

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

Esports and Gaming: Small working groups have been formed in the development of courses and discussing the idea of creating focused minor branches under an esports and gaming program. The group's new goal is to create a steering committee with interested representatives from WMU colleges and departments. This steering committee will consider strategies for programing including an interdisciplinary minor, a graduate certificate, and community outreach opportunities. As the program grows, an interdisciplinary major may also be possible.

In way of background, esports has become a 1.1 billion-dollar industry (Newzoo, Global Esports Marketing Report, 2020) with the U.S. making up 55.76% of the global esports jobs (Hitmaker, Esports Jobs Growth, 2019). After the 2018 President Montgomery Transformational Initiative Fund launch of the Esports@WMU project, the WMU Esports Arena was constructed at the Little Theatre seating 190 spectators, moving lights, sound system, dual large projection screens and a stage that contains 36 competition computers. The student esports club has become one of the largest clubs on WMU's campus.

Many universities and colleges in the U.S. are building esports and gaming minors and majors after seeing success with their esports student programs. Some of these schools include Ohio State University, Boise State University, University of California Irvine, and Trine University. A second phase originally discussed by WMU leadership was to create a curriculum based on esports and gaming courses. Starting in 2019 the former WMU Esports Project Director, Scott Puckett, has met with interested deans, chairs, and professors to begin creating courses in esports and gaming. These new courses include: PHIL 3140 (Values and Video Games), HPHE 3000 (Introduction to Esports), CS 2100 (Video Game Programming for Everyone), A-S 3900 (Gaming Issues, Culture, and Controversies), and EDT 5030 (Esports in Education).

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

Early adopters in the esports and gaming curriculum discussion include: the College of Arts & Sciences, the College of Education and Human Development, the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences. We have additionally had preliminary conversations with the Haworth College of Business, the College of Fine Arts, and the College of Health and Human Services. Currently the working groups include: Dr. Fritz Allhoff (Philosophy), Dr. Colin Cork (Human Performance and Health Education), Dr. James Lewis (Human Performance and Health Education), Mr. Dave Paul (Philosophy), and Dr. Whitney DeCamp (Sociology).

In creating an esports and gaming curriculum, a steering committee could include additional members of academic areas interested in expanding and adding to the program. Early interdisciplinary initiatives could include interdisciplinary research, courtesy cross-appointments, and the cross-listing of courses. In addition to Academic Affairs, there may be opportunities in Athletics (Inside Higher Ed “Video Games: Entertainment or Sports?”) and Student Affairs and Admissions (Inside Higher Ed “Leveling Up Esports on Campus”).

Our hope at this stage is to involve as many units as possible, with a particular emphasis on collaboration across Colleges—this sort of collaboration is the hardest to effect, but also has the most potential in terms of building true University-wide initiatives. We realize that we’re in a revenue neutral climate, so the challenge is to build a program without resources. We are fortunate, however, in that various courses already exist, which we can incorporate into a broad, crowdsourced program. Our early focus would be to add one additional course that would serve as an anchor for the interdisciplinary approaches in other course—this course would itself be interdisciplinary and team-taught by members of the Steering Committee, but would have the benefit of bringing students together to promote a sense of community and shared experience.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Several of the courses mentioned above are already off to successful starts, including HPHE 3000 (Introduction to Esports) and PHIL 3140 (Values and Video Games). A-S 3900 (Gaming Issues, Culture, and Controversies) debuts this summer and CS 2100 (Video Game Programming for Everyone) launches this fall.

In 2019, the Office of Admissions partnered with the WMU Esports Arena staff to host an esports booth and tours of the arena during recruitment events. This was met with much success as hundreds of potential students and families have visited the arena. Being able to add an esports and gaming curriculum discussion to recruitment would be a great opportunity to attract additional students and families.

Discussions on utilizing the WMU Esports Arena for labs, special projects, hands on training, and guest speakers would be of interest in esports and gaming courses. There could be community involvement from gaming industry companies, Merit Networks (expanding into esports), the MAC’s new esports conference, and connections created with the Detroit Pistons staff from the Pistons GT professional esports team possibly offering guest speakers and employment opportunities. Connections, presentations, and gaming competitions with high schools’ interest in starting esports programs also took place in 2019 and early 2020. These connections could expand to recruitment with high schools into an esports and gaming degree.

The current esports student club at WMU has seen positive retention rates. Based on information provided by Institutional Research in 2019, retention rates for FTIAC and transfer students involved in WMU’s student esports program had a 3% - 9% higher retention rate vs. non-esports WMU students. In addition, in 2019 45% of WMU students involved in the esports

program were freshman and 27% of students in the program were non-resident. This data shows the possibility of incoming and out state students having an interest in WMU's esports and gaming initiatives.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

This program is primarily designed to accommodate student interest and to tap into demand from regional employers. In that regard, we anticipate that—at least from the outset—the emphasis will be more on curricular programming than on research and creative activity.

However, the College of Education and Human Development has already demonstrated an interest in graduate-level research and discussion regarding esports and gaming-related fatigue, injuries, and rehabilitation—this has been a part of HPHE 7100 (Independent Research). The College of Health and Human Services is another partner in some of these conversations.

Additionally, within the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. DeCamp (Sociology) has already leveraged a substantial national profile in this area, both through journal publications and news media interviews/coverage. Dr. Allhoff (Philosophy) also has national recognition in technology ethics, including a strong record of support from the National Science Foundation—its funding stream in “Ethics, Values, and Society” would be a principal target for the new initiative.

We have also developed research collaborations at the Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine, including Dr. Karen Horneffer-Ginter, Dr. Parker Crutchfield, and Ms. Kelsey Caras. Dr. Horneffer-Ginter is an expert on wellness, Dr. Crutchfield researches performance enhancement, and Ms. Caras works on continuing education with the regional medical community. We have also made contact with Mr. Nick “Breaky” Caras, who has been a shoutcaster at various high-level esports events and would also like to contribute to this program.

Finally, we would very much like to include—but have not been able to identify—collaborators from the College of Fine Arts, specifically graphic design. The Design Center is a valuable resource for the University, and we hope to be able to develop pathways for students to look at the creative and artistic sides of esports and gaming as well.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

This esports and gaming program is being recommended as an interdisciplinary minor with the idea of expanding to a future major. Of the five esports and gaming classes already created, these courses utilize existing department faculty and staff from the WMU esports program for course development and instruction. The goal has been to utilize experience and knowledge from existing faculty and staff across campus to build the interdisciplinary program. In its earliest phases, this program will take advantage of these existing resources. Courses in the program may be optimized for students as well by intentionally designing courses to meet WMU Essential Studies requirements so as to not impose additional credit demands on students. Bringing together faculty and staff from across campus into a single program can

facilitate the coordination and cross-listing of appropriate courses, can prevent low enrollments, and can mitigate other programmatic redundancies. This should also minimize administrative expansion as an existing director could initially take on the direction of this program.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

A steering committee for the esports and gaming curriculum could continue to utilize faculty and staff in building new courses. The current five courses will be taught by existing WMU faculty and staff. In addition, existing classrooms, computer labs, online learning systems, and the esports arena would be utilized for the courses. No new space or additional staffing should be needed in this initiative.

The Department of Philosophy has offered PHIL 3140 (“Values and Video Games”) two times, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, which has filled with 35 and 25 students respectively. In addition, HPHE 3000 (“Introduction to Esports”) is running Spring 2021 with 30 students.

Some of the current course offerings use existing departmental variable topics courses. The courses have enrolled very well. In the departments where there are no accreditation or other concerns, the steering committee may determine that creating new courses, not using the variable-topics courses, may be appropriate.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

This proposal is seeking additional interest from deans, chairs, and faculty to collaborate and to assist with developing more esports and gaming courses for the interdisciplinary program. We are committed to a program that spans across Colleges and disciplinary boundaries.

References:

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<https://hitmarker.net/>

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/16/bringing-esports-campus>

<https://esports.osu.edu/about-us/academics-and-research/>

8. Contact

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