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## NEWS RELEASE

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## Surging UW-Stout esports program scores new arena for 2025, thanks to \$1M gift from Foundation

*Lab in University Library to be converted into 'state-of-the-art' home for team's matches and academic opportunities*

[Story Link](#)

### Photos attached

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 12, 2024

Menomonie, Wis. — The esports program at University of Wisconsin-Stout had a banner year in 2023-24, winning a state championship and qualifying for two national tournaments.

Along with a record roster this fall of nearly 50 players, some nationally ranked, and high hopes for more competitive success, the Blue Devils are excited about what lies just ahead: A new \$1 million arena in fall 2025.

The [UW-Stout Foundation and Alumni Association](#) is donating the money to create the arena on the first floor of the University Library. The project will include renovating a lab space and equipping it with state-of-the-art technology to build out a new home for Blue Devil esports.

“The UW-Stout Foundation Board is delighted to further the athletic and academic innovation and achievement of our student athletes with a new, state-of-the-art esports arena. As we say at Stout, this is a very ‘Stout Proud’ moment for our board,” said Linda Funk, president of the Foundation Board of Directors.

Construction is expected to start in March and finish prior to the 2025 fall semester.

“UW-Stout's continued leadership in esports is impressive — forming the first varsity team among the Universities of Wisconsin; launching the first associated academic program, a minor in esports coaching, in the state; and winning a collegiate championship,” Funk added.

The coed [esports team](#), part of UW-Stout Athletics, is competing from a retrofitted classroom in Heritage Hall, but the space only is large enough for 12 computer stations — meaning many team members still must practice and compete from their residence halls or apartments.

“The current space is not viable for the future,” said Coach Aaron Froelich. “The university is really invested in esports, and with this Foundation gift we’re headed in the right direction.”

Having the arena in a central campus location also will help bring the sport to the forefront on campus. “The accessibility and visibility will be great,” Froelich said.

Heritage Hall will be shut down for a \$139 million renovation project beginning in spring 2025. “It’s good timing to find a new home for the esports team,” said Justin Utpadel, senior facilities officer.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with the UW-Stout Foundation on this project that supports our esports athletes and reinforces our connection between athletics and academics, enabling us to utilize this space to its fullest potential. I am excited to see how this new space will transform our esports program,” Utpadel said.

The site plan aligns with the university’s long-range plan to make the library a campus hub. The space also could be used as an applied learning lab for students in UW-Stout’s [esports coaching minor](#), [game design and development program](#) and other academic programs and uses.

Many esports team members are majoring in game design, [computer science](#), and [computer networking and infrastructure engineering](#).

“It’s definitely going to be an esports arena, but there’s an opportunity to have academic instruction there too,” Utpadel said.

## **Arena to feature ‘state-of-the-art’ equipment**

The room, on the first floor of the library near the lobby, is about 2,000 square feet. It has been used as a computer lab and is divided into two spaces, but it will be opened up and brightened up with esports team branding, special effects lighting, a spectator area, windows and a production room to broadcast matches to online fans.

About 75% of the budget will be for renovation and 25% for new computers, monitors, broadcast technology and special tables and chairs designed for esports.

Space will exist for up to 34 computer stations — nearly three times the current arena — along with overhead TV screens. The arena will give UW-Stout the ability to host matches and regional events.

“A state-of-the-art broadcasting system will be the best in Wisconsin and one of the best in the nation,” Froelich said. “This will be the future for Stout esports for many years. We can continue to grow into this space, and it will be a highlight for recruiting.

“The team members are really excited to have a space to call their own. Right now they don’t have a communal place to play, socialize and build camaraderie. It will be nice to get everyone under one roof,” Froelich said.

After winning the Wisconsin Valorant Summit LAN championship last spring, defeating UW-Madison in the title match, UW-Stout will transition to the new Wisconsin Esports Conference this year with teams from public and private universities and colleges. Froelich helped found and is co-director of the conference.

UW-Stout also is a member of NACE — National Association of Collegiate Esports. The Blue Devils have four varsity teams, Overwatch, Valorant, Rocket League and Super Smash Bros. that compete in the fall and spring, along with three Academy or junior varsity teams.

*UW-Stout is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the [FOCUS2030](#) strategic plan.*

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## **Photos**

A rendering shows a potential interior of a new \$1 million arena for the UW-Stout esports program on the first floor of the University Library, thanks to a gift from the Stout Foundation.

Blue Devil esports players have new jersey tops for the 2024-25 season.

The UW-Stout Valorant team won the 2024 state title last spring, going undefeated in tournament play.

Nathan Filtz was on UW-Stout's state championship team in spring 2024.