SETREADY.

PLAN EASY. PLAY HARD.

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Overview

On many college campuses and high schools, many students don’t take advantage of opportunities that their schools and peers provide to go out, be active, and healthier individuals. Many times finding organizing group activities and checking recreation spots availability is too much of a hassle in a busy schedule. This is in part due to the way current communication methods are used. Calling is inconvenient and too formal for many. Plans made through texting and Facebook are often seen as not being set in stone. We aim to create a mobile application service that allows people to quickly make and modify plans with various groups, friends, or network, reserve a field/court and check for its availability all through the use of a user-friendly mobile application that is tailored just for active events first on the UMCP campus for its students and faculty for now.

Review of Past Work

There are many current methods for organizing group activities. Facebook, email, texting and phone calls show to be the most popular ones and allow people to communicate with each other for group activities to be organized. The problem is that people have been conditioned through the use of each method of communication to view them as tools that serve specific purposes.

Texting is seen as being very informal, so there is often no urgency to reply. Some people also don’t like the hassle of sending mass texts to get something organized, as the text “threads” will often grow to a cumbersome length as more and more people reply. On the other hand phone calls are seen as a more formal way of communication not making it very intuitive or expected if a pick-up game on the fly is to be organized. Although, a one to one audio connection that the phone provides proves to be very effective, it turns out to be a tedious nightmare if 10+ attendees need to be contacted.

According to Westlake students find Facebook to be effective when promoting performances, parties, and political causes within their social networks [1]. However, Facebook event creation fails when it comes to creating sport team gatherings, games, outdoor activities on the run. This is mainly due to the fact that Facebook’s event feature is too hard to spot and requires internet connection and the will to be checking your events on a regular basis instead. Even if the event gets pushed on your phone, the user will just think of it as one more invite about some random event from one of your hundreds of friends; not very appealing.

Participants:

Being fit is important to certain college students. For that reason, they continue to exercise by engaging in cardiovascular simulating activities and also going to the gym. It is also a popular option for them to commit to something like organized soccer intermurals activity levels. Because they place emphasis on the effective use of time due to the academic demands of their schedule, pick-up games are considered too inconsistent for their tastes.

Overall, college students are generally less active following high school because it is radically more
difficult than they expected to find recreational sports. School sponsored sporting leagues are not well advertised; the school website’s poor design does not help much either. These programs seem to spread through word of mouth more than anything. Also, if you can’t construct a team with a group of friends, it becomes uncomfortable to join a random team.

Largely inactive college students attribute their decision not to play sports to more than just lack of interest or time. Intermurals, though a popular option for college students, is not always accommodating to the respective schedules of each individual student. Some students are inactivity because there is no network to continue playing unique sports. In other words, there are no regular leagues for less common sports like softball, squash, or hockey. Inactive students also often explain that they need motivation or invitation from external sources to be more comfortable with the idea of playing sports again.

Though our application would not target coaches specifically, they are an interesting study because they are constantly managing and creating sporting events. There are an inordinate amount of similarities in the experiences of coaches. First, they observed that email seems to work well though they are working with the more responsive parents of the team members. However, it was not effective for last minute changes. They seemed to notice that high school students around 15-16 years old seem to be most vulnerable to change in their activity levels. And lastly, they find that transportation for a select few people is always an issue.

As parent with two children (a 19 year old boy and 21 year old girl) and the head of a high school in DC, Tim Emerson was able to offer a fundamentally different perspective on student activity. In his school, he sees there being a distinct group with no interest in playing sports. This group played sports in the past due almost exclusively to social reasons. Accordingly, they later turn to running for a healthy life style and would not really be impacted by an event creation app. He proceeds though to say that there is another substantially larger group that no longer can keep up with the competitiveness in sports at a higher age and get into the habit of replacing sports with other more leisurely activities. It is then very difficult to get back into sports. For example, he even predicted that his very active son may eventually unnecessarily stop sports all together because he doesn’t enjoy running or other individual forms of exercise.

Being the focus of the application, it was crucial to interview several high school students. They mentioned that when available during in-school recess and breaks, everyone, including nonathletic kids, seemed to enjoy playing pick-up games. They also discussed the issues with communication and the difficulty acquiring the minimum amount of people needed to have an enjoyable game. Overall, it was interesting to discover that there was a prevalent sentiment among students that they would continue playing sports in college. Also, to underscore their desire for ongoing activity levels, the prospect of playing with strangers in a new environment like the first year at a new university did not seem bothersome. They did express however that if there is a strong dynamic in a group, students would want to have access to them for future games.

Results of the inquiry

The Coaches and Parents provided insight on the logistical demands and requests for our application. Whereas older high school students interviewed capture the perspective of young
individuals when viewing outdoor play, without all the constraints that college students experience. At the core of our user base is college students interested in being active. All parties seemed interested in an application to quickly set up organized events quickly and well defined, especially when looking at the current forms of communication.

An interesting conclusion we found in the interviews is the motivation behind working out and being active. For both high school students and in college, the desire to workout in any way possible is important. This can stem from cultural pressures to personal enjoyment, but the desire to be fit and healthy is a major goal in our target audience. Although many have busy schedules, our audience still does devote time to activity. Major reasons behind not playing outside are primarily the issue of the logistical obstacles associated when trying to plan organized activity. Incentives for play may not be our priority for this age group of college students.

We found that both high school students and college students recognize a couple pitfalls with current organized activities as well as the process of organizing events. With regards to current forms of activity like organized sports, uneven teams due to an unbalanced skew of skill can turn a lot of people off. This is the reality of serious sports teams and even in some inter-mural sports teams from the perspective of someone that simply wants to play for fun. They want to find places where skill-level is more evened out. In terms of organizing events, many of our interviewers have tried to organize events in the mediums we had predicted: Facebook, e-mails, texting, and calling. All four methods had issues in their own right. Both the coaches and parents find that events change, and that adapting to these changes is one of the hardest things to do. If a field is booked or weather prevents play, the organizer’s role of informing the team becomes that much of a mess. One of the college students interviewed had suggested the ability to find out field conditions and availability, a possible solution to this problem so organizers can make better decisions earlier and in fewer steps.

The common organizational features established by current social networking sites such as the ability to group friends and then reuse those groups for future events, the ability to accept or reject events invited to, and to see the current list of RSVP, all are standards when thinking about using technology to set up events. All participants were interested in GPS capabilities when they were told this was a mobile app, although they didn’t exactly specify how it would be implemented. Notifications for current accepted event changes were also a common feature many suggested as well.

Tasks

**EASY** The simplest task a user will be accomplishing is the ability invite friends, groups of friends, or an entire network to a game or event they are planning. This essentially boils down to the user taking his idea of an event and sharing that with others with the mediums currently available to him/her.
MEDIUM A user might need to check whether or not a given field is available, or if the gym is crowded. This applies to all public fields under the school such as tennis fields basketball courts and others. The information of the availability public fields is not readily available online. It requires a very inconvenient and frustrating call to the school or a walk in request to find that information. With the given time constraints of the users and their schedules, this is another obstacle in their active lives.

HARD Last minute changes in an event is both a logistical nightmare for both the creator and the participants. Event cancellation or event time changes are very likely to occur due to weather conditions or due to the availability of campus fields and facilities. Creators of events must notify all participants and also receive feedback of acknowledgement from each one, which is very difficult considering the current forms of notifications available to the creator.

APPLICATION SOLUTION
The purpose of the application is to aid users in making the best informed decisions in how they plan and structure group physical activities. This includes finding updated and relevant information on available play-spaces, connecting with a scalable number of other users, effectively customize, modify, and push out new events, and allowing users to easily search for relevant active opportunities available around campus at any certain time.

Easy solution
Our solution is a mobile application downloaded by the user on their smart phone. Notifications that come through the app will appear as a unique type of visual and optionally audible notification on the user’s phone. The feature of distinguishing opportunities for activity apart from just another phone message is partly the reason why the user would want to download the application. When a user receives a message, he will be able to quickly check the time, location, and type of event without having to repeatedly ask the original sender for more information.

Medium Solution
By accessing data from the school, we will be able to provide users with the ability to find an open field to play on without having to spend time wandering around campus. We will also be able to inform students of when fields are closed. Currently, some information can be found on the CRS website, but the site is difficult to navigate, has broken links, and does not present information in an intelligent way. Furthermore the application will update in real-time updating the availability status of a field or court right when CRS updates it, prompting participants to go ahead and make a reservation on the fly.

Hard Solution
The application can handle last minute changes and notifications. In this case the application will provide information to all participants given the state of each event and they will be able to make last
minute plans confident that everything will be ready to go and set up by the time they get to their event destination. By knowing the approximate number of people in the gym, it will allow students to go at a time when they can get the amount of privacy and space they want, hopefully encouraging more people to work out. Also, if there is another user of the app with a preexisting event at that time, then it will prevent the other user from scheduling an event there. In situations where it will not be possible to regulate activity levels at certain location, like an event scheduled at a public park, the app will provide statistics based on past trends for that location at a comparable time and day.

One other task we had suggested specifically with regards to the GPS function is the ability to find approximate time it takes to travel from the user’s current position to the current designated location for the event to occur. This would allow peace of mind for some users both walking bound and vehicle bound to make educated decisions on when to leave their home to go to a marked event in a timely fashion. We may be able to account for walking shortcuts around campus, data which is already stored by the school.

Communication and chatter related to an event is a natural feature established by social networking sites, we can possibly implement a running thread related to any one event, but only be shown on the screen if the user wants to access it for compactness and screen real estate.
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Bibliography