High school students learn about esports at NU summer camp

Editor's note: In July, 11 Niagara Falls High School students participated in a special esports camp offered at Niagara University.

BY DR. KAREN KWANDRANS
Executive Director, Levesque Institute

The Levesque Institute at Niagara University, in partnership with the Niagara Falls City School District, offers an esports program designed to present new and innovative learning experiences to students. The NU summer camp and school year activities prepare high school students for the post-secondary options available in this area. The series is offered to 11th and 12th grade high school students to expand their knowledge and understanding of esports and identify future educational and career possibilities.

Students participated in a three-week summer camp in July where they attended two college classes, experienced the world of gaming in the NU Esports lounge, visited the M&T Tech Hub, explored the metaverse in the NU Oculus Lab, and heard from esports and IT professionals, as well as tech start-up business owners. Successful completion of Python I/programming languages and a digital media course meant students also earned six college credits.
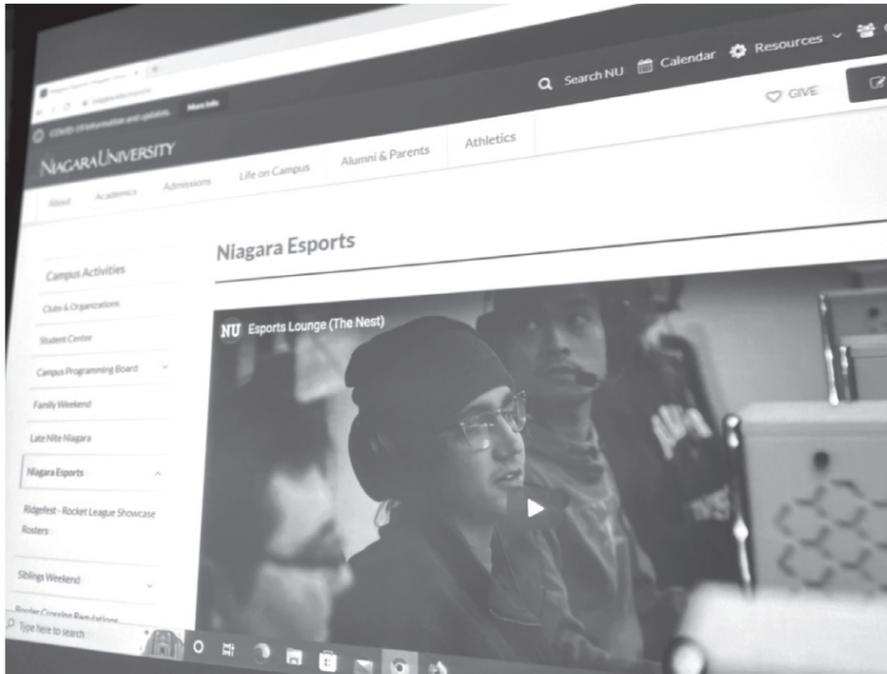
Following the summer component, students who continue to participate in the esports program will have the opportunity, throughout the school year, to take two additional college courses – intro to marketing and CIS mobile game design – and also will visit the NU campus to continue to engage with NU students, faculty and professional speakers.

The NU Esports program provides an excellent opportunity for students seeking to learn more about career pathways, including the education and essential job readiness competencies needed to enter the expansive esports job market.

The program engages learners to develop the skills needed for agile learning environments in the multidisciplinary field of esports.

NFHS students pursued college opportunities this summer

Niagara University Esports members play titles inside "The Nest" in O'Shea Hall. (NU photo)

BY L. ANTHONY TOWNSEND AND ETHAN SMITH
Niagara Falls High School/Niagara University Esports Camp Participants

While most kids spend their summers playing games and sleeping in, 11 students from Niagara Falls High School signed up for a three-week course at Niagara University for an opportunity to earn six college credits. The Niagara Esports Camp was an interactive learning experience comprised of two classes: CMS 120EC and CIS programming.

The program began on July 11, and the educators for these classes were professor Joshua Maloni, who taught CMS 120EC; and Dr. Yonghong Tong, who taught CIS programming. The courses included guest speakers, on-campus tours and field trips. The guest speakers included members of the Niagara Esports club; speakers from ZIZO; and Peter LePore, partner and chief learning architect at Scarole Enterprises. The NU esports program also provided information on job opportunities in the fields of journalism and programming through guest speakers and field trips.

The CMS 120EC class was taught by Maloni and, like the programming class, lasted three weeks. Students learned to write press releases, feature articles, and proper interviewing strategies. During this class, students had many opportunities to learn these skills through the work assigned and the lectures.

One assignment that really stood out was the second assignment in which the students were given the opportunity to interview guest speakers Alyssa Chorazak, president of the esports club; and Bill Newton, assistant director of campus activities at NU. The class concluded with a final assignment that gave students a higher degree of freedom with their article, and an opportunity to have their work published for more people to see.

Despite the class's limited time, professor Maloni said that there was enough time to cover everything on the syllabus – although the class could have benefited from a few more days.

Overall, the class left a great impression on the students. When asked about this class and their experience with it, the students had nothing to say but positives. Student Ahnaf Tanim said, "I learned that writing is just like cooking, because it must be timely and appealing."

The CIS programming class, taught by Dr. Tong, covered the basics of the programming language Python. Throughout the course, students learned how to use Python in Replit, and the basics of using functions with variables to write complex code. In this class, students also had an opportunity to go to M&T Bank in Buffalo to observe the facilities and positions in the growing tech world.

The final assignment in the class was to create a game with the information provided throughout the class. For this final assignment, students were allowed to work in groups, allowing for a collaborative experience. They were given a couple days to complete it.

While the class was very informative, the limited time effected the course. When asked what could be improved with the class, Dr. Tong said that, while the class was good, more time could have helped. Time aside, the students were able to complete the assignments on time.

When asked about the experience teaching the class, Dr. Tong said, "I can see that these young adults work great, because all of you have different backgrounds. They were very good and very engaged students."

While the course is over now, there will be an opportunity to continue in the fall and spring with more in-depth lessons on game design.

After the students' class time was complete, they would have the opportunity to go to the campus dining hall and then participate in campus activities. These activities included campus tours, visits to the campus esports club in O'Shea Hall, and lectures that provided information on job opportunities.

One of these lectures was from LePore, who talked to the students about the growing esports industry, job opportunities and his job as chief architect. This was one of the many activities the students were able to partake in on campus.

Along with these activities, students also got to take on a higher degree of freedom and responsibility with these courses, better preparing them for college life.

Overall, the esports camp was a great experience for everyone involved, with students learning skills in journalism and programming. When interviewed, students had nothing negative to say; and when asked if they would take the program again, most students said yes.

Asa Gates said, "I think that the Niagara Esports club was a great experience, and I would love to continue this in the fall."