



academic side of things and working with partner organizations. So yeah, there are so many different, I don't know why it was good on octopus. There's so many different tentacles that esports has and touches on a college campus like Syracuse, and I can't wait to keep diving into each of these areas and figuring out how all this works together.

So with the degree program, launch this year, year zero, programmed it out, getting the planning, the curriculum set up, the courses, marketing, advertising, all the things that go with it to bring in our first incoming class. So joint degree program, like you mentioned, is set up excellently by Olivia, by Chris, by Jeff Rubin, and everybody else that worked behind the scenes over the last few years to get it going. So it's joint between Falk and Newhouse, where the curriculum is split between those two schools. It is not a dual degree, it is a joint degree, which is confusing in ways and figuring out exactly how enrollment structures work, how the homeschool idea works about communication to students, the advising opportunities. So it's constantly work in progress, like, all right, we have this thing that is split between two different schools equally.

How does that actually work? And when I came to campus, I was like, I don't know, but we'll figure it out. And my favorite phrase that I've learned here, John is, we will get there. And I'm like, okay, that's cool. We'll get there. What opportunities can we set up within this academic program for this broader idea of professional development, career preparation that is not just focused on esports careers, but is also focused on those transferrable skills that work across different entertainment sectors and industries that we're not here with an esports degree to get somebody to be the next best caster for a rocket league in a professional setting. If that's a career opportunity that somebody gets, awesome, love it, fantastic.

But let's make sure we're preparing our students to work across different sectors and industries through this lens of esports and gaming and getting those transferable skills that is also based in experiential learning. Which is what Syracuse has done well for so long, is making sure the students aren't just in the classroom learning, but that they're actually out in the field doing and experiencing and networking to make sure they actually have the skill sets that industry leaders are looking for in the workforce coming through.

So that's been a big push for us recently is making sure that we do have those opportunities with those companies and those industries to do that. It's been a really great start for things. And my job, my position again, has evolved to not only report to Dean Jordan and Dean Wo and Falk and Newhouse respectively, but working with Jeff Rubin out of the chancellor's office, but also now working with OHAI Groves out of student experience to set up experiences on that side of things too. So it's been a great start. It's been 10 months, it feels like sometimes 10 years and sometimes 10 weeks that I've been in the position. So it's never a dull moment and always exciting to work with great people at the university that's doing things that nobody else is doing. And we're one of about 20 schools that has an esports major in the country, and we're by far the biggest when it comes to recognition and popularity, those kinds of things. So I really like where we are.

Also, the fact that we have the chancellor and the provost supporting these initiatives on campus goes a very long way, because they understand the importance and the opportunity, that educational opportunity that esports and gaming has to offer that is not about playing video games, but understanding the ecosystem and the industry around this idea of video games and competitive video games and all the components that go with it. So even this year, no esports students pervade our office space, we had about six to eight students on a daily basis that would just be in here asking us questions, wanted to get involved with the planning, the understanding, the execution of our matches or our competitions or the production, the long form, short form content we were creating. Because it helps them build their resume up and build their portfolio through something that they're interested in already.

We know these young adults are playing video games. But now with this program, we're offering them a structured and intentional opportunity to have an educational experience through this new and exciting lens that they value and they love and they're passionate about, to help them gain these skills

that portfolio, develop their network of connections in this field, yes. But it touches so many different fields that it's important for them to understand where their career can go with the knowledge and skills they get through these opportunities.

John Boccacino:

You happen to come from a great school, Shenandoah University in Virginia that actually was one of the first esports programs in the country. What lessons did you take away from that experience that have served you well so far in your current role here at Syracuse?

Joey Gawrysiak:

Yeah, that's a great question. And I love my time at Shenandoah. It was a fantastic experience. I came there as a sport management professor. That was my background, was teaching in sport management. And then I developed the curriculum about, at this point, but seven, eight years ago, geez, that makes me feel old. That I started working on this curriculum for what esports could look like in higher ed. And I think that what was so great about the program down there, that it was all in one school. It was in the business school down there, and I had the varsity programming. I had the facilities that we were building at the same time I was writing curriculum. And that was great, and this is one of the biggest lessons I had I wanted to carry over, was that it was really based in not just being in the classroom.

It was also based in, hey, running events out of our esports arena that we could use as a lab space for students to be in, not to play video games, but to understand different setups for an event, understand a run of show and broadcast and production that goes with running an esports event. We could have local high schools come in and have a competition in our space, and we could have our students doing the tournament operations, do the advertising, social media posts, do the videos, the editing, the graphics, everything that goes with an event, hospitality, all this stuff that goes with an event. Our students can now do that as part of the curriculum to get a degree, which I thought was great. Because honestly, somebody looking at an esports degree on a resume, it's like esports degree, okay, "They played video games and got a bachelor's in that? What does that mean?"

I want that to pop out and people to say esports degree, tell me what that means and what you did? And our students can talk about not just being in a classroom listening to somebody like me talk and blab on, but actually being in the field in an arena or off campus running an event and talking about all the things that go into that planning, the organizing, the execution of those events. So at Shenandoah, one of the biggest things I learned was how to write experiential learning based curriculum. And that's something I wanted to make sure that we had here, those experiences. Something else was the value of global experiential learning to go with that. So how do we take students abroad? How do we work with organizations and schools in other countries to give students that chance to work with students from other countries that have very different backgrounds, very different cultures, but have a shared commonality of esports and gaming to work on projects or experiences with?

How do we take our students out to South Korea or to Amsterdam or to London or to Dublin or the other places that Bangkok that we traveled to, with students to work with organizations in the esports gaming industry to get their connections, to develop their network. But maybe most importantly, just global competencies to understand how the world works, that it is not all about what's going on at the time in Virginia or here, what's going on here in New York, but what's going on abroad? What's going on across borders? How do I navigate that landscape where I might not speak the same language as that person I'm trying to work with? I think those are important ideas as well that I wanted to make sure to bring here to implement international programming as part of the experiences our students have.

So yeah, I take a lot of lessons I learned at Shenandoah, and I bring them here to Syracuse. Because I see it as a very similar conceptually program with the academic component, the facilities, the varsity component. It's just elevated to such a higher degree here at Syracuse because it's a very prestigious and

historical university. So we want to make sure that we are carrying on that legacy of what has made Syracuse so fantastic and now implement something brand new to it and learn lessons along the way and make mistakes along the

little more on the

broadcast and production side of things, I was like, this is already set up perfectly for me to come into and hopefully start filling that cupboard up.

John Boccacino:

When do you think that became the reality where it flipped from esports being gaming and fan passion to an actual career opportunity?

Games as part of their experiences here. As part of the experience, they're going to be able to travel to Washington DC and go meet with monumental and other entities down in DC that are part of the esports organization because of the umbrella and the network that we have here.

So I think somebody looking at Syracuse to come and study esports, yes, you're going to have world-class classes as part of this. You're going to have teachers that are proficient in their discipline in sport and in communication. But now you're going to have esports specific faculty that are top of their field in researching esports and teaching esports, but also with the industry connections that will help you find a job and an experience, a capstone, an internship that are part of your educational journey here. And to top it all off, you're going to have the best in-class facilities that no other college campus has with what we're putting together in Schine and in Marley to go with what we've already have in Barnes. We're going to have three massive esports facilities that any university would be lucky to have one of if for our students to have so many opportunities to engage with esports and gaming that you don't get anywhere else.

We have the, and I'm sure we'll get into this, we have the largest staff for esports on any college campus. And that's some on the academic and some on the student experience side. We have the most work study opportunities. We have the most facilities. We are competing and engaging in so many different levels that if you want to have any experience in and through esports and gaming, there is no place that's doing what we're doing here. So that's the biggest thing that we talk to parents about is, "What does your son or daughter like to do?" "Oh, they'd like to stream their stuff." Cool. Here are seven different rooms that we have, and here are streamers that we work with on a daily basis that could talk your son or daughter about how to set up a stream and how to monetize their branding through that stream in a way that makes sense.

We're not just going to throw them to the wolves and say, "Streaming. Cool. Good luck. Go find a PC on your own." We're going to support students every step along the way as part of the program here.

John Boccacino:

And that's really reassuring. Again, given the fact that with this program we just wrapped up year zero in the fall, we'll have students admitted for the first time. So how would you summarize the first year of the esports program on campus, and what were some of the highlights you're most proud of?

Joey Gawrysiak:

It's been a whirlwind. It's been a lot of fun. It's been a learning experience for sure, not just for me, but for me educating and working with other people across campus. For me, the biggest area of growth that I've seen is that getting people to understand what esports like in higher education and that it's not just a degree program. It is not just a club team. It is not just a varsity team, it's just a facility that you're throwing money at to make it look really cool and sound really cool. It's how all of those pieces work together to make an esports program. Not an esports major, an esports team, but an esports program under this awesome S right here.

So that's the biggest thing that I'm most proud of is that people are starting to coalesce and not have siloed approaches to what esports can be on campus. We're bringing it all under this esports broader umbrella to make sure that all those entities are working together. The sum of everything we do is so much greater than those individual parts that we were offering initially to students, which were great, and it's fantastic that we had some offering for students. But seeing the top down approach and the value that the chancellor and other administrators have for what esports can really is reassuring that we are going to have that support structure for us to really go for this and make it something meaningful for our students. So our varsity teams, they don't operate in a silo. Our varsity team works with our production area to make sure they coordinate the schedule and information and analytics and graphics and headshot

and media that goes that they need. All of that has been an experience just to get things set up and structured how they can work most effectively and efficiently as a holistic program.

The thing I'm really, really proud of is also the fact that we had varsity competition for one semester. So we had clubs, they were competing on their own. In January, I had a full meeting with all of our students that wanted to keep competing, and I said, "All right, we're going to offer the chance for you to be varsity competition starting this spring semester. If you want to be varsity, there are certain expectations you will have. And there are time commitments, GPA requirements, blah, blah, blah. If you want to remain a club, because that's what you want to do and just have fun and play together, cool, we will support you still, but you will be on your own a little bit more. More freedom, but not as much support from the university." So some teams decided they wanted be varsity, ~~wanted~~ wanted to stay club.

Of those varsity teams, we had a Counter-Strike team, one of the games we compete in, they won a national championship. They were the best counterstrike team in the countr



we could get something like that to Syracuse, New York, I mean mind blown. You'd know we've arrived. You know we got the best program.

John Boccacino:

People might not believe there are hardcore intense practice sessions that go into these esports games. There's communications lessons, there's comradery. How does an esports student athlete demonstrate that comradery, that communication, the skills needed to reach the pinnacle?

Joey Gawrysiak:

Yeah. A lot of it is communication. It's just like any other sport. It's constant communication and teamwork and practice. So our students do have very intense practice sessions. They have call VOD review, video on demand, where they're watching gameplay of scrimmages they have. Scrimmages are so important in the competitive esports space compared to more traditional sports because you can play a team from anywhere in the world online right now. So coaching, VOD review, breaking down

Kids are digital natives. It's accessible. It's accessible like it never has been before. And it's largely

John Boccacino:

I can't wait to see what happens moving forward in the fall with students being admitted for the first time