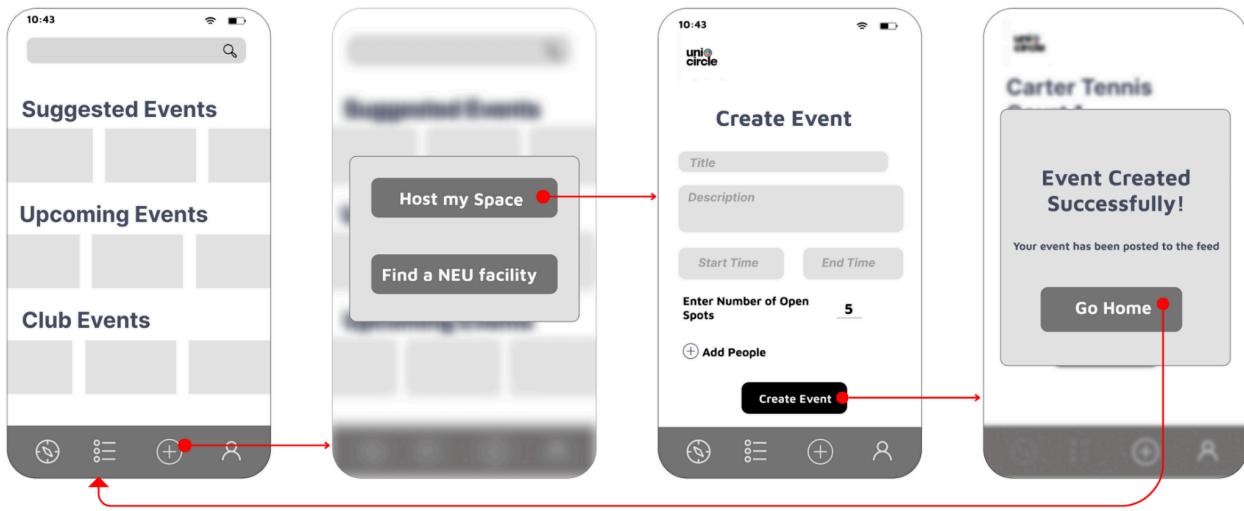


Rahul and Anna meet for the game at Marino at 2pm and after the game Rahul and Anna feel great. After the game, they talk about many topics about tennis and they learn a lot about each other. Later when after getting back home, Rahul decides to go to the app and rate his connection with Anna on the UniCircle app by adjusting the connection rating on Anna's Profile. Meanwhile, Anna also does the same at her end and this updates their connection strength meter from 25% to 35%. When Rahul taps on his profile icon he is able to view his profile with all his top connections listed where he is also able to see Anna's connection strength updated.



Scenario 2 : Maya wants to host a movie night at her place

After a busy week of classes, Maya wants to unwind and connect with friends by hosting a movie night. She opens the UniCircle app and taps the create button to create a new event. She is given two options: "Host My Space" and "Find a NEU Facility." She plans to host the movie night at her apartment, she selects "Host My Space." On the Create Event screen, Maya enters the event title "Friday Movie Night at My Place," adds the movie name, sets the start and end time, and specifies the number of open spots. In the description, she includes her apartment location and a note mentioning that snacks will be provided. After filling in all the details, she creates the event and a confirmation message appears saying the event has been successfully posted. The event is now visible to nearby students, and a few of her connections RSVP. On Friday night, they gather at Maya's place, enjoy the movie, share laughs, and build new friendships, which are all made possible through UniCircle.



Attributes	UniCircle	Meetup	Eventbrite	Discord	Facebook Groups	Partiful
Event Creation & Management	Yes: Northeastern campus events & activity hosted by verified clubs and individuals with RSVPs	Yes: Group events, RSVPs, no ticketing	Yes: Robust ticketing, analytics	Limited: Scheduled events, no RSVPs	Yes: Basic events, RSVPs	Yes: Quick invites, guest management, no formal ticketing
Event & Activity Suggestion	High: Suggests events by profile and Preferences	Low: Self-selected groups	Low: Event discovery, no suggestion	None: Community-driven	Low: suggests groups rather than events & activity	None: Invite-based
Communication Tools	High: activity/events specific conversation starters; invite past connection; Text: Real-time chat	Moderate: Discussions, comments and no real-time chat	Low: Email updates only	High: Persistent chats, voice and video	High: Posts, polls, chats video/voice	Moderate: Features an event-specific Activity Feed for real-time updates and photo sharing;
Connection Strength	High: Quantified mutual connection strength that increases with shared activities and positive ratings	Low: Connection feature on meetup is private; No mutual connection visibility	Low: Does not show mutual connection	Low: Mutual server visibility	Low: Mutual friend are visible through profile	Moderate: highlights mutuals who you've partied with before on the platform
Discoverability	High within university	High: Events searchable	Very High: Public event marketplace	Moderate-Low: Invite-based servers	High: Suggested groups/events	Low: Invite-only events
Exclusivity & Credibility	High: @northeastern.edu signup	Low: General platform	Low: Generic events	Low: Open platform	Low: Optional .edu Campus	Low: General use

Table: Competitive Analysis

Platform	Description
UniCircle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campus-focused social network for university students, accessible via web and mobile (iOS/Android) apps. Requires verified .edu email sign-ups (e.g., @northeastern.edu) to ensure trust and safety for students. Features a high-depth algorithm suggesting events based on student profiles (interests, majors, clubs). Provides event creation and management tools for campus activities (e.g., club events, study groups) with RSVP tracking. Offers connection strength indicators that quantifies shared experiences and mutual connections, helping students gauge familiarity and foster confidence in making new connections, and real-time chat for student interactions. Ensures privacy with a closed community accessible only to verified students, supported by real-time customer (student) support.
Meetup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest-based community meetups and events platform, accessible via web, iOS, and Android apps. Facilitates strong community-building through shared-interest groups for recurring events, fostering connections. Provides effective event management tools, including scheduling, RSVPs, and group coordination for in-person gatherings. Boasts a large, active user base, offering a wide variety of meetups across different interests and locations. Supports moderate engagement through discussions and event comments, connecting users with common interests.
Eventbrite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event discovery, ticketing, and promotion platform, available on web, iOS, and Android (attendee and organizer apps). Offers comprehensive event management tools for organizers, including ticketing, analytics, and promotion for events of any size. Provides high discoverability through a large public event directory, allowing users to find events by location or category. Scales effectively for events ranging from small meetups to large conferences, catering to diverse event needs. Includes robust tools for event promotion and attendee management, enhancing event visibility and organization.
Discord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real-time chat and community platform (text, voice, video), accessible on desktop, web, iOS, and Android. Excels in real-time engagement and group communication through text, voice, and video channels, ideal for student groups. Free and feature-rich, widely used by student clubs and online communities for its accessibility and tools. Fosters tight-knit online communities for clubs, hobbies, or study groups, supporting niche interests with persistent chats. Offers customizable servers with roles, badges, and moderation tools, enhancing community interaction and management.
Facebook Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook-hosted communities for shared interests or affiliations, integrated into Facebook's web and mobile platform. Leverages a large, diverse user base, including student organizations, offering extensive group options for campus life. Includes built-in event hosting and engagement features, such as posts, polls, chats, and video/voice interactions. Provides privacy controls, allowing groups to be public, private, or secret, offering flexibility in community visibility. Supports real-time community chats and event-specific threads, enhancing interaction for shared interests or affiliations.
Partiful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Casual event invitation and planning platform for parties and social gatherings, accessible via web, iOS, and Android. Features user-friendly, visually appealing event pages with quick invites and guest management for casual gatherings. Emphasizes mobile and SMS communication, aligning with student habits and enhancing accessibility for event coordination. Offers a modern design with strong appeal to Gen Z, making it a trendy choice for social events among university students. Includes an event-specific Activity Feed for real-time updates (e.g., RSVPs, host posts) and photo sharing, boosting engagement for each event.

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