

College Student Needs and Pain Points with Fitness Applications

For our final project, we wanted to understand the current landscape of fitness applications used by college students and determine what improvements could be made. In order to obtain a thorough grasp of the landscape we conducted four interviews with U of M students. We wanted to make sure we were voicing a diverse range of perspectives, so we interviewed individuals who differed in gender, year, number of days exercised in a week, and types of exercises. In these interviews, we had four main categories of questions we were targeting: exercise experience, exercise motivation, exercise challenges, and exercise organizations and applications. From there, we organized all the information and identified our two main user needs—students want a variety of workouts and students want a digital platform that will allow them to plan workouts efficiently at a reasonable cost—and breakpoints—students find it difficult to stay motivated and students struggle with effectively planning a workout.

Our first participant's need for variety across their workouts is something we noticed across the board in all four interviews. The first thing we noticed was that students really value human interaction when approaching a workout, whether it be by working out with someone or just talking to individuals to get their advice. We also found that every student we interviewed did at least two different types of workouts, with the main ones being IM sports, cardio, and lifting. IM sports have emerged as a trend that could provide valuable insights into students' motivations for participating. For example, participant four already shared that “IM was more organized, had a set schedule of 1-2 games per week,” which inspired questions that led us to our first break point of students struggling with effectively planning a workout.

We found that the students who are successfully working out multiple times a week like to have a set workout schedule, exercises, and sessions. Those who were struggling were finding it difficult to maintain that set routine because they felt as if they lacked time and prioritized other tasks. These users also mentioned a lack of motivation, leading to our second major break point of students struggling to stay motivated. Although these students had the initial motivation of exercising to stay healthy and have fun, their tools of music, social media posts, friends, and strong emotions weren't enough to keep them consistent. The individuals struggle with staying motivated if their mood changed or just started working out. What we also learned though, is that these same individuals have had success working out in the past by maintaining a set schedule, because they were able to go to the gym at similar times and didn't have to face the extra demotivating factor of not knowing if the gym will be busy, leading to a lack of equipment availability.

With all of this previous information, we were able to determine our last major user need of wanting a low-cost digital platform where they will be able to plan workouts efficiently. We found that users currently utilize a multitude of online tracking applications—Google Calendar, calorie trackers, excel, notes app, and Strong—to plan their workouts. Our interviewees had differing opinions on wearable technology as a method of tracking due to the bulkiness, and we found that they preferred having something that could be directly integrated into their phones, leading to the conversation of a digital platform. With digital platforms, students emphasized the importance of low cost and the ability to have all the information they needed in one place. The interviewees identified the key features of easily editable workouts, exercise animation, reminders, and creating a workout plan. These features allowed them to plan more effective workouts and stay consistent with their routine.

By conducting our user interviews, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of what the fitness application scene looks for college students and what it is they value when it comes to working out. Now that we have an understanding of our user needs and their current breakpoints, we will proceed

with beginning to think of what our potential path for improvement will be.