Esports in Education – Program Considerations

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Esports is the fastest growing activity in the education space with online viewership among college students exceeding that of MLB, NHL and the NBA. As more states formally recognize it as a varsity sport, the talent pool entering colleges is increasing exponentially and has prompted many schools to begin offering sports scholarships to top players. Additionally, more and more students are using the state of a schools esports program as an evaluation criterion when deciding where to attend college.

With decisions to be made around PC requirements, league selection, facilities layout, coaching staff, scholarship eligibility and more, schools are often confused about where to begin. Below are a few things to consider as you plot a course for your growing program.

Determine the end game first.

Consider whether you want esports to be a student activity, a club sport or a serious competitive varsity sport. Each direction is valid on their own but understanding what your program goals are can help you position yourself early for success.

Typical attributes of each are:
- **Student Activity Center** – Setting up an open Gaming Lounge for student use
    - Moderate level of investment in space and equipment
        - Dedicated space with staffing requirements
        - 30+ gaming stations
    - High level of participation for all enrolled students
    - Useful as recruiting tool
    - Low advertising value beyond local area or recruiting assets
- **Club Sport** – Setting up "casual" competitive teams as a student rec activity
    - Low level of investment in space and equipment
        - Space can be shared with other activities
        - Can start with as few as 3 game stations (single team – Rocket League)
    - Participation limited to students on active teams
    - Limited use as a recruiting tool
    - Low advertising value beyond local area or recruiting assets
- **Varsity Sport** – Dedicated team with coaching and support programs
    - High level of investment in space and staffing
        - Dedicated space with coaching for each title
        - Minimum 12 high end gaming stations
    - Moderate level of student involvement (Players and Spectators)
    - High value as recruiting tool
    - High advertising value for successful programs at national level
        - Requires online broadcast capabilities to maximize presentation values and audience reach

Focus on being the best at 1-2 games.

For the Varsity and Club Sport paths it is important to select a few titles to focus on.
- Coaching resources tend to specialize in 1 or 2 titles so the more you compete in the more coaching resources you will have to retain.
- Hardware requirements vary by title with the most popular 3 games having relatively low demands.

- o Overwatch, League of Legends and Rocket League are each 3+ years old and not graphically demanding.
- o CoD, Rainbow Six Siege, and more realistic first-person shooter games have significantly higher hardware needs.

Consider who you will be competing against.
Now that you have a great team you need to find worthy opponents.
- League structure is not tied to NCAA conferences but is beginning to align as schools play against their traditional sport rivals.
- Participation in one league does not preclude participation in other leagues.
- Many tournaments award significant cash prizes that can be assigned to the program development or awarded directly to the student athletes.
  - o Not under NCAA jurisdiction so free from those constraints
- NAECAD is a great resource for information on the local leagues you may want to consider and can provide coaching guidance and development resources.

Think beyond the athletes.
Esports can be used as the central pillar of a full curricula or degree program.
- Communications departments can be involved as Sports Casters
- CS departments can be involved in network layout and operations
- Sports Med departments can be involved in team health and nutrition
- Business departments can be involved in advertising and promotion

Show it off.
To make the most of the advertising value of your program you will need to make the games accessible to a wide audience.
- In-person spectators require an arena with adequate seating and large format displays to follow the action.
- Many league operators including streaming services ranging from simple direct game footage to a fully produces sports cast complete with commentators, multi-PoV screen streams and live shots of the athletes.
- Larger programs often invest in their own production capabilities, involving students from multiple other majors.

Help is available.
There are many resources available to help you answer the above questions, including:
- NAECAD – National esports coaching association. They run periodic workshops for coaches and program directors at the K-12 and collegiate levels.
- NACE – Collegiate esports association made up of over 170 member schools. Resources for league discovery, academic program structure, etc.
- HSEL – Nationwide High School esports league
- NASEF – Nationwide High School esports league
- OMEN Esports – Hewlett Packard premium gaming PC family. Offers free consultations for new and growing programs. For more information or to schedule a consultation, please contact us at omensled@hp.com