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Converse College Announces Inaugural eSports Athletics Program
Student-athlete recruitment begins summer 2020, with the full team anticipated for fall 2021

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (May 13, 2020) – Converse College announces its inaugural eSports athletics program, with the anticipation that the full Valkyries eSports team will be recruited for fall 2021. The eSports team will be one of two co-educational teams across the roster of Converse athletics.

“The addition of eSports will encourage talented students to consider Converse as their college home,” said Krista L. Newkirk, Converse president. “Students who are interested in competing in eSports at the collegiate level tend to be high achievers who are attracted to institutions with strong STEM programs. As Converse continues to innovate for the future and add to its STEM programs like its new data analytics minor, I am confident these students will be drawn to the excellent academic programming that Converse has to offer.”

Student-athletes on the new Converse eSports team will have structured schedules for academics, gaming, and community involvement, and will be held to the same standards as other student-athletes. In addition, Valkyries eSports student-athletes will benefit from using all of the resources on the Converse campus that are currently being used by the NCAA and IHSA student-athletes, which include the tutoring lab, writing center, strength and conditioning center, and more.

“eSports helps students hone their talents and develop valuable life skills such as innovation, management, teamwork, and strategic thinking,” said Jenn Bell, Converse director of athletics. “We are excited to offer this new sport to our lineup of athletic teams. We already have a number of Converse students who are competitive gamers, and this addition will benefit both existing and prospective students.”

Converse plans to participate in varsity eSports as a member of one of the collegiate eSports leagues that promote the education and development of students through intercollegiate participation. One of the largest collegiate eSports organizations, National Association of Collegiate eSports (NACE), currently has about 175 colleges participating in varsity eSports, and provides benefits to member institutions such as standardized rules and compliance, professional development, business intelligence and a lobbying arm with media and publishers. Member schools compete in a variety of game titles across the fall and spring seasons, and have included *Overwatch*; *Paladins*, *Champions of the Realm*; *Rocket League*; *Smite*, *Battleground of the Gods*; *Counter Strike*; *Fortnite*; and *League of Legends*.

Over the next year, Converse will prepare for the new team by developing an eSports hub with gaming equipment and infrastructure within the institution’s Montgomery Student Center. A search for an eSports coach is also

underway, with a hiring decision anticipated by August 2020. The new coach will implement and manage all phases of a competitive eSports program in accordance with NCAA, Conference, and Converse regulations.

Recruitment for the eSports team will begin in the summer of 2020, with the full team anticipated for fall 2021, although gameplay may begin as early as spring 2021. Competitive scholarship opportunities will be available for athletes selected to play on the inaugural eSports team. While recruitment will be led by Converse, interested athletes may also reach out to valkyries@converse.edu with questions and to request consideration.

Converse is home to the only NCAA Division II athletic teams in Spartanburg. The men's teams currently planned for the 2021-2022 academic year include basketball, cross country, equestrian (co-ed), soccer, tennis, indoor and outdoor track and field, and volleyball. The men's teams will be in addition to the 13 NCAA Division II and IHSA women's teams currently a part of Converse's athletic team roster.

About Converse College

Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC who aimed to create an educational experience that enables students "to see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly." Effective July 1, 2021 it will acknowledge its university status under the name Converse University, and in fall 2020 it will welcome its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. Converse is a creator of opportunity for all academically-qualified students through a personalized education that is combined with the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers. Converse pushes beyond traditional boundaries to make a quality educational experience available to every qualified student who seeks it – both at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Converse College's mission is to help students develop their unique voice, a sense of value, and a vision for the future.

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