

How to start developing Esports programs in Educational Institutions

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Read the introduction to this paper [here](#).

Where to Start

Why hasn't every school created an Esports program? Universities should be jumping at the opportunity to become a leader in Esports because of the explosive growth and increasing popularity it is experiencing. While many schools would like to enter this blossoming industry, many do not know where to start. After all, educational institutions have to address their concerns before they can take any action. For Esports, there are many. Some of these include an expensive barrier of entry and lack of student interest to sparse regulation of online sports. Many schools believe it may be too risky to dive into this new and unordinary medium. However, some research can readily solve these myths. Any college with the right amount of passion, commitment, and time can build a successful Esports program. There are just a few key steps necessary to creating a successful Esports program. While the formula isn't set in stone and isn't guaranteed to work, here are a few steps to start the road to success.

Building Community

The first step for any school or university looking to add Esports to their program is to have a community of gamers they can build and support. Like any other extracurricular or school program, an Esports program cannot thrive without a student base to sustain it. Luckily, gaming is one of the most popular mediums in the world – in fact, in a 2019 report from The NPD Group, [“73% of Americans ages 2 or older play video games, an increase of 6 points since June 2018.”](#) There is no shortage of gamers at any school – it's just a matter of finding them. Usually, universities and schools will already have a gaming club. If a school doesn't, faculty will play a significant role in helping foster one. To start a gaming or Esports club, a school needs to find a devoted member of staff who loves playing games and is willing to work with students to build one. Once found, spreading the word of a newly created club or program is critical. From announcing the club in schoolwide meetings or club fairs to adding an article to the school newspaper and posting flyers around campus, mention Esports and gaming to as many ears willing to listen. Recruit as many gamers as possible, regardless of what kind of gamer they are and what games they play.

Recruiting is just one step in the process. After, it is up to the students to maintain and foster the community. Students need to be devoted and enthusiastic to make this a success. There are a few things that a school or a club can do to maintain and grow the community. First, the club must host weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Regardless of how initial turnout is,

students need to be hosting as many meetings as possible to grow the society. They should also try to make all attendees involved in these meetings to entice participation. Playing casual party games together like Among Us, Skribble, or Super Smash Bros is one way of increasing involvement, but students can also run custom games on more competitive titles like League of Legends, VALORANT, Overwatch, or Counter-Strike: Global Offensive. Furthermore, the club should create a school Discord so that students can find others to play at any time of the day.

What is unique to gaming is that people don't need to all be in one location to play and socialize. Most students who game will already own their favorite gaming device, whether it's a PC, Switch, or console, and can readily play together. For schools, students owning their hardware makes it a lot less expensive to create an Esports club or team. The barrier of entry for schools to start an Esports team is very low. However, suppose schools want to have gaming on campus. In that case, not every student will have a powerful enough PC that they can bring to campus, so it would be worth it for schools to look into upgrading their PCs. Schools should note that upgrading is not crucial to the success of the club. Non updated PCs should still be able to run some prevalent titles like League of Legends. Competitive gamers play on the lowest settings anyway because it gives them improved performance in-game.

Running Events

Once meetings are usual, the club can start thinking about larger-scale events. These events, while important, are not as imperative as weekly meetings, so students need to make sure that their regular occurring get-togethers are running smoothly. Running public events is where students can learn quite a considerable amount of knowledge and acquire skills they would never have discovered. A large event can range from a schoolwide tournament to having a watch party of professional competition. Students can also contact rival schools to examine if they have an Esports club or program and create an interschool tournament.

Once students know what they want to do, it's time to start planning. Students will need to start planning logistics, scheduling, attendance, marketing, and amass sponsorships. Having good faculty will be necessary for organizing logistics from a school perspective. In this step of the process, they need to help guide students in creating a sound event to run smoothly.

Many companies are searching to sponsor Esports related events at the academic level. Clubs should look to alumni in the Esports industry, reach out to gaming companies and teams through email or social media, and contacting the game developer itself. Some examples include [Discord Hype Squad](#), Mountain Dew Game Fuel, and [Riot Games](#). Nothing is guaranteed, but clubs can receive funding and some pretty sweet gear and prizes to spice up their event if they reach out, and it never hurts to try.

These events are essential to add legitimacy and popularity to the club. Students will look forward to and commit to these events, and it can create a tradition, rivalries, friendship, and recognition.

Creating and Improving Your Esports Teams

Esports teams are the final step in the process. While the teams create the buzz, without the community, there is no team. When building a team, schools need to evaluate and ask their students what games they play to enter the correct leagues and tournaments. Every school is different, and students can compete at a plethora of countless games. It is vital to start with fewer teams than too many, as teams need to be focused and specialized. Players must find time to practice like any other sport, specifically at least four hours a week for practice plus another four hours (usually on weekends) for tournament play. Students who join too many different games will not focus on specific teams and balance schoolwork. Therefore schools should recommend students to enter a maximum of two Esports teams.

At first, practices can be student-led so that they know the feel of scrimmages and team play. They can ease into becoming an Esports athlete and not be pressured to perform well. It won't be hard to find tournaments either, as there are many scholastic leagues for collegiate and high school. Examples include Riot's PlayVs League of Legends League for high schoolers and Activision Blizzard's Collegiate Overwatch League. However, third-party websites host tournaments that students can look into joining, including the Collegiate Star League and PLANET9. Students will need to learn how to improve by watching back scrimmages and tournament play. At the same time, they also need to apprehend new strategies and build confidence with one another.

Once the team has a feel and has started competing, it is worth looking into getting an Esports coach. Coaching is only for serious programs that want to further their commitment and are ready to completely dive into the realm of Esports. Coaches are necessary if a school wants to compete against the very best. They help students improve by teaching new strategies, techniques, and thought processes, and help foster conversation, build upon teamwork, and hold members accountable. They can help students look out for flaws in their gameplay and can help scout players. Coaches can also work with schools to figure out rules and regulations for their players should problems arise, from GPA requirements, sportsmanship, cheating, and more. Luckily, there are already countermeasures that game developers have to counteract cheating and toxicity. For example, games already have anti-cheat on every game, and every tournament organizer has moderators that review cheating allegations. As for toxicity, it too is reportable to the tournament organizer, but schools can also avoid toxicity entirely by making it a requirement for students to mute in-game. It also means that students would not be allowed to talk to the other team and receive messages from them. So while a coach would help set up rules and protect students, they aren't always necessary. Furthermore, if schools can't commit to getting a full-time coach, they can look into renting a coach out on sites like [PLANET9](#).

Conclusion

Creating an Esports team will be a lengthy process that will take time, energy, and commitment. However, having an Esports program will help schools and students in the long run. Not only will schools entice prospective students by having an Esports team, but they will also help their students be set up for success later in life. Students will be able to enjoy and bond with others in this new extracurricular, and they will be able to learn so much more than if it did not exist. Therefore, Esports programs are something that schools should pursue, and following a few basic steps can turn into something massive and remarkable.