

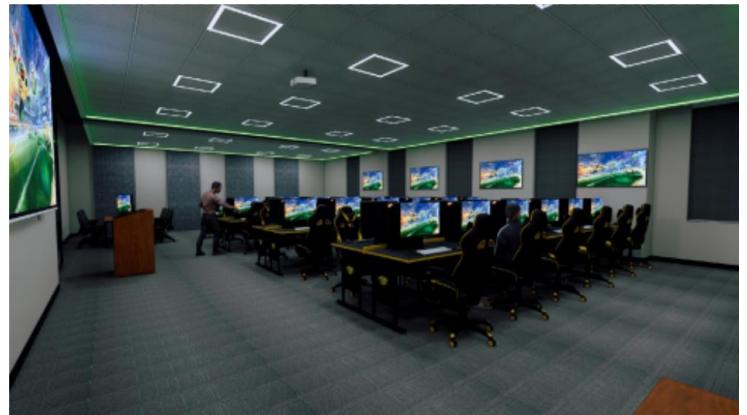
Proposal Summary: Request for Operating Budget for Esports

In order to support the annual operating costs of Esports, the Memorial Union is requesting consideration for an increase in the Student Activity Fee of \$0.75/credit, capped at \$9 per student, to generate a \$190,000 annual Esports operating budget. The funds would be used to support a new fulltime dedicated staff position, student staff salaries, and replacement of technology on a rotating basis.

The Memorial Union Student Activity Fee supports the Memorial Union Operations and Student Activities. The Memorial Union staff works with the following areas: Memorial Union Operations, Conference and Event Services, Thundar's Game Room, Design & Sign, and The MU Gallery. Up until this time, the Thundar's Game Room fulltime and student staff worked directly with Esports as it was located within the same space. The new Esports lab, located in Ladd Hall 316, had a soft opening in October 2023 and is set to be finalized for a Grand Opening Ceremony on February 15, 2024 at 4 pm. This state-of-the-art facility was built utilizing reserve funds provided from Student Government and the Memorial Union and from funding from the university. It was designed based off student input and includes 36 machines, a teaching station, a shoutcasting room for streaming games, two console gaming carts, several wall monitors and an overhead projector. The space is a significant improvement over the old 350-square foot lab located on the ground floor of the Memorial Union or the temporary lab set up in the Badlands meeting room, which had 18 gaming stations.



Old Memorial Union Ground Floor Esports Lab



New Ladd 316 Esports Lab

Current State of the Department

Access to the Esports lab is free for all NDSU students and student organizations and available via a pay-per-hour fee for reservations. A soft opening of the new lab occurred mid-October 2023. During this time, the members of the recognized Esports club teams, Rocket League, League of Legends, Overwatch, Valorant, Super Smash Brothers, Chess, and Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), were able to utilize the space for competitive play in the two national leagues NDSU is a part of, The National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) and The National Esports Collegiate Conference (NECC). From day one, the lab was found to be almost half-full each weekday evening, with some nights each week already reaching capacity of people playing their competitive matches.

In addition to competition, the lab was used for social events for the Esports clubs. This allowed access to those students that don't want to compete, but wanted to connect with others and game. Another

use of the new lab was the hosting of conferences. The semi-annual Dakota Collegiate Rocket League (DCRL) tournament was held for 64 local college students and the regional National Association of Esports Coaches and Directors (NAECAD) was held for 20 area coaches and 32 high school student players. In total, 35 different reservations were held in the lab during Fall 2023, before it was even officially open.

The Esports lab is also utilized for two hours a week by the Heath, Nutrition, and Exercise Science (HNES) 167 Esports Class. This eight-week, one credit class, held twice a semester, is designed to teach students to play different types of Esport games by acquainting them with the rules of the games as well as teaching game and socialization etiquette. Students compete in class against classmates, as well as people all over the world.

The lab is to now open to the entire student population at NDSU. The Spring 2024 Esports Lab hours are set to be Monday through Wednesday from 2:00pm to 10:00pm; Thursday from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm; Friday from 2:00pm to 12:00am; Saturday from 1:00pm to 12:00am; and closed on Sunday. Summer and break hours will be by reservation only. During these hours, 12 computers will always be available for walk-in use by any student. The goal of the 12 walk-in computers is to allow social players the ability to come in to hang out and meet new people and new players the ability to try different games. The open lab times will also be utilized by the club teams needing to practice for and play in competitive matches, clubs or student organizations wanting to host meetings and social gatherings, and outside group reservations.

In order to provide staffing for Esports, the full-time Thundar's Game Room Coordinator currently splits time between the game room and Esports areas. Thundar's Game Room has a group of 10 student staff members and an additional group of six student staff members has been hired to staff the Esports lab. For Spring 2024, funding for the Esports student employees has been allocated out of the Thundar's Game Room student staff budget, with hours being reviewed at both locations to ensure that funds are not overspent. In the future, the goal would be to have both Esports and Thundar's Game Room staffed by separate full-time employees and around 10 to 12 student staff members each so that each area can offer full access to the classes, walk-in opportunities, and social events that all students want to engage in.

Contribution to Current Student Life on Campus and Future Potential Impact



Students Utilizing the New Ladd 316 Esports Lab



2023 Dakota Collegiate Rocket League Event

In 2017, Esports at NDSU began with just two clubs, the Rocket League Club and League of Legends. In 2022, Esports was added to the job responsibilities of the Thundar's Game Room Coordinator and they worked with students to expand the two original clubs and organize additional clubs at NDSU. Beginning in Fall 2022, students added four new Esports titles and it was recognized they needed more space. The push from students for the creation of the new Esports Lab has elevated the program and positions it for a new age of Esports at NDSU. The lab went from a tightly cramped space of just 18 stations to what is now a spacious and inviting room with 36 stations, console gaming, and a shoutcasting room. With this renovation Esports can now provide service to more students, support more clubs and competitive teams, host tournaments, be utilized as a classroom space, and provide additional programming opportunities. This fall, students worked to complete the process of adding one student Esports organization, CS:GO and are working on starting another, Halo. And there is a growing interest from the student body in adding more titles in the future. With the new lab opening, the core five titles (Rocket League, League of Legends, Overwatch, Valorant, Super Smash Bros) have seen explosive growth over the last year and now average almost 50 students per club! In total, Esports at NDSU involves 368 students currently. It is anticipated that club membership will continue to increase as more people are able to connect with one another through the new lab. Fulltime staff support will be key for providing guidance and administrative oversight to the club groups and lab space.

The competitive NDSU Esports teams are highly successful. They are well-known across the region and are growing in recognition nationally. Just recently they have been asked to join the NACE Superconference. The teams not only compete online in the lab, but they have travelled for tournaments. This past year's teams have been to South Dakota School of Mines for "The Grubby Games", a growing Esports tournament that had matches for multiple titles, the "UJ invitational" held at the University of Jamestown, where the teams took home four first place trophies in its inaugural event, and the Collegiate Champions League (CCL) hosted by Dakota State University, where teams also won 1st place trophies.

Esports has begun to become part of the culture of NDSU. Welcome Week 2023 included a night of "Esports Takeover" in the Memorial Union. Clubs shared meeting room spaces and had open games for students to come and play with the Esports teams and learn more about Esports at NDSU, both competitively and casually. This event is already scheduled to be in the lab for Welcome Week 2024 and is anticipated to garner great interest amongst the new students.

Annual events are also becoming a big part of NDSU Esports. A now alumni of NDSU was the brain behind DCRL, a cross-campus competitive league run by students for students. The in-person LAN-event finals, held once each Spring and Fall Semester, has seen a growing number of students both from NDSU and other North Dakotas collegiate and MSUM students participate. This past Fall, 64 students competed in the two-day event in the Ballroom while 56 people watched in person and an additional 93 individuals watched online. It is anticipated that the event will continue to grow as more students learn about it and become involved.

With the success and attention DCRL has gained, academic programs at NDSU are beginning to notice. There is already a partnership for the HNES 167 Intro to Esports class in which students learn to play some of the most popular Esports titles. The Sports Management program has also inquired about the possibility of including Esports in their class in the future. The idea would give students the opportunity to organize an Esports tournament as part of their capstone project.

Esports is continuing to gain popularity amongst the current NDSU students and the goal is for this to grow. Students do not need to be part of the club teams in order to be part of the Esports community. The new lab is a place where all NDSU students have the opportunity to utilize a computer for gaming as there will always be 12 machines set aside for walk-ins anytime it is open. The space provides students access to play, watch, and talk to each other through several popular Esport games. The soft opening has shown that students gravitate toward the lab and it is not yet officially open. This funding request will allow even more students to make connections and collaborate with their peers. Ideas for engagement opportunities include Friday Feature Game Nights and Learn-to-Play events throughout the semester. At Feature Nights, a different game will be featured on Friday nights, giving people the opportunity to socially play the game or participate in a one-night tournament against their peers who have the same interest. On Learn-to-Play Nights, students can come learn a game from experienced players of the club teams.

Proposal

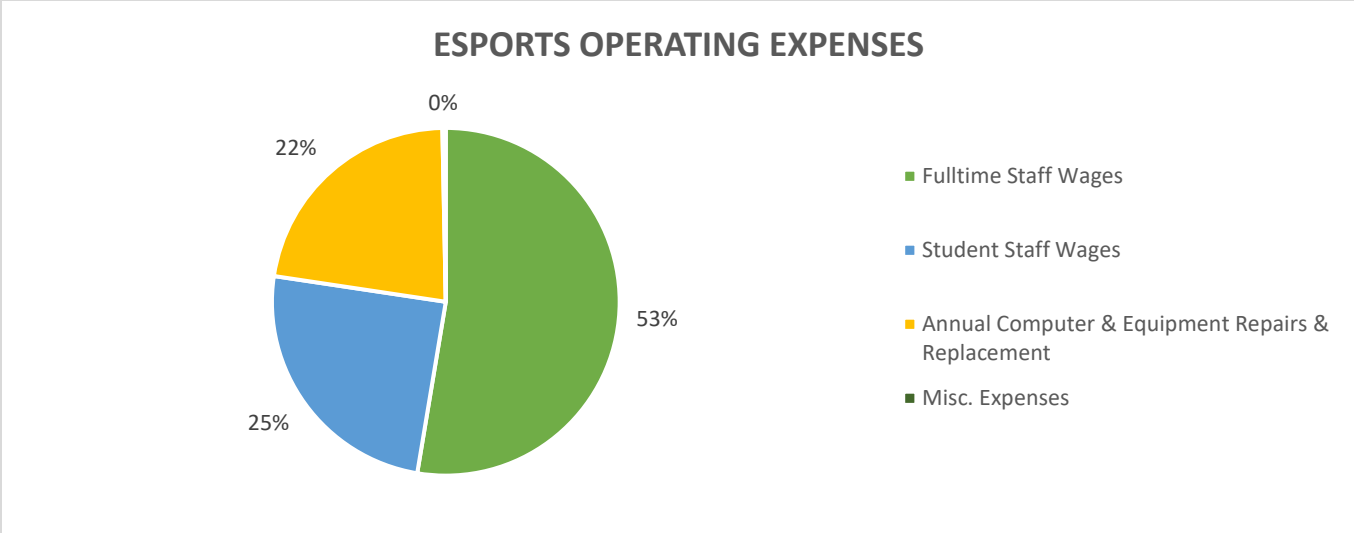
In order to support the annual operating costs of Esports, the Memorial Union is requesting consideration for an increase in the Student Activity Fee of \$0.75/credit, capped at \$9 per student, to generate a \$190,000 annual Esports operating budget. Funding is being requested in order to hire a fulltime staff position to help build community engagement opportunities, potentially add intramurals, provide student support, and assist in advising the club programs. The fulltime staff member will also be responsible for the administrative aspects of the lab, supervising the student staff members, hosting and promoting events, helping with student recruitment activities, and supporting the competitive play of the club sports.

Student staff funding will be used to have staff members present during the currently established lab hours and either hours over the summer or additional hours during the day during the academic year, depending on student demand. Student staff are present for assistance with computer concerns, to check out equipment, and to assist with reservations.

Annual computer and equipment repair and replacement fees will be used to purchase an additional 12 computers in year one; bringing the total number of machines available in the lab up to 48. After that the funds will be utilized to keep the technology in the room current. Twenty-five percent of the computer consoles and peripherals will be budgeted for replacement each year. In addition, one gaming console station and component parts will be budgeted for replacement annually. Wall monitors will be replaced on an as-needed basis. If funds are not utilized, they will be placed in reserves for potential expansion as student demand grows.

Finally, miscellaneous expenses will cover costs such as printing and office supplies.

ESPORTS OPERATING EXPENSES	
Fulltime Staff Wages & Benefits	\$ 100,000
Student Staff Wages	\$ 47,000
Annual Computer & Equipment Repair & Replacement	\$ 42,400
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ 600
TOTAL	\$ 190,000



History of Departmental Fee Increases Approved by SFAB and Balance Sheets of Previous 3 years

As this is a new initiative request in order to complement the new lab space, Esports has not previously had a budget and therefore does not have previous years’ balance sheets nor has it had previously approved fee requests or increases. The request for funding is for a new fulltime staff position, new student staff positions, and additional funds to support expansion in year one and then ongoing technology repairs and replacement in order to keep the Esports lab equipment up-to-date.

Spending Projections For Next 3 Years

The annual inflationary increase to the Student Activity Fee is projected to cover any increases to expenses for fulltime staff wages, student staff wages, and annual computer repair and replacement costs for the Esports lab.

Contingency Plan

If the \$0.75/credit fee increase to the Student Activity Fee is not approved to support the ongoing operating expenses for Esports, lab hours may need be limited to the number of hours that can be absorbed by reductions in other areas of the Memorial Union Operations student staff budgets. This would limit the ability to expand times available for walk-in students to use the equipment, limit the reservation times available for student organizations to host events and meetings in the lab, and limit the opportunities for the expansion of services such as potential intramural collaborations. In addition, the fulltime dedicated staff member would not be able to be hired to support Esports. The goal of this staff position is to grow and expand the Esports programs to support the students who are excited about these engagement opportunities and to meet the ever-changing landscape of this fast-paced industry. The current fulltime staffing model would need to continue with time being split between support for the Esports lab, co-advising the club sports teams, maintaining the bowling alley equipment, and staffing Thundar’s Game Room. Finally, funding would not be available for the needed ongoing computer repair and replacement within the lab. It is anticipated that the lifespan of the gaming computers and console games located in the Esports lab is three to four years. If money is not budgeted for replacement, these machines will start to become outdated quickly.

Esports is becoming more and more popular on the NDSU campus. These games and the atmosphere surrounding the gaming community have the ability to drive collaboration, socialization, and foster friendships within the safety of the University environment. All students will have access to the Esports lab. In this space, students are provided a safe and comfortable University environment to explore their entertainment options and to gain a greater understanding of what goes into the games behind one of the largest growing entertainment industries in the world. The funding requested would allow this to continue to be free for student use without having to impact other areas of the Memorial Union Operations.