

# MRD Template

Spring 2025

## Name of Product: UniCircle

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## Vision

In a large, diverse university environment like Northeastern, students, especially those juggling academics, part-time jobs, and extracurriculars, often struggle with social isolation and forming meaningful connections. Many find it difficult to meet new people, sustain relationships beyond surface-level interactions, or discover like-minded peers for shared activities. UniCircle addresses these challenges by providing a platform exclusive to Northeastern University that fosters friendships through shared interests, campus-based events, and social opportunities. Unlike existing platforms like Meetup or Eventbrite, which are generic and open to anyone and pose credibility concerns, UniCircle creates a trusted environment for students to seamlessly engage and build lasting connections within their community through shared interests.

## 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.

## 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.

Attributes	UniCircle	Meetup	Eventbrite	Discord	Facebook Groups	Partiful
<b>Event Creation &amp; Management</b>	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
<b>Event &amp; Activity Suggestion</b>	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
<b>Communication Tools</b>	High: activity/event 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;
<b>Connection Strength</b>	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
<b>Discoverability</b>	High within university	High: Events searchable	Very High: Public event marketplace	Moderate-Low: Invite-based servers	High: Suggested groups/events	Low: Invite-only events
<b>Exclusivity &amp; Credibility</b>	High: @northeastern.edu signup	Low: General platform	Low: Generic events	Low: Open platform	Low: Optional .edu Campus	Low: General use

Table 1: Competitive Analysis for UniCircle App

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

Table 2: Other similar solutions in the market with their own value propositions



## 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.

## 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

Rahul had just finished all his assignments for the day, and he wanted to go out and do something. He signs in to UniCircle and scrolls through his explore feed to see what's happening on campus. The feed shows a game of badminton scheduled for an open spot to partner with Anna at 6 pm at Marino Recreation Center. He decides to select the activity and see the event details. He RSVPs and receives a confirmation message. A chat opens up for Rahul and Anna to communicate and coordinate. Meanwhile, Anna gets a notification saying that she found someone to play 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

Maya is a new graduate international student at Northeastern University. She's new around and finds it challenging to meet someone who likes art as much as she does. She opens UniCircle, views the explore feed, and comes across a casual painting session hosted by the Creative Arts Club at Curry Student Center on Thursday. She RSVPs and attends the event, where she speaks with other artists. She also meets Lisa, who invites her to her student art gallery. She and Lisa became friends and connected on UniCircle so they could easily communicate and continue hanging out.

### **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

Rahul RSVPs to a badminton game at Marino Center on the UniCircle app. After he confirms his attendance, he is able to access the event's group chat on the UniCircle app. He introduces himself in the group and asks if anyone wants to warm up before the game. Rahul notices James has responded by saying that he would like to. Other players in the group discuss court reservations and check if anyone is bringing extra rackets and shuttles. James and Rahul meet half an hour early to warm up, and they've already broken the ice by learning about each other's warm-up techniques and other badminton talks, and are looking forward to meeting the others.

### **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

Maya gets a notification saying that Priya has invited her to join a hiking trip to the White Mountains. However, Maya and Priya have met only once before at a campus event and feel unsure about spending several hours with someone she has met only once before. Maya checks Priya's profile and notices that they have a low connection strength of 25%, which indicates limited shared experiences. Maya decides to check mutual connections through the connection web feature, where she notices that Priya has an 80% connection strength with Zoe, who has an 85% connection strength with Maya. The app shows that Zoe and Priya attended five activities together last month and gave each other positive ratings. Maya feels a sense of comfort and accepts Priya's invitation. After the hiking trip, Maya and Priya rate their experiences and their connection strength increases to 42%, making future interactions more likely.

### **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

As the secretary of the dance club at Northeastern University, Maya needs to schedule a dance workshop. She logs into UniCircle with the dance club credentials and creates an activity. She sees the dance studio availability and books it to make the activity on Thursday, 6 to 8 pm. Maya enters the event details and sets the number of open spots for the workshop. Over the next one week, the activity gets 30 RSVPs and Maya is able to see the attendees icon on the event details page with their connection strengths shown.

#### **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

Riya is a graduate student and a part-time TA. She enjoys socializing, but often loses touch with people because of her busy schedule. Riya and Rochelle had met earlier at a board game night where they bonded well, and they found out that they both love trivia nights. On the UniCircle app, Riya sees a trivia night event posted with three open spots. Riya RSVPs and clicks the invite option to invite her friend Rochelle. Riya sees Rochelle in her past connections with a 20% connection strength. Riya taps on the invite button and gets a message saying invite sent. Maya is then taken to the event chat. Meanwhile, Rochelle receives an invitation notification. When she opens it, she is taken to the event details page with rsvp options, and the other attendees below it show their connection strengths. Rochell selects yes and is brought to the event chat. After the event, their connection strength increases to 38%.

#### **Use Case 7**

**Persona:** Late night hustler Jake (Graduate student)

**Pain Point:** Breaking the ice

Jake signs up for a late night coding workshop at ISEC. Although he is interested and excited about the event, he still feels anxious about being paired up for activities and interacting with strangers during the workshop. On the UniCircle event details page, he sees 18 other attendees. In the event chat, he sees a carousel of conversations that start with topics related to coding languages and trends. He taps on one of them and sparks a great discussion in the group even before the event has begun. They have already broken the ice online and now are looking forward to meeting each other in person at the workshop and collaborating.

#### **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

Rahul wants to organize a pickup volleyball game on Friday evening. He opens UniCircle and selects “create activity”. After choosing volleyball, he sees an option to reserve a facility at Marino with real-time availability shown. He selects the 7 pm slot and confirms the booking with his NUID. UniCircle reserves the court through the university facility system and creates an

activity with him as the host. He sets the player limit, adds a couple of his friends and posts the activity to feed as a 5v5 game with 8 more open spots. Within an hour, the open spots get filled up with interested players.

## Market Size

UniCircle's **Total Addressable Market (TAM)** consists of **31,159** Northeastern University students<sup>1</sup> who are looking to improve their social life. Out of the entire student population, **25,239 students** were on campus students<sup>2</sup>, which accounts for the **Serviceable Addressable Market (SAM)**.

A 2024 Voice survey<sup>3</sup> indicates that 75% of on-campus students actively engage in on-campus events. However, only 60% of them are considered to be in the **Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM)**, which comprises **15,143 students**. This adjustment is due to the fact that some students already have an established social circle, and others are looking to attend events and activities for purposes other than making new connections.

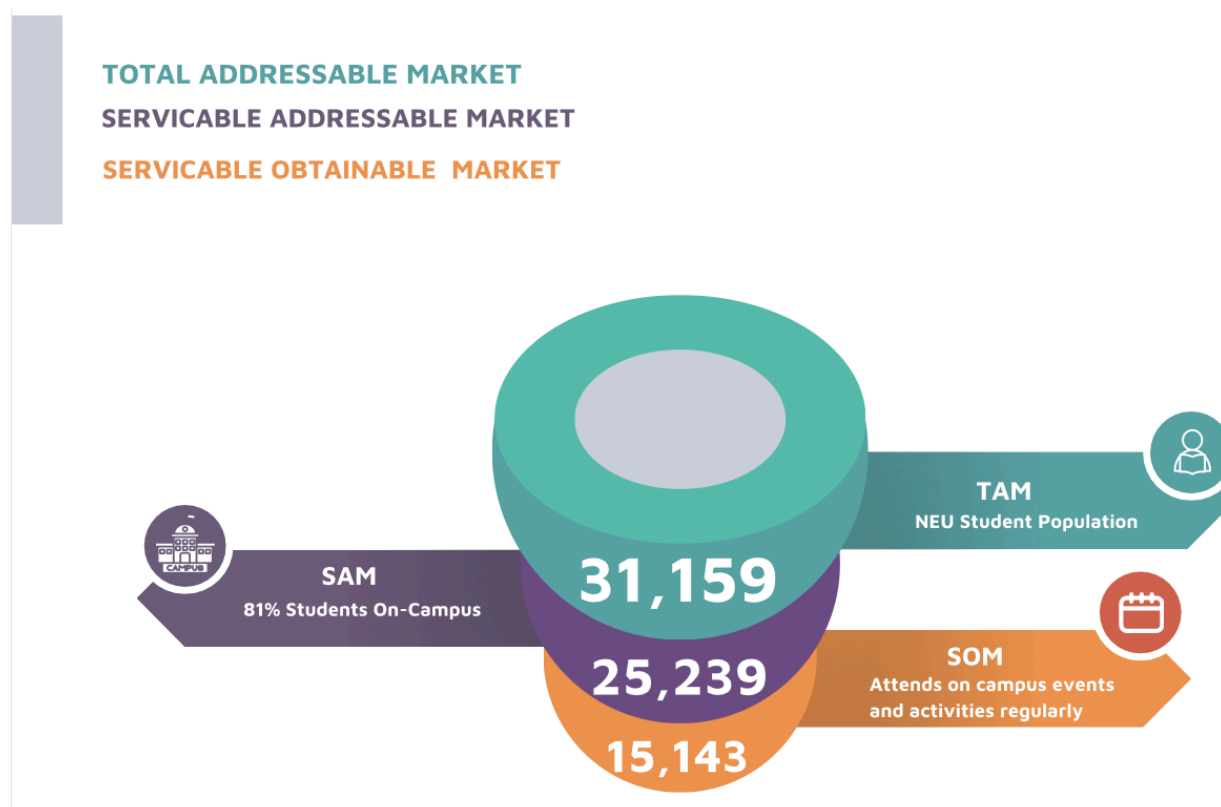


Figure 1: TAM, SAM and SOM for Unicircle

The spending estimates show that students tend to have a total yearly spending of USD 13.63 million on offline solutions<sup>4</sup>, considering an average spending of USD 75 per month per person, on offline solutions that encourage social activities and events, entertainment, hobbies and other recreational activities. About USD 545,040 is spent on digital solutions like social apps and other platforms, assuming that 30% of students currently pay for premium features on social platforms<sup>5</sup>, with an average premium of USD 10 per month<sup>6</sup> per person. Combining both online and offline spending, the estimated current spending in the market on socialization is USD 14.2 Million per year.

This estimate gives an initial understanding of the current market trend. Considering UniCircle's niche, unique differentiators, exclusivity and potential to capture a larger market by expanding into other universities across the US, this is a sufficient starting point to warrant further development of the UniCircle application.

## Caveats / Risks / Key Dependencies

Risk	Description	Possible Mitigants
User Privacy	UniCircle collects and stores user data, including profile information, event participation, and connections. This data could be vulnerable to security breaches or unauthorized access, especially given the platform's focus on NEU students and its .edu email verification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement robust encryption and security measures, ensuring compliance with data privacy laws.</li> <li>Provide clear privacy settings allowing users to control visibility of their profiles and interactions.</li> <li>Conduct regular security audits and penetration testing to prevent vulnerabilities.</li> <li>Offer real-time customer (student) support to address privacy concerns promptly, as outlined in the document.</li> </ul>
Legal Issues	UniCircle may face intellectual property risks related to its event discovery system, platform features, or integration with university databases, particularly since it's NEU-specific and collaborates with campus entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a comprehensive patent search and consult legal experts to ensure compliance.</li> <li>Obtain proper licenses and permissions for third-party data integrations and university partnerships.</li> <li>Ensure terms of service and user agreements are legally sound and protect UniCircle from liability, especially given its closed, student-only community.</li> </ul>
Pirated Content / Fake Events	Users may create spam, fraudulent, or inappropriate events, misleading students and damaging the platform's credibility, which is critical for a trusted, university-exclusive platform like UniCircle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement event verification systems for university-affiliated events, leveraging NEU's verified clubs and individuals.</li> <li>Allow users to report and flag suspicious events or profiles.</li> <li>Introduce moderation policies and automated content filtering to detect fake events or spam accounts, ensuring safety and relevance for students.</li> </ul>
Dependence on Internal University Systems	UniCircle may rely on integration with university email verification (e.g., @northeastern.edu), student databases, or event calendars for authentication and event synchronization. Any failure in these systems could disrupt the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop standalone authentication options (e.g., student ID uploads) as a backup to .edu email verification.</li> <li>Maintain manual event submission for organizers in case automated syncing fails.</li> <li>Establish partnership agreements with NEU to ensure system compatibility and support, aligning with the document's emphasis on campus integration.</li> </ul>
Availability of Third-Party Services	The platform may depend on third-party services for cloud storage, communication features (e.g., chat, video calls), or payment processing for event tickets. Disruptions to these services could impact functionality, particularly for real-time engagement tools highlighted in UniCircle's features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and evaluate alternative third-party providers in case of service disruptions.</li> <li>Use redundant cloud providers to ensure uptime and data availability.</li> <li>Establish service-level agreements (SLAs) with vendors to maintain consistent availability and response times, supporting the platform's low-effort, real-time interaction goals.</li> </ul>
User Adoption & Network Effect	UniCircle's success depends on a critical mass of students and event organizers using the platform effectively. Low adoption rates may limit its effectiveness, especially given the document's emphasis on addressing social isolation and requiring broad student participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement campus ambassador programs to drive initial adoption, targeting early adopters as described in the document (e.g., students seeking social opportunities).</li> <li>Offer incentives for early adopters, such as exclusive event access or rewards, to boost engagement.</li> <li>Leverage targeted university partnerships to promote UniCircle through student organizations and official channels, aligning with the strategic consideration of integrating with NEU campus life.</li> </ul>

Table 3: UniCircle Risks and Mitigation Measures

## Strategic Considerations

To ensure that UniCircle actually improves student life, we prioritize key methods that distinguish us from generic networking apps and event platforms and tend to improve social well-being in the student community.

**1. Assisting Students in Meeting the Right People:** Making friends in college should not feel like work. UniCircle facilitates natural connections between students by pairing them based on shared interests, availability, and previously enjoyed activities. Whether starting a study group, playing pickup basketball, or meeting folks who enjoy photography, interactions should feel active and interactive, easing the process of social gathering.

**2. Making Campus Events More Convenient to Find and Attend:** With so much going on on campus, it's easy to miss out on events because they're spread across multiple platforms. UniCircle connects everything, including club meetings, student-led events, and casual hangouts, so students can stay up to date and participate with a single tap. There are no lengthy group chats or difficult sign-ups; just quick, easy access to the important things.

**3. Personalizing the Encounter:** UniCircle acknowledges that every individual has distinct social requirements. Our platform learns about the activities of students, including weekend game nights, intramural sports, and academic meetups, and adjusts recommendations accordingly. Instead of being bombarded with irrelevant events, students see things that pique their interest.

**4. Directly Integrating into Campus Life:** Unlike platforms such as Meetup or Eventbrite, UniCircle is not just another event listing app woven into the university experience. We cooperate with student organizations, dorm communities, and campus departments to ensure that everything is relevant, accessible, and specifically designed for NEU students.

**5. Low-Effort and Low-Commitment Socialization:** Not everyone has the time to work on long-term projects or join clubs. UniCircle prioritizes informal, drop-in social activities such as impromptu study sessions, brief coffee conversations, and pickup games. It's a great way for students with hectic schedules to socialize without feeling rushed.

**6. Keeping It Safe and Exclusive to Students:** We understand that privacy is important. UniCircle is a closed, student-only platform that ensures connections are secure, relevant, and spam-free. Students have control over their visibility, who they interact with, and how they interact with the platform, creating a space in which they can truly feel at ease.

**7. Ensuring everyone's included:** NEU has an incredibly diverse student culture, and UniCircle reflects that and uses it to its advantage. Whether someone is looking for career networking, cultural groups, gaming communities, or mental wellness circles, our platform makes it easy to find and connect with the right people, no matter their background, interests, or schedule.



## Team Members

Esha Thakur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading product strategy and feature prioritization, ensuring alignment with user needs and market demand.</li> <li>• Conducting market research and user interviews, translating insights into intuitive design elements and impactful features.</li> </ul>
Karthikeyan Raghavarajan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led product ideation and development, ensuring alignment with user needs and identifying key differentiators for a competitive edge.</li> <li>• Conducted competitive analysis and market research to assess market size, uncover opportunities, and refine customer segmentation.</li> </ul>
Niraj Mehta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining customer segments and unmet needs, analyzing pain points in student networking to shape a user-centric product strategy.</li> <li>• Identifying key differentiators and integrating solutions like event personalization and post-event engagement tools.</li> </ul>
Mayur Mahavir Bijarniya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing competitive analysis, identifying market gaps and opportunities for product differentiation.</li> <li>• Overseeing product development, ensuring alignment with user expectations and technical feasibility.</li> </ul>
Rutish Pawar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating industry trends and competitor tactics, spotting potential growth areas for innovation.</li> <li>• Supporting feature enhancement initiatives, ensuring the integration of new, high-impact product improvements.</li> </ul>

## Go/No Go Recommendation (to start working on PRD Report):

Our research suggests that a need for a platform that helps students improve their social lives is necessary. Many students find it difficult to stay in touch with the people they meet, even though most of them actively look for opportunities to connect through clubs, campus events, or interest-based activities. Research indicates that strong social ties directly impact students' academic performance, engagement, and well-being. Furthermore, 60% of students prefer to meet people through shared activities over planned networking events, and part-time students (TAs, RAs, and campus employees) frequently feel alone due to conflicting schedules. These results highlight the clear need for a simple social media platform aimed at colleges that encourages communication and connections among students.

Because UniCircle is exclusive to NEU students, it creates a secure and interesting environment free from distractions and spam, which sets it apart from other solutions. It brings everything together: event discovery, interest-based matchmaking, and socializing through study groups, casual meetups, and drop-in activities. Unlike other platforms, UniCircle helps students reconnect after meeting, ensuring that first encounters turn into lasting friendships.

The business model is based on real trends from platforms like Snapchat, Meetup, and Discord, where about 30% of users opt for premium features. According to our survey, 32% of students would pay for benefits like advanced engagement tools, priority matchmaking, and invitation-only events. Additional revenue streams, such as local business sponsorships, brand partnerships, and event promotions, ensure UniCircle's long-term financial sustainability.

UniCircle is a go because of its robust, distinctive value proposition, high student demand and potential to capture a larger market by expanding into other universities across the United States. It has the power to change how students interact, enhancing the social and engaging aspects of student life and campus life.

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# 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

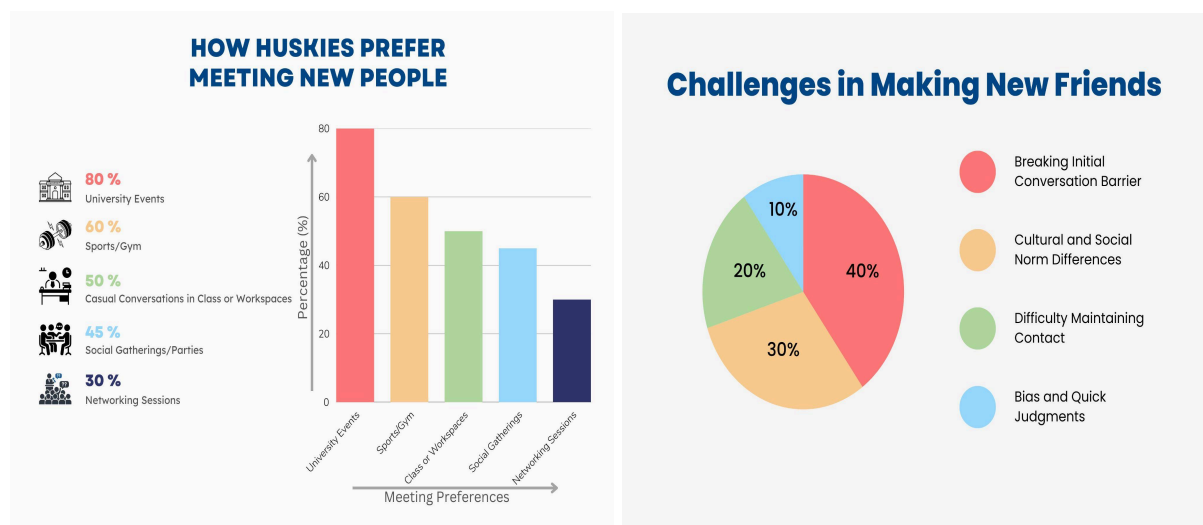


Figure 2: Social Interaction Preferences and Challenges Among Huskies

### 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.