

4. The Power of Collegiate Esports Clubs

collegiate gaming during COVID

MATTHEW LOPEZ

Matthew Lopez explores the theme of esports as community from a personal angle, recounting his experience during the global pandemic finding connections through his school's esports Club. Matthew is a graduating senior at the City College of New York (CCNY). He majored in political science, is the president of the CCNY Esports Club, and is a resident of the Bronx.

I currently am the president of CCNY's Esports Club, but I'd like to take us back, about two and a half years, to the very start of the pandemic, when video games were still a large part of my own life but in a very different way than today.

Back then, having video games as an outlet for myself, to just enjoy and relax and be social with some of my IRL [in real life] friends, was normal to me. Every day, I'd come back home from school or work and then play some games with friends I had just seen.

But as the pandemic started to roll in, and as things really changed, especially for me and my family, video games started to take on a different role, as did much of regular life.

Being home all day had an impact. It definitely had an impact on my college experience. It had an impact on my mental state as well. A lot of unfortunate passings really took a toll on me, mentally. And even though video games were still there for me, they were not the same.

I took it upon myself to make an investment. I was at a low point in my life, both in school and mentally, and I decided that I would try to turn it around.

I invested in a PC for myself. I decided, "You know what? I'm not going to be

going out. I'm not going to be doing anything else. This could be something that I could do positively for myself." And so I did.

I went through the grueling task of putting a PC together. Not only did I do it for one person, but I did it for three people. And through that, I found something that I hadn't really known existed before.

You see, I had been a console gamer. The CCNY Esports Club here on campus did exist, but it existed mostly through playing League of Legends, an online, PC game that just didn't interest me as a console player.

But having a PC made me think, "Well, maybe there is something to this. Maybe I can dip my toe in the water and get social."

I'm a senior now. And I've had some experiences on campus but, to my own regret, a lot of it was really just spent going to class, getting something from the cafeteria, and then just going straight home. It was the same process, every single day.

Socializing was just not on my radar. School and work and other responsibilities were really taking up a lot of my time.

But being on the CCNY Esports Discord channel, and knowing that there was a community of people that I could connect with, was something unique, something that I hadn't experienced before. I leaned into that. I wanted to make it something that I could come to rely on. And so I did.

For about a year and semester, along with five fantastic friends that I had made through direct messaging on Discord and bothering them to play Rainbow Six Siege, I played on a competitive team to represent CCNY. We went out and played.

And let me tell you something: We were awful. I think we only won one game. I still feel the vibe from it – fantastic times. But I think the important thing to come out of that experience was I had done something that I had never done before: I socialized. I felt like I was a part of a community.

That experience really meant something to me.

I decided to take it even further. I put myself out there and said, "I want to become the president of this club. I want to enact the same change in people

coming in. I want them to recognize the power of community that we really do have here.”

And that’s what this Gaming Pathways Project is all about, bringing so many people together.

I feel like my socialization, through the CCNY Esports Club, through all the games that we play, through all the new games that I play, has really brought me to a different state of mind, one where I feel motivated, where I feel like I can shape my future with my own two hands.

I can move forward now and envision a better future for myself than I probably could have two years ago.

There’s something completely unique to esports: the idea that virtually you can know so many people, and feel closer to them without meeting in person than even some of my friends in real life. That is something I genuinely wish to see expand.

This has helped me personally and it’s something that I want to help other people see and embrace as well.

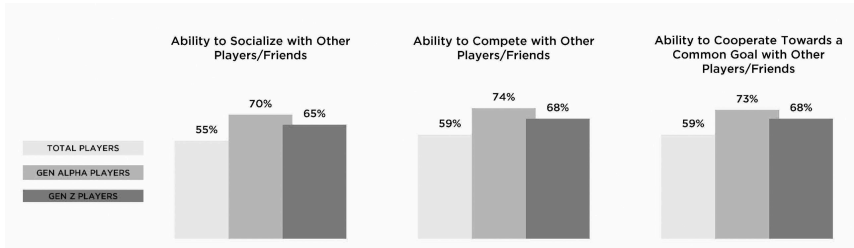
As Collegiate esports gets larger and larger, I think people will start to come to realize that this is just a part of college life as we know it. It truly is. The amount of times that me and my friends have spent at night gaming, or looking at worksheets, studying for tests, these are aspects of socialization that just would not have been possible.

For me, personally, the motivation to get involved with CCNY’s Esports Club was the saving grace of the pandemic. It propelled me to take responsibilities that I might not have taken. It made me accountable. It made me feel like I’m welcome. Most importantly, it made me feel like I am a part of CCNY.

When I talk to people who aren’t at CCNY, when I play games with them, the first thing that I always tell them is I played Rainbow Six Siege on a CCNY team. I was the captain. I was the in-game leader. This is something that I take pride in, in the same way that an athlete at any college takes pride in the fact that they played lacrosse or soccer for their school. I take that exact same pride.

For these reasons alone, gaming and esports and these club environments

should continue to be expanded all over the country within college life in ways that are not only accessible to everybody, but open and welcoming to all.



The importance of social features in games. Additional game-related research and reports can be found at Newzoo, who provided the above information.