



March 2023

Diversity in Movement: Expanding Access at Sport & Rec



Introduction

As a part of the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, Sport & Rec provides physical activity and sports programs for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members at the University of Toronto. Sport & Rec has partnered with the Innovation Hub to understand the needs and perspectives of students who are not currently engaged in Sport & Rec spaces, and programs.

Sport & Rec is interested in knowing how to make its spaces and programming more accessible and inclusive. With a particular interest in the needs of students with disabilities and those from equity-deserving populations, Sport & Rec is committed to designing spaces and services that better meet a more diverse set of student needs. We hope that the insights from this research will help the Sport & Rec team co-create future programs and service offerings that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

Methods



At the Innovation Hub, **we strive to understand students' experiences, as told to us through their stories, and allow that understanding to inspire design.** We explore the 'problem space' in all its textures—moving beyond the what questions to the underlying whys and hows—rather than jumping to solutions. To achieve this, students describe their experiences to our student researchers in dialogue to ensure that we generate authentic data that helps us to understand their diverse perspectives and reveal unmet needs that will inspire future designs.

In the fall of 2022, we conducted **group feedback sessions and interviews with stakeholders speaking to 18 student leaders, faculty members, and staff members** about their experiences and perspectives on Sport & Rec programs, spaces, and services.

In the winter of 2023, we initiated a widespread call for participants for an event titled *Reimagine Access with Sport & Rec* across various communication channels. We received interest from 62 students.

The Innovation Hub then hosted **four open dialogue and interactive feedback sessions using empathetic and story-based methods for data collection** to learn about students' experiences with movement. We invited community members from various levels of study, disciplines, and divisions within U of T. A total of **27 students participated**, 25 students attended the group feedback sessions, and an additional 2 students participated via one-on-one interviews.

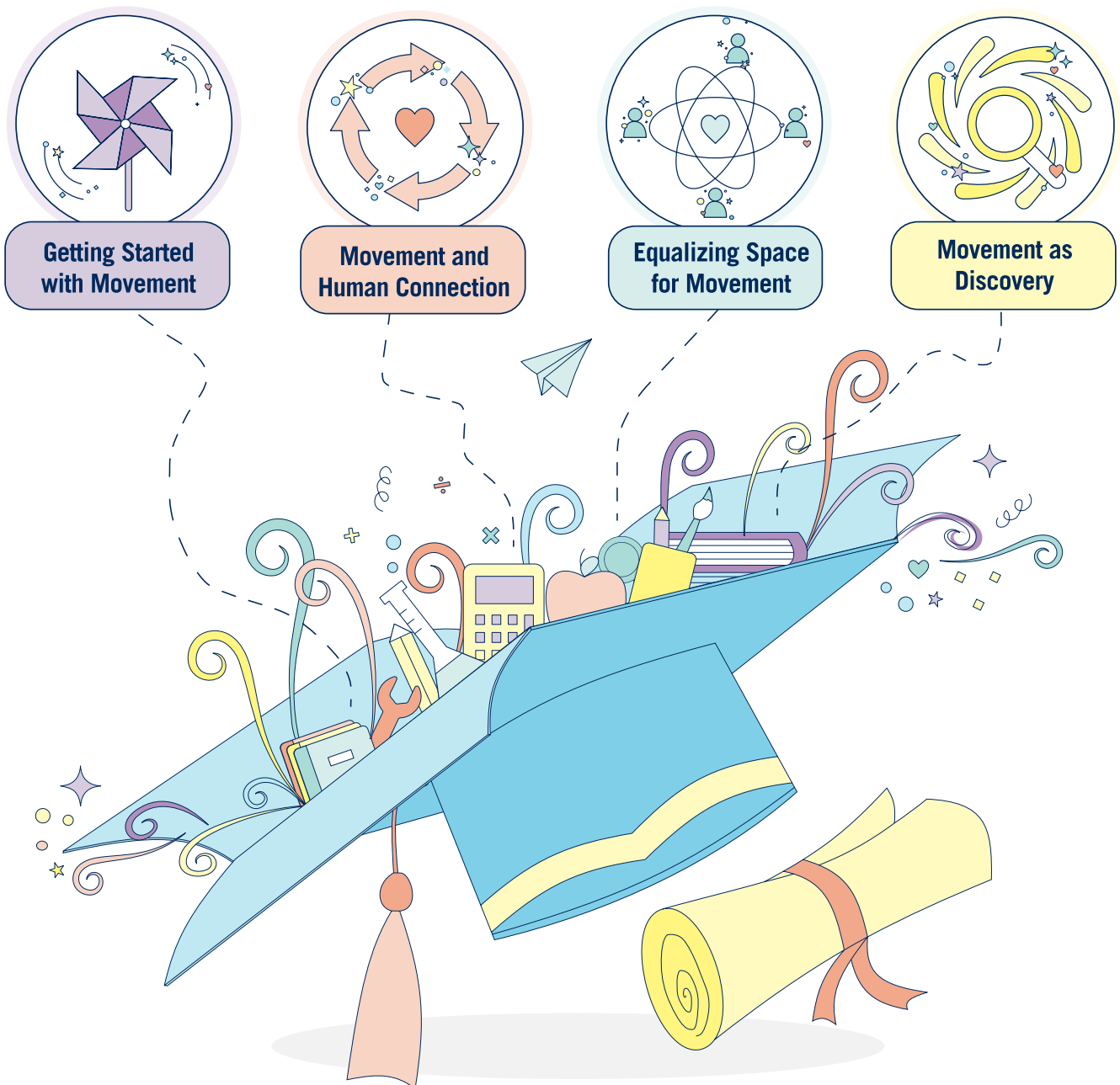
Our data set was transcribed and de-identified and included the interview and feedback session transcripts and short answer question responses. Additionally, the data was supplemented with the Innovation Hub's archive of data for further analysis.

In our examination of the data, we used grounded analytical techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the core needs students communicated and developed a vision based on our insights. We synthesized stories into personas to bring students' needs to life. We also developed design principles intended to serve as guidance for future steps in expanding access to Sport & Rec programs, spaces, and services.

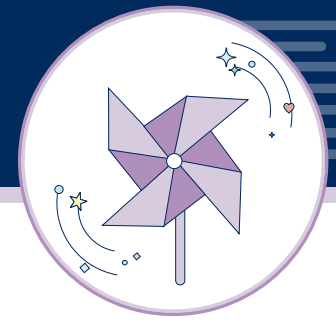
Our Findings

Vision: When students engage in movement, they find freedom beyond the academic box

We found that movement impacts every student's life in some way. When students engage in movement, they discover more about themselves beyond just their academics and studies at the university. Our data revealed that movement acts as an opportunity for discovery, human connection, and creates an equalizing space for students. We also learned that students experience barriers when deciding to pursue movement at the university, and much of our data addresses some of the specific challenges that they face, particularly when getting started. Of paramount importance across all stories was the idea that people need to feel safe when participating in physical activity, and when safety is created, students can find freedom in movement.



Getting Started With Movement



Access as an Expectation

Our data showed that physical **access to space is a bare minimum expectation for students**. When a space is inaccessible, it creates a barrier to participation. Student stories revealed that access issues such as inadequate wayfinding, and barriers to physical access give the impression that the programs inside these spaces are intended for people not living with disability.

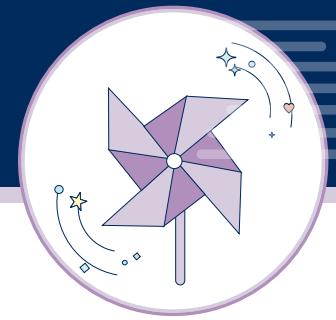
- A student expressed how having microphones or repeating the instructions a couple of times on the instructors' part in large gym classes improved their experience as someone who was hard of hearing.
- Students shared that features such as clear signage for navigating physical spaces and labels on how to use equipment makes movement more accessible for participation.
- A student with visual impairments had trouble reading the labels on equipment when working out in the Sport & Rec spaces.
- Students explained that when Varsity spaces and equipment were blocked off without their awareness, they felt frustration and felt that they were not prioritized. Students told us they want to know when they can use the spaces/equipment and feel welcome to access the physical spaces.
- A student who identifies as part of the Trans & Non-binary community expressed that the binary change rooms creates confusion in not knowing which room to access, leading them to feel excluded and out of place and not having a safe space to change.

Exercising Curiosity

Students told us that they feel curiosity to try and learn something new is a muscle that can be exercised. Our data revealed that **students shared an excitement to explore the different programs and activities at Sport & Rec**. When students exercise that "muscle" to learn, they told us they feel that engaging in movement fosters learning and development. Student stories demonstrated the different ways movement inspires students to be curious to discover more about themselves and find more of their potential.

- Student stories demonstrated that positive experiences with trying out a program at Sport & Rec for the first time increased their interest and willingness to explore other forms of movement. One student shared that they tried a program that encouraged students to learn a new sport, and after attending the class they were excited to try another activity at Sport & Rec.
- Students told us that seeing the various activities and programs at Sport & Rec inspired them to try something new. Many students explained how seeing programming highlighted on Sport & Rec social media got them curious and excited to try new programs and participate in new activities with their friends.

Getting Started With Movement



Welcome to be Myself

Our data revealed that when students feel welcomed to enter movement spaces, **they feel safe to be their authentic selves.** Students reported that they feel welcome to engage in movement when they don't feel pressured to modify parts of themselves to belong in physical activity spaces. When **students feel like they won't be judged for who they are or their skill levels, they feel respected and safe to participate in movement.**

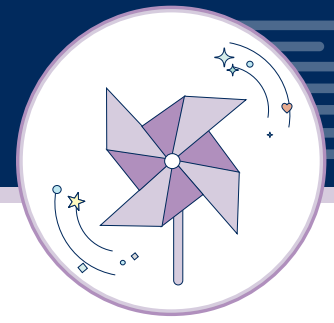
- Student stories demonstrated their desire to feel they can be themselves in Sport & Rec spaces. One student expressed their preference to wear modest clothing in Sport & Rec but doing so made them feel like they stood out uncomfortably in the space because of what others were wearing.
- Students shared that the more accessible beginner-level programming was, the more they became open to engaging in movement. The availability of beginner programming reduced intimidation and uncertainty for students when they decided to take part in new activities.
- One student shared that taking various movement classes on campus to learn the foundational skills of a sport allowed them to be more open to engaging in movement. They shared that entering beginner level courses allowed them to feel welcomed without judgment.
- Staff told us they experienced a sense of joy when they saw students showing up as themselves. Staff report feeling fulfillment when they see students begin feeling more comfortable in their own skin through programs such as Vent and Sweats and Women's Hours.
- Students told us that they feel vulnerable entering a space. One student who identifies as part of the Trans & Non-binary community shared that at times, they did not feel safe to show up as their authentic selves because they felt they were being judged by other users.

Flexibility in Choice

Student stories demonstrated that **having options to engage in programming that aligns with their varied schedules is important to them.** Students told us that **movement is an opportunity to take a much-needed break from their academics or other commitments.** However, they shared that when programs of interest conflicted with their schedules, they felt inconvenienced and prioritized academics or work over movement. Students appreciate opportunities to integrate activities they enjoy into their lives, yet they expressed that these activities need to be conveniently timed to coordinate with their school and work schedules.

- Some students feel that the timing of Sport & Rec programs conflicts with their academic schedule. A student expressed disappointment that they could no longer attend Women's Only hours after their class schedule changed, preventing them from engaging in a program they enjoyed.
- Students communicated frustration when scheduling issues meant that they could not participate in programs of interest. Students who commute to campus expressed that they wished programs had more options and flexibility.
- Some students expressed a need for flexibility in scheduling for cultural reasons. Students shared that they feel they need to prioritize cultural expectations over movement in their schedules. For instance, some students shared that they need to be home by a certain time and struggle to find programs offered at times when they can be home at a reasonable hour.

Getting Started With Movement



Information as an Invitation

Students shared that they **want to feel invited to use spaces or programs at Sport & Rec**. Student stories demonstrated that they need information about Sport & Rec that goes beyond the variety of offerings. Students explained that when they felt like information about movement programs was promoted to welcome users of all skill levels, and backgrounds, students felt represented. Students told us they want to feel like there are programs that can meet them where they are in interest and skill level to feel encouraged to try new spaces and programs

- Student told us that during exam season they saw a poster asking if they were stressed from cramming and offering a quick break. They described how they felt acknowledged, and really identified the poster as a much-needed invitation to take a break to engage with movement.
- Many students shared that they found out about programming and spaces through word of mouth. Student stories revealed that they tend to rely on the knowledge of their peers to learn about opportunities at Sport & Rec, rather than Sport & Rec communication itself. Students told us they feel frustrated and disappointed when they are unable to find out about interesting programs or find out about them too late.
- Staff and students shared the sentiment that although the website for Sport & Rec may serve as the official dashboard, it is not used or perceived as such. Although the website is the central hub for program information, many students expressed difficulty finding information through the Sport & Rec website. Unless a staff member sat down with a student to walk through the website, students told us that they needed to already have an idea of what they were looking for in order to find it.

Movement and Human Connection



Building Connections Through Movement

Students expressed that they see the vulnerability of participating in movement as an opportunity to share experiences and form connections with others. Students shared that they sometimes feel they are leaving their comfort zone by engaging in movement. The stories of students we spoke to demonstrated that **the vulnerability of engaging in movement is tolerable when students feel like they belong to a community working towards a shared goal**, no matter where they are in their movement journey.

- An international student who arrived into the semester late to U of T expressed a fear that their late arrival would make it difficult for them to make friends. This student shared how consistently playing squash at Sport & Rec helped them to make genuine connections with others and build positive relationships, and “they” especially appreciated these new relationships in contrast to those they met in class, because they were able to talk about a wider range of topics.
- Another student shared that they participated in the Learn to Skate program with their friends to learn a new skill they could bond over. Participating in the program provided a means for these friends to connect through movement and grow their friendship by participating in a fun activity together.
- One student shared how they used time at Sport & Rec as time to socialize with their friends. Participating in activities together provided this student and their friends with a way to get together and enjoy each other’s company over an activity they enjoy such as organized sports games or sometimes just a game where they made up their own rules and had fun.
- Another student shared how finding support in Women’s Only hours inspired them to move, and they expressed that simply being around other women participating in movement made them feel like everyone was working towards a common goal, providing a sense of support.

Courage within Community

Students expressed **the importance of feeling supported by others while engaging in movement**. When students participated in movement with supportive peers, they told us the support overpowered any intimidation associated with entering movement spaces. Students emphasized the importance of not feeling alone in their physical activity journey. Students shared that having support from others fueled their confidence and gave them strength to overcome any barriers and challenges that used to prevent them from engaging in movement.

- Students emphasized that moral support from Sport & Rec instructors helped them navigate programs for the first time and made them feel supported as beginners. For instance, one student who had limited previous physical activity experience shared how having a supportive instructor in a beginner’s dance drop-in helped them to feel comfortable and encouraged.
- Students shared how social support from their friends was helpful in encouraging them to participate in new activities. Students explained that attending programs and spaces with supportive and enthusiastic friends helped them ease into the space, build confidence, and encouraged them as they worked towards their goals together.
- One student shared that one particular equity-focused program was helpful at the beginning of their movement journey and helped them build the confidence to go to other programs. This student felt that being surrounded by others in the same demographic provided a sense of community, and they felt supported.

Movement and Human Connection



Individual Needs Matter

Students want **their unique needs to be recognized as an important component in how they participate in movement based on their individual experiences.** Students expressed that without recognition and accommodation for individual needs, they felt hindered in their ability to participate. Student stories revealed that when individual needs are validated, they feel supported to engage in movement.

- One student shared how an accommodating environment was integral to their positive experience as a beginner in a movement class. The student communicated that the availability of physical accommodations, combined with a lack of judgment surrounding the need for accommodations, made them feel welcome as someone new to movement.
- Another student shared how simple accommodations for their personal needs made Sport & Rec spaces more accessible to them. Instructors modifying, repeating, and clearly communicating instructions helped them feel more included as a student with ADHD. The recognition of needs greatly helped the student feel more welcome in the space and made the activity more equitable.
- An autistic student felt their needs were invalidated at times when engaging in movement when their needs and accommodations to participate in movement were dismissed and criticized by peers and instructors. The student shared that the invalidation of their concerns and needs prevented them from returning to Sport & Rec spaces and programming.

The Comparison Trap

Students shared that they **want to feel competent and capable when using Sport & Rec spaces and facilities.** Students explained that they felt movement spaces, like academic spaces, breed comparison and competition and as a result they found they were comparing themselves to other students. Students reported that self-doubt and fear of being judged took away their willingness to engage with a movement space or program. Students explained that they found themselves in a paradox of not feeling skilled enough to be in movement spaces but not feeling capable enough to develop skills on their own to get to a point where they felt good enough to participate.

- One student shared that they felt the need to stay in the slow lanes during drop-in swim sessions, and they felt as though the middle lanes were for swimmers that were more experienced than them. Staying in the slow lane made this student feel hindered in their ability to challenge themselves in the activity.
- Students shared that they want to feel validated at all points in their movement journey and that they need to feel secure in their movement abilities in order to participate in movement. One student mentioned that when they went to a gym during general hours, they felt watched, judged, and embarrassed when they could only lift the bar without weights. As a result, the student only feels comfortable using gym spaces at certain hours when fewer people are present.
- Student stories revealed that the pressure to look and act a certain way in movement spaces created hesitancy and fear about engaging in movement. One student shared that they were anxious about entering Sport & Rec spaces because they worried that they would be filmed and judged for not using the equipment or using proper form. Some students shared that they felt that they were being scrutinized by regular users and felt pressured to have an all-or-nothing mentality toward fitness.

Equalizing Space for Movement



Information for Impact

Our data revealed that students value consistency in the experience that is advertised in Sport & Rec programming and spaces. **Students shared that they want to feel well informed with information about what to expect from programs.** Students explained that they felt frustrated when they had difficulty finding accessible information about Sport & Rec programming and spaces. Students shared that they frequently felt caught off guard by events or circumstances that were not effectively communicated. Students told us that they don't want to feel blindsided by details that would otherwise deter them from engaging in the programming. **Students expressed a need for clear communication to help them navigate decisions about whether to participate.**

- A student told us that one specific program was advertised for all levels, but upon entering the space they found it was predominantly high-level athletes and there were no areas to differentiate participation by skill level. The student shared that they felt demotivated and less open to participating again in the future.
- Students explained that when drop-in programs were explicitly listed as being welcoming to all levels, they felt more comfortable going to have fun and fears about not being able to keep up with others were alleviated.
- Students reported frustration when they had made time to go to a movement space only to find out once they were there or mid-workout that it was blocked off for varsity athletes. One student shared that a strength and conditioning center was frequently overcrowded with lengthy lines, which made them feel worried about waiting in line for a long time and prevented them from going to the space.

Costs Create Barriers

Multiple students expressed their **desire to have an equal opportunity to participate in programming, regardless of their financial status.** Our data revealed that students **value the availability of a variety of affordable activities.** Students told us that they want to feel like they can engage with the U of T community and their interests, but that finances can pose a barrier to doing so. Students shared a need for programs that are **financially accessible** and provide opportunities to make engaging in movement a reality.

- Students shared positive experiences knowing the cost of renting skate equipment at an affordable price when trying the skating program for the first time.
- A student shared how having cost barriers to purchasing equipment and having resources that aren't available prevented them from engaging in a sport that would have benefited them in their movement journey.
- A student expressed how they were motivated to try new sports because of the lower cost barrier. They mentioned seeing a movement class priced at \$70 a semester and finding it "insanely cheap", seeing that the same price may only be enough for one or two classes elsewhere.

Equalizing Space for Movement



Low Stakes, High Rewards

Students told us **they value having the ability to choose the frequency at which they engage in movement based on their schedule and preferences.** Students expressed that including physical activity in their schedule without worrying about being penalized for missing sessions improves flexibility and alleviates stress. Students shared that removing scheduling concerns allows them to fully enjoy the benefits of incorporating movement into their routine as a stress reliever, not another source of stress.

- Students shared that they liked drop-in programs because they were low stakes, and they did not have to commit to attending every week. However, one student shared that when playing intramurals if there was low attendance or missing groups, they would be eliminated. The student felt that the elimination was punitive, and they told us it discouraged them.
- One student emphasized how important their academics were to them, and how they wanted to be able to engage in programming that respected their decision to prioritize academic demands. The student wished to engage in programming that fit with their academic workload and was understanding of those needs.

Peace in Predictability

Students shared that they **want the movement spaces and programs they go to to be predictable.** Our data revealed that when students know what to expect upon entering a movement space it helps them feel more informed and reassured that the space or program might work for them. When students have an understanding and expectation of the level of support and accommodation in a program or space beforehand, the likelihood they will engage is greater.

- One staff member emphasized that having worked with students with diverse needs, they recognize the importance for students to have a detailed understanding of what is involved in a Sport & Rec program when making the decision to participate.
- Some neurodivergent students expressed that having information about activities or spaces in advance, such as details about how stimulating the environment will be, what accommodations are available, and how the space is laid out, would help them make an informed decision about whether they will feel comfortable participating.
- One student who identifies as transgender expressed the importance of knowing whether gender-neutral facilities are available in spaces. They explained that knowing whether they will be able to comfortably change clothing played an important role in their decision to attend a space.

Movement as Discovery



Time for Me

Students shared that movement allowed them to reconnect with core parts of themselves beyond their role as a student. Students explained that engaging in movement allows them to ground themselves amidst the chaos and stress of being a student. Coming back to movement allowed the students we spoke with to have an **anchor to their identity when they connected with an activity that brought them joy**. Students explained that **movement helped them reconnect with a part of their identity, separate from their identity as a student**.

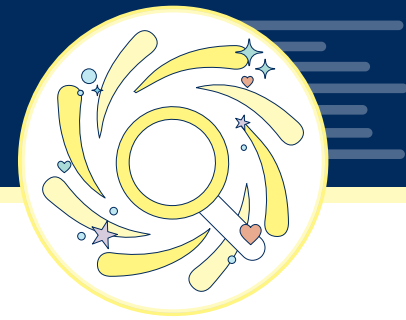
- Student stories revealed that intramural sports programs allow them to reconnect with an activity that was part of their lives prior to university. One student shared that they hadn't skated in a long time, over ten years, but engaging in a beginner program inspired them to come back and learn how to skate.
- Another student shared how intramurals gave them a chance to play in a team again without having to dedicate a large portion of their schedule to their sport. The student expressed how they valued the ability to have fun doing an activity they enjoy in a low-commitment environment.
- Another student shared that they were excited to try an intramural sport because they had played the sport previously when they were younger. The student said that they did not feel the most confident in their skill set, but they felt a lot of enthusiasm at the prospect of playing the sport again, so they decided to participate.

Going at My Own Pace

Our data revealed that **students feel empowered to engage in movement when they feel they could grow their skills at their own pace**. Students feel pressure in an academic environment to keep up with expectations and structures set out by others. Students shared when they could try new skills and levels of difficulty at their own pace, they felt comfortable working towards growing their movement skills. When students were able to do this, it allowed them to feel like they have a place where they are all equally appreciated, and their involvement is encouraged.

- Students shared that the availability of programming for a variety of skill levels, or options to engage at different levels of intensity, which helped them feel comfortable entering spaces at their given skill level.
- A student shared that they appreciated the option to participate in different lanes during drop-in swim sessions. As a beginner, the option to use the slow lane helped them comfortably build their skills without feeling intimidated by faster swimmers.
- Students expressed how the availability of beginner-centric programs helped them feel comfortable breaking into fitness spaces. These programs offered a space for them to feel supported by a group of people at a similar level.
- A student spoke about the growth and confidence to develop their skills to use Sport & Rec spaces. A student started working out during Women's Hours, then they felt inspired to shift and work out in the co-ed spaces

Movement as Discovery



Unlocking Potential

Our data revealed that when engaging in movement, **students felt fulfilled and inspired when the activity created space for challenge and growth.** Students expressed appreciation for Sport & Rec programs and spaces because they could break out of their comfort zones and explore their abilities. Students explained that **movement helps them discover and unlock their untapped potential when they exert effort and practice perseverance.** Even when an activity seems overwhelming, students said that they found an immense sense of fulfillment in facing physical challenges and achieving goals which helped them feel confident and empowered in other areas of their lives, including their academic pursuits.

- One student discussed participating in the Learn to Skate program to fulfill a long-standing desire to learn ice skating. While engaging in this program, the student felt confident in their ability to develop and expand their skills. The student noted that because this program was explicitly marketed as being designed for beginners, they were less apprehensive to participate.
- Another student shared a story of being self-conscious about entering a dance drop-in class, because they feared they would not be able to do all the movements or be unable to keep up with others in the class. The student found that participating in the class was a challenge that helped them feel good and increased their confidence.
- One stakeholder relayed the story of a student who took part in the Vent and Sweat program and described how the program helped the student repair their relationship with movement after suffering from an eating disorder. The focus on mental health in the program helped the student see movement as a form of self-care and they learned to practice self-acceptance.

Permission to Move

Student stories revealed that **engaging in movement provided a means for students to relieve tension and enrich their lives beyond the stress and pressure of their academic pursuits.** Students explained how they get bogged down by the obligations and expectations to perform in academia and told us that movement brings a spark of joy back into their lives by allowing them to be curious and explore their minds without fixed expectations or grades. Engaging in movement gives students time to sideline their daily obligations and enjoy the present moment.

- Students reflected on how rare the opportunity of having to really exert their body on a daily basis in their university context, and mentioned how participating in activities other than walking gave them the option to do something more physical and explore different ways they can move.
- One student reflected on the energizing role of movement in their life. Reflecting on their daily activities, the student found that they felt noticeably more energized and excited immediately before and right after engaging in movement.
- Many students shared that they use movement to improve their mental health. One student explicitly described how exerting energy through movement helps them reset their mind after a period of feeling stuck, especially as they engage in schoolwork.

Personas

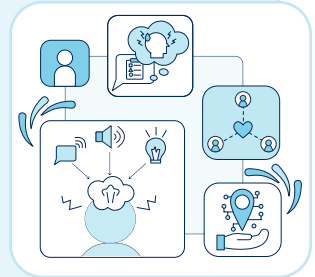
Personas are data-driven aggregates of experiences that students have shared with us. Personas are useful in understanding and contextualizing the needs and reflections of people as shared in interviews.

Erin (they/them)

I am an undergraduate student with a dual diagnosis of autism and ADHD. I have always struggled with participating in movement activities due to my neurodivergence. The bright lights, loud noises, and overstimulating sensory environments can be too much for me to handle, making it difficult for me to engage in physical activity. This, coupled with my motor difficulties, makes things like coordination and balance a bit challenging, so I fear that I won't be able to do movements 'properly.' I can feel self-conscious about how I move and worry about being judged by others. I have had instances where my neurodivergent needs were not taken seriously, and I felt belittled. The difficulty I've had in the past when asking for accommodations, has made me anxious about asking for help. I often feel like I need to sacrifice my comfort to participate in movement activities, which is a frustrating and limiting experience.

Despite my fears and concerns, I decided to attend a few classes at Sport & Rec. The small group setting felt more comfortable and beginner-friendly, but I still struggled to follow the instructions at times. I often missed what the instructor was saying and had to copy what the other students were doing. Some of the moves were also beyond what my body was capable of, which made me feel exposed and anxious that others were judging me.

It would have been helpful if the instructor had noted modifications for some of the moves, so I could feel more capable of participating. Additionally, having more information about available accommodations or sensory-friendly spaces to engage in movement would be amazing. The combination of the overstimulating environment and the mental barriers of feeling inadequate and exposed is taxing, and I want to feel like I can engage in physical activity without sacrificing my comfort or dignity.

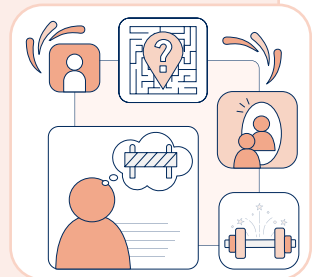


Ji-ho (she/her)

I am an undergraduate student who has struggled with body image and movement my entire life. As a plus-sized woman, entering movement spaces like the gym has always been intimidating for me. I've had so many negative experiences growing up where I was ridiculed for my appearance and performance in movement. I felt like I was always being judged and was never able to keep up with my peers who were "fitter" than me. Even the teachers would get irritated at me and would push me to move in ways that strained my body, it made me feel like they didn't respect my knowledge of my own body. I felt exposed for being different when other kids were staring at me, and it was hard to shake off that feeling even as an adult.

Despite all of this, I finally decided to try and make movement a part of my life again because I was curious about strength training and using equipment like weight machines. I was interested in using the facilities at U of T, but I was hesitant because I didn't know where to start. Finally, I worked up the courage to give it a try. When I walked into Goldring, it was an intimidating experience. The building was huge, and I had trouble finding the entrance. I didn't feel welcomed or acknowledged by the staff members, and as I began to work out, I felt like I was transported back to gym class, and everyone was giving me strange looks. I felt as if people were giving me looks and judging me based on my appearance. I was also hesitant to reach out to a trainer or staff member in case they too would not respect my limits and push me too far.

But the real blow came when I was told that the space was being closed for a scheduled practice session for Varsity athletes. It made me feel like I didn't belong, or that I wasn't good enough to use the space. I felt discouraged and wished that there had been better communication about when I could use the space to participate in movement programs.



Personas

Sam (he/him)

Before my transition, I was active in both solo and team activities like hockey and swimming. But once I started transitioning, I was worried I didn't fit in these spaces anymore, so I quit.

When I built up my confidence again, I only felt safe sticking to solo and private activities like outdoor running. But when I heard about trans friendly open swim hours at U of T I felt my excitement starting to come back to me. I was hoping that a good experience at this program would help me one day build the confidence back up to join hockey intramurals.

However, when I showed up, I was disappointed to find that due to communication issues many non-trans inclusive students had also come to these hours, and it was no longer the safe space I was looking for. As a trans man who hasn't yet had top surgery, I also find myself in a paradox with my physical health, emotional comfort, and safety. Wearing my binder while working out can cause significant damage to my ribs, but without it, I get gawked at and experience gender dysphoria. It's already hard enough to not draw attention to myself in male fitness spaces like change rooms, because I must go into a stall to change, unlike most cis men, and it just draws a brighter spotlight onto me.

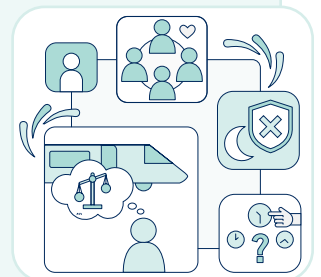
Going to the gym is already a bit of a mental hurdle for me, and I want to be able to do it without feeling like I'm being judged. I wish I could say this was just in my head, but I've seen people do double takes at me. I usually go to my local gym during late hours and come already changed to avoid other people. This is why I tend to avoid the facilities at the university, even when there's a lot of programming and equipment – I have to concurrently battle vulnerability and shame.



Farah (she/her)

I am a second-generation immigrant and commuter student struggling to balance extracurricular activities, academics, and parental expectations. Some of the programs I am interested in are held in the evenings. I do not feel safe commuting at night, and my parents also do not support me prioritizing physical activity over academics or safety, so I am unable to attend certain programs that genuinely interest me. As someone who wears a hijab, I'm also hesitant to use co-ed spaces out of fear that I may be stared at for looking different. I also want to feel comfortable showing up in these spaces as I have not had much experience with movement. It's important to me that I don't feel judged for how I look and move in space.

Discovering women's hours at Sport & Rec facilities was a game-changer for me. These spaces allow me to show up as myself without feeling self-conscious or unwelcome. I was so happy to be able to dress comfortably and use the space freely. I felt quite vulnerable entering a new movement space, so it was super inspiring to connect with and be around other women working towards their goals. However, something I find difficult is the backlash that women's hours get from other students. I sometimes see male students coming into women's hours and getting frustrated. This makes me uncomfortable as it makes me feel like I am exposed or as if I shouldn't be using the space, so there have been times when I've cut my workout short. While I understand the space is shared, I wish there was a clear signal for the beginning and end of women's hours so I can enter and leave the space more comfortably.



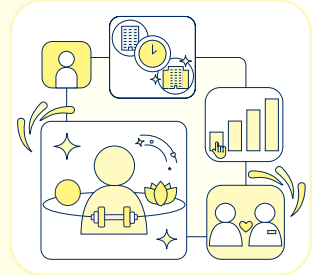
Personas

Amir (he/him)

I am a mature student who is returning to my undergraduate degree after some time away from school. Returning to U of T, I'm realizing just how much has changed. The athletic facilities look like state-of-the-art movement spaces and there are so many offerings for different types of movement classes.

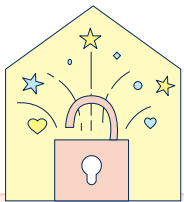
Looking at the different programs also made me realize my body has changed quite a bit since I was first studying at the university. I have some mobility issues and I'm not able to do things the way I used to. I'd like to integrate movement back into my life and make it more of a priority, finding activity outside of academics, but I don't know where to start. I'm not sure which programs are beginner friendly or fit my needs, and the idea of not being able to keep up with younger students and the instructor's pace makes me feel very self-conscious.

I decided that I should take a leap of faith and try one class. I was pleasantly surprised by how welcoming and friendly the instructor and fellow participants were. I let the instructor know that I might move at a different pace, and they were so understanding. I appreciated that they assured me that they would provide modified movements throughout, and asked if that would be helpful. I feel like my needs were respected and normal, and I wasn't singled out or ridiculed on account of them. Afterwards, I felt so relieved that I've decided to try other programs as well. I just hope that this welcoming experience is the standard, and not the exception.



Design Principles

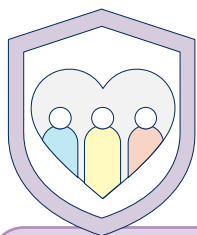
The principles presented here are guidelines for designing to meet people's needs. The principles suggest issues to keep in mind while prototyping solutions and offer criteria for refining and prioritizing design ideas.



START WITH ACCESS

Prioritize accessibility in everything. Ensure that physical spaces are accessible and barrier-free with appropriate wayfinding and that access challenges can be accommodated to encourage participation.

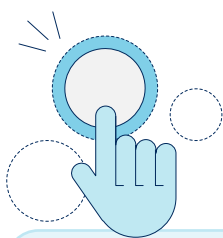
- For example, create readily available materials/guides that have detailed accessibility information about all spaces and programs.
- Use a comprehensive set of diverse student personas to evaluate programs, spaces, and services by asking: would this person's needs be met?
- Offer designated times for modified movement support with additional staff available to demonstrate adaptive options for movement.



WELCOME EVERYONE

Go to great lengths to ensure students feel safe to participate in programs or spaces as themselves, without modification, and there is no one "model" they need to fit. Promote a variety of programming options to create opportunities for students to participate in activities that best meet their needs.

- For example, ensure diversity in hiring and provide staff training that prioritizes welcoming students from all backgrounds, and ability levels.
- Provide accessibility statements with detailed information about what to expect for every program and space.
- Consider programs for students with neurodiversity in quieter, less stimulating environments.

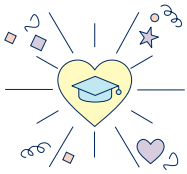


ONBOARD WITH OPTIONS

Create low-stakes, low-commitment opportunities for students to try Sport & Rec with bite-sized options. Design programs intended for students who have never participated and ensure additional caring and empathetic staff support these programs.

- For example, create a no-cost passport to movement or choose-your-own-adventure option where students can try different programs and spaces with others who have never participated before. Communicate the additional supports provided with these programs.
- Design marketing materials intended specifically for students who have never participated and ensure that these materials include information on how to find equity and access resources within Sport & Rec.
- Create opportunities for students considering participation to visit Sport & Rec spaces and have a brief individual consultation with a well-trained staff member who can ask questions about their needs and direct them to appropriate programs and spaces.

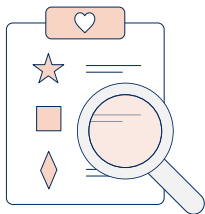
Design Principles



GIVE LIFE BEYOND LECTURES

Recognize and promote the need for students to engage in non-academic interests. Prioritize Sport & Rec as a space for students to let go of their academic stressors and have fun.

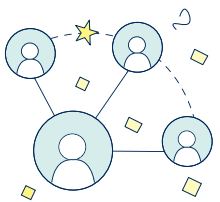
- For example, design programs as intentional spaces where students can vent their academic stresses and frustrations. Consider designing programs with a target audience (i.e. students writing a dissertation, first year students, etc.)
- Bring movement programs into academic spaces (i.e. designated times to lead a 5-minute movement break in common areas of busy academic buildings between classes)



SCHEDULE FOR ALL SCHEDULES

Provide students with a variety of opportunities to engage with Sport & Rec, giving students the choice to participate according to their schedules. Students are more inclined to participate in programming and spaces when there are opportunities to engage without straining their existing lifestyle

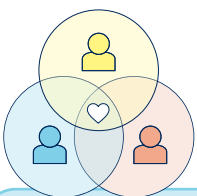
- For example, ensure variety in the times that programming runs and provide engagement opportunities that don't require a rigid time commitment.
- Consider piloting programs at extreme hours such as very early morning or very late night and observe if these times enable more students to participate.
- Partner with others outside Sport & Rec to offer family-friendly times for participation for students with children.



CURATE CONNECTIONS

Create opportunities for students to connect with each other through movement. Students may feel vulnerable engaging in movement and feel supported by connecting with students in a supportive setting.

- For example, provide small group-based settings for movement and help facilitate meaningful connection, especially for students just getting started.
- Ensure staff are trained to establish safe spaces in movement facilities by creating community ground rules and identifying when students need support before they ask.



BUILD COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Uncover opportunities for smaller groups within the larger Sport & Rec community so that students can find like-minded others and have a sense of finding smaller ponds in a big sea.

- For example, use social media campaigns and widescale communications to have students vote on ideas for the next program from a list of generated options, giving priority to creating safer spaces for equity-deserving groups.
- Bring movement activities into spaces that are already well known and safe to students who may have barriers to participation.

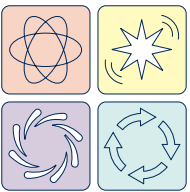
Design Principles



AGILITY WITH AFFORDABILITY

Ensure students of all financial circumstances feel welcome to participate in programming and spaces they are interested in. Establish programming and financial supports that make programs more accessible to students

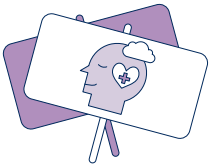
- For example, clearly communicate any relevant costs (program fee, rental prices) and provide options to rent or borrow equipment for different activities.
- Provide students with free trials for paid programming so they can see if they enjoy an activity before committing.



MOVEMENT IS PERSONAL

Recognize that students choose to move for different reasons. Allow options for both introverts and extroverts, ensure that variety in space options for movement are provided to address a wide variety of reasons why students choose to move.

- For example, seek opportunities to create spaces that are smaller and more intimate, or bring movement options into non-traditional spaces to address the needs of students who are more introverted or prefer a quieter environment.
- Train staff to connect with each student as they arrive in a movement space to determine their needs and offer options they may not be aware of.



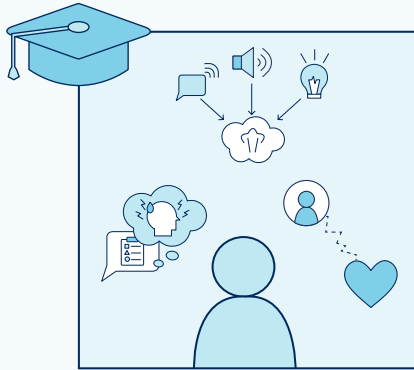
MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Actively promote the mental health benefits of movement to students. Create programs and spaces that intentionally support mental health. Design spaces and programs intentionally designed to encourage taking care of ones' mental health with movement.

- For example, partner with mental health experts on campus to incorporate concepts such as resilience, growth mindset, and stress reduction into movement programs.
- Create movement programs and spaces that encourage open dialogue between students about mental health topics.

Movement Stories

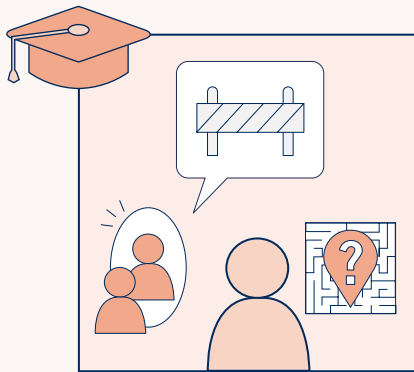
Here we show the identity stories of Erin, Ji-ho, Sam, Farah, and Amir, as they navigate their journey with movement before and after design principles have been applied to their experiences.



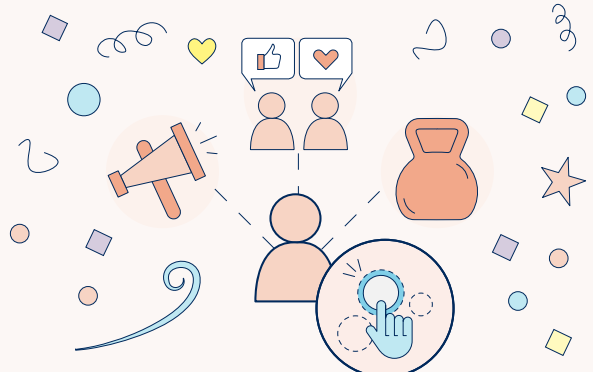
Erin is a student with autism and ADHD. They have had challenges in their movement journey asking for accommodations but hope to engage in physical activity without sacrificing comfort or dignity.



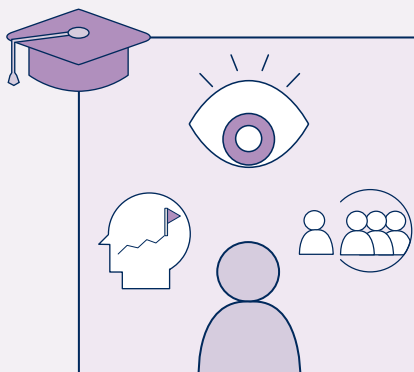
Erin knows they can expect to encounter understanding instructors who will recognize their accessibility needs in class which makes them feel more confident and accepted in movement spaces.



Ji-ho is a plus-sized woman who wants to integrate movement in their life and use Sport & Rec facilities, but has had negative experiences of not feeling welcome in movement spaces in the past.



Ji-ho is relieved to know that there are staff members who they can connect with at Sport and Rec facilities to learn how to use the equipment, which gives them hope that they can physically access even more Sport & Rec spaces.

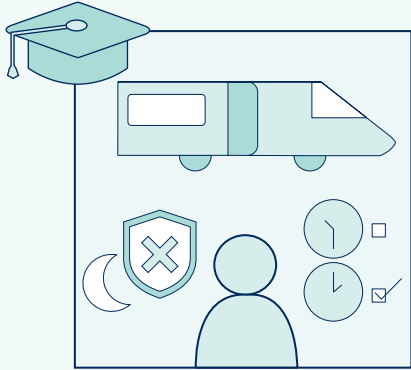


Sam is a transgender man with history participating in organized sport and individual movement but is hesitant to use the facilities in fear of being vulnerable and judged.



Sam is grateful to see gender-neutral change rooms and more options for drop-in programming and feels welcome to show up as their authentic self.

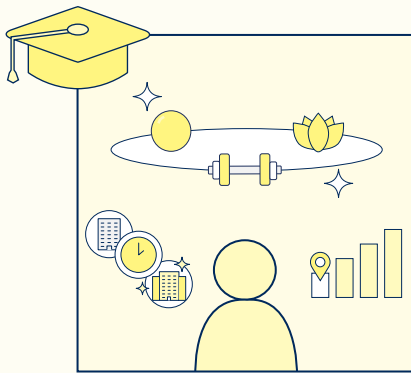
Movement Stories



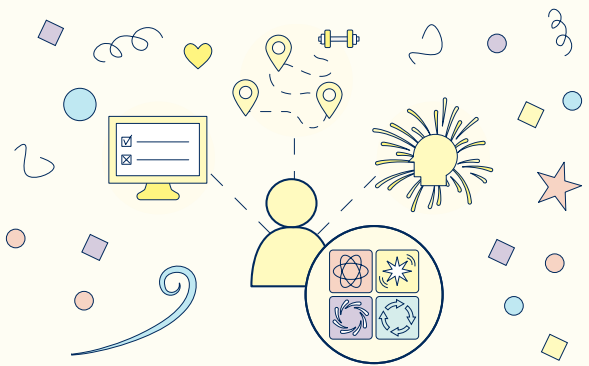
Farah is a second-generation immigrant commuter student who wears a hijab. They want to engage with movement but are worried that they will be judged or intrude in the wrong spaces due to their beginner skill level.



Farah feels comfortable and safe participating in movement spaces they had previously avoided through Women's Hours and similar programs.



Amir is a mature student who wants to integrate movement into his life but struggles to find the right movement program for him. He wants to feel confident that he will be welcomed without judgement.



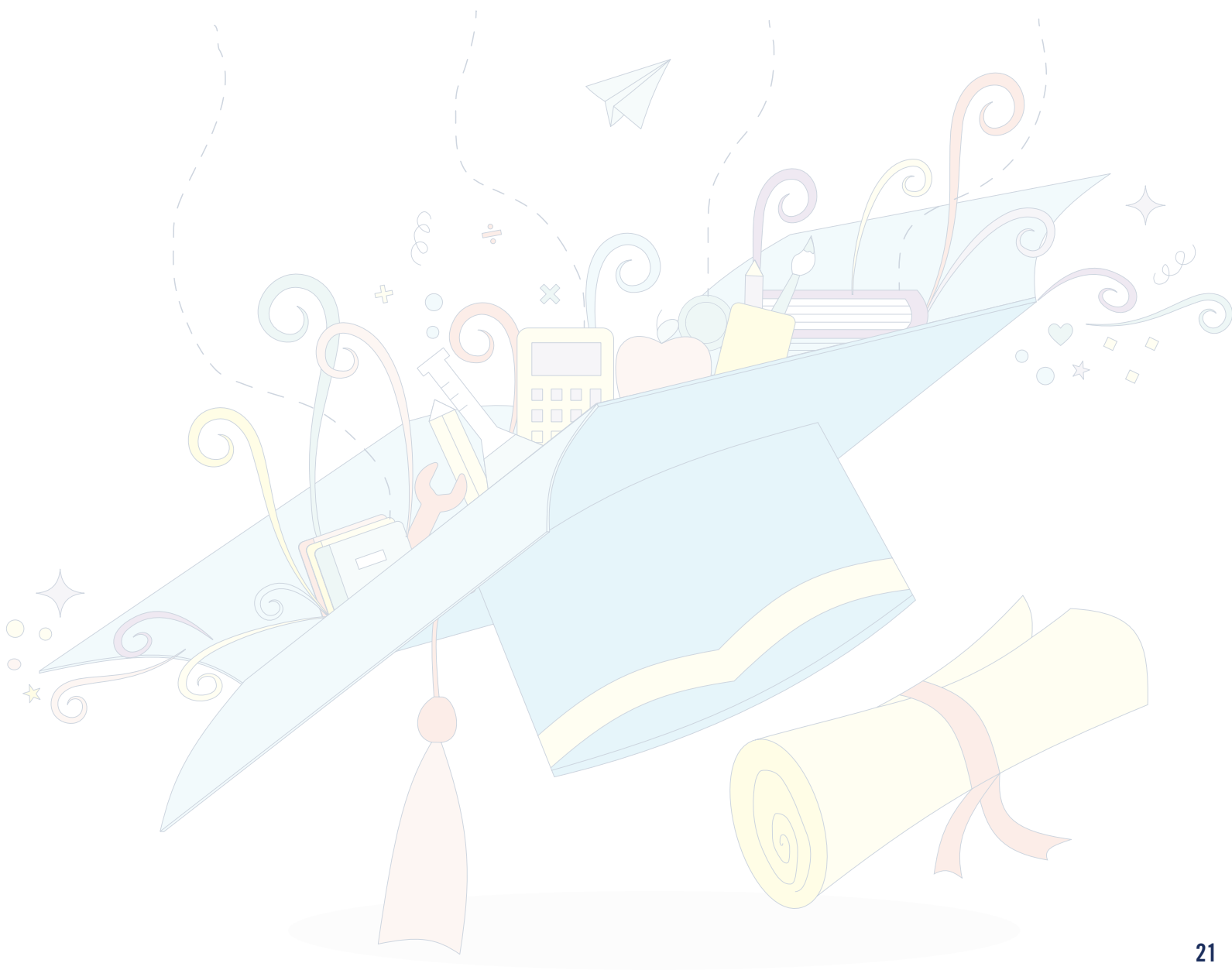
Amir can find classes with clear and detailed information on the website which made them feel excited to show up in movement spaces knowing what to expect and can participate at their own pace.

Conclusion & Next Steps

In conclusion, the expansion of access of Sport & Rec programs will need to accommodate the evolving needs of the growing community to meet the needs of present and future students who engage with Sport & Rec.

Movement impacts every student's life in some way. When students engage in movement, they discover more about who they are beyond their identity in an academic context. Our data revealed that movement helps with discovery, human connection, and creates an equalizing space for students. We learned that getting started with movement is a particular challenge for many students, especially those students from equity-deserving populations. Emotional safety is of primary importance to students when making decisions to participate in movement. **When students engage with movement, they find freedom beyond the academic box.**

The data and insights discussed in this report will support future program, space and service design at Sport & Rec to expand access to a more diverse range of students and continue to foster a community where all are welcome. We hope that the findings from this project will strengthen Sport & Rec's understanding of the needs of current and future users of the spaces.





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