

UNI ESPORTS GROUP

BRINGING ESPORTS TO CAMPUS: PROGRAM INSTITUTIONALIZATION RUBRIC

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Founding a sustainable collegiate esports program requires a high level of preparation, strategy, and grassroots alliance building across campus. Resistance from key stakeholders and a general climate of scarcity in higher education are obstacles that any champion must confront in the process of creating an esports program. An organizational learning perspective informed by a social science approach can clarify the challenges common to esports champions working at the intersection of esports, student life, and institutional politics. Thus equipped, champions and their allies can more explicitly assess where they are in the process of building the capacity of the esports initiative. They can also learn from others who are further along in the “institutionalization” of esports. A preliminary set of benchmarks, and a protocol for gathering, analyzing and presenting data will strengthen the case for esports on any campus.

This rubric synthesizes data gained from three in-depth interviews and dozens of conversations with directors of esports programs at institutions of higher education in the US regarding the common obstacles, strategies, and outcomes associated with the launch and growth of a high-quality esports program. The findings were aggregated to create a cline of development (from “initial” to “highly developed”) that spanned the sample, profiling the key patterns that emerged from the narrative. The dimensions selected are by no means exhaustive, are fairly high-level, and deserve much more granular treatment in separate rubrics. Culture, political capital, and coalition-building are themes common across the rubric, reflecting the distributed authority characteristic of educational institutions.

The rubric is offered to aid professionals who are preparing to launch esports or seeking to advance an existing program on campus. It is intended as a tool to inform program planning and evaluation based on a culture of transparency, inquiry and evidence. More importantly, it foregrounds the possibilities for esports to create a richer, more inclusive, and more engaging campus culture for all students. As an informal diagnostic and tool for reflection in unique contexts, there is no expected rating.

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Key Terms

Institutionalization: The degree to which an esports program is integrated into campus culture as an “institution” with the capacity to outlast a single champion or advocate. This stands in contrast to a quality of impermanence or transience typical of many new programs on campus.

Stakeholders: The members of the community who have a direct interest and role in esports and its impact on campus (students, staff, faculty and administrators in most cases, but may extend to include employers and community members as appropriate).

Cultural Relevance: The degree to which esports is visible on campus and plays an integral role, comparable with other noteworthy programs, in defining the brand of a university and the texture of the student experience on campus.

Using the Rubric

Based on your sense of all available evidence, rate your campus or system on each dimension (no ½ scores, must meet all criteria in the cell.). How effective is your effort to develop esports in achieving its current aims? Where are the pain points, opportunities and strengths? Consider these questions and suggestions:

1. In what ways can points of strength be leveraged to address less developed dimensions?
2. What practical steps can you take now and in the near and medium-term to move towards your goals?
3. Revisit the rubric as you progress and share with others as a key performance indicator or metric for evaluating your progress. Correlate with other data sources as a dashboard element in your reporting cycle.
4. Add dimensions or adapt the indices to suit what is possible within your context. (Please send your comments and a copy to alex@uniesportsgroup.com)

Institutionalization	Initial	Developing	Developed	Highly Developed
Program Leadership	The program is an informal initiative with no or little official status. There may be a champion, but they are low-profile and not proactive.	The program is a formally-recognized initiative but lacks official status. At least one champion is officially recognized and active on campus. Champion is effectively driving towards a higher profile for the program	The program is recognized and has official status. An officially-designated champion is in place with appropriate time commitment and clear mandate. Leadership is moving towards a more distributed model.	Fully Institutionalized leadership in place for esports program with at least one fully committed leader. Integral to normal operations and processes; key players can be swapped out and program will continue to thrive and grow.
Governance	No explicit governance structure in place. There is some informal and/or sporadic consultation with stakeholders. Ownership and decision-making processes are not explicit or properly documented.	Some processes in place for convening key stakeholders in decisions about program governance and direction. Esports are addressed in some important committees and units within normal structure. Some problems are being addressed collaboratively as they emerge.	Functioning esports governance in place spanning the most important stakeholder groups and units, sufficient to respond to pressing issues and advance toward strategic goals.	Esports initiative is a bellwether example of good governance, incorporating decision-making and planning from front line to C-Suite. Leaders at each level have a clear sense of their responsibilities and authority for supporting it. The possible value of the program is clear to assigned leaders and they work proactively and collaboratively in their lanes to claim it.
Alliance Building	Esports leader(s) are not actively building alliances across campus. Informal allies may be in place, but the circle is not growing.	Alliances with more than one unit have been developed. Esports leaders are actively reaching out to build more alliances with key units and players. A more diverse group of stakeholders have been persuaded about the value of esports to their unit and begin to support the program proactively.	At least one working relationship with a member of each core stakeholder group. Esports leaders can solve problems and leverage resources from other units based on reciprocal benefit and mutual respect. A diverse group of stakeholders understand the value of esports to their unit and support the program proactively.	Alliances with core stakeholder groups (faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni, sponsors) are robust. Esports issues are considered routinely in multiple venues (e.g., C-Suite, academic programs, student life, athletics) and conversations are driven by multiple advocates. All stakeholders understand the value of esports to both their unit and to campus as a whole. Esports becomes a common vector of support and collaboration that transcends groups.
Branding and Cultural Salience	No explicit connection with branding of university or linkage with the student campus experience.	Nascent alignment of esports and institutional branding "under the radar.". Some initial connections between esports and public face of the university.	Esports is explicitly included in brand architecture and strategic market positioning planning. May be aspirational, but some evidence of synergy with brand is evident (e.g., new recruits who name esports as a reason to attend).	Esports is integral to brand and an expected offering for those who attend. The value added is articulated in multiple platforms consistently and is replicated by viral transmission (word-of-mouth, social media, web content, newsletters).
Strategic Planning	No apparent connection with strategic planning. Esports is a rogue or informal effort without visibility or explicit value proposition.	Some alignment of esports with strategic planning with dedicated or re-allocated resources. May be marginal with no benchmarks or offsetting return on investment named.	Esports is formally included in strategic plan with required investments and expected return clearly identified.	Esports fully integrated with strategic plan for all relevant units (e.g., academic, student life, athletics, residence). Ideally spans multiple years and includes explicit benchmarks and mid-course monitoring points for assessing and responding to conditions on the ground.
Metrics and Tracking	No processes in place for collecting and correlating esports data to key success indicators. Success indicators are unarticulated or remain implied.	Some process in place for correlating esports with core institutional indicators such as admissions, recruitment, retention, graduation. May be based on pilot, inconsistent or incomplete data.	A developed process is in place for collecting and correlating esports data with multiple units in the institution. Core values are reflected as well as some department or unit-specific indicators, such as viewership, academic outcomes, or student engagement. Assessment practices are meeting or slightly exceeding the benchmarks established by other units in the institution.	A fully-developed process is in place for collecting and correlating data with a broad range of success indicators from across the institution. Assessment practices are robust and provide a model for other units in the institution.
Resources	Insufficient resources to comfortably pursue any success benchmarks. Dedicated program budget is non-existent and there is no consistent "ownership" of on-campus space.	Adequate resources are provided to pursue some success benchmarks. Budget is established but small and "ownership" of on-campus space may be shared or partial.	Adequate resources are provided to pursue all success benchmarks. Budget is secure, adequate, and there is full "ownership" of dedicated space on campus.	Surplus resources are provided to pursue all success benchmarks. Budget is secure, exceeds adequacy, and there is full ownership of an extensive and well-funded dedicated space. Program is empowered to pursue growth and new initiatives.
Diversity, Inclusion, and Engagement	Low engagement from a population of students that does not reflect the demographic composition of the campus. Program engagement is limited to one or two core constituencies. No effort is made to invite under-represented students into the space and program.	Occasional engagement from a more diverse population of students. Program engagement is anchored by core constituencies but begins to attract a larger demographic of students more reflective of campus composition. Little direct effort is made to invite under-represented students into the space and program.	Increasing engagement from a diverse population of students. Once-important core constituencies are joined by a plurality of students that is reflective of campus composition. Direct efforts are made to invite under-represented students into the space and program.	High engagement from a diverse population of students. There is no clear "core constituency" supporting the program: demographic of users is diverse and institutionally-representative. Direct efforts to invite under-represented students to participate are strong and consistent.
Curricular Integration	No apparent articulation of esports at course or program level.	The curriculum includes at least one or two courses presenting units focused on esports as a site for learning.	At least one course largely focused on esports as a site for learning. At least two faculty members or an informal learning community are exploring related theory and pedagogy. Some formal recognition of related career pathways, including esports development in public-facing content.	Broad and deep curricular integration of esports with at least two different disciplines or departments offering relevant courses. Career paths in esports explicitly connected with specific courses, concentrations or programs are used in marketing and admissions.