

Beyond the Noticeboard: Rethinking How Students Participate on Campus

KID: 20260203



Campuses are full of opportunities, but information about them is scattered across WhatsApp groups, Instagram pages, emails, posters and word of mouth. Students who are new, or who sit outside the right circles, often miss out entirely. Through interviews with club heads and a student survey, I have been exploring whether a campus-specific digital layer could bring opportunities, places and communities into one view. What began as an app idea has turned into a research question about how students discover activities, participate in them, and stay involved afterwards.

There are hundreds of opportunities on a campus, be it in the form of clubs, workshops, competitions, talks, sports or informal communities. But discovering the right one is often more difficult than organizing it in the first place. Information is spread across WhatsApp and Instagram, posters, emails, and personal contacts. For some students, especially those who are new to a campus or have not yet found their own circle, an opportunity can easily be missed simply because they never hear about it.

I first noticed this during my B.Tech. I was involved in different clubs and activities, and I also had the opportunity to observe how similar activities were organised in other colleges. I noticed that participation often depended on something as simple as being in the right group at the right time. During my M.Tech, I started looking at this more closely by talking to club heads and students, conducting interviews, and carrying out a student survey. These conversations made me think beyond just event discovery. I began wondering whether a digital platform could help students discover opportunities, stay involved, and at the same time make it easier for them to navigate the campus and find their place within its communities.

Origin of the idea

The idea started out simply enough: to make the discovery of campus life less of a chore. There was a pattern in campus life that I began noticing during my B.Tech years. Some activities were widely known, while others remained within a small circle. If an aspiring entrepreneur was not aware of such opportunities, they might let a workshop pass them by. A student could be entirely unaware of a competition until it was too late to register, or a photography enthusiast might never know that a community existed. These experiences made me realize how much participation can depend on information reaching the right people.

I set out to look at the problem more closely and spoke with club heads and other students, which put it in a new light. At first, my focus was on the events themselves, but over time I saw an event as merely one stop on a longer journey.

Consider a student who discovers a workshop, attends it, meets like-minded people, joins their community and eventually contributes by organizing something of their own. I began to see this as a journey:

Discover → Participate → Connect → Continue → Contribute

Surrounded by opportunities, yet unable to find them

Most campuses already generate many opportunities. There are technical workshops, cultural activities, sports, competitions, talks and club meetings.

Today, different activities use different channels. One club may post on Instagram. Another may rely on WhatsApp. A department may send an email, while an informal activity may spread entirely through friends. This works reasonably well for students who are already connected to the right groups. It can be much harder for someone who has just joined a campus or has interests outside their existing social circle. A student can therefore be surrounded by opportunities without knowing that they exist. Figure 1 shows how information spreads across these channels and where opportunities get lost.

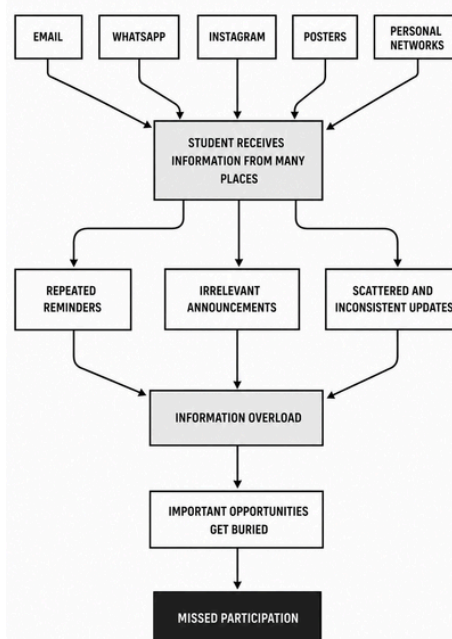


Figure 1. From Fragmented Information to Missed Participation

Campus opportunities reach students through multiple channels, creating repeated reminders, irrelevant announcements and scattered updates. As information accumulates, important opportunities can become difficult to identify.

The platform I am exploring brings these opportunities together based on what may be relevant to a student, rather than requiring the student to know where each piece of information is posted.

The campus beyond the buildings

As I thought more about how students experience a campus, I began thinking about the physical environment as well. A student may know that a laboratory, department or facility exists but still have difficulty finding it or understanding what happens there.

Conventional maps are useful for locating a campus and its major buildings. Inside a large campus, however, students may need more specific information about routes, facilities and places relevant to their daily activities.

This led me to explore a campus-specific guide that treats locations as more than points on a map. A place could be connected to the activities, facilities and communities associated with it. Figure 2 shows how such a layer would sit between the physical campus and the student.

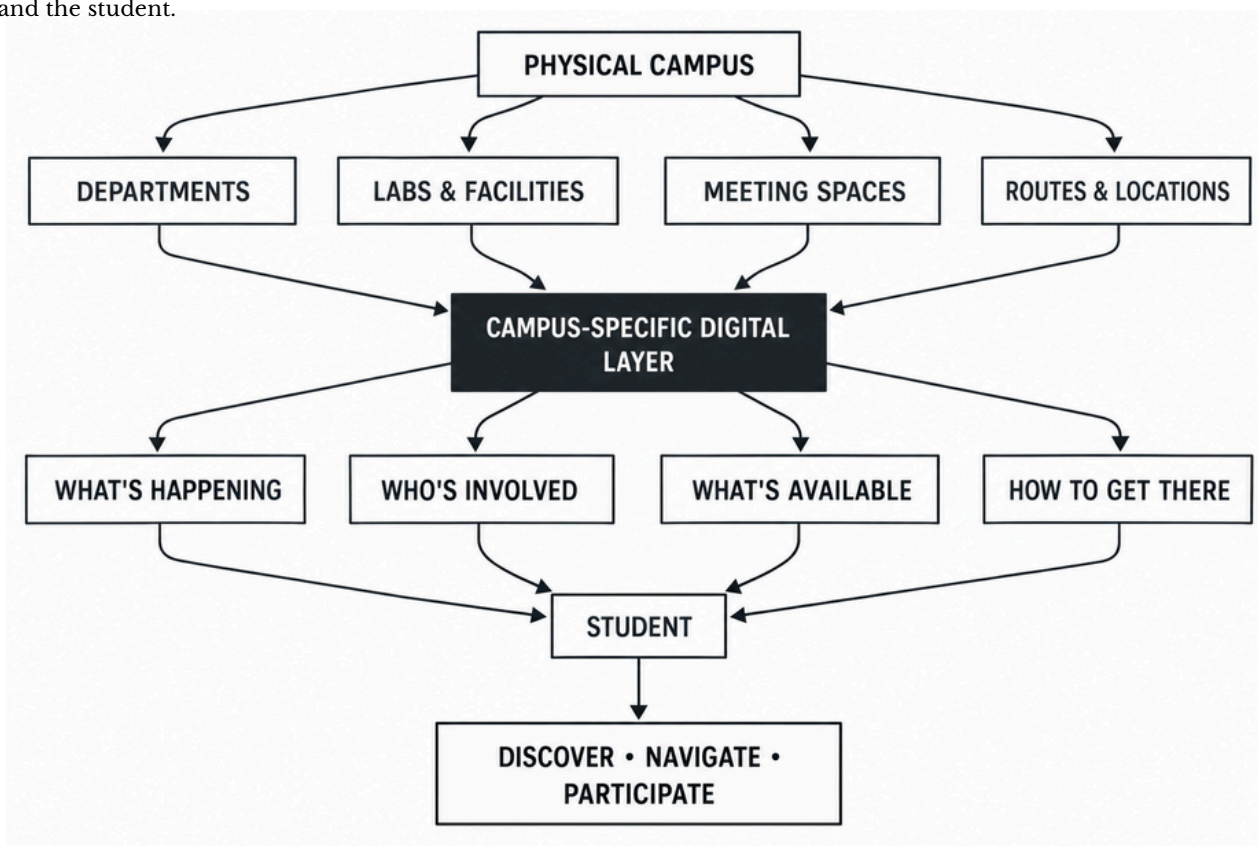


Figure 2. Connecting the Physical and Digital Campus

The proposed campus-specific digital layer connects physical locations with information about activities, facilities and communities, helping students understand what is happening around them, where it is happening and how they can participate.

My experience with clubs raised another question: **What makes a student move from attending an activity to becoming part of a community?**

Students arrive on campus with different social networks. Some find groups quickly. Others take longer. A student may enjoy a club event but still not know how to become more involved. Someone interested in a particular subject may want to meet others with the same interest but not know where to begin.

The platform could help students understand what a community does, what interests it is built around and how someone can participate. It would not be about forcing interaction. Instead, it would make potentially relevant communities easier to discover.

What happens after the event?

Another question emerged as the idea developed: **What happens when an event ends?**

An event has a beginning and an end. A useful connection does not necessarily have to.

A student might meet someone during a workshop and never interact with them again. Someone interested in research might want to speak with a senior student but hesitate to approach a stranger. A participant may want to continue learning about a topic but not know whom to contact.

I began exploring whether the platform could support more structured interactions. Instead of sending an open-ended networking request, a student could indicate that they are looking for a short conversation around a particular topic, while another member of the community could indicate their willingness to help. Whether students would use such a system remains an open research question. That is something I need to test rather than assume.

Can the campus extend beyond its boundaries?

The same problem also appears between institutions. Students already participate in hackathons, competitions, workshops, conferences and cultural events organized by other colleges.

Discovering these opportunities often depends on following the right organization or knowing someone there. This raises the possibility of cross-college opportunity discovery. A student interested in entrepreneurship could discover a relevant event at another institution, while organizers could potentially reach students beyond their own campus.

But several questions remain. Would students travel for opportunities they discover this way? Would organizers benefit from reaching students from other institutions?

Designing for behavior, not just features

One of the biggest lessons from developing this idea is that useful features do not automatically create a useful product. It is easy to build an event listing, map, community directory or messaging system. The difficult part is understanding whether students will use them.

It is a cycle that goes something like this:

Places → Opportunities → Participation → People → Communities → New Opportunities

Figure 3 shows this cycle.

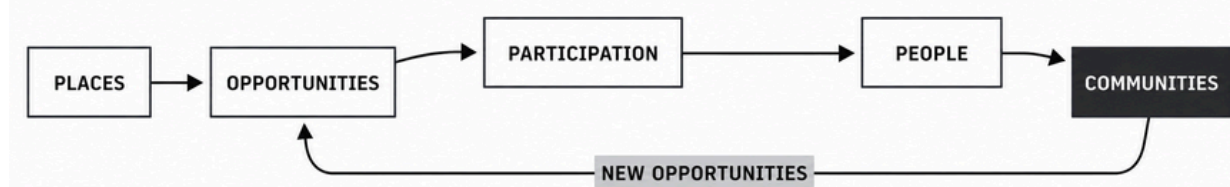


Figure 3. A Connected Campus Participation Cycle

The proposed framework views campus participation as a continuing cycle in which places create opportunities, opportunities encourage participation, and participation brings people and communities together, potentially leading to new opportunities.

For now, I find myself with more questions than I do answers. One has to think why a student would opt for another platform given their dependence on WhatsApp and Instagram. Are clubs prepared to put in the work to keep up an additional channel? And as for the students, will they be inclined to engage with opportunities beyond their usual circle or stick to the communities they are familiar with? The mere act of constructing a platform is no answer to that.

So my aim in the coming phase is to put these notions to the test with the campus community and see how the platform is used by both students and clubs. There is a need to keep refining things, to separate what truly has value from what might seem useful on paper but does little to alter student behavior. In a way, an observation has turned into the essence of my research: in what manner can we open up the campus? I do not view a campus as just its classrooms and buildings; it is also the people's communities and the chance encounters that define the experience of being a student there. I am looking to see if a digital medium can be of service in uniting some of this without diminishing what gives campus life its meaning.

This has pushed my research beyond technology and entrepreneurship and towards questions of behavior. How do students discover activities? What makes them participate? Why do some return while others attend only once? What prevents someone from approaching a new community?

A platform can be technically well designed and still fail if it does not fit the way students behave.

From an app idea to a research question

An app idea has gradually become a research question. As the various elements of the project have started to come together, a pattern has emerged. An event takes place at a location, and a student sees it as an opportunity. Participation brings people together. Some may become part of a community, which in turn can create further opportunities.

This is about more than churning out yet another app. What I want to do is examine a new approach to the digital campus, one that allows students to get their bearings, become involved and put them in contact with people and communities they may never have otherwise found.

[1] **Mr Abhiram Ramachandran**
MTech Student, Techno-Entrepreneurship
Department of Entrepreneurship &
Management