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## Game On: Ready Your Campus for Esports

For those on the fence about esports, consider the following: The global revenue of esports has quintupled within the past five years and will exceed \$1 billion in 2019. More than 73 percent of the U.S. population between the ages of 14 and 21 has played or watched online esports in the past year, and a staggering 83 percent of males in that age group identify as “gamers.” Today, more than 100 U.S. high schools host competitive esports teams, and nearly 200 colleges now offer esports scholarships.

It's little wonder then that esports is one of the most common topics universities ask about when discussing campus facilities. The conversation begins by helping schools assess their long-term goals for esports. Do they envision a recreational facility that could cater to the entire student body? Or do they see varsity-level competition in their future? Will they offer an esports degree program?

Regardless of the approach, all esports facilities need a robust technology infrastructure. For esports, wired connectivity is akin to the turf or court in traditional athletics. If the network is compromised, so is the game.

## Recreational approach

For most young adults, esports is about socializing and entertainment. Students increasingly expect colleges to offer inclusive esports amenities as a reprieve from the rigors of academia. Dozens of universities now feature esports spaces within their rec centers and student unions, where they can be highlighted during campus tours and used for recruitment.

These recreational spaces can be as simple as a room with multiple computers and screens. Some are more sophisticated environments with theater seating and wall monitors for displaying real-time play.

Branding should differentiate the esports space from other campus facilities and foster a sense of pride for gamers. Branding elements often include immersive graphics, theatrical lighting and adjustable gaming chairs.

## Athletics (varsity-level) approach

Earlier this year the NCAA decided to take a pass – for now – on governing collegiate esports. But that's

not stopping colleges from pursuing competitive esports. The National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) boasts more than 170 schools dedicated to advancing esports at the varsity level.

For colleges considering competitive esports on the club or athletics-department level, gaming facilities are more complex. These spaces require multiple environments for practice, team meetings, and physical training and nutrition to counterbalance the sedentary aspects that come with long hours in front of a computer.

Designing for flexibility within these spaces enables universities to host fans and visiting teams, create immersive experiences (including virtual and augmented reality) and set up “war rooms” to solve challenges.

## Looking ahead

Given the growth of esports, it's not unfathomable to imagine collegiate esports drawing crowds as large as those of established sports programs. In cities like Los Angeles and New York, professional esports events already have filled entire arenas and stadiums. Most universities already have similar facilities that could be configured for esports. They also have a built-in base of gamers, ready and willing to tune in.



**Doug Vance**

**CoSIDA**

*Executive Director*

It's not breaking news that the sports information director job is a demanding one requiring long hours and a variety of special skills.

That's the precise reason the jobs our members perform are so essential in support of coaches and student-athletes.

Recently, I spoke with a NCAA Division III SID forced to assume an extra workload due to the departure of his assistant for another job. He shared, in matter-of-fact fashion, that he was averaging nearly 80 hours a week in doing both his job and the work of his missing staff position.

“Please don't think that this is a complaint on my part,” he explained. “I love this job and this is what I signed up to do.”

I was neither surprised at the reported hours he was working nor the fact he accepted the job realities without protest. Dedication and commitment are commonplace in the athletics

communications profession and it's one of the reasons I take pride in advocating on behalf of those who represent our membership.

To reinforce that dedication and time commitment, Brian Laubscher, director of athletics communications at Washington & Lee, conducted research a few years ago on the number of hours he and his staff invested in the job over the course of a year. Brian used an app to track his hours and those of his two staff members. He broke down the data in several different ways, but the telling statistics related to their workload for a 30-week period of time (September-May) when the three averaged between 53 and nearly 58 hours per week on the job.

These two examples are clear evidence of why we see quality athletics communications directors leaving the profession and higher instances of job burnout. As an organization concerned about its members and the profession, our responsibility is to be strong advocates in telling this story and advocating for better work-life integration.

Advocacy is a major focus for the CoSIDA Board of Directors and staff during 2019-20 with four major projects headlining our efforts:

- A comprehensive salary survey of the membership bringing forward specific data regarding established pay levels of the profession. The survey results will

benefit our membership in clarifying how athletics departments are funding their communications staff positions, based on all appropriate factors.

- Broad, all-inclusive research into staffing protocols in sports information at all levels of the membership. The data will be valuable in helping establish benchmarks for athletics departments in determining appropriate staffing based on a variety of factors.
- An extensive review of CoSIDA's governance structure to determine if this leadership approach continues to be effective and appropriate.
- The CoSIDA Board of Directors recently created a new Advocacy Committee to serve as a catalyst in bringing structure in enhancing how the organization views advocacy on all fronts.

Advocacy is a responsibility we have always taken seriously and we plan to step up those efforts in the months ahead, providing better resources to help our members and athletics administrators evaluate needed support in communication offices.