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WHITE PAPER

Advanced Computing in Universities

How Esports Facilities Impact University Recruitment and Student Success

What Today's Students Think About PC Gaming and Esports Facilities:

Today's students evaluate their choice of university on a long list of factors, with some expected and others less anticipated. Technology directors may be surprised, for example, to learn just how much control they have over the relative appeal of a particular university.

Gaming and esports have become inescapable parts of the culture for current and prospective students today. In partnership with Logitech, XMA has surveyed 1,000 present and aspiring university students and found, among many other notable discoveries, that 9 in 10 play games at least once a week.

By delving deeper into the data, university administrators can discover what students are really looking for from the educational institutions they attend in terms of advanced computing infrastructure for gaming, game design, research, and AI. This knowledge could represent the difference between a university that makes computing a positive differentiator and one that lags behind.

What Universities Need To Know About Gaming: Top-Level Takeaways

The recent survey by XMA and Logitech screened respondents to focus on current and prospective students aged 16 and up, with those who'd played video or mobile games receiving 14 questions about their preferences. Among this audience, gaming isn't just a trivial interest, but a major lifestyle component: 88% said they play games at least once a week. Universities seeking to position themselves well in the eyes of prospective students can take the overwhelming popularity of games into consideration.

The sample included perspectives on gaming across gender lines. The thousand-person group included 636 female and 364 male respondents. This revealed potentially actionable takeaways, including that large numbers of both male and female students game weekly (93% male vs. 85% female). This can set university administrators at ease about using games as a marketing or recruiting tactic. While stereotypically seen as a male activity, today digital gaming is relatively universal.

Upon collating the survey results, a few larger patterns emerged. These have strategic value for university IT leaders and administrators based on the following high-level takeaways:

Technology Access Does Matter

Students do place value on the technology tools provided by their universities, and their interest isn't limited to a single kind of hardware or software. Respondents expressed interest in: AI, virtual reality, motion capture, and streaming as potential gateways to their post-graduation lives. When asked about this list of technologies, 83.4% of current and prospective students said they're at least somewhat important to preparing their future careers. 52.6% said the technology is either "important" or "extremely important." To pursue these interests, students want access to capable PCs, peripherals, and more. When given an open-ended question about what they would like to see in advanced computing facilities, numerous respondents mentioned the advanced, specialised equipment necessary to interact with VR and other high-spec applications that could be inaccessible with personal technology. New and emerging tech were frequent subjects of interest.

Gaming at University Has Strong Career Associations

When asked which careers they associate with esports and advanced computing technology, some students (44%) listed the obvious path of professional gaming, but also other careers in the general tech world. Respondents mentioned game design (72%), programming (54%), digital content creation for marketing (34%), and IT/cybersecurity work (32%). This broad set of applications shows that investment in advanced computing isn't solely about gaming, but is rather a multi-purpose opportunity.

Game Development Remains an Interesting Topic

PC gaming at university doesn't just mean playing games or competing in esports. More than half of survey respondents (55%) expressed interest in attending workshops on game development and related topics if universities made these programmes available to them. This interest in games beyond playing demonstrates their value to student culture and community-building.

Equipment Should Be Powerful and Versatile

When asked what types of computers and peripherals best suited their needs, respondents answered that they were most interested in functional, high-quality technology with practical applications. While recreation is one side of the equation, with 62% wanting to use advanced computing spaces' PCs for relaxation and casual gaming, 37% of students also want to perform work on these same powerful computers, while 33% want access to content creation tools.

Gaming Isn't Viewed as a Solitary Activity

While one stereotypical view of modern video gaming may define it as a solitary or purely recreational activity, survey respondents offered a variety of interesting associations that indicate a different interpretation. In an open-ended query around the advantages of games on campus, current and prospective students make connections between gaming and:

- Belonging and socialisation at a university level.
- The development of practical digital skills.
- The creation of a vibrant and positive campus life.

By listening to students' wants from a social perspective and their needs from a course perspective, universities can create a lab that focuses on both learning and community — ultimately ensuring that advanced computing offerings not only meet academic expectations but also enrich the wider student experience.

Detailed Results: What Students Said About Advanced Computing and Esports

### 1. How often do you play video games or mobile games?

When asked how often they play games, **50%** of respondents stated they play **every day**, with **38%** playing several times a week. This adds up to **88%** of the total group playing games several times a week. This indicates gaming is a core activity for today's university pupils. Responses by gender did reveal a split in frequency of play: **57%** of male respondents play games every day, vs. **46%** of female players.

2. How often do you watch professional eSports or gaming livestreams?

Watching esports and professional gaming is now a common activity among university students, though less common than playing themselves. **50%** of respondents watch at least once a week, while **20%** watch streams every day. This question also indicates a gender gap, with male respondents **20%** more likely to be regular viewers of gaming stream content.

3. Which of the following benefits do you most associate with esports and gaming?

When presented with a list of potential benefits of gaming, more than half of respondents **(52%)** named **stress relief and relaxation**, making that the top response. This was followed by **community and friendship (44%)**, **entertainment (41%)**, **improving problem-solving skills (33%)**, and **developing teamwork skills (33%)**. Esports and gaming have strong associations with positive mental health and social outcomes, with skill-building as a secondary advantage.
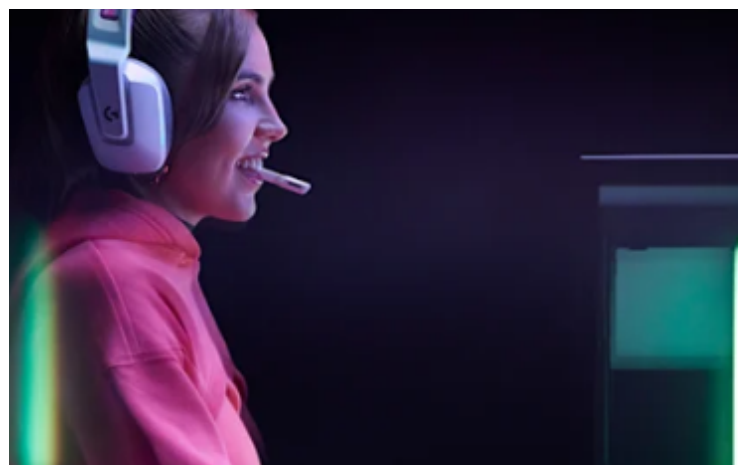
4. If you were choosing between two universities of similar ranking and cost, how would the presence of dedicated gaming facilities influence your decision?

There's a clear opportunity facing administrators, with **60%** of respondents saying the presence of gaming facilities would either "strongly" or "somewhat" encourage them to choose a specific university and only **1.5%** saying it would discourage them. Adding esports and gaming technology is an opportunity to boost a university's appeal with minimal downside.

5. If you were choosing between two universities of similar ranking and cost, how would the presence of active gaming associations or clubs influence your decision?

The results of this question were very similar to the query about gaming facilities, leading to a similar opportunity for IT leaders and overall administrators. **Exactly 6 in 10 respondents had a positive appraisal of gaming clubs**, while 2.3% said it would be a negative factor. There's clearly far more to gain than to lose in encouraging gaming activity.

6. Would access to gaming facilities at a university make you more likely to choose a technology-focused course?

There is an opportunity for university leaders to encourage students' learning pathways by offering gaming technology. **44% of respondents said they would be influenced**, 38% answered maybe and 18% said there would be no impact on their course decisions.

7. Which of the following would you most want from university gaming facilities?

When asked to choose which potential features they would be most excited to have in gaming facilities, students overwhelmingly picked **social and casual gaming spaces (62%)**. This shows that gaming centres are not just places for individual play or competition, but for socialisation and community. **High-performance computers for coursework (37%)** came in second place, followed by **content creation tools (33%)**.

8. Would dedicated gaming facilities make you more likely to participate in extracurricular or cross-disciplinary activities?

Similar to the response when asked about tech-focused courses, nearly **90%** of respondents said either "yes" or "maybe" to being more likely to join a club or group if given access to powerful gaming technology. In fact, over half of the respondents **(51.2%**) said "yes," showing strong commitment to the idea.

9. How important is access to emerging technologies in preparing you for your future career?

Advanced PCs and peripherals aren't just gaming devices. They can also point toward high-tech work. A majority of respondents **(53%)** said technology is "important" or "extremely important" to their professional lives, and **over 80%** said there's at least some importance.

10. Which career paths, if any, do you believe gaming can support?

Responses to this question pointed to some expected outcomes and some further afield. While **72%** of students drew a clear line between gaming and game design, other popular answers included programming and computer science **(54%)** and digital content creation **(49%).**

11. Would you be interested in workshops or classes held in a gaming facility setting?

When presented with a list of classes or workshop activities that take place in gaming facilities, respondents had a clear interest in game development **(55%),** followed by digital media creation **(47%)**. Also attracting attention were more technically focused subjects, coding **(31%)** and network security and IT **(24%).**

12. In your own words, what do you think is the biggest benefit of gaming for students?

This open-response prompt drew several interesting and telling answers, with tech, IT, and coding skills being the most-cited theme. Others named stress relief and mental health benefits, with a representative answer being: "It helps students unwind, and games can also help to learn things in a fun way." There were also multiple mentions of gaming as a builder of connections, teamwork, and friendships.

13. What would you like universities to provide in their gaming facilities?

Another open-response question, this query drew varied answers. **Top themes included up-to-date PCs and consoles, as well as reliable peripherals from manufacturers like Logitech.** Students want access to VR and AR technology, as well as quiet social and casual areas where they can relax together. In terms of administrative elements, respondents want easy access, long hours, inclusivity, and frequent upkeep.

14. Please share any other thoughts on how gaming could improve the student experience.

When asked to give their general opinions on gaming spaces, students cited everything from lifelong friendships to mental health and career skills. Some respondents view games as a way to meet peers without the potentially harmful aspects of standard socialisation activities like drinking and clubbing.

Delivering Positive Experiences for Students via Advanced Computing

The results of the survey cover a wide range of topics, but taken together, they deliver a strong general endorsement of gaming and advanced computing spaces. With multiple positive associations and little downside, it's clear there are advantages to be gained by universities that make the investment.

In short, students view advanced computing as a way to elevate the experience of campus life through community-building, overall mental well-being, and preparation for tech-based career paths.

It's important to note that while gaming has historically been stereotyped as a male activity, the survey results confirmed the appeal of these spaces across gender lines. These positives can sway prospective applicants toward a university, while having little potential to deter them, which marks gaming spaces as one of the safest investments an IT department can make.

Of course, a university's advanced computing lab should reflect the overall wishes of students to make sure it meets or exceeds their expectations. As described by survey respondents, wishes for gaming spaces include:

- A focus on advanced hardware, kept up to date and maintained by professionals.
- A need for high-quality peripherals, up to the standards of esports and high-level PC gaming.
- Equipment allowing users to engage with new tech areas like VR and AR.
- Long hours and straightforward access policies to make sure the spaces don't become exclusive or go unused.
- A welcoming atmosphere conducive to community-building, relaxation, socialising, and club activities.
- The ability to perform work and contribute to projects, rather than solely play games.

Case Study:
Desiring a refresh for complicated and aging advanced computing spaces, the University of Lincoln updated its computer labs. The new spaces were designed to accommodate hackathons and game jams, alongside student projects in robotics, AI, natural language processing, machine learning, and more. Now, with 140 high-performance PCs in two labs, the university has delivered a compelling new experience for students.

Watch the video case study **here**.

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An Opportunity for Your University

Offering advanced computing options is a way for universities to connect with a large and engaged segment of the prospective student population: the 90% of players who entertain themselves with games at least a few times a week. Rebranding a university as a place that offers advanced computing can shift the perception of that school.

Delivering the types of high-quality experiences students expect, both in terms of physical space and organisation, requires collaboration with an expert partner. This means an experienced and well-connected technology provider that understands the process of building and supporting reliable, appealing advanced computing facilities, and that will take the time to understand the project at hand.

Contact XMA, a homegrown, U.K. based, and award-winning IT reseller, to get started on your university's advanced computing project. We hold status on over 25 public-sector procurement frameworks and have helped thousands of varied customers over our 35+ years. We'll focus on crafting a successful gaming programme that suits your needs and fits into your university's identity.

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