



Client: Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU)

Industry: Higher education (private university)

Size: 3,000+ students on campus and 200,000+ online students

Client Profile: Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is a private, nonprofit, accredited institution with a 92-year history of educating traditional-aged students and working adults. Now serving more than 200,000 learners worldwide, SNHU offers approximately 200 undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs, available online and on its 300-acre campus in Manchester, NH. Recognized as one of the “Most Innovative” regional universities by U.S. News & World Report and one of the fastest-growing universities in the country, SNHU is committed to expanding access to high quality, affordable pathways that meet the needs of each learner.

CASE STUDY

Esports: Leveling Up Student Success and Community Building

How Connection helped Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) build a successful esports program to benefit university and high school students and the community at large.

Level 1: Starting the Program

Soon after the first collegiate esports scholarship was offered, SNHU founded its esports program in 2018 and became one of the first New England schools to offer competitive esports.

“This is something that I did back in 2011 when I was in college. I founded a club organization at my alma mater and saw a lot of students who had very similar interests come together, be able to play, and make great friends. In 2016, after the first collegiate scholarship was offered for esports, I thought that it might be a really great opportunity for the university to adopt a similar idea, a similar program.

When I started putting it together, I saw students dispersed all throughout campus. There were a lot of students just sitting in their dorm rooms playing video games, not necessarily having a group to play with. So, the very first goal for me was, let's get all those people together in a room. It's an interest that they share together, and they will be able to make friends almost immediately.”

–Tim Fowler, Director of Esports at SNHU

“It’s clear that Connection is invested in what we are doing on campus and our goals in supporting our students. Even outside of the equipment—which is very much necessary, and the students very much need—they have been extremely helpful.”

–Tim Fowler
Director of Esports at SNHU

Even with a robust campus environment, the players and coaches trying to establish and grow the esports program faced key challenges:

- Limited resources for a dedicated space: In the beginning, SNHU lacked an esports arena that included the necessary equipment for collaborative play, streaming and broadcasting, and in-person spectatorship.
- Need for IT support: The program had specific networking requirements and hardware configurations that it needed to be successful.
- Creating more professional development opportunities: Bringing students together was the first and foremost goal of the program. But another core objective was to help students explore career paths beyond playing video games professionally.

To address these pain points, SNHU needed a trusted partner to help take their esports program to the next level.

Level 2: Finding the Right Solution Partner

Fowler, who had previously worked in IT at SNHU before founding the esports program, had a long-standing relationship with Connection utilizing their consultative services and expert approach to evaluate IT equipment. He reached out to Paul Cardinal, Business Development Manager for Strategic Higher Education at Connection and SNHU alum, to see how Connection could help advance the program.

Connection helped Fowler evaluate various solutions with demos, presentations, and “try and buys” to ensure the esports program had the best-of-breed products and optimal configurations for its needs. After a thorough, curated approach to help guide purchase decisions, Connection supplied the original esports equipment to help launch the program and later outfit the entire SNHU Esports Arena in 2021. Connection supplied 42 PC setups—including rolling refreshes—and six televisions and monitors. They provided technical services as well.



Connection provided:

- 42 PC setups with rolling refreshes
- 6 televisions and monitors
- Networking services
- Procurement and implementation services

“We have part-time coaches, and they are checking in with students, doing one-on-ones with them every week, making sure that their grades are good, making sure that their lives are going well, making sure that they’re healthy and happy and doing well—totally outside of the games.”

–Tim Fowler
Director of Esports at SNHU

“Connection really helped us with all the networking requirements including the equipment that we needed for TVs in the space for viewers to be able to come in and watch, the recording equipment, all the cameras, and some of the underlying software so that we can pull data across the network for recording. They also provided all the PCs and made sure that we had the opportunity to try out multiple different configurations from many different suppliers.”

–Tim Fowler, Director of Esports at SNHU

The close ties between SNHU and Connection go beyond Fowler’s partnership with the company. Before helping with the esports program, Connection had been working with the SNHU Professional Sales Program for years. Ed Ithier, the Senior Director of Development at SNHU who helped launch the Sales Program, said the partnership with Connection has been a great benefit to students:

“We have a Professional Sales Program for students interested in pursuing a sales career. Connection has been involved over the last several years. The win-win is that students can get exposed to a company and showcase their talents. The company gets to know the students, and it provides them with recruitment opportunities. As a result, Connection has been able to hire a number of our students over the years. It’s been a great partnership.

What’s really nice about both our sales and esports programs is that the skills students learn are transferable. The students can take those learned skills into any other profession.”

–Ed Ithier, Senior Director of Development at SNHU

Level 3: Amplifying Student Benefits

In the 2024–2025 academic year, the SNHU esports program had 43 varsity players and 20 work-study students. Part-time coaches check in with the students one-on-one on a weekly basis and cover topics beyond esports to foster their academic and personal development.

“For us, the program is primarily a retention tool with a focus on individual growth and attention. We have coaches for every one of our games. We have part-time coaches, and they are checking in with students, doing one-on-ones with them every week, making sure that their grades are good, making sure that their lives are going well, making sure that they’re healthy and happy and doing well—totally outside of the games.

That really helps retain students, making sure they’re focused on their academics, and ultimately graduating from school.”

–Tim Fowler, Director of Esports at SNHU

“We have more than 20 schools in New Hampshire that just participated in the high school leagues this past year. So, they’re all looking to us, saying, ‘Can we come to SNHU next year?’”

–Tim Fowler
Director of Esports at SNHU

“It’s a great opportunity to make an impact on someone else’s life and put them in the right direction.”

–Ed Ithier
Senior Director of Development at SNHU

In addition to improving academic success, students also get opportunities to hone their skills for professional development in areas beyond professional gaming, such as graphic design, video production, streaming and broadcasting, marketing, team management, IT, and operations.

“The internships and skills that the students are learning really come naturally out of this thing that they love and that they’re all doing together. You get a bunch of students in the room, and they think like, ‘Hey, it’d be really cool if we could promote our match tonight. How are we going to do that? What should that social media post look like to promote it? How does our broadcast work?’”

This occurring naturally is one of the things that we’ve been trying to support because realistically, going pro in esports, as cool as that is, is as unlikely as going pro in traditional athletics. We get these students who are really good at esports and make sure that they are learning the skills that they need outside esports.”

–Tim Fowler, Director of Esports at SNHU

In an age when screen time is [usually spent in isolation](#) and can impact the psychosocial development of students, esports uses the screen as a vehicle for developing the soft skills, community, and professional opportunities students need to become productive members of society. The best part is esports achieves this in a way that feels comfortable to students and connects them with others who share their passion for gaming.

Level 4: Serving the Greater Community

The partnership with Connection helps to extend SNHU’s mission to expand access to education through high-quality, workforce relevant, and meaningful learning experiences beyond its own student population. Fowler was an integral advocate for starting esports for New Hampshire high schools and has opened the SNHU Esports Arena to host high school tournaments at no charge to the high schools. With 20+ New Hampshire high schools now participating in the leagues, more prospective students are getting a preview of what the esports experience is like at SNHU.

New Hampshire high school students benefit from esports, as well as other local youth involved in organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. SNHU is currently working with local chapters of the Boys & Girls Clubs to help them establish their own esports programs and host events.

“Especially in those communities where there may be kids or young adults coming from disadvantaged situations, esports opens up other opportunities for them and keeps them out of trouble. I’m very close to non-profit organizations that support at-risk youth throughout New Hampshire. Kids in those situations are trying to find their way and looking for something to help them be productive and take their mind off whatever life issue they may be dealing with. Esports can help fill those needs. It’s a great opportunity to make an impact on someone else’s life and put them in the right direction.”

–Ed Ithier, Senior Director of Development at SNHU

The partnership with Connection gave SNHU a launchpad to enrich students and youth with academic, professional, and community opportunities through esports. Today, the impact of this partnership extends far beyond the SNHU Esports Arena walls to make a difference in students' lives and futures.



Press A to Start

Connection recognizes the value esports has to offer your school and community and can help you prepare for a future in this quickly growing field. Connect with an Account Manager today at 800.600.9357 and learn how to:

- Start an esports program
- Plan and build an esports arena
- Create an esports team
- Select the right esports gear
- Design and build digital signage that makes an impact
- Prepare your infrastructure



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