

Transcript of Interview with Kaitlin Teniente by Vianne Beltran

Interviewee: Teniente

Interviewer: Vianne Beltran

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Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: An interview with the Director of Esports at St. Mary's University, Kaitlin Teniente, discussing how the pandemic affected interacting with the students through esports and other casual videogame events.

Vianne Beltran 00:00

Okay. So thank you for doing this for me.

Kaitlin Teniente 00:04

Yeah, of course.

Vianne Beltran 00:05

Um, so you're the director of eSports named Kaitlin, of course. Just a bit of background, so people who aren't familiar with the program. Was there a program before you started here?

Kaitlin Teniente 00:21

There was not.

Vianne Beltran 00:22

There was not a program. Um, when you were hired, did you come in like, no... Did you come in with like, no long...

Kaitlin Teniente 00:39

Like work experience?

Vianne Beltran 00:40

Or, um. I'm, sorry. Like, did you start from scratch, or did you have to? Did you come in with some of the experience yet?

Kaitlin Teniente 00:50

Gotcha. So, previous to this job, I have been working in the eSports industry for about four years. Um, most of my work was in marketing and event management. So coming here to build this program, those two things really helped to kind of establish our branding and establish the way we coordinate things only we, you know, run practices and competitions, things like that, or the competitions we participate in, rather.

Vianne Beltran 01:22

And so you were hired in spring of 2020, I read.

Kaitlin Teniente 01:26

Mhm.

Vianne Beltran 01:27

Did you, when you heard that spring break was being extended, did you ever think that school was going to be canceled?

Kaitlin Teniente 01:39

So that was it was really interesting, because I signed, my like, official offer letter the, the Friday of spring break, I think. And that's when we were told we weren't coming back to campus. So at the time, I didn't, I didn't really know how...

Unknown 01:58

[Background conversation] You did so good. Thank you. No seriously...No seriously, I might have to like ask you for some cleaners. Yeah, like you did really, really good. See you. Bye.

Kaitlin Teniente 02:14

[Interview resumes] I feel like it's usually not this busy on a Friday.

Vianne Beltran 02:16

Yeah.

Kaitlin Teniente 02:18

But um, yeah, no worries. So like, when I got the news that we weren't coming back to campus, and that we'd have to work remotely. You know, I didn't, I didn't really think we would be working remote for so long. My expectation was like, come fall, we'd be back on campus, but obviously, that didn't happen.

Vianne Beltran 02:34

Did there, were there any obstacles you expected?

Kaitlin Teniente 02:40

Um, I don't think anyone really knew what to expect other than, you know, technical difficulties of working remote. And, you know, with that, you know, when you're working remote like that, it's really hard to build relationships on campus, especially with, with other departments, like, you know, not seeing people face to face when you're not being able to just walk over to someone's office. I think that definitely poses some challenges.

Vianne Beltran 03:09

Did you think there was an easier transition because you're working with students who probably had experience with technology?

Kaitlin Teniente 03:18

You know, I think we had a little bit of a head start because of that. But I think there also has to be a lot of credit given to those that kind of jumped into technology at the, you know, because of the pandemic, right, like learning how to navigate Zoom and learning how to navigate all these new online resources et cetera, et cetera. So I think we had a little bit of a head start, but I mean, with such a push to virtual learning and virtual working, I think we all at the same time had to, had to learn, right?

Vianne Beltran 03:53

So, was there a lot of, um, do you think that you probably had a lot more events online that included people like casual gamers?

Kaitlin Teniente 04:10

It's hard to say because we really don't have anything to compare it to, you know what I mean? Like, it's, I guess, it depends on how you measure, you know, what is the success of an online event? If one person shows up, is that a success? If 20 people, if more than 20- It's really hard to measure, but I think what we saw was that there was a lot of support online, right. And that comes in a lot of different forms. So not just people coming to our virtual events, but people engaging with our Twitter posts and our Instagram posts and the things that, you know, we were collaborating with. So that's, I think, some of the virtual success we saw was just that online engagement because it's kind of hard to count, you know, how do you really quantify someone who shows up to a virtual event because you don't really show up, you know?

Vianne Beltran 05:05

Were there, do you think there's things that definitely didn't work out you saw or do you think there's like, techniques that you...?

Kaitlin Teniente 05:16

Um, you know, again, it's hard to say because we really didn't have anything to compare it with. Even looking at other eSports programs at different universities, we were all figuring out how to do these things at the same time. I mean, granted, before the, before universities have like eSports arenas or eSports programs, there were just gaming clubs on campus, and then the students would operate primarily online. So that's something that we really looked at was, you know, if it's been done online before, it can be done online again. And yeah.

Vianne Beltran 06:00

So now that you're back on campus, do you think that there's a difference, like being face to face?

Kaitlin Teniente 06:09

I think um...

Vianne Beltran 06:09

Do you think there's more relationships like...

Kaitlin Teniente 06:09

I think like, the work itself can be done anywhere, but like you said, the relationships, I think that's really the key component or really the key thing that we've seen, develop is students who, you know, all last year played

remotely, are now getting to meet their teammates. I mean, it definitely makes for some interesting interactions. You know, we've had students come into the arena, and someone asked, you know, who are you? And it's like, I'm your teammate, you know, they've never met before, they've never seen each other before. And so, you sometimes get those kinds of situations, but I think, you know, having players and teammates just physically in the same room, you know, playing a match or practicing has helped to build some of those really strong team bonds that are needed on any team really.

Vianne Beltran 06:12

I saw that you had like, a League of Legends watch party. Was that one of like, the first of like gaming watch parties in like, not just in person, but did you often have those like online also?

Kaitlin Teniente 07:18

So, yes and yes. Well, let me expand. So the League of Legends viewing party was our first in person eSports event where we invited the community to a physical location. Prior to that, we did do some online events, but we hadn't, we hadn't done a watch party for an Esports event, we had done like a watch party or a viewing party for movies. But this was our first eSports event in person, and it just so happened to be watch party.

Vianne Beltran 07:53

Were there any COVID precautions that the university had you, um, follow.

Kaitlin Teniente 07:59

Um, I wouldn't say there was anything that we specifically had to follow other than the guidelines that we've been using all semester. So we really just followed that and didn't run into any issues.

Vianne Beltran 08:11

So there's nothing they specifically, you didn't have to ask permission or anything for like, specific...

Kaitlin Teniente 08:16

Um, you know, we have to reserve the room and, you know, say how many people are going to be there, things like that. And once that got approved, and we established that we'd be using the school's COVID protocols, everything was pretty much checked out at that point, in a good way.

Vianne Beltran 08:34

And how many people do you think showed up in person?

Kaitlin Teniente 08:36

We had 20 people show up...

Vianne Beltran 08:37

20 people.

Kaitlin Teniente 08:38

...at 7am on a Saturday.

Vianne Beltran 08:39

Wow, that's a lot for a morning.

Kaitlin Teniente 08:42

Yeah, I think so. So I think that was a success.

Vianne Beltran 08:45

That's good. Do you think there will be any more like, watch parties type of things in the future?

Kaitlin Teniente 08:52

Yeah. So we're actually, we're planning more events in the spring. They're not going to be too large, but our goal is to have that similar, you know, 20 to 30 people show up. Right now, we have plans for an open house in the arena in the spring, and we're working with the business school to coordinate a tournament. So you know, we're hopeful and things you know, take time to plan, but from the success that we saw on the viewing part, I think we can mirror that elsewhere.

Vianne Beltran 09:25

You, are you prepared to in case things have to go back completely online?

Kaitlin Teniente 09:30

Yeah, 100%. We have contingency plans on contingency plans. If we have to go 100% remote, we know exactly what to do, how to do it, when to do it. We don't want to do it, but if we have to, we're prepared.

Vianne Beltran 09:47

That's good. Are there any, are there any like, casual game nights for students?

Kaitlin Teniente 10:04

Yeah. So one of the things that we've learned along the way is, or one of the things we're trying to figure out is like the happy medium for gamers of all walks of life because some people want really competitive games at a high frequency, whereas other people may want much less competitive games at a much lower frequency. So it's been, uh, you know, it's been a challenge figuring out what works best for a large group of people. And what we're deciding on or what we've decided is that come springtime, we're going to include more game nights, but have it more varied. So maybe another Minecraft night, you know, in February, but come March, we'll do Valorant, something like that, so that we can again, have a larger audience or appeal to a larger audience.

Vianne Beltran 11:01

Yeah, I saw that there was like the Dean of Students like, Among Us night, do you reach out to the Dean of Students or do they reach out to you like, Hey, we want to interact with the students?

Kaitlin Teniente 11:12

So we will try to work with as many departments on campus that will have us. So for like our fundraiser, when we do our 12 hour live stream on Twitch, we reached out to Dean Bessler, again, we reached out to President Mengler, we reached out to some faculty and staff and invited them to the event, and it was wildly successful. I mean, people really enjoyed seeing Dr. King, you know, play Fall Guys as well. I mean, we had Dean Bessler

play Fall Guys in the spring, but for us, it's really about, you know, starting that conversation, building that bridge and offering, you know, an opportunity to be a part of eSports in some way. I mean, that could look you know, that may look a lot of different ways, but we like to reach out to as many people as possible.

Vianne Beltran 12:08

Well, I think that's a, that's good enough for my project, so thank you.

Kaitlin Teniente 12:13

Yeah, no, problem.

Vianne Beltran 12:13

Thank you for...

Kaitlin Teniente 12:14

Sorry about the noise. I know we couldn't really narrow down a good place to talk, but hopefully you got everything you needed. If you need anything else, just let me know. But yeah, glad I could help.