Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**®

3 Ways to Play: Special Olympics Unified esports at the college level

Background Information

Special Olympics provides year-round sports training and competition for people with intellectual disabilities. Through these events, physical fitness, courage, inclusion and joy are promoted and practiced. By engaging athletes and Unified partners through sport, Special Olympics is reaching families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® college programming

[Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools](#) (UCS) is an education and sports-based program aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities that bring together individuals with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) in competition and training. It creates an inclusive campus environment for individuals of all abilities through 3 components:

- Special Olympics Unified Sports®
- Inclusive leadership
- Whole campus engagement

What is Unified esports?

Esports provides a virtual experience for athletes and partners to experience the inclusion and joy that is present in Special Olympics programming, whether at home or in-person. Unified esports can be either recreational or competitive gaming where teams consist of both teammates with ID (Special Olympics athletes) and teammates without ID (Unified partners). Teams must include an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners.

Why Unified esports?

Esports is already very popular at colleges and universities and is continuing to grow. Esports at the college level provides the opportunity to expand the pool of athletes and partners participating in Special Olympics programming, leading to more individuals that experience the benefits of Unified sports, such as:

- Teammates with and without ID build friendships and gain respect for each other
- Teammates discover they are more alike than different
- Teammates learn from each other through training and competition
- Campuses will be perceived as more inclusive and accepting

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The 3 Ways to Play

The following section will help established or interested college clubs/campus recreation programs determine what level of involvement is right for them. Multiple ways to play can be implemented if there is enough interest to do so. Be sure to check out the "Additional Resources" section at the end of this resource for more guides, tips and tricks.

1. Social event (Recreational)

This way to play is the simplest of the three. A Special Olympics College Club or State Program can host an informal Unified "game night" either on campus or virtually. This can be as simple as everyone getting into a room and playing a video game together as a group. The purpose of this way to play is social interaction through Special Olympics athletes and partners coming together to play games they enjoy.

Social Event Details		
Level of Play	Recreational/Beginner	All Special Olympics athletes and partners should be invited.
Barrier to Entry	Low	There should be little to no requirements for athletes and partners to participate.
Frequency	One-time event or regularly occurring	This can be used as a one-time event to gain more members, or a recurring event to engage athletes and partners throughout the semester.
Location	Online or in-person	This event can be on campus or through a virtual meeting platform.
Game	Any appropriate game	Look into school's policies, if any, for the type of games that can be played.
Equipment	Consoles, games, controllers as needed	Depending on the game being played, consoles and controllers may be needed.
Administration/Rules	Determined by student club/campus recreation program	The college club or campus recreation program leaders determine the date, time, game and rules for the event. The State Program may be consulted for best practices.
Team Ratio	Any	The ratio of athletes to partners should be as close to even as possible.

Sample Timeline

- Week 1: Introduce "esports game night" and recruit athletes and partners to participate
- Week 2: Pick the game based on interest from participating athletes and partners. Set a date and time based on availability
- Week 3: Run the event! Continue to run the event if your members want more game nights

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2. Unified intramural esports (Competitive/Developmental)

This way to play can be described as organized competition(s) between teams from the same college and typically is administered through campus recreation. The league or tournament would run in the same way as traditional intramural sports leagues. Schedule, standings, season length, cost, and awards should all match traditional intramural sports. Check with campus recreation staff to see what esports leagues are already being offered to determine which is best for Unified. If there is a student esports club on campus, they can help recruit athletes and partners to play, as well as potentially help with equipment and running game nights/tournaments.

Intramural Esports Details		
Level of Play	Developmental/Competitive	This can be intended for fun and socialization, but there will be a winner at the end of the season/tournament.
Barrier to Entry	Medium	There may be a cost associated with joining the league. Additionally, if members want a fun and relaxing experience, a league may not be the best method.
League Costs	Set by campus recreation/intramural staff	Some intramural programs have costs associated with joining leagues.
Frequency	Weekly (season) or single day (tournament)	There will be weekly games and postseason playoffs to determine a winner. Tournaments can take a few hours or days, depending on participation, to finish.
Location	Online or in-person	Campus recreation/intramural staff will determine the location of gameplay.
Game	Intramural esports offerings	Check with your campus recreation program to see what esports are already being offered to determine which is best for Unified. We suggest games rated "E" for everyone.
Equipment	Consoles, games, controllers as needed	Depends on the location of gameplay. Some campuses may have an esports room stocked with equipment.
Administration/Rules	Campus recreation/intramural staff	Schedule, standings, season length, cost, and awards should all match traditional intramural sports.
Team Ratio	Depends on the game	Teams should consist of an equal number of athletes and partners. If the game is 3v3, teams should be 2 athletes and 1 partner.

| Practice | If desired | Unified teams can practice on their own time if they so desire |
| Coaching | Team captains | Team captains can assist their teammates in game strategy and provide tips and tricks |

Sample Timeline

Intramural League

- Week 1: Meet with campus recreation staff to determine what esport(s) league will be offered as Unified. We recommend introducing the idea of adding a Unified division to an intramural league the season prior to implementation.
- Week 2: Recruit athletes and partners for the league, and make sure all committed players have the appropriate equipment, if applicable.
- Week 3: Host an assessment/practice night to judge the skill of participating athletes and partners in order to make fair teams for the best experience possible.
- Weeks 4-8: The regular season occurs and typically lasts about 4 to 5 weeks. Playoffs begin.
- Week 9: A champion is crowned! Begin discussion of next Unified esport(s).

Tournament

- Weeks 1-2: Begin team recruitment for the tournament. Determine who team captain(s) are.
- Week 2-3: Host an assessment/practice night in order to make balanced but competitive teams. Register your team and fill out the rest of your roster if necessary. Make sure that all players have the correct equipment. Practice!
- Week 4: Tournament occurs. A champion is crowned!

3. Intercollegiate League/Tournament (Competitive)

This is the most competitive of the ways to play and can be described as organized competition(s) between teams from different colleges.

In **leagues**, teams participate with other college teams in their state or around the country. League play matches are scheduled regularly over the course of a season. Leagues will often finish with a postseason playoff to determine a league champion. League coordinators can determine how many teams from each college can enter.

Tournament matches can happen over the course of a few days or a singular day, depending on how many teams sign up. Each team has a captain to manage logistics, rosters, and in-game strategy. Competitive teams of varying skill levels are welcome to play. The tournament host can decide how many teams from each college can enter. State, regional or national tournaments may be offered as a culminating event for teams participating in intramural or intercollegiate leagues.

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Intercollegiate League/Tournament Details		
Level of Play	Competitive	Teams will be competing for a regional/national championship.
Barrier to Entry	Medium	There may be a cost associated with joining the league/tournament.
League Costs	Determined by hosting organization	The hosting organization determines if a cost is associated with joining the competition.
Frequency	League (weekly, up to 8 weeks); tournament (1-3 days)	Leagues consist of weekly games and postseason playoffs to determine a winner. Tournaments can take a few hours/days to finish.
Location	Online or in-person	Leagues/tournaments can be either all virtual, or can be hosted at a campus/location where teams travel and compete in person.
Game	Determined by State Program/national organization	The organization that is running the league/tournament will determine the game that will be played.
Equipment	Consoles, games, controllers as needed	This will be determined by the hosting organization.
Administration/Rules	NIRSA/Special Olympics	Date(s), time, game and rules will be determined by the hosting organization.
Team Ratio	Depends on game	Teams should consist of an equal number of athletes and partners. If the game is 3v3, teams should be 2 athletes and 1 partner.
Practice	Determined by team	Teams will determine if they want to practice.
Coaching	Team captain(s) or coach	Team captain(s) or a coach assist the players with practices, in-game strategy, tips and tricks

Sample Timeline

League

- Week 1: Begin team recruitment for the season. Determine who team captain(s) are. Host an assessment/practice night in order to make balanced but competitive teams
- Week 2: Register your team and fill out the rest of your roster if necessary. Make sure that all players have the correct equipment. Practice!
- Weeks 3-8: The regular season begins and would last about 5 to 6 weeks.
- Week 9: Playoffs begin. Begin team recruitment for the spring season.
- Week 10: A champion is crowned!

Tournament

- Weeks 1 and 2 Begin team recruitment for the tournament. Determine who team captain(s) are. Host an assessment/practice night in order to make balanced but competitive teams
- Week 3: Register your team and fill out the rest of your roster if necessary. Make sure that all players have the correct equipment. Practice!
- Week 4: Tournament occurs. A champion is crowned!

Additional Resources

- Esports Online Safety Guide: https://blog.nationalonlinesafety.com/news/online-gaming-what-is-it-and-how-to-stay-safe-online
- Equipment guide: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/120fb9afj6ea1icb3im5t/Equipment.docx?dl=0&rlkey=bc5ii3wisyrfi41ee1x16yxvw
- Game Selection Considerations: https://www.dropbox.com/s/v6yn3or66ure2pe/Considerations%20when%20selecting%20a%20game.docx?dl=0
- Sample Code of Conduct: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/9ozv98ydxqcuani5dxox2/Esports-Code-of-Conduct-07.28.21.docx?dl=0&rlkey=8ngrm7fptq8lmx0fmn19r1lpp
- Recruitment/Engagement tips: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/5v1lwoeaowbam8h6cucuu/Engagement.docx?dl=0&rlkey=0h5ssl6qbvlq2yhwjf2f1x8sb
- Discord guide: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/crcsh0cw3mc7woz1vw0xi/Discord.docx?dl=0&rlkey=dquv5ygwapdzrf47umn1e7k5m
- How to create a tournament/league guide (video): https://www.dropbox.com/s/1g0ktvx5bo1kk7k/How%20To%20Create%20A%20Tournment_League.mp4?dl=0
- Coaches handbook: https://www.dropbox.com/s/f6buq7p9bpw5tuw/NSG%20Coaches%20Handbook%20%281-20-21%29.pdf?dl=0
- Esports Fitness guide: https://www.dropbox.com/s/fatiake913lysup/Esports_Fitness_Draft_V2.pdf?dl=0