Universities launch degrees in esports

By Kelvin Chan
The Associated Press

LONDON — On their first week in class, a group of students is playing a first-person shooter video game in a sleek new digital studio. It's their introduction to the degree in esports they've all enrolled in.

The group clicking away on their mice are at the University of Staffordshire, one of several U.K. and U.S. schools launching programs aimed at capitalizing on the booming industry's need for skilled professionals.

Ryan Chapman, 18, said his parents were "skeptical at first" about studying esports, or competitive multiplayer videogaming.

"But now they understand how big the industry is growing, the pace it's growing at. They're now really all for it because it's a great industry to start to get into," said Chapman, who was among the students in the lab playing Counter-Strike, one of the most popular esports games.

Kelvin Chang/The Associated Press

In this photo taken on Sept. 17, 2019, Ellis Celia and other students starting Staffordshire University's esports degree course play "Counter-Strike" in the school's new London digital studio. A number of U.K. and U.S. universities are launching degrees in esports, or competitive multiplayer videogaming, to capitalize on the booming industry's growing demand for skilled professionals.

The University of Staffordshire last year launched its bachelor's and master's esports programs, in which students mainly learn marketing and management skills tailored to the industry. This autumn, it's expanding the program to London while other schools are also debuting esports degree courses, including Britain's Chichester University, Virginia's Shenandoah University, Becker College in Massachusetts and The Ohio State University. In Asia, where esports has seen strong growth, schools in Singapore and China offer courses.

The global esports market is expected to surge to $1.1 billion this year, up $230 million from 2018 on growth in sponsorships, merchandise and ticket sales, according to Newzoo. The research firm expects the global esports audience to grow in 2019 to about 454 million as fans tune in on livestreaming platforms such as Twitch and Microsoft's Mixer.

Esports tournaments have become a cultural phenomenon and now rival traditional sports events in size and scale. Big competitions are held in arenas where thousands of fans watch big-name professional video gamers compete for lucrative prize pools.

Esports leagues have franchises in North America, Europe and Asia. The biggest names, such as Fortnite superstar Tyler "Ninja" Blevins, can earn millions in prize money and livestreaming deals. Esports are even set to be a medal event at the Southeast Asian Games in the Philippines in November.

Dozens of U.S. colleges have offered varsity level esports competitions for years. But some schools are taking it a step further by adding courses as the industry's boom drives demand for professionals who know how to, for example, organize esports tournaments.

New niche degrees partly highlight the changing economy, but they also reflect the "need to communicate to parents and students that there will be a job waiting for someone once they earn a degree," which may include hefty tuition fees and student loans to pay for them, said Joni Finney, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Institute for Research on Higher Education.

She worried that some degrees are too specialized and that some schools are launching them to offset falling enrolment.

"It's really up to the faculty of those institutions to step up and say, 'You know, a degree in business will cover these kinds of jobs,' rather than saying we have a degree in a certain job category," Finney said.

Becker College formally launched its Bachelor of Science in esports management this month after an initial "soft release" last year.

"It's no longer kids playing games in their basement," said Alan Ritacco, dean of Becker College's School of Design and Technology. The top esports players now earn almost as much as the highest paid stars in traditional sports like golf or tennis, he said.

The schools emphasize that their courses aren't about just playing video games.

"People are unaware of the industry that goes behind esports," said Matt Huxley, a lecturer at Staffordshire University's Digital Institute London, a new outpost in tech hub Here East that the university, which is based near Birmingham, England, opened so students could be closer to companies in the capital.

Huxley, who teaches a class on organizing tournaments, said learning about esports was akin to studying sports management.

"If you were to go and study to be a director of football you're not playing football, you're learning the business behind how (player) transfers work, how you run a stadium and all those kind of operational things."

Chichester University hired former pro gamer Rams Singh, known as R2K, as a senior lecturer for its program, which includes playing games such as FIFA and League of Legends as part of the course.

Ohio State is poised to launch an esports and game studies undergraduate major that will include the application of games to health and medicine.

A business focus helps to ease worries among students and parents about paying tuition for degrees that have no track record. In Britain, standard tuition fees are set at 9,250 pounds ($11,430) a year while the U.S. programs charge as much as $36,000 a year.

"There's always going to be risks but I have zero regrets," said Ellis Celia, 26, who is also starting the Staffordshire course. The industry "can only go up at this point," she said.

Millennial Money: Sneaky ways burnout hurts your bottom line

By Amrita Jayakumar
NerdWallet

Millennials are a burned-out bunch.

Millennial workers are more likely than older generations to report being burned out at work, according to a 2018 Gallup study. The gig economy, the temptations of social media and the high expectations millennials have of themselves contribute to this trend, behavioral finance experts say.

Add to that record student debt levels, the cost of health care, slow wage growth and little work-life balance, and you have a recipe for emotional exhaustion.

"Millennials have this double whammy of anxiety coupled with a really strong work ethic," says Kit Yarrow, a consumer psychologist and professor emerita at Golden Gate University. "Before they even get started, millennials approach their tasks in life with a (base) level of anxiety, which depletes their resources for managing stress."

This is not to say "adulting" is especially difficult for this generation, or to assume that all millennials are struggling. But understanding how burnout harms financial decision-making can help you or a loved one break through it and achieve goals.

BURNOUT TRICKS THE MIND

Burnout isn't the same as stress.

The World Health Organization, which added burnout to its handbook of recognized health conditions this year, says symptoms include "feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy."

Burnout is linked to your job, but it can also affect your financial decisions outside of work in the following ways:

• You pay more for convenience

You could be spending money regularly on takeout, Uber rides or grocery delivery, for example.

People are often willing to pay more for convenience because they're exhausted — from working multiple jobs, long hours or being available for work all the time — and because it makes mundane tasks easier, says Theresa Stevens, 26, a financial coach who works with millennials at Declutter Your Money in Providence, Rhode Island.

• You splurge as a reward

"Treat yourself" isn't just a hashtag; it can be a coping mechanism. When it comes to rewarding ourselves, "our mind tricks us into taking us off the hook," Yarrow says.

"You might think: I already have student loans and credit card debt and my rent is half my income so I might as well go out and eat, because what difference will it really make?" Stevens says.

Social networks and the ease of online shopping make it harder to resist temptation, says Mariel Beasley, co-founder of the Common Cents Lab, a behavioral science research lab at Duke University that focuses on improving financial well-being for low- and middle-income households.

"We see the food people are getting at fancy restaurants, the cute new shoes they bought or the places they're traveling to," Beasley says. "We're seeing their spending; rarely do we see what they're saving."

HOW TO BREAKTHROUGH BURNOUT

You can't fix the economy or wish away debt. But by recognizing burnout, you can make things easier on yourself. Here's how:

• Know your "Why"

Your values motivate you when you're paying off debt or saving money for a dream vacation. They can also help you prioritize what you're willing to spend money on and cut back on.

Values aren't the same as goals. Paying off a credit card is a goal, but achieving financial freedom is a value, Stevens says.

• Budget strategically

Budgeting isn't about cutting out the small things that give you joy, like the occasional Uber or your latte habit.

Taking a big step to save money — think moving into a cheaper living situation, refinancing your student loans or canceling subscriptions — is more sustainable in the long run than, say, resolving to eat out less, Beasley says.

"Every day when you're making a decision to spend less, it's hard to keep going," she says. "We naturally bounce back to our old habits."

After you've identified your values, a budget is a tool to help you live them. The 50/30/20 budget, which divides spending into needs, wants and savings, is a good place to start.

• Channel money motivation

When you're feeling motivated, take a one-time action that will save you effort, Beasley says.

Set up a small transfer — perhaps 5% of your income — to a savings account so the money is out of sight, out of mind. Or cut up a credit card (but don't close the account) to make it a little harder — but not impossible — to buy things you don't value.

Oregon State University gets $1M to study hemp

The Associated Press

CORVALLIS — The Global Hemp Innovation Center at Oregon State University has received a $1 million gift to explore hemp genomics, research that can grow understanding of how hemp may be used in health and nutrition products, textiles and construction materials.

In a statement the university said the gift to the OSU Foundation was provided by Oregon CBD, a hemp seed research and development company.

The Global Hemp Innovation Center was launched in June by OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences and is the largest, most comprehensive hemp research center in the nation.

Oregon CBD is a family-owned business with longtime ties to OSU. Seth and Eric Crawford both have several degrees from the university and prior to starting the family business Seth Crawford taught in the School of Public Policy for 13.

PILT

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lasting solution, and we owe it to them to fulfill our obligation and reauthorize PILT."

"PILT funding is critical for communities across Colorado that use these funds for essential services like infrastructure maintenance and law enforcement," Bennet said. "This legislation is a common-sense step to reauthorize the program, so that we can continue to fully fund PILT and meet the needs of our counties. We will continue to work toward a long-term solution for PILT that will provide counties and local governments sustained funding and more predictability."

"The PILT program is an important resource for many counties in Colorado and across the country with large amounts of non-taxable federal land," Gardner said. "It's important that Congress fully funds this program, which is used for critical services like law enforcement and infrastructure investments."

Earlier this year, Wyden, Merkley, Crapo and Risch also introduced the bipartisan Forest Management for Rural Stability Act to make the Secure Rural Schools program permanent by creating an endowment fund to provide stable, increasing and reliable funding for county services.

According to National Association of Counties Executive Director Matthew Chase, "In 61% of the nation's counties, the federal government is a major landowner. Counties provide critical services for residents and visitors in and around untaxable federal public lands, including roads, bridges, search and rescue, law enforcement and solid waste disposal. The PILT program represents the federal government's commitment to these and many other services. This bill ensures the long-term certainty we need, instead of being susceptible to the whims of unpredictable federal funding and shifting the burden to local taxpayers and businesses. We applaud and thank Senators Wyden, Crapo, Merkley, Risch, Bennet and Gardner for working to establish a decade of stability for the PILT program. We urge Congress to fulfill its promise to public lands counties and swiftly pass this legislation."