



GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY ESPORTS PROGRAM PROPOSAL

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INTRODUCTION

GMU Esports is a registered student organization that aspires to create an environment where students at George Mason University can connect with others to participate in competitive video game competitions at the collegiate level, all while forming communities and fostering skills. Founded in Fall 2014, the club was originally started to attract those interested in esports to find others who were involved in the same games as them. As the collegiate esports scene expanded across the nation, so did GMU Esports. Growing from a few players in just a couple games—to now fielding teams in almost 20 different esports—there are many different game communities that fall under the GMU Esports umbrella today. Over the years, we have hosted many on-campus and online tournaments and events to get students involved and connected with each other through their favorite games. We have amassed over 1000 members through both our Facebook group and across our three Discord servers.



Super Smash Bros. Ultimate crew battle at GAMEmason 2019.



Players attending an Overwatch League watch party.

This document aims to familiarize the reader with the concept of esports and esports industry, the collegiate esports scene, and the current GMU Esports RSO. In doing so, this document sets a case for why a school-sponsored esports program housed under Student Involvement at GMU should exist, what the benefits of such a program would be, and what it would look like.

THE ESPORTS INDUSTRY

What is esports? Esports is remarkably similar to traditional sports. Take a game like basketball, you have your players on each team, and each team is trying to complete some sort of objective while playing on a court. But now imagine that that "court" takes place in a video game... with players taking control of characters within the game, and not physically partaking in a game on a real life field or court. This allows for many opportunities to be molded out of these video games and made into entirely new sports, or in this case, esports, that aren't bound by the physical restrictions of real life.

Let's take two of our most popular games in the club, League of Legends (which I will call "League" for short) and Overwatch. Both are team-based games where two teams of players play against each other on a map to complete some sort of objective. Sounds pretty similar to a game of basketball or hockey right?

Take another popular game, like Super Smash Bros. for example. In Super Smash Bros. ("Smash" for short), two players fight against each other one-on-one on top of a stage until one of them has no lives, or "stocks" as they are called, remaining. Smash could be likened to something like boxing or wrestling, where two athletes face off until one of them taps out or is knocked out.

But remember how I mentioned earlier that these are video games and not physical games, so players are able to do things they normally couldn't? In Overwatch, you can play as a cyborg ninja who can climb walls and channel the power of an ancient dragon. In League, you can play as a raging minotaur or a haunting sea spirit. In Smash, you can play as an iconic character like Pikachu, and your opponent could be Mario. You can begin to see the appeal.

An advantage of video games, and thus esports, that often goes overlooked is how easy it is to get into a game and play. If at this moment I wanted to get up and play a full game of basketball, it would take me a while to find enough people to create two whole teams and are available and interested to play and can get to whatever court we are meeting at in a relatively short period of time. But with a video game, I can open my computer, click on a game, and get into a real match with other players in a matter of minutes—it becomes a small wonder why so many people play video games, and by extension, esports. It's truly accessible.

Due to their digital nature, the competitive format that games in esports can take can be quite similar or wildly different than traditional sports. A common competitive format in traditional sports follows a pre-, regular, and post- season timeline. This is followed in the Overwatch League and the League of Legends Championship Series, top professional leagues for Overwatch and League. These can be likened to the NBA or NFL. The competitive format of Smash differs from its physical counterparts of boxing or MMA, however. Because you're playing against someone digitally and not physically, your real body isn't getting beat up during every fight. This means that after playing a game of Smash, you can go and play another one right after. This has led to Smash following a bracket tournament format, usually double elimination.

Now that you know a bit about some popular games and how they are played, let's talk about the esports

industry—the entire industry surrounding all of the competitive video games scenes. After all, there are more multiplayer games out there besides League, Overwatch, and Smash, and the competitive scenes around these games vary widely in size and scope. But surrounding many of these esports are the same concepts you'd see around traditional sports: leagues, tournaments, journalism, fan groups, merchandising. And within those, many of the jobs you'd expect as well: coaches, managers, casters, production crew, journalists, graphic designers, etc.

The top professional leagues or tournaments in a given esports are often run by the same company that developed the video game that is being played. For example, the League of Legends Championship Series that I mentioned before is run by Riot Games, who also developed the game itself. Outside of those top leagues, many third party organizations also hold smaller leagues or tournaments. In the case of an esports like Smash, tournaments are not run by Nintendo, but by various other endemic esports organizations.

These top leagues are often global in nature, with North America, Europe, and East Asia, specifically South Korea, being hubs for esports growth. South Korea especially can probably be considered the esports capital of the world. The esports industry in the country is further developed than any other nation, and as such, Korean players, coaches, managers, and organizations dominate top professional leagues with their skill and proficiency in their respective games. As the industry grows in the United States, however, American players and organizations are catching up with rapid pace.

This global outlook has been great for propelling esports into the mainstream. In recent years, established companies in the sports and technology industries, such as the Kroenke Group, Kraft Group, Monumental Sports, Comcast, and Cox, as well as numerous famous individuals such as Drake, Shaquille O'Neal, and Michael Jordan have invested in various esports teams and leagues. And with leagues securing mainstream sponsors such as Toyota, Honda, and State Farm, these esports begin to look a lot more like traditional sports in scope and size.

The number of viewership and attendance professional esports events have seen in recent years shows that this investment is paying off. In just this past year alone:

- ◆ The Super Smash Bros. Ultimate tournament at Evo 2019 set the record for peak viewership at the yearly tournament with 279,000 viewers.^[1]
- ◆ The 2019 Overwatch League Grand Finals drew in 1.12 million viewers globally.^[2]
- ◆ The 2019 League of Legends World Championship garnered 100 million viewers globally, with a peak of 44 million concurrent viewers, and filled up a Stadium of 15,000 fans.^[3]



League of Legends World Championship 2019.^[4]

And as time goes on, these numbers will only continue to get bigger, especially with networks such as ESPN broadcasting certain games. The rest of the industry surrounding these esports leagues will both help facilitate this, as it has in the past, as well as grow along with it. This includes things like journalism or reporting, stream-

ing and video content, and fan groups and participation. All these are ways that people can have careers in esports outside of being a player or working for a team or league.

But how does collegiate esports fit into this picture? Earlier it was mentioned that oftentimes developers will have control over the competitive scenes of their games. In some of these cases, such as with Riot and College League of Legends, the developer will also run the college-level league. In other cases, like with Blizzard and Tespa, the developer (Blizzard) will partner with a third party organization (Tespa) to run the college-level leagues for them. This doesn't stop other third party organizations from holding their own college level leagues and tournaments. Collegiate Star League, or CSL, is an example of this, and is the largest organizer for Smash competition at the collegiate level. Across all of these games, students are, for the most part, competing for prestige and scholarship money. In some cases, cash or item prizes are involved. Almost 300 schools have chapters in Tespa vying for the top prize, and almost 700 are competing in various games in CSL. But college esports extends beyond just the competitions, and includes a dedicated community that is carving a space for itself in the greater esports scene.



2019 Overwatch League Grand Finals.^[2]

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COLLEGE ESPORTS & NACE



Hunger for esports competition has been prompting college students to organize and play for years, and this passion is finally paying off. This global increase in collegiate competition has led hundreds of universities across North America to begin creating and expanding their esports department through the help of collegiate esports organizations.

Although there is no overarching governing body for collegiate esports as wide reaching as the NCAA, there are other organizations, primarily the National Association of College Esports, or NACE. NACE is a national non-profit organization whose membership encompasses over 170 universities, and its members include some powerhouse schools in the collegiate scene, like Maryville University, University of California - Irvine, and Harrisburg University.

The purpose of NACE is to develop collegiate level esports through facilitation of local, regional, and national competition as well as laying the groundwork in terms of eligibility, routes to graduation, and varsity esports scholarships. Within NACE's network of schools, they have involved over 5,000 student-athletes and generated \$16 million dollars in esports scholarships and financial aid.^[1] While some schools choose to run varsity esports through their athletic program or another separate wing, 30% of schools in NACE run their esports programs through their student involvement office.

Making up the nine schools in Virginia that have varsity programs partnered with NACE are Old Dominion University, Shenandoah University, Northern Virginia Community College, Randolph-Macon College, Virginia Wesleyan University, Averett University, Bryant and Stratton College, Marymount University, and ECPI University. Partnership is beneficial to these institutions because it acts as a great facilitator for growth of their own esports departments, can assist in finding sponsorships, and can also allow colleges to get connected with local high school esports leagues and outside organizations.

Even outside of NACE-partnered institutions, many collegiate esports scenes without varsity-level programs at their school have been able to make a name for themselves as club sports and RSOs, including GMU Esports.

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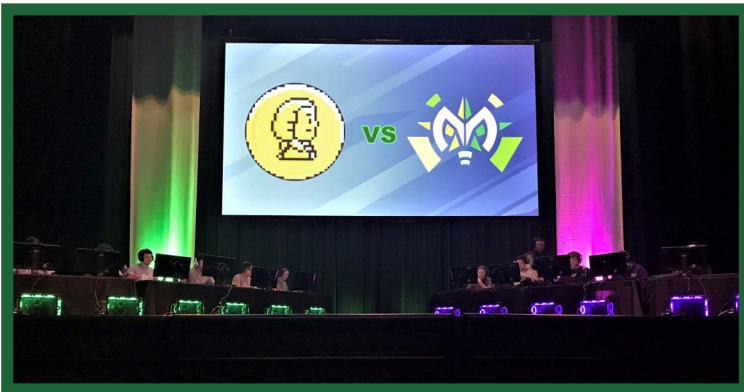
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GMU ESPORTS RSO ACTIVITIES

GMU Esports currently stands as one of the largest and most successful collegiate esports scenes that is not an official school-supported program, to the point that many outside students, players, and teams think we are. This is due in large part to both the success of our teams and players in some of the most popular games, as well as the effort club members have put into promoting the teams and events. We've been able to keep up this forward momentum by holding events and activities that not only are inviting to new members and keep current members engaged, but also inspire a sense of passion and competition in our players.



VCOI grand finals between GMU and JMU at GAMEmason 2019.

Even though GMU's team fell to JMU in the finals, this tournament was a fantastic way to foster competition between colleges in Virginia and showcase player skill. It was also a great opportunity for non-player students to gain experience running and promoting an event like this. The tournament, now titled the Overwatch Virginia Collegiate Invitational, will be held for a second year, with the finals taking place at GAMEmason 2020.

Smash is another great example of this—The Super Smash Bros. community at GMU is by far the largest game community in GMU Esports. In fact, it's the largest college Smash scene in the entire country, as measured by the average attendance of Bring More Setups (BMS), the weekly free-to-enter tournament hosted by the club. When it first started out, the event gathered around 15-20 people per week, but recently, the event has been averaging 130-150 total entrants across both Smash Ultimate and Melee. Student Involvement was pivotal in this continued success, as the department was able to provide its office space as the new weekly venue when the previous venue became unavailable. Over time, BMS has become well known in the local Smash scene for its accessibility and showcasing up-and-coming competition. The event is nearing its 100th week, and will soon also be featured at GAMEmason 2020.

A recent example of this is GMU Esports' participation in GAMEmason. In preparation for the inaugural year of Mason's own video game convention, GMU Esports hosted an online state-wide invitational Overwatch tournament between various colleges and universities across the state. The third place and grand finals matches of this tournament took place at a LAN event on the main stage of the Center for the Arts building to cap off the GAMEmason event day.



Bring More Setups at the Corner Pocket in The Hub.

The club has also held countless other events in partnership with a plethora of outside organizations, including watch parties with Washington Vice & Virtue, Amazon, and Twitch, and blood drives with Inova Hospital and Team Liquid. Smaller online events such as pick-up games, and intra-club special rule tournaments are also frequently held.

The teams themselves are nothing to joke about as well. GMU Esports' top teams in their respective games have done very well considering the varsity support many of our competitors receive. In Fall 2019, GMU Esports was ranked #4 in North America in teams created for the Tespa Collegiate League and #7 in titles won across those 10 teams.^[1] Many of our flagship teams have also sported better win rates year after year than that of GMU's Basketball team.

Just this past Spring (2019) semester, GMU's College League of Legends (CLOL) team was consistently ranked within the top 10 of ESPN's bi-weekly CLOL power rankings.^[2] It's well deserved—over the past few years, the team has amassed \$56,000 in scholarship prize money for their playoff placements:

- ◆ 2017: South Conference Semifinals - \$14,000
- ◆ 2018: South Conference Finals - \$28,000
- ◆ 2019: South Conference Semifinals - \$14,000

The Overwatch team has also recently had impressive performances, including a second place finish in the Washington Justice's Back to School Brawl in Fall 2019, and a win in the 2019 Tespa playoffs over 11th seed University of North Texas as the 43rd seed in the round of 32. The team's overall Tespa performances have also been consistently great:

- ◆ Spring 2017 regular season: 11W - 3L, Round of 8
- ◆ Fall 2017 preseason: 7W - 3L
- ◆ Fall 2018 preseason: 15W - 5L
- ◆ Spring 2019 regular season: 8W - 4L, Round of 16
- ◆ Fall 2019 preseason: 14W - 4L

The successes of the rest of GMU Esports' teams should not be glossed over as well—our Rocket League, Rainbow 6 Siege, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive teams, while forming much more recently, have also seen positive results. It should be noted that these teams' performances are in spite of all the limitations that come with being a team from a student club competing with opponents that have varsity-level programs supporting

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PROPOSED PROGRAM OUTLINE

Despite the burgeoning collegiate esports scene and the success teams at GMU have already seen, there are many roadblocks that stop GMU Esports from reaching its full potential. A huge hurdle that teams currently face is the lack of no established physical space to meet up, practice, or compete on campus. As a result, players will generally practice and play solely out of their homes or dorms. While this might work out logistically, it puts those who may have a lower end desktop computer or laptop at a disadvantage from the start—potentially hurting player performance when competing, and hampering the club’s inclusion. Financial burdens are also a huge obstacle for players outside of not being able to afford adequate PCs, as there are many skilled players looking for a college education that don’t have the monetary means to achieve that.

Another obstacle is the current lack of player scholarships: financial support for current or prospective students who are competing as players on GMU’s teams. This is vital because it has the two-fold purpose of allowing the school to attract top players to compete for our teams and remain competitive, while at the same time enabling the student to use their skill to help pay for a higher education. This becomes easier to realize as a necessity when considering that the previously detailed success of our top esports teams has attracted enough attention to the school that people are starting to take notice of the club and our



Former GMU Overwatch player Tuo preparing for the VCOI finals.

teams. We have had both talented graduating high school students and current working professional players who compete at the top level in their respective games contact us looking for player scholarships, only for us to have to unfortunately turn them away. Perhaps even more regrettably, a player who used to compete on the GMU Overwatch team recently had to stop playing the game in pursuit of work to pay for their tuition.

Furthermore, with GMU Esports’ current status as an RSO, there is limited opportunity for involvement from non-players. Each individual game’s team and community under GMU Esports is run somewhat autonomously, with students taking on leadership, managerial, and creative roles. All of these students, teams, and communities fall under the umbrella of GMU Esports and are under the authority of the RSO officers that are registered with the school. Students have pushed the boundaries of previously mentioned managerial and creative roles within club structure, and while many students have done excellent jobs promoting the teams, engaging the community, and managing the players, they are still held back by the limitations of a typical RSO.

A full, school supported esports program at GMU would not only alleviate many of the problems facing students and players right now, but also open a world of previously unavailable possibilities, all the while fulfilling Student Involvement’s core goals of academic and career readiness.

A core structure for this program is needed, and from there it can be expanded in certain ways to fit various needs depending on the direction Student Involvement would like to take. At a baseline level, the program would need to constitute of 2-3 teams in individual games, then the surrounding non-player staff revolving around those teams. The games that this program should prioritize supporting are League of Legends, Overwatch, and Super Smash Bros., as these games encompass the largest communities in GMU Esports, and are among our highest performing teams. How Smash is accommodated within the program will need to be different than other games, due to being played on a different platform than PC, and its divergent competitive format.

There should be three main priorities when creating the foundational infrastructure of the program. Securing a dedicated practice space on-campus with at least seven adequate PCs should be the utmost importance. Aside from alleviating the player problems outlined before, this dedicated space may also serve as a physical meeting place for members of the GMU Esports non-player student staff—and, depending on the size of the space, the general student community as well. The use of these computers and space should be prioritized first and foremost for the teams the program is supporting, since it would be their designated practice space. As such, peer-to-peer connections across campus ethernet and wifi will be required for these computers in order for the players to use them properly.

Additionally, the program would need at least one dedicated school employee to help helm the program. This is something that a few organizations, like Tespa and NACE, require in order for a school to be considered “varsity” and compete in designated varsity-level competitions. The main responsibilities of the position would encompass much of what the RSO officers do now, in addition to managing non-player student staff and working alongside other school faculty. This position would not be involved in player coaching, and should be considered more of a managerial role.

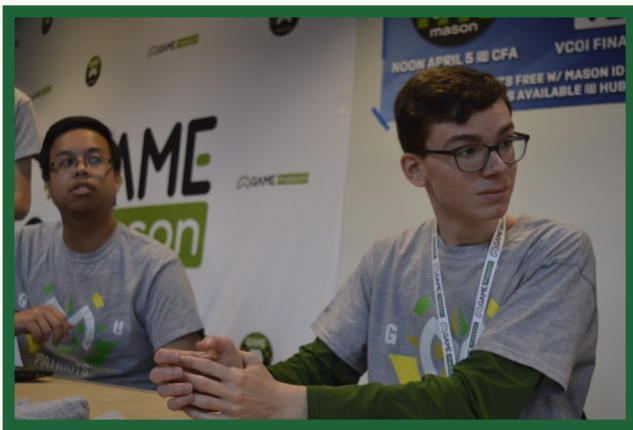
The third most important priority is securing player financial support in some form. The requirements for this would need to be stringent to ensure continued academic and gameplay performance. As such, it should be noted that not every player on a team may be eligible for financial support. Player scholarships should be reserved for incoming and current students of exceptional skill that are looking to take both gameplay and academics seriously. Amount of financial support should also be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Regarding Super Smash Bros., players will make smaller use of the above priorities, however accommodations should still be made for the game, as it’s inclusion is equally necessary. The game has been a galvanizing force for club growth and student engagement, and the continued success of that would help the program tremendously. To ensure this, use of the Student Involvement offices as the venue for the weekly Bring More Setups tournament should be maintained. It would also be beneficial to be able to schedule the office or other on-campus space for non-weekly Smash events, and extend office closing time on those days. As previously mentioned, this free-to-enter event has been our largest continuously running offline event, and the Student Involvement office has been popular with students, so it should absolutely be supported for as long as possible.

All of this is necessary to lay the foundation for the program, but the question of how a program like this could benefit student involvement doesn’t truly begin to be answered until we look at how non-player student staff can be implemented into the program.

MEETING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT'S GOALS

The main goal of Student Involvement at GMU is to ensure academic and career readiness for students. In a potential GMU Esports program, this can be achieved through non-player student staff positions. Multiple practices and fields of expertise are needed in various positions within the esports industry. In fact, a lot of esports-specific jobs can easily find root with another common field of study. “Real world skills” are entirely applicable in the greater esports industry, and a collegiate program that supports the growth of students who wish to gain experience in their respective career path can be cultivated through a school-sponsored program that provides them with that opportunity.



Hadi Khalil and Peter Parker at GAMEmason 2019.

This is especially valuable when realizing that workers in non-player roles make up the backbone of the esports industry. Like in traditional sports, they are the force that keeps organizations running smoothly. These people can range from player managers, translators, journalists, graphic designers, marketers, event and community organizers, and more. A lot of these jobs may already require a college degree and hands-on experience to pursue, regardless if the student is looking to join the esports industry or not. Whatever major you name, a job that relates that major to esports probably exists within the industry.

As previously mentioned, non-player student staff under the GMU Esports RSO have gone out of their way to make positions like these within the club, despite their limited resources. This has served to be beneficial to both parties, with students gaining experience through something they're passionate about, and the club growing in scope and size. Here are some examples of a couple of students who have demonstrated this:

Hadi Khalil - GMU Overwatch Game Head (General Manager):

Hadi is currently a sophomore earning a majoring in Information Systems and Operations Management. As GMU Overwatch general manager he has helped to conduct semesterly player tryouts, secure scrimmages for teams, oversee staff decisions and Discord communication, and more. Recently, he has worked for Blizzard as a player relations coordinator aiding Overwatch League teams during their regular season games in Washington DC.

Peter Parker - Former GMU Overwatch Social Media Manager and Graphic Designer:

Peter is currently a junior studying Computer Game Design. As GMU Overwatch Social Media Manager and Graphic Designer, he created a coherent team branding and aesthetic across social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram in order to bolster online awareness and recognizability of the team. He also helped manage and create video content with the team's video editors.

There are also examples of students utilizing coding and statistical research skills to aid the teams. A former team captain built a web scraper program to use for scouting opposing teams. The program would automatically cross-reference the usernames of the players on the opposing team for an upcoming match with the available information on player statistic collection websites. This would give a rough idea of the skill level, hero tendencies, and other information of the enemy team all in one place, allowing our teams to have a rough idea of what to expect. In another instance, a prospective student looking to be accepted into GMU to earn a masters in statistics spent the Fall 2019 semester collecting and applying data from the Overwatch team's scrimms and matches into a usable form to aid coaching and team decisions. Because of her statistical research for the team, she got accepted into a masters program at GMU.

These students have already shown that one can participate and gain meaningful experience from non-player positions within an esports team, but the caveat is that they had to form this opportunity for themselves, with limited resources. This is where Student Involvement can step in to provide what is lacking—a standardized structure for these experience opportunities that students can be a part of and learn from before applying themselves in a similar position beyond college. Furthermore, by providing this structure of student-run and school-supervised management around each team, students can gain said experience investing themselves in something they are already passionate about. It engages students and provides something meaningful in return.

This esports experience can extend beyond the boundaries of the program as well. More official GMU team activity means potential coverage from the Fourth Estate and other outside publications. It also could mean greater opportunity for student body engagement and interaction through events like GAMEmason. The program becomes what the players and student staff make of it.

IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRAM GROWTH

Currently, GMU Esports already conducts various events. Some of these, such as the aforementioned Smash weekly tournament and watch parties in various other games, should be continued under an esports program. They are some of the core ways we have strengthened our presence and community on campus. Participation in GAMEmason should also be continued. Despite how recently this yearly event has begun, it's already something that student staff spend their time looking forward to and working towards. Marketing and promotion have been a bright spot within the club, and a program should enable that further with student social media and community managers, tournament organizers, and event planners.

Other activities, such as game streaming and casting, stream and social media graphic design, and video/film creation can all be continued and expanded upon under a program. These things have been vital in getting the club's name heard outside of campus and the student body and into the greater college esports scene. Video creation, ranging from gameplay montages to player interviews, have been done in the past, but have been difficult to pull off due to the previously mentioned issues of varying computer quality and lack of physical meeting space. Likewise, for streaming, similar issues have arisen as many lower-end computers are unable to run both the game and streaming client at the same time. Desktops as part of a practice space on campus can double their usefulness and solve these issues by being utilized by student video editors, casters, and graphic designers for these activities.



Ayham Hasan, video editor for GMU Overwatch, capturing footage of GAMEmason 2019.

Player management has also become more of a necessity as teams' success has grown. Having another person who is not a playing member of the team schedule and book scrimms, coordinate tournament invitations, and solve player conflicts is vital to making sure the team is operating well. This does not include coaching, which requires an entirely different skill set that the vast majority of students aren't equipped to handle. However, students who are familiar with sports management or conflict resolution might be interested in a player manager role.

Students may take on one of these various non-player staff roles with regards to a respective team/game community. Some teams may require more attention in one area than another. For example, Smash would require more tournament and event organizers than League would, but both might require a social media manager and graphic designer. So, with a general idea of what this program structure would look like, and how students would partake in it, there are a couple different ways Student Involvement can grow the program according to its needs.

One way the program can grow is sideways—incorporating more teams and their game communities into the program and offering them the same or similar treatment to League, Overwatch, and Smash. The games that should be prioritized after these three are Rocket League and Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six Siege. These game communities are the next most active in GMU Esports, and both teams have been doing very well—Rocket League especially is one to look out for. So now let’s say, for example, the esports program expanded sideways to include Rocket League. The Rocket League team would be given the same opportunity for practice time and player scholarships as the other teams, and interested student staff should be supported to give them the chance to create events and promote the Rocket League team and community at GMU.

Another way the program can grow is upwards—providing more support to games that are already incorporated into the program. This would mainly include a paid coaching position within each team, and a travel stipend to allow players and teams to cover travel costs for tournaments they are invited to or interested in attending. For example, if Student Involvement wanted to provide the program with more upward support, they could create a school employee position in which the employee would serve as the League team’s coach, and also provide a limited semesterly travel budget for the top four GMU student Smash players to use if they were traveling to a major tournament as a group under the GMU Esports name. Additionally, upward growth could also include outreach to the Korean student population on campus and across the Pacific Ocean to Mason Korea. Korea is a major force in the esports industry, and with so many existing connections between the school and the country, a GMU Esports program is the perfect opportunity to capitalize on that. International students who are far from their home can become part of a new community on the Fairfax campus. In fact,



The practice facility of Virginia Wesleyan University, another institution with an esports program.

the beginnings of this almost happened! Before the Fall 2019 semester, a Korean student who was very highly ranked in Overwatch was set to begin studying on the Fairfax campus that semester, and was interested in trying out for the team. However, he ended up not attending Mason as he was picked up by a team in Overwatch Contenders, the farm league for the Overwatch League!

All of this is what a potential esports program George Mason University could look like. But what are other colleges and universities in Virginia doing, and how can GMU learn from their successes and mistakes?

Old Dominion University’s esports program, set to begin in Fall 2020, is primed to be one of the better examples of a program in Virginia, and will also be run out of their version of Student Involvement, the Department of Recreation & Wellness.^[1] The main goals of ODU’s department are diversity, inclusion, passion, and innovation, all of which they are hoping to exhibit through their esports program. The program will provide opportunities for students of several academic fields such as game design, graphic design, sports management, administration & finance, community engagement, and more.

Their future esports center is an existing 2,400 square foot space that will be repurposed and retrofitted with high-end gaming computers and consoles available for recreational use by students as well as their teams. All computers are also equipped with game design and graphic design software. Equipment for streaming and

broadcasting of competitions will also be fitted into their esports center. It is currently unknown what games the program will support, and if any scholarships or financial assistance may be provided to players.

Shenandoah University is another Virginian example of what a great esports program could look like. Unlike ODU, it is not run out of Student Involvement, but rather from a greater esports department, which includes two separate majors in Esports Management and Esports Media & Communication. Similar to what ODU will have, Shenandoah's program provides external school staff and coaching structure for the teams. They do not, however, provide player scholarships. This, combined with the school's small population, has meant Shenandoah's teams have not been able to be competitive in the collegiate esports scene.

A unique feature of Shenandoah's program are their esports summer camps, which get local high and middle school students involved through classes about esports management, social media presence and management, streaming and broadcasting, as well as game practice. In terms of facilities, Shenandoah has created an entire esports arena fitted with 12 stations for competitors, 70 spectator seats, a separated broadcasting/streaming booth, and three 12' projectors. The creation of this arena was possible through their partnership with Logitech international, and all of the equipment in the arena is able to be arranged and transported. Shenandoah has utilized this space to hold their own regional Esports Collegiate Invitational, inviting a few other schools to compete in games like League of Legends and Rocket League.

The weakest example of a program in Virginia is that of Northern Virginia Community College. Their esports program is run out of their athletic department and is much smaller than many other Virginia esports programs. The goals of creating an experience for students and a surrounding community seem to be lacking in NVCC's esports program. The main way for students to participate in this program is through playing for a team. There was, in fact, a student run club with teams that existed before the program was created. The club was disregarded once the program started, however, with some players opting to try out for the newly formed official NVCC teams.

The program's infrastructure is also lacking. The practice space is a tight room accessed through a small corridor on the top floor of a building on their Annandale campus. So tight in fact, that it can not house all 10 of their gaming desktops, and one must be placed in a side room to accommodate them all. Because of its location, the space can quickly get overheated, yet there is no way for students to either open a window (because there are none) or quickly go outside (because it is on the top floor). Additionally, the program's director acts as manager and coach for all or most of the teams, despite him not having adequate knowledge to coach, as well this arrangement being unfeasible when actually put into practice.

Looking at what these other schools have to offer, GMU could choose to take cues from each of them to help pave its own path and set its own goals. Perhaps a program at GMU would end up a bit different from what has been done before, but it is still important that it is successful in its own right.

References:

[1] https://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/28030890/old-dominion-adds-varsity-esports-fall-2020

Additional Reading:

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CONCLUSION

Regardless of what an esports program at GMU would look like, or if one is eventually enacted, the passion and dedication from students, both player and non-player, to create something bigger than themselves should be recognized. In fact, this love students have for their game and their community, and their perseverance to see these things succeed, should rather serve as a reason why a program such as the one outlined should exist. If Student Involvement does receive the confirmation to create a program, it would be remiss to not allow the students who got this club and these teams to this state in the first place to take it even further, and to not see these students into success when they eventually have to leave the university.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document, and to consider the proposal it sets forth. And, if it applies, thank you as well for allowing yourself to consider something that might be entirely unfamiliar and foreign to you, learning about it, and learning why it means so much to other people. Hopefully, you can now see what so many others see in the future of esports.

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