

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
College of Education and Human Development
School of Sport, Recreation and Tourism Management
SPMT 480 Esports: Fundamentals of Competitive Gaming (3)
Spring 2023

DAY/TIME:	M/W 12:00-1:15am	LOCATION:	
PROFESSOR:	Jordan Whitaker	EMAIL:	jwhitak7@gmu.edu
OFFICE:		PHONE:	
OFFICE HOURS:	By Appointment	FAX:	
CREDITS:	3 hours		

PREREQUISITES: N/A

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course serves as an introduction to the esports industry. A history of the development of competitive video gaming will be provided, as well as an analysis of the current industry. Insights on every level of competition – from collegiate to professional – will be explored, as well as an exploration of the largest esports franchises and organizations which exist at present. Students will learn about some of the popular categories of games and specific esports titles, as well as the landscape of major esports tournaments. As part of this, students will study the structure of the competitive environments which define the esports scene. There will be an overview of the broadcasting mechanisms and formats through which esports titles reach their target audience, as well as insights as to how esports events are organized and experienced for consumers. The course concludes with a discussion of issues those in the industry grapple with, as well as speculation of the future of the esports industry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The student will be able to:

1. Recognize and describe the history and major milestones of esports
2. Distinguish between major titles of the esports industry and the gameplay dynamics
3. Analyze the structure of competitive gaming, including how leagues and teams are managed as well as the various levels of competition
4. Evaluate the similarities between esports and mainstream sports
5. Compare the different tools for broadcasting and streaming esports, and discuss how esports events take shape to provide immersive experiences for consumers
6. Identify major industry challenges and appraise the industry's future potential

COURSE DELIVERY:

This course is delivered face to face. Alternative methods of instruction may occur in the event of inclement weather or personal emergencies.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

From remarkably small beginnings, the esports industry has experienced immense growth and transcends many social barriers. As a product of the entertainment industry, esports enjoys an expansive and ever-growing influence, cultivating its own culture while simultaneously breaching that which is mainstream. Consequently, its rapid evolution creates a complex and difficult to navigate landscape. The best way to learn about the esports industry is to be directly involved – to be open to playing games; to recognize parallels between esports organizations and player-bases and those of mainstream sports; and to approach understanding the industry not simply as a one-dimensional definition of the word “esports,” but to identify it as a dynamic ecosystem which evolves as society’s unquenchable thirst for entertainment and technology moves forward.

Students will be required to complete Written Assignments which will engage the student directly with elements of the esports industry. Exposure and personal experience is quintessential for learning all things “esports.” As part of these assignments and other course requirements, students will be tasked with conducting industry research and be encouraged to reflect on their experiences along the way. Through conscious exploration of aspects of the industry as well as immersive participation between classmates, students will gain a strong understanding of the esports industry.

HONOR CODE

George Mason shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. On the application for admission, students sign a statement agreeing to conform to and uphold the Honor Code. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code's provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee. Any student who has knowledge of, but does not report, a violation may be accused of lying under the Honor Code. With this in mind, all students in this course are held to the strictest standards of the George Mason University Honor Code.

INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS

1. Course Week: Monday through 11:59pm on Sunday.
2. Log-in Frequency: You must actively check the course Blackboard site and your GMU email for communications from Professor, class discussions, and access to course materials daily.
3. Participation: Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.
4. Workload: Please be aware that this course is not self-paced. You are expected to meet specific deadlines and due dates listed in the Class Schedule section of this syllabus. It is your responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities and assignments due. It is your responsibility to keep up in this course and to use the syllabus provided.
5. Written Assignments: Written assignments will be expected to demonstrate college-quality writing. All work will be assessed for content AND for presentation. Your assignments must have been planned, researched, and proofread. Do your own work and don't COPY material from anyone else or from a published source. *Re-read the Mason rules for plagiarism and the Honor Code in the Student Handbook!*
6. Format: Papers and projects submitted must be in proper, ***college-level*** form (including grammar, punctuation, spelling, and general appearance). Your content is to be your best work.
7. Instructor Support: You may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content, or other course-related issues. Email me to schedule a one-on-one session in person or on Blackboard.
8. Honor Policy: George Mason University takes its honor policy quite seriously, and so do I. Papers, projects, and other assignments must be your own work.
9. Plagiarism: Plagiarism is representing another's work as your own or recycling your work and representing earlier work as new work. I will be checking your work for originality. Remember to use proper source citations in citing the evidence you use in your research. Failure to do your own work, or not to give credit where necessary, will result in failing the course and a report to the honor committee. If you need assistance with citation rules beyond the APA style guide or with determining if something should be cited, please ask me!

10. **Technical Competence:** Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. If you are struggling with technical components of the course, I expect you to seek assistance as early as possible in the semester.
11. **Technical Issues:** You should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget your time accordingly. *Late work will not receive full credit.* Start your submission well before the 11:59 pm deadline.
12. **Etiquette:** The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued, and the same is true during competitive gaming. Always take care in how you speak, write, or otherwise interact with your classmates and your instructor, so as others do not consider them as personal offenses. Be positive in your approach with others and diplomatic in selecting your words. Remember that you are not competing with classmates, but sharing information and learning from others. I will also be respectful in all communications. In all communications in this class, it is understood that you are constructing your sentences at the college level. For example, if you are emailing an instructor, pretend you are writing in a professional setting such as a job - **YOU ARE NOT SENDING AN EMAIL TO YOUR BEST FRIEND.**
13. **Accommodations:** If you require effective accommodations to ensure accessibility, you must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services.

Class Engagement and Participation:

Participation is important not only to the individual student, but to the class as a whole. We will have fun if everyone is engaged. Online participation is also part of how you will be assessed (earn your grade). To be engaged, you have to keep up with the reading, participate in a timely fashion and complete ALL assignments on time.

Required Text:

N/A – All course material students will be assessed upon is available in Professor Whitaker's PowerPoint lectures, made available through the duration of the semester on Blackboard to students.

Assessment:

Class Enthusiasm, Participation, Assignments, Two Quizzes: Each quiz will include short answer questions, definitions, matching, and multiple-choice questions.

Each Quiz is worth 10% of Total Grade

Participation is worth 5% of Total Grade

Assignments:

Paper Assignment 1: Are Esports Players “Athletes?”

Students will be issued a written assignment which asks them to consider the question of whether or not esports players are athletes. This assignment requires students to evaluate the term “athlete” and discuss the extent to which gamers may or may not be considered to be athletes. An asserted opinion with a defense of that opinion is expected, to be supported with logic and any external research the student wishes to use in support of their claim.

10 % of Total Grade

Activity and Paper Assignment: Students will be engaged with an actual, high-level collegiate esports program, including the space and a discussion of what it takes to run such a program. A couple esports student-athletes will also be available to briefly speak on their experience and engage students with Q&A. A short (minimum one-page) reflection paper based on the experience will be completed by each student following this site visit.

10% of Total Grade

Paper Assignment 2: Dissecting an Esports Franchise

Students will be issued a written assignment which tasks them with dissecting a successful North American esports franchise or organization. This assignment will have designated spaces for the student to build-out content, specifically providing the following information: A brief history and overview of the organization; listing of major investors or partnerships with brands and professional mainstream sports organizations/actors; net worth and revenue estimations and statistics on the number of followers for main social media accounts; a listing of all game titles in which the organization participates, as well as an assessment of which titles the organization enjoys the most success; identifying the top faces/personalities of the organization (player, investor, CEO, etc.); a list of as many jobs offered by the organization the student can find.

15 % of Total Grade

Paper Assignment 3: Esports Consumer Engagement Activity

Students will be tasked with watching one full match or series of a self-chosen esports title/event, and must watch on one of the primary broadcasting sites (Twitch, YouTube). Students will reflect on their experience in consuming this content. What made this live-stream appealing? What aspects of the broadcasting platform enhanced the consumer experience? Are there pitfalls for these mediums? Was there a live, in-person audience for this event – if yes, describe your perception of the audience experience. Are there parallels to mainstream sports? What can you perceive about the nature of the experience

for virtual viewers partaking in the event? Describe the structure of the spectacle – was it similar to mainstream sports and half-time shows?

15% of Total Grade

Final Exam: Exam questions will include short essays and multiple-choice questions.

Exam is cumulative and will be taken/administered in person, NOT online:

25%

GRADING SCALE

A+ = 98-100

A = 94-97

A- = 90-93

B+ = 88-89

B = 84-87

B- = 80-83

C+ = 78-79

C = 74-77

C- = 70-73

D = 60-69

F = 0-59

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times, including their email and online communication.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week Number Week Module & Assignments

- 1 Course Introduction/Overview/Intro to Esports
Evaluation, expectations, syllabus, and interactive group discussion; Rules for the semester and successful class
- 2 Intro to Esports – Origin of Esports, the Foundations
Video: How Esports Changed the Game: From Media Laughingstock to Media Craze
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_GxPXXLc-w&t=143s
- 3 Esports History, Part 2
Video: Our Game | League of Legends
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5QahFFHvOI>
- 4 Esports History, Part 3
Video: A Brief History of Esports
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahE6ePrp1EI>
- 5 Esports Scene at Present – Industry Overview

Quiz 1 – Esports History Quiz

Reading: “Shaq Believes Esports Players Should Be Considered Athletes”

Source: <https://gamerant.com/shaq-esports-pro-players-athletes/>

6 Are Esports Players “Athletes?”

Paper Assignment 1: Are Esports Players “Athletes?” (Due upon start of Week 9’s class period)

7 Levels of Esports Competition: High School, College, Amateur, Pro

Activity & Paper Assignment: Class will site visit the GMU Esports space, have a Q&A with a couple esports athletes, and write a two-page reflection paper on the experience (Due upon start of Week 15’s class period)

8 Structure of Pro Esports Organizations and Franchises

Paper Assignment 2: Dissecting an Esports Franchise (Due upon start of Week 10’s class period)

9 Examining Game Categories: First and Third-person Shooters

Paper Assignment 1 Due

10 Examining Game Categories: MOBAs

Paper Assignment 2 Due

11 Examining Game Categories: Fighting Games & Sports Games

12 Examining Game Categories: Card Games & Auto Chess

Paper Assignment 3: Esports Consumer Engagement Activity and Reflection (Due upon start of Week 15’s class period)

13 Mobile Games – the Booming Market

Quiz 2– Esports Industry & Games Quiz

14 Attending an Esports Event – Scale and Spectacle

15 State of the Industry: Ethical Issues & Future Projections

Paper Assignment 3 Due

Final Exam Wednesday, May 10, 2021 10:30-1:15pm

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class/exams unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursesupport.gmu.edu/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/>.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

CORE VALUES COMMITMENT

The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles.