

A high-angle, wide shot of a large indoor arena, likely a convention center, filled with a large crowd of people. The arena is dimly lit, with bright blue and white stage lights illuminating the central stage area. On the right side of the stage, there is a large, multi-story building facade with arched windows and a sign that reads "FAZECLAN". A large screen on the right side of the stage displays a game, possibly a first-person shooter. Another screen on the left side of the stage displays a game, possibly a strategy game. The crowd is seated in tiered rows, and many people are holding up phones or cameras to capture the event. The overall atmosphere is one of excitement and anticipation.

E-Sports & the Future of Collegiate Athletics & Recreation

HASTINGS+CHIVETTA

When you hear the term “E-sports”, what do you think of? Many folks have an image of a socially isolated 20-something-year-old living in their parents’ basement, wearing a Mountain Dew®-stained t-shirt and Cheetos® dust-covered sweatpants playing video games for hours on end. This stereotype may be common, but there is much more to collegiate E-sports than the surrounding stigma.

E-sports are multiplayer videogames played competitively for spectators. Fostering a spirit of teamwork, inclusion, and wellness, E-sports prepare students for real-world jobs and challenges.

E-sports is also a growing industry that’s made its mark and proven it’s here to stay. E-sports sponsors include major brands like Adidas, Coca-Cola, Samsung, Mastercard, and Sony. Through streaming services like Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and Mixer, E-sports tournaments reach millions of fans around the world and surpass the viewership of even the most influential athletic events. In 2018, 97 million viewers tuned in to watch the NCAA Final Four. 103 million viewers watched the Super Bowl. The League of Legends World Championship, however, attracted **over 200 million viewers** as teams battled for over \$6 million from the prize pool. The reality of competitive E-sports is a world of opportunity that is largely concealed by the stigma that surrounds videogaming.

E-sports is a booming young industry, and the benefits of collegiate E-sports programs are abundant. E-sports programs can be an overall enrollment driver, attracting nontraditional students, connecting potentially isolated students to each other and their school, and boosting GPAs. E-sports involvement can also be a springboard to a multitude of post-graduation career opportunities, including:

- + Professional E-sports Player
- + Coach or Analyst
- + Shoutcaster/Host
- + Broadcast Production
- + Public Relations & Marketing
- + Sales & Partnerships
- + Team Ownership & Management
- + Agent or Event Manager
- + Statistician, Lawyer, or Finance
- + Game Developer



H+C-designed Saint Louis University E-sports Facility

With so many opportunities in the E-sports world, there’s no wonder *why* colleges and universities across the country have added e-sports programs on campus. But *how* did they do it?

Once an institution has decided to pursue adding E-sports to campus, it must first decide how to **define E-sports for their campus**. Will it be housed by athletics, will it be a club team, or will it be for individual recreational play? Decision makers must discern the top priorities for their institution, as there are pros and cons to all three options:

- + An E-sports program housed by the **athletics department** can host tournaments, obtain sponsorships, support college or university branding, offer scholarships, and recruit students who are serious about E-sports. The NCAA has not yet embraced E-sports,

though, in part because players receive compensation and there are potential risks of online gambling and Title IX issues. Women account for approximately *50% of videogaming enthusiasts* but only an estimated *5% of professional E-sports athletes*, so it's no surprise that gender disparity is common on E-sports teams.

- + An E-sports program housed within **club sports** is more student-focused, under the jurisdiction of Student Life, and open to the entire campus. There would be similar opportunities for sponsorships and recruitment as an athletics-housed E-sports program, but student players would share any compensation with their team. However, it is easier for players to leave a club sports program, and club E-sports teams would not be able to host tournaments or contribute to the college or university's marketing like an athletic team could. The main challenge, though, is a lack of guaranteed resources and funding from the University, especially in comparison to an E-sports program housed by athletics.
- + When it comes to individual **recreational** E-sports offerings on campus, there are virtually no restrictions and more compensation potential for individual players. However, there is no formal recruitment process for recreational E-sports, the program is less campus-focused, and players are more isolated. There is also a lack of opportunities for tournament hosting, sponsorships, and marketing in a recreational E-sports setup.



Columbia College Game Hut, designed by Hastings+Chivetta

After defining E-sports for your specific institution, the next major consideration is **budget**. The average startup cost for computer equipment for 25 students is **\$43,000**. An additional approximately **\$20,000** is needed for furniture, spectator LED screens, team jerseys or spiritwear, and branding. An E-sports coach's salary tends to lie somewhere **between \$40,000 and \$60,000 annually**. If the E-sports program is housed by athletics or club sports, though, there is potential for sponsorships to help offset some of the startup cost.

E-sports arena construction is also a major budget consideration, and the cost can vary greatly. Facility size will play a major role in defining cost, and construction cost can be anywhere from **\$80 to \$500 per square foot** depending on facility location. An interior renovation tends to run \$80 to \$120 per square foot, the repurposing of an existing building is usually \$180 to \$220 per square foot, and new construction is the largest financial investment at \$350 to \$500 per square foot. Full Sail University's 11,200-square-foot E-sports facility with capacity for 100 athletes and 500 spectators, a concert-grade PA system, full production studio, and a 10 million-pixel LED wall was a \$6 million investment. However, the Hastings+Chivetta-designed Game Hut at Columbia College, one of the nation's first E-sports facilities, was less than a half million dollar investment that repurposed an existing 840-square-foot building with 10 gaming PCs, two console lounges, and a player lounge for the college's championship team.

Regardless of dollar amount or square footage, space planning and infrastructure are also vital factors in the addition of a campus E-sports program. Needed hardware includes gaming PCs with high-end graphics cards, high-resolution monitors, a private gaming server, and a gaming keyboard, mouse, and headset for each station. Internet access needs to be hardwired, either using existing infrastructure or by building a dedicated pipeline. Within the games, needed infrastructure includes anti-cheating systems, random seeding or skill level matching services, and heartbeating¹.

The space planning effort to integrate E-sports into a college's athletics, club sports, or recreational offerings considers user groups, building code analysis, future planning, and key adjacencies and interchanges. Is the E-sports program part of varsity athletics or club sports, or is it recreational? Will the space host community or public events? Whatever the answers to these questions are, it's important to design an E-sports facility with flexible furniture and infrastructure that can accommodate future program expansion.

Once a stigma-laden hobby, the E-sports world is now taking its place at the top of both collegiate and professional realms. The rise of E-sports has proved to be far more permanent and impactful than any passing fad, and institutions across the nation are adding programs to campus. If your college or university is one of them, reach out to the Hastings+Chivetta E-sports experts for guidance through the process.

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¹Heartbeating is the intermittent capturing of data during gameplay that automatically detects important moments and enables researchers and announcers to observe player behavior and define moments of victory or defeat.