

ESPORTS IN HIED

A “Getting Started” Checklist

Esports is quickly making inroads across college campuses—reshaping stereotypes about gaming and providing essential workforce skills for both student players and those playing supporting roles. Colleges and universities looking to start their own program, however, are struggling with where to begin. That’s where this checklist can help—providing you with what you need to know to start and maintain a successful esports program.



Esports in higher education: A real game changer

INTEREST IS SKYROCKETING.

475+

colleges and universities offer esports club programs, while another 150 and counting have varsity programs—up from just a handful in 2016.^{1,2}

557M

projected total viewership for esports’ by 2021. That’s more viewers than every other U.S. professional sports league.³

\$1.4B

projected total investment by brands in esports by 2021, representing 84% of total esports revenues.⁴

IT’S MORE THAN A GAME. ESPORTS IS DRIVING STUDENT SUCCESS.

Esports supports widespread participation.



97% of Teens Play Video Games⁵

Esports helps to prepare students for today’s diverse workforce as it tends to include students from different cultures, race, gender, geographies, etc.



Esports is associated with a wide variety of career pathways, including:

Game design theory, computer programming, S.T.E.A.M. (science, technology, engineering, art, and math), finance, marketing, graphic design, health and wellness, architecture, etc.

Players are being awarded sizable scholarships and cash prizes.



200+ **200+ colleges and universities** offer partial or full-ride scholarships. TESPA, a collegiate league, has awarded students more than **\$3 million** in tournament winnings since its inception in 2013.⁶

Esports is preparing students for the workplace.

Esports is:

- Highly collaborative—it develops workforce skills such as critical thinking and teamwork
- For non-players as well; including those involved in event planning, programming, shoutcasting, design, analytics, and management
- Technology-rich, giving students access to state-of-the-art technological tools and skills
- Leading to professions with high-earning potential such as game design theory, software engineering, etc.



Esports can improve the overall college experience

Involvement can help reduce stress levels by giving students much needed downtime from their studies.



One study found students involved in intramural participation had a higher retention rate than those that did not participate in any activities on campus.⁷

Players and non-players involved in the program learn new skills and make valuable career contacts with industry and professional organizations.

“Social media management, marketing, legal PR, finance... every function you would find in a sports’ organization you’re starting to find in esports.”

Todd Harris, Co-Founder, Hi-Rez Studios and President, Skillshot

Where to begin: Start the conversation

WITH STUDENTS

- Begin here, where interest is likely high
- Consider surveying the student population to gauge interest
- More than not, programs are student-driven
- Don’t underestimate student interest

WITH ADMIN & FACULTY

- Administrators will need to approve the program—you’ll need to address their specific concerns and requirements
- Professors or Faculty Chairs if the program is going to align with specific areas of study
- Athletic Director, Intramural Director, or Director of Student Affairs (which one depends upon the division or department the program will fall under)

WITH IT

- Understand technical requirements
- Establish a baseline and set a goal of what’s needed to get started
- Understand the technical requirements, including what types of gaming stations, network, infrastructure and supporting technology might be needed

INDUSTRY LEADERS

- Technology brands like Dell Technologies and Alienware
- Gaming and esports production companies like Skillshot Media, Hi-Rez Studios, Riot Games, and Blizzard Entertainment
- Understand what it takes to get started and how to build as you develop your program

INSTITUTIONS WITH ESPORTS PROGRAMS

- Consult with local schools and institutions who have established programs
- Understand first-hand what kind of lessons need to be learned and to build off their successes

ESPORTS LEAGUES AND ORGANIZATIONS

- A direct source of knowledge in helping to ensure you align with their policies and practices
- Here are a couple of leagues that you can reach out to:⁸
 - EG Federation
 - National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE)
 - Tespa

*This is a rapidly evolving area, and we recommend doing your own research to identify the correct industry organizations and leagues appropriate for your college or university.

“Student involvement was critical from day one. When we started building our esports program at NYIT, we looked to our students to guide us on what we needed to compete successfully.”

Daniel Vélez, Director of Athletics and Recreation, New York Institute of Technology (NYIT)

Map out a strategy

Identify your academic goals.

- What new degree paths and research opportunities exist for your institution?** Game design theory, social media communications, etc.
- How will you measure success?** Consider monitoring academic performance and retention rates
- Consider requirements to participate:** minimum GPA, behavioral standards, etc.



- What majors and degree programs will be involved?** S.T.E.A.M. disciplines, marketing, finance, programming, graphic design, health and wellness, etc.
- How do you see the program impacting other aspects of campus life?** Campus culture, community outreach, student success, etc.

Here are just a few of the colleges and universities that have established esports majors, minors, courses and/or degree programs:

- Shenandoah University:** Multi-Track Esports Major (first in the U.S.)
- St John’s University:** Undergraduate Course in Esports Administration and Management
- Caldwell University:** Bachelor of Science Degree in Esports Management
- NYIT:** Interdisciplinary Studies Bachelor of Science Degree with a Concentration in Game Design and Visualization

Understand the logistics.

- Will your program exist within student affairs, athletics, intramural sports, or other areas?**
- What games will you play?** Consider the genre, type of game, and ESRB rating
 - Popular games include:
 - SMITE and League of Legends (Multiplayer)
 - Starcraft (Real Time Strategy)
 - Smash Brothers and Street Fighter (Sports and Fighting)
 - Overwatch, Hearthstone, Tetris (Miscellaneous)
- What leagues will you be involved with?**
- How many students will you accept into the program?**
 - Including number of players and those that play a supporting role
- Who will be involved?**
 - Senior-level manager to lead planning and execution (potentially in student affairs or athletics)
 - Coaching staff (faculty or retired esports gamers)
 - Program supervisor to oversee competitive and recreational play
 - Administrative support for personnel, financial, and facilities management
 - Faculty for curriculum development
- How long will the program run?**
 - Consider aligning your academic or athletic program calendar.
- What are your policies and rules of engagement?**
 - Consider following NCAA rules even though Esports is currently unactioned by the NCAA
 - Identify requirements for play such as maintaining a minimum GPA, meeting attendance standards, and ensuring accounts are in good standing with no outstanding debts, fees, fines
 - Identify how you’ll promote good user behavior, digital citizenship, and sportsmanship to maintain Title IX compliance
- Will you have local tournaments and how do you build prizes/awards?**
 - Cash prizes and other awards remain effective ways to quickly build interest and discover talent
 - Hosting tournaments or events are good ways to bring in new revenue streams for your institution

Identify your technology goals.

Gaming stations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options range from existing laptops to dedicating gaming hardware and peripherals (keyboard, mice, headsets, etc) Specs are dictated by the type of game, the number of players, and the type of play (club or competitive) Check with gaming manufacturers for recommendations 	A fast, reliable network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t go wireless! Minimize the impact of network latency with 100Mbps+ of unfiltered internet access to each gaming station 	For more advanced programs, consider adding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Servers for running on-premise games and supporting additional activities like production, shoutcasting, livestreaming, and data analytics. Storage for broadcasting, management for analytics, as well as supporting arena or audience viewership experiences, and recording player statistics.
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Create a Budget.

It’s easy to slowly scale as your program grows. Consider leveraging existing equipment and resources, like your computer lab when making **your financial plan**, and take into account these three areas:

- Faculty and administration**
 - Coaches and coaching staff
 - Program supervisor and potential supporting staff, these may separate for both competitive and recreational play
 - Administrative support for personnel, fiscal resource management, and facility management
 - Support for course development and research opportunities associated with esports and game design
- Technology**
 - Gaming stations
 - Servers
 - Storage
 - Networking
 - Video editing and data analytics software/hardware
- Player equipment and miscellaneous**
 - School-branded jersey and other merchandise (like backpacks)
 - Marketing/logo design
 - Room decor
 - Streaming webcams
 - Keyboards
 - Mice/mousepads
 - Headsets
 - Security locks
 - In-house events
 - Food/travel
 - Decals

Tip: You can help fund your esports program by reaching out to local businesses for sponsorships, or apply for available grants in areas such as technology and innovation.

Get buy-in

Interest may start with the students, but buy-in needs to also come from administration and any departmental chairs who will be overseeing the program.

- Build your case** (reference stats in this infographic)
- Start small, grow as you go**
- Refine, cross-pollinate, and extend out**
- Establish partnerships with industry leaders** like Dell Technologies



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