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The Digital Generation: Exploring the Effects and Creation of Collegiate E-sports Programs

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Abstract

This phenomenological study looked at five collegiate e-sports programs that are members of the National Association of Collegiate E-sports (NACE) to better understand why and how those programs were made, how e-sport athletes are recruited and retain, and operational differences between e-sports programs and traditional sports programs. The participants for this study were five higher education institutions from across the United States that were being represented by the leading administrator of their e-sports team. These institutions ranged from small private schools to large public schools in the hopes of getting a more holistic understanding of collegiate e-sports. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview designed to learn about their program's specific experiences. The findings of this study who that e-sports programs are more similar to an athletic department than an athletic program. The findings also confirm previous research that video game culture can be sexist which causes lower participation from non-male e-sport athletes. Another major finding was that one of the biggest reasons why higher education institutions develop e-sports programs are to get a return on their investment through revenue streams and enrollment drivers to their institution.

Dedication

There have been so many wonderful people in my life that have helped inspire and support me during this experience. I am incredibly thankful for those that have helped me, and I would not be the person that I am today without all their help.

First, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family. My mom Julie, my dad Jack, and my siblings Travis, Barrie, Jessica, and Zach. Throughout the ups and downs of my life you have all been the foundation of my support. I cherish our time that we spend together, and appreciate all the advice, guidance, tears, and laughs that we have shared. I am incredibly proud to be in this family. Thank you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Starting from a tournament in a small lab on Stanford University's campus in 1979 to approximately 43 million viewers watching the League of Legends tournament in 2016 (Consolazio, 2019), the e-sport industry has been growing rapidly over the past forty years. The e-sport industry has generated international tournaments with individuals competing for millions of dollars, one tournament in 2013 had a prize pool of nearly three million dollars including a grand prize of $1.43 million for the winning team (Warr, 2014). In 2019, the grand prize for a Fortnite tournament was $3,000,000 to a single e-sport athlete who was sixteen years old at the time he won (Pei, 2019).

The growth of this new industry is not limited to professional athletes but is developing at the collegiate level as well with many universities implementing e-sports programs on their campuses (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). While the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is not a regulating body for collegiate e-sports (Haywood, 2019), the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) has emerged as a regulating body that universities can become members of (Baker & Holden, 2018). As an association, NACE is growing and according to the executive director of NACE, Michael Brooks, NACE has six to seven inquiries per day by schools seeking information about membership with the organization (Hennon, 2019).

Additionally, Brooks suggests that universities are more willing to invest in the facilities to support e-sports, such as an e-sports arena, because it costs significantly less than other sport arenas (Hennon, 2019). Some Division One football stadiums can cost up to $400 million including the construction, staffing, utilities, and maintenance (Maxcy &

Larson, 2014) while supporting e-sports requires barely a fraction of those costs with e-sport arenas costing on average $47,000 to establish (Hennon, 2019).. With these significantly smaller costs, developing e-sports programs rather than other sport programs can be more appealing for some colleges and universities (Hennon, 2019). Coupled with the low cost of developing the program (Hennon, 2019), it is believed that collegiate e-sports has the potential to be a very high revenue generating form of entertainment, which has helped push more colleges and universities to investigate and develop e-sports programs (Baker & Holden, 2018). Public and private universities have created scholarships in order to recruit talented e-sport athletes which can pay for up to $24,000 of tuition costs (Moore, 2017).

As collegiate e-sports programs continue to grow, it is important for college student affairs professionals to be prepared for the growing interest in e-sports programs. A better understanding of how these programs are formed and operate will be beneficial to administrators wishing to create an e-sports program, or possibly improve their current e-sports program. This research study seeks to further understanding of e-sports programs and to assist institutions in creating these programs as well as creating a more supportive environment for the athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand how and why universities form new e-sport programs and how universities recruit and retain their e-sport athletes. The study will be comprised of in-depth interviews with administrative figures from multiple institutions across the United States in order to identify best practices for forming collegiate e-sports programs. These will be identified by examining

the perspectives, motives, and any other driving forces related to the formation and operation of e-sports programs including the recruitment and retention of e-sport athletes.

Research Questions

This study will examine how collegiate e-sport programs are developed as well as how the programs recruit and retain their e-sport athletes. The following research questions will guide the study:

1. Why do universities form e-sports programs?
2. What was the process for creating an e-sports program?
3. What challenges were encountered during the formation of the institution's e-sports program?
4. What differences are there in the recruiting and retaining process of e-sport athletes compared to traditional athletes?
5. What are the operational differences between an e-sports program and a traditional sports program?

Significance of the Study

E-sports are increasingly becoming popular around the world and have been rapidly expanding to collegiate programs (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). A recent survey found that 41% of educational institutions said that e-sports programs have helped recruit new students, and 56% of those surveyed said that the programs improved the overall campus experience (Cagle, 2019). Regulating organizations have been created, such as the National Associate of Collegiate Esports (NACE), to give structure and help the continuation and rapid growth of collegiate e-sport programs (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). NACE has also partnered with the High School Esport

League (HSEL) and several other organizations to assist in the recruitment of e-sport athletes as they transition into college (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). The proposed study is significant because, as technology advances and students are increasingly interested in the digital world, it is imperative for higher education to understand how the rise in popularity of e-sports can affect students at their institution. As collegiate e-sport programs continue to grow, it is possible that there will be more coordinated efforts to recruit these students to the institution.

Limitations of Study

A potential limitation of this study may the difficulties associated with the fact that collegiate e-sport programs are a fairly new phenomenon. This may make it difficult to find sufficient institutions with an established e-sports program that also recruits e-sport athletes to participate in the study. Additionally, it is possible that these institutions may not have formally established ways of recruiting e-athletes, retaining them, or may be waiting to begin doing so in the expectation that the NCAA will start regulating e-sport programs. Many institutions may be choosing to wait to recruit athletes or compete officially against other universities until these regulations are more established.

A second possible limitation for this study may be managing technological issues that could happen while interviewing participants. Video chatting may not provide as full of an interaction with participants as face to face encounters and may make the participants less comfortable with the study, and less willing to share potentially embarrassing or negative aspects of their experience. Lastly, as with any technology, problems with the recording software can occur so the use of a backup recording device will be employed to reduce this potential issue.

Finally, the time when this study takes place may impact the collection of the data. The study will be during the Fall semester of 2020, and therefore will be taking place in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. This could increase the difficulty of securing participants for the study.

Definition of Terms

Arena

A term used by e-sports programs to describe the space where e-sport athletes compete. Unlike traditional arenas, e-sport arenas do not always have spectator seating.

E-sports

Organized, competitive video gaming that is played either an individual or with a group of other players as a team.

E-sport Athlete/ Cyber Athlete

A student who competes in e-sports events sponsored by the university or as a representative of the institution in externally organized events.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study is to better understand how e-sports programs develop at four-year public and private colleges and universities. Specifically, this study aims to examine why and how institutions choose to develop e-sports programs, the challenges associated with starting an e-sports program, how recruiting and retaining e-sport athletes differs from traditional athletes, and the operational differences between e-sports programs and traditional athletic programs. Due to the rapid development of collegiate e-sports programs, there is a lack of research on this specific topic, so this literature review examines other aspects of higher education and collegiate sports to infer possible applications to the collegiate electronic sporting world.

E-sports are one of the fastest growing forms of entertainment in America (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). In 2013, more than 70 million people watched a competitive video game tournament (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Moreover, it is expected that the e-sports industry will reach over one billion dollars in revenue within the next few years (Holden et al., 2017). With the rapid expansion of e-sports world-wide, it is important for institutions to be aware of the potential impacts that these programs can have on their students and the institution itself. The following is a review of literature surrounding e-sports to give more context to how e-sports can affect a university and its population.

History of E-sports

Competitive video game tournaments can be traced back to when Stanford University first held a video game competition in 1972 (Consolazio, 2019). However, the truly first large-scale video game tournament happened in 1980 when Atari created a

"Space Invaders" tournament that drew in over 10,000 players (Consolazio, 2019; The History and Evolution of Esports, 2019). This was the first time that competitive video games were brought into the public's awareness and helped lead to the creation of television shows that further solidified competitive video games role in society (Consolazio, 2019). In 1990 and 1994, Nintendo held the "Nintendo World Championship" which helped to generate additional interest in competitive video gaming (Consolazio, 2019). This was still tournament style play, but that would soon change. It was in 1997, that the "Red Annihilation Tournament" took place, an event which many consider as the first official e-sport tournament where 2,000 contestants were able to play against each other from all over the world and the top sixteen finalists were brought to the Electronic Entertainment Expo, more commonly known as E3, to play each other while fans watched live and online (Consolazio, 2019; Edwards, 2013).

Shortly after this event, the Cyberathlete Professional League was founded in the hopes of making competitive video games more popular (Edwards, 2013). The term "e-sport" was officially coined in 1999 by the Online Gamers Association in an effort to more closely associate competitive video games to other sports (Wagner, 2006). After this, e-sport tournaments became more popular and audiences grew larger as the internet helped propel e-sports into greater popularity (Consolazio, 2019, Edwards, 2013, Wagner, 2006). In 2002 Major League Gaming (MLG) was created to make a structured competitive league and is currently one of the most successful leagues for competitive video games (Edwards, 2013). MLG tournaments have had prizes as large as $1 million for the grand prize, allowing these tournaments to promote the idea that being an e-sport athlete is a viable career option (Consolazio, 2019, Edwards, 2013). Since the early

2000's, video game tournaments for large prizes have gone from approximately 12 tournaments per year to over 240 as of 2010 (Consolazio, 2019).

In 2011, there was a significant change in the way that e-sports would be viewed by most Americans (Consolozio, 2019) when the streaming platform, Twitch™, went live and allowed millions of people around the world to watch individuals stream video games and donate money to players which led to some streamers generating over $100,000 annually in income from this element of e-sports alone (Zhang, 2019). Twitch began to stream e-sport tournaments that could be easily streamed from any device that could connect to the internet to any device for viewing. This attracted millions of additional viewers to watching tournaments (Consolozio, 2019). With its continued rise in popularity, e-sports tournament prizes continued to grow. In 2017, one e-sports tournament reported over $24.7 million in prizes (The history and evolution of esports, 2018).

Negative Issues in Video Games

Competitive video gaming is known for being a very toxic environment for those that don't fit into a stereotypical demographic (Fu, n.d.). Toxicity can take several forms from acceptable behavior during gameplay, gambling problems, sexism and misogyny, and more (Fu, n.d.) The following section looks at four of the most prevalent negative issues in video games and video game culture: violence associated with video games, gambling addictions, gender disparities, and social stigma around e-sport athletes.

Violence Associated with Video Games and Video Game Culture

Video games are often viewed in a negative way because of how they promote negative stereotypes. For example, Professor Eugene Provenzo (1991) found that video

games promoted violence, sexism, and racism in how they portrayed minorities. In his book, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo,* Provenzo found a large library of violent video games that Nintendo had published in which foreigners were normally villains and women were often made out to be victims. An earlier study also showed that if an individual plays an aggressive video game, it can have a short-term negative effect on their emotional state (Anderson & Ford, 1986). The largest change in negative behavior when playing violent or aggressive video games happens to individuals who are younger in age (Griffiths, 1999). Conversely, Provenzo's book stated that the most popular games that were being played on Nintendo's video game consoles were non-violent (1991).

Gambling Addiction

Online gambling is one of the fastest forms of gambling today and is continuing to grow in popularity (Reilly & Smith, 2013). Over 3000 websites allow people to play the lottery, bet on sports, and enjoy casino style games, such as poker, bingo, etc. (Reilly & Smith, 2013). As of 2013, online gambling is estimated to have a yearly revenue of over 30 billion dollars (Reilly & Smith, 2013). As competitive video gaming becomes more well known as a sport, it will increase opportunities for social gambling on video game competitions and events (Macey & Hamari, 2019).

Video game developers have been steadily integrating gambling style rewards into video games using real money (Zendle & Cairns, 2018, Macey & Hamari, 2019). Video game players experience gambling activities while playing games where they use real world currency to purchase randomized loot boxes and other rewards, correlated with gambling, to enhance the gaming experience (Zendle & Cairns, 2018, Macey & Hamari, 2019). This aspect of gaming design is heavily correlated to gambling because typically

because loot boxes have different degrees of rarity or may be exclusive for a limited period of time encouraging spending to avoid missing out (Fu, n.d.). This causes gamers who want a higher chance of getting a limited time offer to spend real world money on a mini-game of chance embedded in the actual video game (Fu, n.d.) Additionally, many of the games that use loot box systems can be played by adolescents, which can contribute to gambling problems in their future (Zendle et al., 2019). The purchasing of loot boxes or similar in-game purchases in 2018 was estimated to be $30 billion dollars in revenue and as games continue to add similar loot systems into their games, this number is expected to grow over time (Zendle & Cairns, 2018).

Gender Disparities

Currently, almost all collegiate e-sports teams are co-ed, meaning that regardless of gender, men, woman, and non-binary athletes are able to both compete against each other and be on the same team (Kane and Spradley, 2017). Despite the fact that a team can be made up of athletes of any gender, athletes that identify as female remain underrepresented in e-sports (Kim, 2017). Gaming culture, specifically in online forums, has a history for sexism and misogyny (Ruvalcaba, et al, 2018, Amazon-Hall, et al, 2018). These types of behaviors have created an unwelcoming, and at times, hostile culture that may drive away anyone who does not identify as a male from joining e-sports on the competitive level (Revalcaba, et al, 2018). This finding is supported by Ruotsalainen & Friman's study (2018) that showed that one reason why women did not participate in e-sports was because of how they were treated because of their gender. Another recent study found that well-funded collegiate varsity e-sports programs are

male-dominated, while club and student run groups are much more welcoming of other genders (Taylor & Stout, 2020).

To help make e-sports more inclusive, the University of California Irvine has hosted events such as “Women in Gaming” which allows potential female cyber athletes to meet role models from the gaming field and to connect them to on-campus resources to create a supportive environment (Amazon-Hall, et al, 2018). This is not the only school that has recognized this issue and is attempting to fix the gender disparity in e-sports. In one interview the Director of E-sports at Trine University, Alexander Goplin, said “I think it’s about breaking that stigma about women and gaming. We know they’re out there, so it’s about making them come to the forefront and recruiting them specifically for the program.” (Phillips, 2018, para. 20). As e-sports continue to expand on college campuses, it is important to create opportunities for all students, regardless of gender, to allow the organizations to grow in an inclusive way (Amazon-Hall, et al., 2018).

Social Stigma around e-sport athletes

There tends to be a negative social stigma surrounding people who play video games frequently (Goldman, 2017). The stigma around video game players has been described as, “[a] basement dwelling, neck-bearded, probably fat or lanky, and unhealthy white male” (Goldman, 2017). Traditionally, e-sports have been toxic towards women and members of the Hispanic or African American communities (Amazon-Hall, et al., 2018). Because of the toxic environments towards non-male and Hispanic and African American, women and Hispanic and African Americans make up a disproportionately small amount of e-sport audiences (Amazon-Hall, et al., 2018). Despite women making up making up almost 40% of video game players, they only make up 15% of e-sports

audiences (Amazan-Hall, et al., 2018). While Hispanic and African Americans may not participate as actively as their white counterparts, they do make up 35% of e-sports audiences (Amazan-Hall, et al., 2018).

Another social stigma is the idea that "gamers" are mostly comprised of teenagers who are overweight or otherwise unhealthy, lazy, and socially inept (Choney, 2009; Grohol, 2018). In reality, only 21% of video game players in the United States are under the age of 18 while 38% of video game players are between 18-34 years old (Gough, 2020). The image of video game players being over or underweight has a lot to do with the type of food they eat and the sedentary lifestyle that is associated with playing video games (Choney, 2009). However, video game players that moderate the amount of time they that play video games have similar exercise and diet as people who do not play video games (Grohol, 2018). E-sport programs are beginning to focus on the type of foods that e-sport athletes eat in order to stay physically and mentally healthy (Middleton, n.d.). In regards to video game players being socially inept, online video game players typically have equivalent levels of friends and social skills compared to other groups (Grohol, 2018).

E-sports in Collegiate Settings

As e-sports have become more popular, they have been rapidly expanding their influence and have begun to reach higher education institutions as places where these programs are finding homes (Hennen, 2019). This section provides information on how collegiate e-sports are regulated and how e-sport athletes are recruited and retained by their institutions. Due to limitations based on the lack of existing research, this section will, at times, make comparisons to other collegiate sports' regulations, retention

strategies, and recruitment tools in order to provide context and clarity when discussing esports in a collegiate setting.

Regulation of E-Sports

Currently collegiate e-sport teams are not regulated under the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Hayward, 2019). One of the main reasons why the NCAA most recently voted to not regulate e-sports is over concerns of how Title IX would impact scholarships, participation, and how the NCAA would handle athletes who have received money as prizes from competition and tournaments (Hayward, 2019). With the decision of the NCAA to not bring esports under their umbrella, several divisions of the NCAA including The Big East, Mountain West, Peach Belt, and Metro Atlantic Athletic divisions have created e-sports divisions to allow competitive video gamers to play together (Franko, 2020). Most recently, the Mid-American Conference (MAC) created the *Collegiate Esports Conference* hoping to help recruit hoping to recruit and engage e-sport athletes (Mid-American Conference creating separate league for esports, 2020, Franko, 2020). While there is currently no organization regulating all of collegiate e-sports, the National Association of Collegiate E-sports (NACE) is working to step into that role and is currently the only varsity e-sport association across the United States (Hennon, 2019). NACE was founded in 2016 and has already brought more than 170 colleges and universities into its operating system and currently provides guidance in the regulation of over 5,000 student e-sport athletes (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.).

NACE has also established partnerships with twelve other national organizations in order to offer more comprehensive support and coordination of collegiate e-sports (Collegiate

Esports Governing Body, n.d.). These organizations range from private businesses like Twitch™ and Respawn™ to the High School Esports League (HSEL). There are also a few national collegiate organizations including the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and the Next College Student Athlete (NCSA) (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). While it is still uncertain how e-sports will ultimately be organized, the efforts of these organizations are providing the beginnings of a system of governance similar to what the NCAA provides to traditional sports.

Recruitment of E-sport Athletes

High schools are the primary recruiting pools for colleges to get high quality athletes to their institution (Langelett, 2003). Today, there are nearly eight million high school athletes that have the potential to continue to compete at the collegiate level (mid Athletic Association, n.d.). With universities now becoming more interested in college e-sports, high school e-sport athletes have a legitimate chance to continue to play competitively while in college (Jimenez, 2019). Organizations like the High School Esports League (HSEL) have partnered with NACE in order to help recruit these new athletes to college e-sport programs (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.). A similar partnership has formed between the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and PlayVS with the similar goal of recruiting high school e-sport athletes to play at the collegiate level (Esports in High School, n.d.). These partnerships help to grow the number of high schools that have an e-sports program in order to create a larger pool of athletes that will be recruited into college (Chung, 2019).

NACE has partnered with Be Recruited, an e-sport athlete recruitment organization, in order to help cyber athletes get connected to coaches from over 170 universities (Want to play esports in college, n.d.). Be Recruited created a list of activities that e-sport athletes should do to increase their chances of playing in college which ranged from having an online presence, talking regularly with collegiate coaches, and competing in free tournaments online (Want to play esports in college, n.d.). NACE's executive director, Michael Brooks, claims that the goal of NACE, and all of their partnerships, is recruiting and retaining new college students and building a brand for an institution's e-sport team (Hennon, 2019). There is currently a lack of data that explain why e-sport athletes attend college rather than trying to become a professional video game player out of high school most likely because of how new collegiate and professional e-sports programs are (Nelius, 2019).

Retention of E-sport Athletes

There are three factors that have been identified to help retain a traditional college athlete: motivation, socialization, and commitment (Green, 2005). Green asserted that motivation for team sub-culture is an important factor when considering student athlete retention. Furthermore, the way that an athlete is socialized into their team's sub-culture can have an impact on an athlete's retention (Green, 2005). Lastly, Green (2005) believed that the level of commitment that an athlete has to their sport or their sport organization will have an impact on how likely the athlete will stay at the university. E-sports, similarly, rely on comradery of their team mates to find a sense of belonging with their team (Hustedt, 2020). Additionally, because e-sport athletes can spend more time practicing than traditional athletes, they will need professional staff to be more mindful of

factors that could affected by their e-sport program (Hustedt, 2020). The University of California Irvine created co-ed freshmen themed housing to allow all genders the ability to join a community specifically for video game players (Amazan-Hall, et al., 2018), offering more support to those interested in collegiate e-sports.

Financial Impact

While the majority of collegiate sports struggle to even reach a financial break-even point to operate (Maxcy & Larson, 2014), creating collegiate e-sports programs creates an opportunity for the program to generate a positive financial operation. Collegiate e-sports can be appealing to institutions of higher education due to the ability to establish one at a significantly lower cost of creation when compared with other sports (Hennen, 2019). The two most common areas of costs for e-sports programs are (1) the operational costs associated with creating an e-sports arena or facility and the administrative support for the program and (2) any financial aid provided to students, most commonly in the form of scholarships.

Providing facilities for E-sport teams are significantly cheaper to set up than most traditional sporting programs (Hennen, 2019). Hennen (2019) interviewed the Executive Director of the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE), Michael Brooks, who shared that while the average cost of constructing an e-sport arena is $47,000, this number can fluctuate greatly. For example, the University of Akron allocated $1.2 million for the establishment their e-sports facility currently under development (Hennen, 2019). The cost of changing equipment and updating IT systems is increasingly expensive and is a major factor affecting the costs for keeping e-sports arenas technologically competitive in order to remain on the cutting edge of the industry as time

goes on (Hennen, 2019). Even with these costs, e-sports programs and facilities can become financially self-sustaining (Hennen, 2019) while only in the most favorable situations will traditional stadiums become revenue neutral while they are still in use (Maxcy & Larson, 2014). Similar to traditional sports, collegiate e-sports programs can receive money from sponsorships (Hennen, 2019, Stoller, 2019) as well as revenue through ticket sales at arenas or fees to stream live games (Lawlor, 2019). Michael Brooks also stated that alumni support could also be a potentially large revenue source for collegiate e-sports programs (Hennen, 2019).

Universities are also beginning to give out scholarships in order to attract student e-sport athletes to play for their campuses (Amazon-Hall, et al., 2018, Associated Press, 2014, Kane & Spradley, 2017). The University of California Irvine is creating a scholarship program that is targeting minority students and more women in an effort to have a more diverse group of athletes being represented in their e-sports program (Amazon-Hall, et al., 2018). Additionally, NACE has been able to give over $16 million in scholarships and other aid packages to e-sport athletes (Collegiate Esports Governing Body, n.d.).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

When considering the development of an e-sports program, it is important to have a firm understanding of the effects that it will have on students. The following theories will be used to guide this study.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's theory (1984) was developed from a longitudinal study that he conducted to determine the factors that affect undergraduate students in their decision to drop out of

college. He asserted that as a student becomes more involved on campus through extracurricular activities, they will be more likely to do well academically and are more likely to stay at the institution. There are five postulates in Astin's student involvement theory: "Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects", "regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum", "involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features", "the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program", and "the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement" (p. 519).

For universities and colleges that are starting e-sports programs, Astin's theory could be used as a tool for universities to increase retention rates by bringing a new, structured, program for individuals to participate in which would also serve to increase their sense of connection with the institution. A qualitative study on the formation of e-sport teams (Freeman & Wohn, 2017) showed that even when communicating online, amateur collegiate players still form bonds with one another or would meet outside the game environment for face-to-face interaction. The team dynamic common to traditional sports does not necessarily change when playing e-sports as through playing e-sports, students are able to be more involved and make serious person to person connections despite competing in a digital space (Freeman & Wohn, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory describes how a student develops based on the interactions between their inherent qualities and the environments

that surround them. The theory looks at environments on four primary areas; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem is made up of the ecological systems that are in the student's immediate environment. Some examples of these systems would be peer groups, roommates, and work colleagues. The mesosystem is created by two or more factors that influence a person's microsystem. Some examples of these systems could be how a student's friend group interacts with his/her work or how a student's family interacts with his/her friend group.

The exosystem affects the student's life but in a more indirect way. In the exosystem, the student has little to no effect on factors within that system, but the aspects of that system can impact them. Examples of this could be national immigration policies, state regulations, or university policies. The final system is the macrosystem which is the outer most layer of the systems that contains a person's cultural experiences, social values, and historical events. (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). All the systems that surround the student can either help or hinder the student's development.

This student development theory was selected because it is important to understand how universities create environments that support their e-sport athletes. Factors in all of the cyber-athlete's systems can affect how likely the student will be positively engaged with the institution, and combined with Astin's theory, how that involvement impacts the retention and progression to graduation for these students. Understanding both the impact of involvement and the environments that the student is operating in, will provide a lens through which the participants' information will answer the research questions.

Summary

This chapter provided insight into the history of e-sports, how universities recruit student athletes to their institution and how universities retain their student athletes. The chapter also examined some of the negative stigmas and toxicity that surround video game culture and discussed how universities were working to address these issues. The findings from this study will be analyzed utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model and Astin's Theory of Involvement to further explore the impact of collegiate e-sports programs on institutions and the recruitment and retention efforts for student cyber athletes.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter contains a description of how this study was conducted including the design of the study, participant information, research site, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and the treatment of data.

Design of Study

A qualitative methodology was used for data collection and analysis. More specifically, a phenomenological study design was utilized as it allowed the researcher to analyze the experience from multiple individuals about a specific phenomenon in order to get a wholistic understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A phenomenological study was chosen because it allows the researcher to a holistic view of a specific concept or phenomenon from multiple participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Using this approach allowed for in depth conversations with administrators about their motivations for creating an e-sports program as well as well as offering a detailed explanation for how the e-sports program was implemented on their campus. Administrators will also be able to provide a description of their recruitment and retention efforts for their e-sport athletes.

Research Site

This study took place with multiple college and universities around the United States. For this reason, for a location to be considered for this study, it had to meet the following criteria: (1) It must have an established e-sports program for at least 12 months, (2) it must have at least one full-time employee to coordinate/coach the team, (3) it must have a group of consistent e-sports athletes, (4) the institution must compete against other

higher education institutions, and (5) the institution must be found in the school directory for NACE. A membership with NACE was used as it is one of the most rapidly growing regulatory body for collegiate e-sports (Hennon, 2019) and allowed all of the universities in the study to have the same rules governing their e-sports programs.

Participants

Participants for this study were five higher education institutions that were represented by the leading administrators of their e-sports program. Participants for this study were purposefully selected and were individually interviewed over the video conferencing software, Zoom™. Participants were selected from administrative staff at higher education institutions that are affiliated with the National Association of Collegiate E-sports (NACE). Participant's identities were kept confidential throughout the study and identifying information has been redacted from transcripts where necessary.

Institution One

Institution One is a large public institution located in the Southern Region of the United States. Institution One is represented by Participant One who is a white man and is the Director of Institution One's e-sports program.

Institution Two

Institution Two is a large private institution located in the Southern Region of the United States. Institution Two is represented by Participant Two, a white man who serves as the Director of Institution Two's e-sports program.

Institution Three

Institution Three is a small private institution located in the Mid-West Region of the United States. Institution Three is represented by Participant Three, a man of color who is the Director of Institution Three's e-sports program.

Institution Four

Institution Four is a medium public institution located in the Mid-West Region of the United States. Institution Four is represented by Participant Four, a white woman who is the Director of Institution Four's e-sports program.

Institution Five

Institution Five is a small private institution located in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States. Institution Five is being represented by Participant Five, a white man who serves as the Coordinator of Institution Five's e-sports program.

Instrument

Semi-Structured Interview

This study utilized semi-structured interviews that were conducted over the digital conferencing software. All of the participants in this study opted to use the Zoom™ software. A semi-structured interview allows for the collection of data from the participant's point of view and will allow for follow up questions to probe for additional information (Barriball and White, 1994). The interviews were scheduled for approximately one hour and were audio/video recorded. The interview questionnaire (Appendix B) allowed for a consistent set of questions for all participants while the semi-structured nature of the interviews allows for follow up questions based on their responses. All participants received the informed consent form prior to the interview and

were asked to confirm understanding of their rights as a research participant at the beginning of the interview.

Researcher-as-instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher must also be considered an instrument in the study as they are both the primary collector of information as well as the interpreter of that information during semi-structured interviews (Pezzela, et al., 2012). During a semi-structured interview, the researcher has the ability to directly affect the information they receive and have the potential to encourage or discourage the participants giving data (Pezzela, et al., 2012). It is also important in an interview for the researcher to establish rapport with their participant. By establishing rapport, the researcher will receive more complete answers when asking open ended questions (Pitts and Miller-Day, 2007). As an instrument of the study, the researcher must understand that their biases can have an impact on the quality and accuracy of the data that they are given (Chenail, 2011).

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews during the fall and spring semesters of 2020 and 2021. The interview was structured with open ended questions outlined with a questionnaire (Appendix B). Prior to the interview starting, participants were given an informed consent document containing all of their rights as participants. The interview was recorded by two audio devices to ensure that the data will be able to be analyzed accurately once the interview has been completed.

Treatment of Data

To protect participants' identities during the course of the study, participants and their institution were assigned the code of Institution and Participant one through five and

any identifying information provided during the interview was masked. All data including the recordings, transcripts, and researcher notes will be stored for three years on two password protected USB drives. After the three-year waiting period, all information will be deleted in accordance with university IRB guidelines.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the researcher to prepare for coding. Once the conversations have been transcribed, the researcher read through the transcriptions in order to find significant statements and experiences that relates to the study's research questions. These statements and experiences were then be given a code in order to group similar statements and experiences together (Saldana, 2013). Once the transcripts were coded, the codes were analyzed to find broad themes to what participants said during the interview (Saldana, 2013).

Summary

To accurately investigate how and why e-sports programs are developed, the researcher used a phenomenological study was conducted with five higher education institutions across the United States with an e-sports program. Universities were chosen based off a set of common criteria to allow for the study to answer the research questions. Participants were interviewed through the virtual conferencing software Zoom™ using a semi-structured interview for approximately one hour. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and themes identified in examining the phenomenon of e-sports programs. Chapter 4 will present the participants' responses in the study.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative study and the analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews with representatives from five universities, both public and private, that have varsity collegiate e-sports programs. The participating universities are scattered throughout the Mid-West, Southern, and Rocky Mountain Regions of the United States. The data gathered shows that higher education institutions do not all have the same path to getting an e-sports program at their school, however common themes were discovered across most of the participants. Common challenges of forming e-sport programs were discovered between participants. Lastly, common differences between e-sports and traditional sport programs emerged.

Research Question #1: Why do Universities Form E-sports Programs?

Participants were asked a series of questions ranging from the motivations of the university to develop an e-sports program to operational differences between traditional sports programs and e-sports programs that aimed to better understand why universities decide to form e-sports programs. Participants discussed several reasons for the decision including: Return on Investment, Community Building, and Post-grad Opportunities.

Return on Investment

The first major theme that came up when looking at why universities form e-sports programs is the need for a Return on Investment (ROI). ROI references the benefits that the university can expect after forming an e-sports program. Participants spoke about the administrations decisions to move forward with developing an e-sport

program with two sub-themes of RIO: low costs and revenue and recruitment, retention and enrollment.

Low Costs and Revenue. Low costs and revenue were talked about heavily by one of the participants and were mentioned several times by another participant in regards to the ROI of an e-sports program. These financial benefits include low costs to start, cheaper to maintain once formed, and revenue streams from the program. Participant Two explained, “it was just a slam dunk. It was going to be super easy for them and it wasn't going to cost them a whole lot to do it.”

When looking at the low cost of starting a program, participants often spoke about less frequent purchases and not needing to make major renovations to facilities in contrast to other sports. Participant two explained,

> If you're a university who spends money on like football every year, it's a drop in the bucket compared to these other programs. 80 grand can buy you everything that you need for your arena, up to 20 computers. 80 grand sounds like a lot, but it's really not a whole lot when your equipment purchases for football and lacrosse or something like that are close to a quarter million dollars every year. So, 80 grand once for 10 years, it's worth the initial investment [and] is going to help you recruiting.

Participant Five explained, “we also purchased all of our parts for our computers, and we built them ourselves” which is another way to keep costs lower. These lower costs can help sway university administrators to help develop an e-sports program. At one point, Participant Five said, “initially I think that was the best way to win our President over, to provide some economical boons to what e-sports could provide college campuses.”

Once the e-sports program had been formed, a common element that was looked at was the lower costs of maintaining the program. Specifically, there are numerous costs that e-sport programs do not need to pay that traditional sports programs have to cover. Participant Two shared,

> it's very easy to do because it's not very expensive, cause there's not really any travel. So you don't have to pay for hotels. We don't have to pay ginormous tournament fees. We don't have to pay food for 20, 30 people on a bus, paying for buses. So, my budget is not a whole lot compared to our football program.

The lack of traveling and accessibility to compete was also stated by Participant Five. Participant Five said, “but with e-sports again, you just come to one location and you can connect with someone across the state or across the country and be totally fine.” This cuts down on the amount of money that it costs to maintain a program and to compete with other schools.

The final aspect of low costs and revenue that the participants talked about would be the possibility of becoming revenue neutral or even positive through streaming services and merchandise sales. Participant Two explained,

> If you can get your Twitch up and going, that's another source of revenue for your program. And if you get to the point where you're making a lot of money on Twitch, then maybe your team doesn't need a budget anymore. Cause they're self-sustaining and that's another big benefit of e-sports. They can become self-sustaining through Twitch or streaming on YouTube or streaming on Facebook. That's also something that no other program can really claim, [that] they can

> become self-sustaining. A lot of universities lose money off their sports' programs.

Along with streaming, Participant Two also explained that one of his goals is to make sure that they are able to sell merchandise for their e-sports team. Participant Two explained, "So to get a merch page set up is also a short-term goal of mine. That way people will want to buy [team] stuff." He clarified it was their goal to sell the team's merchandise for people to buy rather than the normal items at the bookstore. These forms of revenue would help offset the costs of forming an e-sports team and could help an e-sport team become revenue neutral.

Recruitment, Retention and Enrollment. Another reason that was consistently mentioned when asked why universities developed e-sport programs was the anticipated positive impact on student recruitment, retention and enrollment. Several of the participants explained that having an e-sports team would be beneficial because it would bring more student e-sports athletes onto campus. Participant Four explained,

> E-sports sports is a very international sport. And we have a lot of international students and we have a very kind of diverse population in terms of being from all over the world. And so we thought that would be a really good opportunity, for us to take advantage of.

She followed up that statement by saying that recruiting and retaining these athletes is a large motivation for why universities develop e-sports programs.

Along with recruiting e-sports athletes, increasing enrollment was another aspect that was talked about by several participants. Participant Five explained that when tours are going through and perspective students see e-sport athletes wearing jerseys, they have

said, “Oh my God, they have e-sports. They have e-sports I want to go here.” He followed up that by saying, “being able to be one of the influences now for why people go to CC is definitely, I think, well, we'll add that little box there as a surprise.” Similarly, Participant Two shared “They knew that kids were going to want to come for e-sports and they knew they could get other kids involved on campus that normally were never involved with stuff before.” When Participant One was asked about recruiting, he said that his school did not need an to see an increase in enrollment because of the large number of students currently attending the institution, he did say in regards to smaller institutions,

> Where if they can get another 20 to 30 students coming to their school because of an e-sports program, that's what makes it a win. The fact that they've got 20 to 30 more enrollments out of 2,000 to 5,000 student body that that would make it successful.

This shows that not all institutions need e-sports to be an enrollment driver, but it would be a larger benefit for smaller institutions that are trying to get enrollment numbers up. This is also supported by Participant Two when claiming, “It's 100% going to pay itself off when you have those kids coming in with tuition dollars making money for your school”.

Most of the Participants said that along with recruitment, retainment was also a factor in bringing e-sports onto campus. However, no institution spoke about how to track the retainment, or how they plan on increasing retainment of their students. Participant Four said, “And that sense of belongingness, I'm pretty sure, has correlated to dropping out of school or transferring”. This recognizes that getting students to feel a

sense of belonging by getting involved in e-sports will help keep students at their institution. This, however, is the most direct explanation that was offered by any of the participants as to how e-sports directly increases student retention.

Community Building

Community building was another aspect that several of the participants spoke of as a value of having an E-sports program. There were three primary aspects that were talked about within community building: rising popularity, student interest, and student leadership. When speaking on the formation of the e-sports program, Participant Two said that one reason his university developed the program was because, "they can engage an audience that never really was engaged before".

Rising Popularity. Participant One explained that one of the reasons why Institution One decided to create an e-sports program was because of the rising popularity around competitive video gaming. This was also reflected by Participant Five when he pointed out that one of the reasons his institution pursued a program was because "I think [as] video games becomes more and more of a daily thing and a regular thing" that more and more students would be interested in competitive gaming. Several of the other participants shared that they felt the increasing interest in E-sports for both participation and as a spectator event was an opportunity for them with several of the participants sharing that watching video games being streamed is becoming a more legitimized form of entertainment as the streaming industry continues to grow. As a result of this growth, there is greater opportunity to engage incoming students. Participant Four said, "there are many schools out there who do not do it well and I think are losing opportunities to bring people in".

Student Interest. Another aspect of why e-sport programs were developed at the participating institutions was the interest generated by the participants themselves. Most of institutions had some form of club on campus that was dedicated to competitive video gaming before they decided to expand to an e-sports program. Participant Four shared that once her campus' video game club got an official university email, they were contacted by the Athletic Department to get a better understanding of student interest on Institution Four's campus. Participant Four explained that her campus' administration instructed her to survey students at the university to gauge the level of interest from current students on campus. After her study was concluded, it showed that there was a significant interest on campus for collegiate e-sports with the survey even allowing students to submit games that they would want to play, or watch being played.

Participant Five also surveyed students on their campus and found that out of the 2,100 students that responded to the survey, 100 were interested in e-sports with 60 participants interested in competing for the e-sports team. When asked what advice he would give to institutions developing e-sports programs, Participant Five said that it would first be important to survey for student interest because it would likely be higher than most administrators would believe. While none of the other schools specifically talked about surveying student interests, most of recognized that student interest was important. Participant One said, "They have to actually be bringing some value to the table. They have to actually have something that makes students want to engage [with] it and think that the program is like a good use of their time".

Student Leadership. Several of the institutions talked about the importance of student leadership within the program. Most of the participants talked about their

program using students as staff members to help with things like broadcasting, setting up events, and helping coach the team. When Participant Four was asked why her institution wanted to bring e-sports onto campus, she indicated that providing "job opportunities for students" was an important bonus factor for their program. She then explained that her students were able to help out in many different ways on campus and even has even had some student staff members make custom music for their broadcasting.

Participant One also claimed that student staff within the e-sports program would be able to learn about the growing e-sports industry in collaboration with their schooling and tie into potential career opportunities or experiences that would assist them in gaining internships or other employment outside the campus. Finally, Participant Five shared that as their program expands, he is planning to bring more student workers into the program to give them experience that they could be missing out on. This goal of tapping into the students to be not only active participants but helping drive the success of the program as a whole was a commonly shared perspective by the participants.

Post-Graduate Opportunities

Several participants talked about opportunities for their athletes and student staff members after graduation. Every school spoke about the need of students within the programs to maintain a high GPA so they are able to graduate. Participant Two said, "Our first priority is graduating kids because e-sports is fine and dandy, but after your four years at (Institution 2) is up, the 0.05% chance that you go pro is not going to sustain you after college." Participant Four also emphasized the need to keep athlete's grades up, but she also said,

> we have a media manager of audio and some broadcasting, and he's going to make custom soundtracks for us. That's a benefit to us. But for him it gives him experience and it's his music, right? He made it for us. So, he's getting that benefit as well. As are all of these students who are staff members, and even the players putting it on their resume. That you're a collegiate athlete, that's huge for jobs.

Most institutions indicated that a hidden benefit of student staff members getting experience was that it decreased the cost of having to hire more full-time employees to actually run and maintain the program, which helped with the decision making by the academic leadership when it came time to invest in, and continue to support, the e-sports program.

In addition, participants shared that some reasons for the program's development were unique to their institution. Participant One explained that one of the biggest reasons that his school was developing an e-sports program was because they were expanding one of their academic departments, and Institution One wanted to be able to give those students more hands-on experience as their program was growing. He explained,

> I know the reasoning was that we have always tried to be a technology focused school. One thing that sort of coincided with that is that the start of the e-sports program also coincided with the inauguration of the (expanded department). That is the (expanded department) which is the organization inside the college of arts and sciences that the e-sports program is housed. And the goal of that is to sort of be a hub for new media content development and new media content training inside (Institution One). And so, the idea was that e-sports would form a competitive counterpoint to the academic side of that, and both give greater

exposure to the university, but also expose students to the burgeoning e-sports industry.

Participant One continue to explain that students within the expanded department helped with the program and that there were large outside groups in their area that they wanted to connect their students to as a way of networking for when they graduate from their institution.

Research Question #2: What Was the Process of Creating an E-sports Program?

Participants were asked a series of questions to describe the process of how their institutions formed the e-sports program at their institution. There were two major elements that emerged from the interviews with the participants that were fundamental to the process of establishing the campus' e-sports program: Student Interest and University Support.

Student Interest

Most of the participants explained that student interest was a key factor during the process of forming the e-sports program. The institutions identified existing student interest in the idea of gaming and e-sports on their campus primarily through two approaches according to the participants: the existence of a e-sports club that was ran by the students as a student organization and more formally through a survey conducted with the student's campus to gauge interest in supporting an e-sports team both by joining the team and watching institutional players.

Club E-sports. All but one of the participants talked about the existence of club e-sports teams on their campus, and several of them spoke about the university reaching out to these groups of students to determine interest in developing an e-sports program.

Participant Five explained that the President of Institution Five found out that e-sports was rapidly rising in popularity because of her son. The President reached out to the gaming club on their campus as a first step in bringing e-sports to Institution Five's Campus. This was very similar to what Participant Four said about Institution Four's decision to develop an e-sports program. She explained that once their club was officially formed, the assistant athletic director reached out to her because she was a member of Institution Four's club team and he wanted her to help gauge the interest on campus.

However, not all of the institutions reached out to involve their student ran club sports despite their existence. Participant One explained, "we have a number of student clubs that are focused on gaming and e-sports and so we knew that there was a strong degree of student interest". The simple existence of multiple organizations around gaming formed by the students was enough evidence of student interest to the administrative leadership to pursue developing an e-sports program.

Survey Student Interest. Another way that the institutions measured interest in gaming was done by conducting a survey of enrolled students to get more information about how knowledgeable and willing to participate students would be on campus with an e-sports program. When asked what advice he would give to an institution looking to develop an e-sports program, Participant Five shared, "Have someone in ITS grant you permission to send out a student wide email to gauge your [students'] interest of e-sports. And that number is going to be huge." This was a critical element to establish student interest. "When you're trying to present this to administration officials saying, 'this is how many students on your campus want to play this game', 'or want to try and do this'."

Having data to show student interest and willingness to engage with the program was a powerful tool in the process of creating the program.

Participant Four shared a similar approach that their institution used to show student interest. She explained, “So a lot of people (administrators) had an interest around it. So essentially, I made a survey which covered student familiarity with e-sports student, current behaviors regarding e-sports and then student projected behaviors regarding e-sports at (Institution Four)”. She continued to express the value of being able to show concrete numbers to upper administration at Institution Four in order to get the university support that was needed to get the program established and continue that support as got up and running.

University Support

Along with student interest, university support was one of the largest aspects behind the successful development of an e-sports program. Participant Three explained, “once leadership and students are on board with it, there should really be little to no reason as to why something shouldn't be started”. The participants described university support in four aspects: staffing, finances, student athlete benefits, and departmental expansion.

Staffing. Despite wanting to E-sports give students working for the e-sports program work opportunities and experiences that will position them for post-graduate engagement with the industry, the full-time staff working for the program are just as critical to its success. Almost all of the participants spoke about the need to recruit the right staff and to make sure that they are properly trained for the position. Participant Four talked about the need to recruit a good staff early in order to set up a successful

culture within the e-sports program. Participant Four stated that it is important to be recruiting for both athletes and staff. She later added, “Your first season of founding your program is really important. The first group is going to be the one that sets the tone and sets the culture going forward.” Participant Four also explained that her student workers were responsible for media management and to make sure that broadcasting happens properly. This was echoed by Participant One who shared “We kind of get by, by using student assistants and work-study students for a lot of like the actual hands-on stuff”.

Participant Five explained that his position was created as a paraprofessional position that was designed to allow someone who is coming out of the program the chance to work for one or two years within Institution Five’s e-sports program while they look for a more permanent position around e-sports. He explained that this gave him a really good perspective of how current students within the program are feeling and he is able to better understand those perspectives while he is making decisions for the program. Participant Five also spoke about the need to get a student assistant as the program continued to grow in order to help him out with the day to day running of the team.

Participant Two did not directly address student staff at Institution Two’s program but knew that increasing staff had to be supported by provable need. When asked about creating staffing positions for the program he said,

> If you want to have a GA or work study, make sure your recruitment numbers are really solid. Because that's going to pay for that GA or it's going to pay for whatever work study that you have. There are talks of getting me a GA. I just have to get more recruits in.

He later talked about hitting a specific number of recruits that would show Institution Two's administration that the program would need more staffing as it continues to develop.

Finances. All participants spoke to, or alluded to, getting financial support for the program from their institution. Funding for e-sports programs come from different sources depending on where the program is housed. Institutions Two, Three, and Four are all organized under the Athletics Departments at their institutions. Participant One's program is under a creative media department and Participant Five's program is under ITS. Most of the participants explained the benefits to the program being housing in specific departments were either helped because of expertise within that department, benefits to the athletes, or access to funding. However, Participant One was the only school that talked about their funding in-depth, explaining that the scholarships for their e-sports athletes comes from the Student Activity Fee. Other than that, no school provided greater details of where their funding came from.

Participant Four spoke about the opportunities for sponsors within e-sports programs. She explained that as they were forming the e-sports programs, outside entities contacting her trying to get a partnership or help sponsor their e-sports program. Participant Four explained that this amount of communication related to partnerships or sponsor requests was hard to keep track of because of how many places were contacting her at once.

Benefits to Athletes. One participant spoke in depth about the desire to make sure that their e-sport athletes were going to be given the same benefits as traditional sports athletes. Participant Four explained,

> We felt that with athletics, there were a lot more benefits to the students and to the school for having the program under athletics because it's a sport department. A couple of those being student benefits, like being able to reschedule, testing priority, access to a personal trainer, access to the Director of Student Athlete Health and Wellness, and opportunity for scholarships. So, a lot of opportunities within athletics.

She explained that there was a brief discussion on whether athletics would be the best place for the e-sports program to be placed, but the decision was made to house the program within the athletics department because there were a lot of benefits to being there for the cyber athletes. Participant Four also explained that being under athletics has helped the e-sports athletes feel more legitimized as collegiate athletes and their professors have been supportive to an e-sport athlete's schedule and needs.

Departmental Expansion. Finally, Institution One decided to locate the e-sports program within an Academic Unit. As one of the departments was expanding, it allowed for e-sports to be supported by the administration staff at the institution in the academic college. Faculty helped to push for the expansion of e-sports as a way of connecting students and athletes within the academic program to the growing industry of e-sports. While Institution One was the campus that has situated the program within an academic unit, he stressed this was a crucial part of Institution One's decision to develop and establish the program.

Research Question #3: What Challenges Were Encountered During the Formation of the Institution's E-sports Program?

Participants were asked a series of questions to better understand the challenges that institutions will face in developing a collegiate e-sports program and as they are growing. Three general themes arose from the participants responses about the difficulties that they faced: lack of understanding, issues around recruiting and retaining athletes, and struggling for adequate financial resources.

Lack of Understanding

All participants expressed that there was some level of not understanding what e-sports are on their campus and with their community. Whether talking to the administration at the institution, perspective athlete's parents, or any other number of groups, there seemed to be a clear lack of understanding of what exactly e-sports are. This lack of understanding can be looked at in four aspects around the lack of understanding: university support, lack of structure, spaces and game selection.

University Support. All participants explained that they had university support, but almost all of the participants also recognized that a number of the people involved in the formation of their e-sports teams do not fully understand this new competitive gaming medium. Participant One explained that the original director of Institution One's program was a faculty member who knew about the business of video game development, but not other aspects He explained, "a game development company is totally different from managing an e-sports team. He didn't play video games really at all. He didn't know anything about them, except from a business research perspective". This understanding about only parts of e-sports was echoed by the experiences of the other participants. When Participant Two was talking about his interactions with the Athletic Director at Institution Two he said,

> It's just me and him because I have to explain everything to him because he doesn't know a whole lot about e-sports. You know I have to explain Rocket League to him and every game you can think of except for Madden and 2K.

The struggle of explaining e-sports to university administration was talked about or alluded to by all participants, and that can make it more challenging when trying to grow the program. Participant Two explained that he has to purchase all of his own equipment because no one within his department understands what they need or why they need it. Participant Three shared that frustration, claiming that he had to justify making purchases for the program because the people who work above him do not understand what the program needs to be successful.

One participant was not even able to get university support until there was a change in the leadership when a new President, who understood more about e-sports, arrived at the institution. Participant Three explained that even though there was support from a lot of administrators and students for the development of the program, the President (at the time) did not understand what it was and refused to support it. Once a new President was hired, Participant Three said that was the change that allowed the e-sports program to be understood among the leadership saying, “it was a big change of leadership that really led into it”. Participant Four explained that Institution Four was on board with the idea only after there was a presentation made explaining how the program would benefit the university so that the leadership better understood what the program would bring to the institution.

Lack of Structure. Another major element of this theme was the lack of structure that e-sports currently has. Participant Four, along with several of the other participants,

had to struggle with a lack of structure for the program on their campus. She explained the challenges of a lack of overall structure was something that make it more difficult for her, “the fact that I can't schedule three weeks out is very stressful for me because that's what the athletic department does, because that's what sports do they know that in three weeks we're playing (random institution)”.

Participant One also had difficulties with how e-sports operated compared to traditional sports in getting support from the institution, “for most tournaments, even the big tournaments, you learn about them maybe a couple months in advance, if you're lucky. Most tournaments that are run by schools or universities we find out about a month before, maybe”. He added that this was in part because there is less structure between schools than there are with traditional sports. Specifically, he said that the NCAA has been around for so much longer and therefore is able to know when tournaments will happen and so they have a more structured schedule that will work with more schools. Participant One said that this lack of structure between institutions and competitions has gotten better, but it is still very chaotic. Other participants shared similar struggles with the less formalized competitive structure of e-sports.

Spaces. Having a physical space to practice and compete is another element that makes is difficult for e-sports programs at institutions where space can be a premium. Participant Five said that when Institution Five began its e-sports program, there was not a space for their team to compete in,

> when we initially started, obviously finding a space for everyone to compete in was very difficult. And I think this goes across all campuses. Space is definitely a huge thing on our campus because we are a smaller school, which means a

> smaller campus, which means you're not going to have a lot of available spaces to try out something new like this.

Participant Five shared that this lack of identifiable space made it really challenging to form a team, and even got the e-sports team into trouble being in places that they should not have been in, or when they were being too loud in the space where they set up. He said, “And we got in trouble a couple of times for using it. Whether that was just not informing enough people that we were using it (computer lab) for practices or causing too much noise when we really shouldn't have”. Participant Three explained that his e-sports program was denied spaces multiple times and just recently was given a space for his team to compete. Both Participants Five and Three explained that this can be an issue that institutions looking to start an e-sports program will need to address if they want to be successful.

Game Selections. Another important topic that participants indicated was important to address was selecting what games the e-sports teams will play. Three of the participants explained that there were a lot of discussions about whether or not to allow games that portrayed realistic violence during competitions sponsored by the institution. Participant One explained,

> the biggest couple of shortcomings for us, is first of all, there's a restriction placed on us at the administrative level due to a bunch of negative feedback from shareholders, which is essentially that we cannot play realistic first-person shooters.

He went on to say that Institution One did not want to get into a debate about realistic violence during a time where school shootings were fairly common, so a decision was

made to not allow video games with realistic violence in their program. Participant Three explained that their Institution also decided that they did not want games like Call of Duty to be played but did not offer any specific rationale behind the decision. Participant Three did say that there were, "very legitimate reasons" for the decision but failed to elaborate on the decision.

Institution Four was a bit of an outlier when it comes to realistic violence in her program. She indicated that there were a lot of discussions about the game Counter Strike Global Offensive (CSGO), but ultimately the institution decided to allow the game to be played. Participant Four explained,

> Now Counter Strike, it was a little bit more of a discussion and thought process. I got a lot of flak for being negative about bringing Counter Strike in initially because of the whole terrorist, counter-terrorist verbiage and considering the fact that, obviously, tensions are high on the other side of the world with the United States and the fact that our student population, we have a lot of students from that area of the world, and I would not want any to get upset or offended by it.

She later explained that despite the concerns, Institution Four decided to move forward with allowing CSGO to be in their program by using words like "offense and defense" in order to try and remain more culturally sensitive.

Recruiting and Retaining Athletes

The second major theme that the participants identified was around the challenges in recruiting and retaining e-sports athletes. It was not just difficulty around finding interested students, but in dealing with the negatives associated with those who

participate in competitive gaming and can be divided into three sub-themes around this challenge: toxicity/diversity of athletes, GPA, and addiction/mental health.

Toxicity/Recruiting Diverse Athletes. All participants brought up the issue of toxicity within gaming culture and talked about the impact that it has on e-sports. This seemed to be a major barrier in recruiting diverse athletes based on its effect on the participants' programs. Participant Four shared that "once something happens where someone in your program makes a mistake, it reflects very poorly on your program. And that could deter recruits down the line." She later elaborated on her thoughts about toxicity saying,

> I think it's more of an issue in e-sports. I think there's a lot more sexism, a lot more racism, a lot more, 'I'm sitting behind a computer. I can say what I want.' There is a dissociation from actions in e-sports.

This sentiment was common among the other participants as well. Participant Three explained, "A man can kind of suck at the game and a woman can be great at it, but then if said woman beats said male in a game, you get that 'Oh man, you got beat by a girl' thing." Participant Three expanded on his thoughts saying that women are often the targets of toxicity. He used the example if a man does not do well in a match, the narrative is that he "fell a short", but if a woman does not do well in a match than the narrative is that she "should probably stop playing the game". Participant One also said that his program has a really hard time recruiting female athletes because of this culture in gaming. Despite there being little complaints from athletes on the team regarding toxic behavior, Participant One said that the sometimes-toxic culture around video games could

stop female athletes from even trying to join an e-sports team, despite when the culture on the team is not only supportive, but welcoming.

Most of the participants focused on the challenges around recruiting non-male athletes, as most of the participants indicated that recruiting male athletes of different races was not a major challenge. Participant Three explained that recruiting new athletes was especially easy for him because he is a person of color and he claimed that helps him to recruit a more visually diverse group of athletes. Participant Three also spoke about being openly supportive of people who are in the LGBTQ community and stressed the point in making sure that is a core value of the program. The problem is that often this toxic behavior can be difficult to spot by the people running the program. Participant Five explained that these issues can happen without anyone in authority knowing about it. Where someone steps out of the computer lab and commits a micro-aggression or it is happening online through messaging, it can be hard to know when it is happening unless someone brings it to the attention of someone in authority.

GPA. A big challenge for these programs was brought up multiple times by the participants was the challenge of recruiting and retaining athletes was with the e-sports athlete's GPA. Participant Two said that because his institution is not able to stack athletic scholarships with academic scholarships, they tend to recruit players with a lower GPA, so the scholarships are more advantageous for the perspective cyber athletes. Participant Two explained,

> There's also this thin line that I have to walk because I can't get kids with super high GPA's cause I can't compete with their academic scholarships, but I'm not

> going to recruit kids with super low GPA's because that tells me their work ethic isn't up to par with what I need for them to compete at a collegiate level.

He continued by saying that most Athletic Directors will tell anyone that the sport that will consistently have the lowest GPA is e-sports for reasons like this. This is supported by what Participant Four experienced in her program. When asked about shortcomings of Institution Four's program, Participant Four explained, "Grades were not what I wanted them to be at all. Students really struggled."

This was different at Institution One, where they actually require their e-sport athletes to maintain a higher GPA than the athletes on traditional sports teams. Participant One explain, "So our standard is actually higher than athletic standards, in part to kind of sway those concerns about varsity e-sports players potentially neglecting their studies or neglecting their path to graduation". Participant One only identified one challenge with having high GPA standards and that was some of the e-sport athletes that applied for Institution One's program did not have a high enough GPA to make the team based on their requirements.

The most talked about reason for cyber athletes not being retained was because of their GPA falling low enough to where they could not be on the team, or even had to drop out of the university. Participants One, Two, and Four all said that the main reason for this was playing e-sports too much during their free time. Participant One explained,

> We want academic standards because a big concern from stakeholders, particularly faculty stakeholders, was that some students who are already gaming in their rooms for 8 to 10 hours a day, if we establish a varsity team, is that going to encourage them to like further neglect their studies?

Participant Two has dealt with a similar concern and explained that it was really easy for e-sport athletes to play video games outside of practice too much and stop doing their homework., Participant Four had to deal with e-sport athletes who have missed class because they have stayed up too late playing video games. Both of these issues not helping the perception of the program by faculty and administration.

Addiction/Mental Health. Participant Four was the only participant to talk about the challenge of addiction within e-sports, but she stressed its importance during her interview. She said,

> I love softball, but it did not take over my life. Yes, it was a giant part of my life, but it did not take over. Whereas in e-sports, I think it's more of an issue of people gaming in general too much

She continued on by saying that it is more culturally acceptable to play video games too much and that the idea of neglecting studies to play video games is viewed by more famous gamers as something that is acceptable, if not applaudable. While no other participants explicitly spoke about concerns regarding gaming addiction, Participant Two experienced something similar in his program. When asked what challenges cyber athletes face, he said, “Yeah, one of our guys, when the new Call of Duty came out, he sat up and played it for 24 hours straight, only taking pee breaks”. Participant Two later said that overplaying video games can lead to mental fatigue and can be detrimental to an athlete. The other participants indicated similar concerns about this issue.

Adequate Financial Resources

All participants spoke about the challenges they were facing with regards to having enough money to run their programs the way they wanted. These challenges

around securing financial support focused mainly on the areas of hiring staff and providing scholarships. While all participants explained that they have support from their institution, all of them expressed concerns about their health and longevity of their budgets and the limits on the program that they were facing due to the situation with their budgets.

Staffing. All of the participants indicated that staffing was a challenge that was faced both early in the development of their e-sports programs, and one that continues to persist within most of the programs. When Participant Two was asked about the shortcomings his program was facing, he said,

> Having to do it all myself has been the biggest shortcoming. Just the amount of multitasking that I've had to do. I think has hurt more than I like to think about because when I'm not recruiting, I'm doing 17 other things. And when I'm doing 17 other things it's taken away from my recruiting, which is really what's going to keep sports going as kids are coming in and playing e-sports.

He then said that in order for the program to get funding for another full-time position, he would have to hit at least 40 recruits into the program. This is a similar situation to what Participant Four experienced when she wanted to be able to hire coaches for her team. When she received the budget she could only afford to get coaches for half the amount of time that she wanted. She explained,

> I was anticipating a budget where I could have several coaches coach for about 20 hours a week, because we are following NCAA guidelines for student athlete activity. So, they can't do more than 20 hours anyway. But to be able to pay a

> coach consistently 20 hours a week, that was what I was anticipating. Then I was given the budget number and that was not feasible anymore.

All of the participants talked about similar barriers for bringing more staff into the program, however, Participant Five had a unique perspective because there is currently no full time, professional position with Institution Five's e-sports program. When Participant Five was asked about how full-time positions could be made for his program, he explained that before a full-time position could be created, there would need to be evidence of student retention, recruitment, a growth of the number of games being played, and if there was growth in the number of competitions that the program participated in.

With few professional positions supporting the programs, all of the participants spoke about being having too many tasks to do with only one person. Participant Three explained that it would be "like asking Jim Harbaugh to run an entire football program by himself." He would coach every position, do all of the recruiting, and make sure that all the athletes were being supported. He pointed out that that would not be feasible, but with how e-sports is currently being handled, that is what most programs are doing. Most of the participants talked about using student staff members to help alleviate these issues, but Participant Five pointed out that that does not always work well. He talked about how one of his student workers did not give a warning to a player that was going to have to sit out of a competition due to grades.

> I hadn't really talked with the student worker enough to have them go through those steps of confronting the other student to begin with, giving them the initial

> warning, and then having this talk because they've been warned about it and kind of know that this is coming.

He later stated that he wants to put more emphasis on training his staff on how to handle issues like this but finds it hard to find the time to do that with everything else that he must do.

Scholarships. Three participants spoke about how finding scholarships for the cyber athletes is a challenge at their institutions. Participant One explained that Institution One offers $1,000 dollar scholarships to their cyber athletes and he did express that he wants to be able to give out larger scholarships but is unable to do so at this time because their funding for scholarships comes from their student activity fee. While this amount is lower than Participant One would like, other participants are unable to offer scholarships at all to their e-sport athletes.

Participant Three explained that his university does not offer athletic scholarships at all because Institution Three has only allocated money for academic scholarships. Participant Three said that it was an inconvenience and has affected some of their recruiting efforts and that in the future he would like to work to get scholarships for his cyber athletes. Finally, Participant Five expressed that their institution does not offer scholarships to their e-sports athletes and that he has had to put getting scholarships for them on the back burner because he has a lot of other responsibilities. He said that scholarships would help his recruitment, but Institution Five is getting enough interest without the scholarships to make it a priority.

Summary. The three themes that were found offer a good understanding of some of the challenges that e-sports programs face early on. There seemed to be a general lack

of understanding from university administrators, there is little structure to the programs, some programs had a difficult time creating a space to compete, and there were issues about what games should be played depending on the game's content. It was also discovered there are challenges with recruiting and retaining cyber athletes. Participants spoke about how toxicity towards non-white male players made it harder to recruit diverse athletes, that it is harder to recruit cyber athletes with good GPAs as well has having them maintain a high enough GPA to stay eligible to compete, and concerns about video game addiction and mental health were discovered. The last major theme that was discovered was a lack of adequate financial resources. Participants explained that there was a lack of professional staffing and a challenge to get impactful scholarships to their programs due to budget constraints.

Research Question #4: What Differences Are There in the Recruiting and Retaining Process of E-sport Athletes Compared to Traditional Athletes?

Participants were asked a series of questions about the recruiting and retention efforts of cyber athletes. It was discovered that there were not many differences between recruiting and retaining cyber athletes and those in traditional sports. However, three areas of distinction did appear between the two types of programs: managing burnout, accessibility, and gender inclusivity in e-sports.

Managing Burnout

The most talked about difference between retaining athletes between e-sports and traditional sports was around the issue of athlete burnout. Several participants pointed out that in other sports, athletes have to stop competing when they are not training or in a sanctioned competition, but that is not true in e-sports. Participant Two explained,

> So, here's the biggest challenge for cyber athletes. We'll start off with a football player. The football player has three hours of practice, then they take their pads off to hang them up. They go back to the dorm. They can no longer practice. E-sports, you go to practice, you play your games for two hours. And then you go back to your dorm and you play all night still.

Several participants pointed out that with all other athletes, fatigue can stop them from being able to compete, but in e-sports, there is less of a physical demand which allows cyber athletes to be able to play with little to no breaks. Participant One explained,

> A football player or basketball player cannot practice for 12, 15 hours a day. Like, it's not physically possible to do so, certainly not day after day after day. While it's not healthy, a gamer absolutely could play 12 to 15 hours of their chosen game day after day after day.

Participant Four pointed out that there is not a lot of spaces for traditional athletes to practice depending on the time of day. She said that once a gym closes, that limits how traditional athletes can train, but cyber athletes are able to go back to their residence and play as much as they would like to.

Another important aspect of player burn out was brought up by Participant Three. He explained that a lot of cyber athletes also play video games to relax in their spare time. He pointed out that this is not the case for a lot of other traditional athletes.

> I don't think we know any NBA player who, on a day-to-day basis, would go home and play pickup games at the Y. That's your job so, because of the uniqueness of how e-sports is, we have conversations like, “how do you play smash for fun?” And, “how do you play smash for work?” “How do you stream

> for fun" and "how you do stream for work?" "How do you compete in video games for fun?" "How do you play video games for fun and then compete for work?"

Participant Three explained that it is really difficult for cyber athletes to be able to differentiate competing for the team, and playing for leisure and fun, which contributes to burnout among the student players. Participant Five shared a similar viewpoint and explained that most cyber athletes have everything they need to compete in their rooms, which limits the ability of collegiate e-sports administrators to help them balance how much they play versus other aspects of their lives.

Accessibility

In terms of recruiting athletes, a large difference between e-sports and traditional sports is that being a competitive video game player can be more accessible than in other sports. Participant One pointed out that a lot of students on campus currently play video games competitively. Because of that, there is a large pool that can be drawn from for athletes for their program, so there is no need to do formal recruiting at high schools for high talented prospective athletes. Participant Five explained that Institution Five only has about 2,100 students on campus and they do no formal recruiting from high school. He explained, "you look at those bigger schools in California that are like 40,000 students and we're able to take them to game five in a game like Overwatch, that's pretty impressive". Participant Five explained that a big surprise for e-sports programs is how large of a talent pool they will have on their campus based on people that have been playing video games their whole lives. Participant Four also spoke about having a lot of

talented cyber athletes on campus to recruit from for their program but did not go into further details about it.

Gender Inclusivity

The last major difference that was identified by all of the participants was how they all explained that their programs are gender inclusive. All of the participants explained that while it is challenging recruiting non-male athletes, they do their best when recruiting to get a gender diverse pool for their programs. Participant Three explained that there are a number of all female e-sports teams to help create a less toxic environment, but he pointed out that most collegiate e-sports programs that he knew of were gender inclusive and had both men and women on teams together. This is obviously different from traditional sports teams where gendered teams are the established norm for almost every sport.

Research Question #5: What Are the Operational Differences Between an E-sports Program and a Traditional Sports Program?

When looking at the differences that e-sports athletes face compared to traditional sports programs, a number of operational differences between the two programs were identified. This study found three major themes around how e-sports differ from traditional athletic programs: e-sports teams typically operate as their own department and are not part of the athletic department that oversees other teams, the relative newness of the program, and issues of accessibility and availability are different.

E-sports as a Separate Department

All participants spoke about how their e-sports programs were more like being a separate department, apart from the Athletic Department, that has to operate on their own.

They do not get the benefits and resources available to teams that sports under the Athletic Department typically get. Participant Five explained,

> When you think about it, e-sports is its own Athletics Department. Because under athletics, you've got baseball, basketball, football, and all the other sports you have under there. And same thing with e-sports, you've got Overwatch, Rocket League, Fortnite, whatever e-sport else you have under there.

Participant One expressed a similar belief, “The way I usually explain it is that people often think of any e-sports program as an athletics team, well no, it's not. It's an athletics program. It contains within itself, multiple teams from multiple different games”. Four sub-themes arose from the interviews that were common between all of the participants’ institutions: staffing, finances, scouting, and GPA.

Staffing. This was the most commonly talked about difference between e-sports and traditional sports. Most participants spoke about them having to be the head of multiple aspects of e-sports, from the director, to the coach, to the head recruiter. Participant Two explained,

> So, if you can imagine an e-sports director, they're like an athletic director, but for video games. Except, I'm also coaching these games at the same time. So, I'm overseeing all these teams, but I'm also coaching five, six different games.

Participant Two went on to say that the games that he has to coach he is not as good as the players and sometimes they have to coach themselves in certain areas because he is not an expert in all of the games that are being played in his program. This experience was very similar to what Participant Three experienced when he transitioned into his position. Participant Three said that when he applied for the position, he was going to be

the Head Coach of E-sports at Institution Three, but he also had to take on the role of Director of E-sports because of the need to have someone handling the administrative tasks for the teams.

Other institutions explained that they had to cut back on coaching for budgetary reasons and they had to help the players learn to coach the teams themselves. Participant Four explained,

> So, we had to drop them (coaches) to basically 10 hours a week, which really sucks. And I only have two coaches. So, [I'm] trying to figure out how coaching is going to work and how much coaching I can give them and pay for.

She went on to say that some other institutions hire student coaches because they are less expensive, but those hires also tend to have less experience. She continued by saying that there is some consideration around bringing coaches in and paying them a flat rate for a session with the team. Participant Five explained that Institution Five does not have any full-time staff, including himself, and that their e-sports program has to pay coaches on a yearly and sometimes semesterly basis depending on the game that is playing as well as their financial situation.

There was a general understanding that all participants either said directly, or alluded to, that the general perception of an e-sports program is that one person can do everything that is needed to operate the team. Participant Four said,

> I think a lot of schools have this huge idea that this one person is going to come to the school and make it all magic. It's not impossible. A lot of these coaches work like 60 hours a week, coaches and directors, and that's not okay.

Participant Two explained that unlike traditional sports, e-sports is able to have just one person run the whole program, but there is a cost to doing so. He expressed concerns that he is not able to get everything accomplished because there is simply too much to do.

Financial. A commonly talked about aspect of the e-sports programs was comparisons with traditional sports programs over finances. The most commonly talked about difference was that the scholarships that are being awarded to cyber athletes are not on the same level with the scholarships being given to traditional athletes. When asked if e-sports scholarships were comparable to traditional sports scholarships, Participant One explained,

> Not really, we just don't have the funding for it unfortunately. So, in traditional athletics, obviously depending on the school, you might see half ride, full ride, whatever. We give out a thousand dollars, which isn't a lot but it's a decent portion of tuition.

This is very similar to what Participant Three said when he claimed that he has rarely heard of any e-sports program being able to offer full ride scholarships to cyber athletes. Participant Two had issues with scholarships as well, claiming that he could not compete with academic scholarships and it was a challenge at times using the scholarships he was able to offer to recruit high quality cyber athletes to his program. Participant Four was the last institution that offered scholarships and she claimed that while scholarships were important, the largest scholarship that she was allowed to give out was $10,000, with most of her athletes receiving "somewhere in the middle" between $1,000 and $10,000.

Another financial difference that was discussed was the costs associated with start-up and maintaining an e-sports program compared to a traditional sports program.

Participant Two claimed that an e-sports program can be started with a budget of around $80,000 and claimed that costs stay consistently low due to little to no travel expenses and not needing to purchase large facility infrastructure for a team. Participant Two claimed that because of the low start-up costs and the low costs of operations that it is much easier for an e-sports program to become revenue neutral over other sports like football. Participant Five explained that since e-sports does not need to travel to compete, that is a key way of keeping costs lower than all other sports.

However, not all participants had the same experience. Participant One explained that the university gives more money to other sports, because other sports generate more revenue and are self-funding. Participant One explained that his program has not become self-funding yet and that is one reason for his budget to not being expanded. Participant One also talked about multiple tournaments and competitions that he and his teams travel to and that travel and other traveling expenses actually take up a large portion of his budget.

Scouting. Another frequently talked difference was the differences around scouting potential athletes. To start, Participant One explained that he does not do any form of formalized scouting for perspective athletes. He explained “having that enormous student body (56,000 students) means we also have an enormous pool of talent to draw from. So, we can field competitive teams without going out and having to recruit specifically competitive students.” He continued by saying that there was no need for him to go to high schools for his program right now as he gets enough interested students from on campus to sustain the program. This is very similar to what Participant Five has experienced. He explained that he does not do a lot of scouting because his teams are able

to be competitive with just the currently enrolled students who are interested in playing on the teams. Participant Four explained that recruiting in person can be really challenging because her institution is in a rural area with little to no options for her to formally scout high school e-sport athletes.

Participants Two and Three both expressed that they actively recruit for cyber athletes but have had mixed experiences. Participant Three explained that while he does recruit players he did not elaborate further on how exactly he was doing that. Participant Two explained that he goes to every high school within 50 miles of Institution Two but is unable to go to other schools because he does not have any full-time staff that can help him recruit high school players. Participant Two shared that e-sports scouting is very geographically dependent because there are not a lot of programs that put money into formalized scouting.

The last major component that was discussed by most participants around finding players was that it is really easy to look up all players' statistics on their player profiles. Four of the participants said that they look at how players are ranked on leaderboards, or profiles, when they are considering anyone for their teams. Participant One explained that some games will let you know national rankings versus all other players in the nation, and some are less detailed but still show a player's skill level compared to other players. Participant Two pointed out that this is different from other sports because it is a complete summary of major statistics for every time they have played the game.

GPA. Similar to traditional sports, e-sports have GPA requirements for their athletes to be eligible to play. The difference is what GPA is required by the e-sports program. Participant One explained that in order to get support from administrators and

stakeholders, cyber athletes must have at least a 3.0 GPA to be eligible to be on any team. Participant One explained that this is a higher GPA requirement than other sports on Institution One's campus. This is similar to what Participant Four experienced when she shared that she requires athletes to have a 3.0 GPA because of how academically demanding their institution is. However, not all programs require a higher GPA. Participant Two said that he has to recruit athletes with a lower GPA than other sports because he does not have the funds to compete with academic scholarships. He elaborated on this by saying that any e-sports athlete that has below a 3.0 has to go to study hall to maintain good grades, and if any athlete falls below a 2.5, he is unable to start them in any competition. No other participants expressed concerns between the GPA requirements between e-sports and traditional sports.

Newness

Because collegiate e-sports is so new, there are several differences from traditional sports programs. Four sub-themes were identified that highlight the differences between e-sports and traditional sports: lack of regulations, lack of experience, technological reliance, and licensing issues.

Lack of Regulations. All participants shared that their institutions are members of the National Association of Collegiate E-sports (NACE), but several of them expressed the lack of documented regulations as a major difference between e-sports and traditional sports. Participant Two explained, "cause it's not like football that's been around for the last hundred years. Having the NCAA that's governed everything already has stuff set up from hundreds of years ago". He went on to say that there is no regulated seasons for e-sports and that competitions can be very inconsistent from year to year.

This is similar to what Participant One also experienced. He explained how there is no consistent sports schedule for regular play or tournaments and that they happen almost randomly depending on who is sponsoring them. He did say that as NACE has gotten more members and has gotten more experience, things have gotten better, but it is still not regulated to the same level that traditional sports are.

Participant Five talked about another aspect of the lack of regulations compared to traditional sports. He explained that because there is no need to travel, e-sport teams are able play in multiple tournaments on the same day. He said that this was different than other sports and can help contribute to e-sport athletes burning out because they are playing too much. Participant One also explained that several of the tournaments that they participant in are not limited to only collegiate teams. He explained that anyone can join the tournaments, which is different than an NCAA sponsored tournament where only certain schools can compete against each other.

Lack of Experience. Because collegiate e-sport programs are so new, several of the participants explained that there was no one that could help guide them to make sure the program was being developed properly or help guide them away from making mistakes. Participant One explained that their institution was one of the first institutions to develop an e-sports program and because of that, his program often gets contacted for advice about how to develop the program, even though they are still working through the process themselves. Participant Two had similar experiences when he contacted several schools throughout the United States asking for advice on recruiting cyber athletes, attending tournaments, what partnerships to seek out, and other aspects of the program. Similarly, Participant Four shared that a key to a successful e-sports program was to go to

the NACE conference before you begin to develop your program in order to gather information from other schools. All participants recognized the importance of collaborating with other schools to help create a better program, but there was no consistent method for how institutions should do that.

Technological Reliance. Obviously, e-sports is entirely reliant on technology and that is a big difference from traditional sports. Participant Two pointed out that in no other sport, common things can happen outside of the players control that can lead to a bad experience. He specifically said that "lag loses games" and that can be outside of the control of the team and institution if anything happens to their internet connection. Participant Two added that the e-sports arena on campus needs to be the "mecca" of internet on the campus to help make competitions as fair as possible and that one of the most important aspects of a good e-sports team is good equipment to have faster inputs into the game.

However, there is an aspect to the reliance on tech that no other sport currently relies on: the need to broadcast the sport. Whenever any of the participants spoke about having spectators watch them, they always spoke about watching the games through a stream. At no point during any of the interviews did any participant talk about having live spectators watching their teams. Several of the participants talked about the need to have broadcasting with Participant Four saying, "so short-term goals would be successful initial broadcasts. We really want to grow our viewership base and have some good income from Twitch". Participant Two also shared the same desire saying, "I would like to probably have fifty to a hundred subscribers where we can make around a thousand dollars a month, just off Twitch streaming".

Licensing Issues. Only one participant talked about the differences in licensing between e-sports and traditional sports, but he stressed its significance. Participant Five explained that traditional sports do not need to worry about licensing to play their sport, but in e-sports, if you want to play a specific game, sometimes there are issues with licensing games for tournaments. Participant Five explained that a company would not let one of their games be played at a tournament if the word, "championship" was in the title, so they had to change the name of the entire event to allow a specific game to be played there. He said,

> So, it's like crazy stuff like that, where it's we couldn't use this one game if we had this one word in our title that we're trying to navigate through. And obviously, that's what you kind of have to work with when you're dealing with companies like that, which is something that obviously traditional sports don't really have to go through.

Participant Five also explained that this is one reason why setting up regional schedules for e-sports could be challenging, if companies have conflicting demands to license their games in order to play, which traditional sports do not have to worry as much about.

Accessibility and Availability

Another key difference that was talked about by participants is the accessibility and availability that e-sports has that traditional sports do not have. As stated earlier in this chapter, some institutions did not do any scouting of high school cyber athletes because there were already large pools of talent in their current student body. There were two major elements that were discussed as being the core of accessibility and availability

for e-sports: cyber athletes competing in multiple games and e-sports being gender inclusive.

Cyber Athletes Competing in Multiple Games. While some collegiate athletes play multiple sports for the school, it is pretty rare (Sorenson, 2010). However, Participants Two and Four said that they have e-sport athletes that regularly play in multiple games for their program. Both participants talked about the fact that cyber athletes often want to play more than one game, but that they have to put limits to how much an e-sport athlete can do. Participant Two explained, "You can play as many games as you want, but I probably won't let you play more than two or three [games]. But you can play any of these games we have". He continued by saying that this allows them to be flexible and fill in holes for other teams that might need one or two players. Similarly, Participant Four explained that her cyber athletes are limited to playing on no more than two games. She said the purpose of these restrictions is to make sure that cyber athletes do not burn themselves out by taking on too many different games. Other participants alluded to having their cyber athletes compete in more than one game but did not provide specifics or address limits during their interviews.

Gender Inclusive. A major difference found between e-sports and traditional sports was that there can be mixed-gendered e-sports teams; something not typically seen in the traditional sports environment. While all participants in the study explained that e-sports is, in itself, gender inclusive, it is still difficult to recruit non-male cyber athletes. Participant Five explained that his program has "Fem Fridays" when they open the computer labs only for female identifying students to give women video game players a place that they can get introduced to e-sports in an environment that is not male-

dominated. Participant Five also said that there is an award that is given out to an e-sport athlete at the end of every year to a person that promotes gender equality within e-sports. All of the other participants talked in broad terms about having gender inclusive programs, but they did not provide examples of how they promote gender inclusion within their programs. While the programs addressed that they could recruit without regard to gender for their programs, they still dealt with the barriers that existed in gaming itself that challenged true gender equity.

Chapter V

Discussions, Recommendations, Conclusion

This phenomenological study was conducted to better understand why and how universities form e-sports programs, to better understand differences in recruiting and retaining cyber athletes, and finally to better understand operational differences between e-sports programs and traditional sports programs. Participants answered open-ended questions during one-on-one semi-structured interviews about their experience developing and maintaining an e-sports program. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings from the study, the implications for higher education and student affairs professionals, recommendations for student affairs professionals, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

As collegiate e-sports programs continue to develop, it is important to learn from the experience of other programs. There were several key findings from this study that are deserving of being discussed. Firstly, there needs to be a shift in how collegiate e-sports programs are organized by institutions if they are going to be successful. They tend to operate more closely to how an Athletic Department runs than to a traditional single sports program. Secondly, there is a fundamental difference in how competitions are played in e-sports versus traditional sports. Lastly, there were some key successes and challenges that e-sports programs are currently facing and will continue to face within the near future.

E-sports Programs are Similar to an Athletic Department

A key finding from the research is that e-sports programs are organized and run in a structure that more closely aligns with how Athletic Departments operate than how an individual athletic program or team is run. Several institutions were explicit that their positions were more like an Athletic Director than a head coach of a single team. The study found multiple aspects of an e-sports program that mirrored athletic departments in areas such as scouting, staffing, and financial resources. A key aspect of this is players may play a single game or multiple games depending on their interests, much as traditional athletes play a single, or in rare cases multiple sports. E-sports programs have to allocate time and resources into different games for different competitions for their teams with a schedule that does not look like traditional sports schedules. This is a vastly different way of managing a program when compared to a single sport such as football, baseball, softball, or soccer. Having to manage different groups of players, on multiple schedules, in vastly different competitive games, moves e-sports programs much closer to the operations of a full athletic department rather than paralleling a coach of a single sport that many outside of e-sports assume.

Scouting. When looking for talented cyber athletes, e-sports directors have to recruit talented players for multiple different games unlike a coach recruiting players for a single sport. For example, two games that were consistently spoken about were *Rocket League* and *Super Smash Brothers*. These games are vastly different and require different skill sets. Rocket League is a game about cars with rocket boosters playing soccer together, while Super Smash Brothers is a fighting game. Cyber athletes may play one or both games, and as a result two different approaches to team building, strategizing, and competition will develop that program directors will have to manage in addition to other

games that the program plays. This is significantly different than a traditional sports team where all of a coordinator's athletes are trying to achieve the same goal with the same set of rules. Directors of E-sports programs have to be able to accurately scout talent in a way that traditional sports simply do not have to do.

E-sports is currently at the point where a scouting strategy similar to traditional sports will not produce results. Instead, institutions typically recruit their teams from students who have committed to the institution for other reasons and wish to continue, or expand, their participation in competitive gaming. While some of the participants spoke about going to high schools in the local area, that was not very common in how players were scouted. Most of the participants explained that they look towards their current student body and use the player's online profile to determine if they are eligible for any of their teams. While participants did express the desire to eventually move into a traditional form of scouting, at this stage there is no need to recruit like traditional sports. A common barrier right now that is stopping more traditional approaches to recruiting is the lack of professional staffing within e-sports programs.

Staffing. During the study, it was discovered that different e-sports programs have different ways of staffing their program, but almost all of them were alike in that they were lacking sufficient staff to manage all of their needs. One area that was consistently talked about was how right now there is a lack of professional staff members within e-sports programs. Most of the participants expressed concerns about having to do all the scouting, recruiting, the coaching, the GPA checks, setting up competitions, and more, which can be overwhelming. This feeling of being overwhelmed can be exacerbated when it is understood that each e-sports program has multiple games that

they are responsible for. So not only does one person have to do all of that, but they must do all of that for several games that are completely different from each other. At this time, it appears that a lot of e-sports programs have decided to hire student workers as a way of mitigating some of these concerns.

When looking at how e-sports programs coach their cyber athletes, there were some discrepancies between how each program was choosing to coach. Some programs will hire coaches for short term contracts, or a few hours every week, to coach the team through a specific competition. While others had the Directors of the E-sports programs coaching all of the games that their team played. It was even discussed that at times cyber athletes themselves had to coach one another depending on how much of the game they know and how well they were able to play it. Currently, e-sports are being coached very differently that traditional sports and how it will develop is unknown.

Financial Resources. From this study, it also appeared that some of the participants viewed their financial resources in similar ways as how an Athletic Department would have done. The participants explained that they had to allocate their scholarship money into specific games in order to keep a highly talented team. This is similar to how in traditional sports, some athletic programs get more money allocated to them. A gymnastics team does not have the same budget and is given different resources than a basketball team for example. Rather than a traditional sports program that only has to worry about their one team, an E-sports Director may have to shift financial resources away from one team to another.

Another important aspect of financial resources is the revenue from streaming, merchandise sales, and sponsors. During this study, it was discovered that all of the

participants understood the need of revenue streams from the above sources. However, all of the programs seemed to still be in the process of developing steaming capabilities and trying to get merchandise sales up. In terms of sponsors, it appears that there are a lot of options currently with sponsors for collegiate e-sports programs, but many are unrealized. Several participants explained that they are overwhelmed with the amount of communication that they have been getting from businesses that would like to partner with them. This untapped financial potential was something that all participants were aware of, and all expressed that the need to do it right in order to be a more legitimized sport.

Competing is Different

Cyber athletes do not compete in the same way that traditional athletes compete. In collegiate e-sports, there is currently no 'season' that athletes compete in, there are no structured regional conferences, and collegiate teams can compete against teams that are not associated with other colleges. This is a stark contrast to how traditional athletes compete in their sports.

No Seasons. One discovery was that there is not a 'season' for e-sports. Tournaments may be scheduled for a certain time of the year, but the dates can very wildly, and teams are not always given much notice on when an upcoming competition will be hosted. Contrastingly, traditional sports are very regimented with advanced notice about dates and times for competition. For example, March Madness is an annual tournament of both men's and women's NCAA basketball teams that play for an entire month. For e-sports, a Counter Strike tournament may be sometime in the fall semester and can vary by weeks or even months. In addition, there can be multiple tournaments or

major competitions within the same calendar year based on who is sponsoring the event. This lack of a structured season for playing can make it challenging for cyber athletes to get time off for classes, be able to practice and be prepared to compete, and to simply plan their lives around a schedule that can change rapidly. With inconsistent scheduling, and no off-season, this can lead to burnout of cyber athletes because they may not be given sufficient time away from their sports to rest and recover.

Inconsistent Opponents. Traditional athletes have either a conference that they compete in, or a shared group of potential opponents and this can help drive up school spirit for a large, upcoming rival game. E-sports currently does not have a system like this, where opponents are consistent and can even be regionally based. It was discovered that at most tournaments, schools from all over the country could attend. This inconsistency in opponents can make it a challenge for e-sports programs to have a "rivalry" style game when opponents may be played once and then not again for several years. During the study the idea of creating regional e-sports conferences was discussed, but unfortunately the logistical challenges around creating these 'leagues' at this stage of competitive collegiate video gaming appears to be too much to overcome at this time.

Non-Collegiate Competitors. One final way that play is different from traditional collegiate sports to collegiate e-sports is that some of the competitions that e-sports programs participate in have cyber athletes that are not current college students. These cyber athletes can be former professional players, or a group of friends that are simply wanting a more competitive space to play their games. This is drastically different than traditional collegiate sports where all of the opponents are NCAA student athletes. Because of this, e-sports programs can be at a disadvantage compared to traditional

collegiate sports because cyber athletes do not need to be affiliated with a college program in order to compete. During this study, it was discussed that some programs have had student cyber athletes leave their programs and then competed in the same competitions independent from their former programs.

Successes and Shortcomings

During the study, several key areas of success as well as shortcomings that the institutions ran into were identified. These successes and shortcomings offer an understanding of the potential pitfalls to avoid and areas that may result in early successes to help establish the program. By taking advantage of this, new programs may encounter less challenge and require less resources when developing their own e-sports program.

Be Accessible, Not Inclusive. Several participants explained that they were able to be competitive in the games and competitions they played in despite having troubles recruiting athletes simply because their current student body was talented enough to stay competitive. Video games have been a mainstream form of entertainment for several decades, and unlike traditional sports programs, anyone is able to get better as long as they spend time playing. Unlike being an athlete for a more traditional sport, a person's body size, or ability, have less of an impact on how competitive they are in any particular game. This allows for e-sports programs to have an easier time to recruit high talented cyber athletes. This is why a school of around 2,000 students can be very competitive with large schools with over 40,000 students. A student that plays competitively in their free time can continue to progress against challenging opponents and can continue to be a

better player without needing the benefits that larger school is able to offer as a result of their size and access to greater resources.

However, even though e-sports is more accessible to a larger diversity of students, there is still a very real problem with disparities around gender and race of players that programs need to prepare for. A common shortcoming that all participants talked about was the challenge of toxicity within video gaming culture that makes it more challenging to recruit female cyber athletes and cyber athletes of color. Previous research has shown that gaming culture has a history of sexism and misogyny (Ruvalcaba, at al, 2018, Amazon-Hall, et al, 2018), a condition that was reaffirmed by the findings of this study. All participants expressed that there were challenges in recruiting non-male cyber athletes, and all participants talked about the issues with toxicity within gaming culture. This was also supported by Ruotsalainen & Friman's (2018) study that explained that women choose to not participate within e-sports because they get adverse treatment because of their gender. There is a need to find a way of creating and conveying a welcoming environment for non-white and non-male cyber athletes in order to create inclusive programming.

Gauge Student Interest. In terms of how universities develop programs, one of the most important aspects that was discovered was correctly gauging student interest. Talking to student organizations that were currently participating in competitive video gaming allows administrators to have a good understanding of what games are currently being played and can help them avoid creating a program for games that perspective cyber athletes have little interest in playing. This is crucial information to have because if cyber athletes believe that the program will not be beneficial or fun for them to

participate in, they will instead choose to go to competitions as private players or as members of other teams instead of representing the institution as part of an university sponsored e-sports team.

Another crucial aspect of gauging student interest is surveying student interest across campus to find out if the general student body will be supportive of a program in general. This allows administrators an opportunity to gauge whether or not current students would be willing to actively support an e-sports program through watching competitions and merchandise sales. Additionally, knowing the degree of interest from the student body allows administrators to be able to gauge how many current students would potentially be interested in playing for a sponsored e-sports team. This information is invaluable in the early days of recruiting for teams and finalizing what games will be played by the newly formed e-sports program.

Logistical Details. One valuable source of logistical success for an e-sports program is the relatively low cost of starting a program. Unlike other sports, which can require an entire arena, locker room, or other major renovations, e-sports teams only need computer equipment to start up. This lowers the initial amount of money to start an e-sports program to a much more manageable level and can allow an e-sports team to be created quicker and for less costs than many other sports. However, one shortcoming of e-sports is that currently it is not clear how much money e-sports programs will actually make in revenue. None of the participants provided any specific information about revenue from streaming, merchandise sales, or sponsorship and how impactful that was on their current e-sports program. So, while starting an e-sports team has a lower initial

cost, it is unclear how easy it will be for collegiate e-sports programs to become revenue neutral.

A second easy to reach logistical success is that e-sports can be played in almost any location as long as there is a stable internet connection. This accessibility allows for institutions that are considering creating an e-sports programs to have multiple options for where teams can meet to practice and can select a location that is more convenient than traditional sports. However, it is important to know that while e-sports teams can be played from any location, it is still important for cyber athletes to practice and compete in the same space. This allows the cyber athletes to bond with one another and to become more invested in their team, equipment, and playing environment. It also can help legitimize the e-sports program and can help with the recruitment of talented players to an institution's team. In cases where an e-sports team did not have a shared space where everyone could be together, participation was more inconsistent and it was a struggle to maintain the program. Institutions that are considering creating an e-sports program must make sure that they have a space set aside where e-sport athletes can compete together.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

Based on both the existing literature and this research, collegiate e-sports programs are not only going to continue to develop, they are going to see explosive growth in all types of institutions from community colleges to flagship research universities. It will be crucial for administrators to understand how to form these programs in the right way in order to create an inclusive environment for their cyber athletes that will benefit both the students and the institution.

All of the participants in this study spoke about the challenges of being understaffed while maintaining the program. Administrators of e-sports programs need to push for their programs to be properly staffed in order to manage all of the administrative responsibilities of successfully supporting a program like e-sports as well as coaching of games and supporting students as they play. Limitations on staff will severely limit the growth and potential of an e-sports program on any campus.

Dealing with potentially toxic behavior from players on their teams as well as in actual competition can become a significant barrier for certain populations to get into e-sports programs and continue their involvement. Creating a supportive environment is a key responsibility for administrators of e-sports program and they need to be hyper-aware of toxic behavior from the cyber athletes in their program, on other teams, and possibly even from coaches.

Additionally, it is important for student affairs professionals acknowledge that there is currently little structure for cyber athletes. Unlike traditional sports, e-sports do not have a season, and their schedule is significantly less structured than other sports. Tournaments can be scheduled with little notice and this can cause a lot of stress on the athletes that need to compete. Student affairs professionals need to make sure that they are understanding of the situations that cyber athletes can find themselves in and that they do their best to advocate for cyber athletes to be treated the same as traditional athletes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research touched on several broad topics to get a general overview of collegiate e-sports programs on multiple campuses. This approach provided a general feel for how these programs developed and how they are operating, but there is much more

that can be researched to provide a better understanding of how to develop and operate a successful e-sports program.

One recommendation would be to conduct a study that is more focused on the financial aspect of e-sports programs. A study with a financial focus could collect specific information about costs, revenue, and other trackable numbers to better understand how collegiate e-sports programs function from a financial standpoint. This can be applied to all aspects including recruitment, retention, diversity, and much more.

Another recommendation would be to replicate this study with an increased number of participants from more diverse locations. This would allow for better understanding of the perspectives of different institutional sizes, any potential differences between public or private institutions, and it would allow for comparison from more parts of the United States to see if there are regional differences. The data collected from such a study could identify any trends that on a larger scale than this study.

As cyber athletes graduate, a study on the impact of student participation with e-sports would provide information on the potential value and possible areas of concern for e-sports programs. Learning how students have been affected by competitive gaming is another area that is significantly lacking in research.

Finally, as competitive gaming and e-sports is a rapidly developing and changing area, regular repeated studies every two to three years would be useful as technology changes and the nature of online gaming evolves. Keeping a close eye on this area of collegiate activity will be necessary for institutions to ensure that they are staying current with new games and competitions.

Conclusion

The number of collegiate e-sports programs has been growing rapidly over the past several years and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. This study found that institutions often choose to develop an e-sports program because of the prospect of a high return on the relatively low cost of investment in creating one. This includes the low costs of starting a program in terms of facilities and equipment, the viability of potential revenue sources, potential to attract and enroll new students, and the potential impact on the retention of students.

Another major finding as to why e-sports programs were developed was to help build a safe and supportive community for those students who wish to participate in competitive video gaming. Competitive video gaming has been increasing in popularity and has caused a significant amount of interest at the participating institutions within their student body. There are also many opportunities for students to develop leadership positions within the e-sports programs and to hone their leadership skills in an area that they are passionate about. The final reason that higher education institutions have been developing e-sports programs is that they want to give their students opportunities after they graduate to join the growing field of professional e-sports players.

E-sports programs face a number of challenges both while they are developing and while they are operating. The lack of understanding about collegiate e-sports can have a serious negative impact on procuring university support for the program which is critically important, unfortunately there are a lot of administrators that do not understand what e-sports are, or how the proper support is necessary for them to operate effectively.

Better information about the program and better communication with decision makers on campus will be critical in the development, growth, and success of e-sports programs.

As higher education institutions continue to develop and grow e-sports programs, it is important to understand why and how they develop, know the challenges that others have faced, and know in what ways e-sports are different from traditional sports in order to create successful programs. As these programs continue to develop, student affairs professionals need to better understand these programs in order to be able to properly advocate for them and help guide them to a successful and prosperous future.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

E-sports in College: How Programs Start and How They Stay

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Joshua Gostlin and Dr. Jon Coleman, from the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have valuable experiences and knowledge that will help discover a holistic understanding of how e-sports programs are forms, how athletes are recruited, and why athletes stay at their institution.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this case study is to understand how universities form new e-sport programs and how universities recruit and retain their e-sport athletes. The study will comprise of in-depth interviews with both administrative figures as well as cyber athletes in order to learn their perspectives, motives, and any other driving forces that they have related to the formation or e-sports and the recruitment and retention of e-sport athletes.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to schedule a one-hour time slot to meet with the researcher to be interviewed. Interviews will take as much of the hour as needed to answer the questions that are asked by the researcher. Participants will be able to choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, the interview will be recorded by two audio devices to ensure proper collection of the experiences and knowledge from the participants.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

A potential discomfort that may arise from questions would be the financial burden of higher education and how that impacts a student's experience when attending college.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

By having a better understanding of how collegiate e-sports programs are formed, higher learning institutions will be able to create more successful and inclusive e-sports programs for their students.
Additionally, a better understanding of how e-sport athletes are recruited and retained within e-sports programs will help create a more supportive environment for future collegiate e-sport athletes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing all documents on the researcher's university OneDrive that can only be seen by the researcher and their thesis committee chair. Data will be shredded and destroyed after a three year waiting period.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.
There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Mr. Joshua Gostlin
Email: jjgostlin@eiu.edu
Phone Number: 217-581-7702

Dr. Jon Coleman
Email: jkcoleman@eiu.edu
Phone Number: 217-581-2400

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Appendix B

Interview Protocol: Administrators

Welcome Participant

Take a few moments to make sure the participants feels welcome and confirm that the participant has received and reviewed the Informed Consent document and if they have any questions. During this time, the participant will have the opportunity to ask any questions that they have prior to the interview.

Program Development

1. Can you tell me about how you came to work in your current position?
2. Can you walk me through the institution's decision to create your e-sports program?
    a. What were the reasons for this decision?
    b. Who were the various parties involved in that and what roles did they play in the creation of your program?
3. When forming your e-sports program, what challenges or difficulties did you encounter?
4. Were there any surprises that you discovered when forming your e-sports program? If so, please explain.
5. What are the short-term goals for your e-sports programs?
6. What are the long-term goals for your e-sports program?
7. Describe any benefits that you may have noticed since forming your e-sports program.

8. Describe any short-comings that you may have noticed since forming your e-sports program.
9. What advice would you give to another university/college that is establishing an e-sports program?
10. What factors were involved when creating professional positions for this program?

Recruiting/Retaining Athletes

11. What are you doing to promote diversity within the e-sport program in your program?
12. Can you tell me about how you decide on who and how you recruit perspective cyber athletes?
13. Are your cyber athletes on scholarship or some other form of financial aid?
    a. If yes, how was funding procured for that?
    b. If no, are they being considered?
14. When looking at prospective cyber athletes, what are some of the qualifications that are important to your program?
15. Outside of scholarships, does your institution provide any other programs or services to support cyber athletes? (such as housing or priority registration)
16. What challenges, if any, have you noticed that are unique to cyber athletes?
    a. What challenges have you noticed that are similar to other athletes?

Operational Differences

17. How would you describe the differences between the operation of an e-sports team compared to a traditional sports team?
    a. How is the staffing different?
    b. Are there differences in university support?