Trevor: As an adviser in the eSports club at Penn State, what do you feel your role is? Are you an organizer? A classical mentor? A coach? Some combination of the three? And can you, just for accuracy's sake, clarify your role and title in the group officially?

Bart Pursel: My role is adviser to the eSports club at PSU. All officially-recognized clubs need to have an adviser from the university. My actual work with the club deals with making sure they are following university guidelines when they do different things, such as fundraise, hold events, take trips, etc. So laison between the club and student affairs (they officially manage all clubs) is key. I spend most of my time with the club trying to help launch events, that bring together the club with other units or students across campus. For instance, we held a spring LoL tournament last year, that teamed the club up with sports journalism students:
http://news.psu.edu/story/406468/2016/04/25/academics/penn-state-students-gain-new-skills-broadcasting-esports
http://news.psu.edu/story/402632/2016/04/07/academics/curley-center-students-penn-state-esports-club-combine-tournament

This year, I'm working with the journalism students, as well as our athletics department, to find a larger venue and try and run this a little more like an athletics event.

T: What is the makeup of the club like -- are there a lot of casual players or is it more geared to competition? Is this a club that just anyone could join, even if they've never picked up a MOBA or a fighting game before, or is it a bit steeper of a learning curve?

B: The club is very friendly to new players! Each sub division (lol, counter strike, street figher, etc) have regular meetings each week. Sometimes those meetings are designed to just play the game, others are designed to teach new players, some to watch live matches and talk strategy, etc. So yes, I believe the club is very open to people that are new to a game, and just want to learn and socialize.

T: How do you balance the grinding quality of competitive gaming with a more educational or at least edifying impulse? Is there any sort of life lesson you feel competitive gaming gives that other more traditional sports don't? Or is it just good fun?

B: As a scholar, one of my research areas is educational gaming. See gaming.psu.edu as an example. I'm a firm believer that games, particularly multiplayer games, can teach people skills like teamwork, leadership, creativity, spatial reasoning, among others. So I do see playing games as a positive thing. That said, moderation (just like with anything else) is important.

T: Do the video games take center stage in the club, or is it more about the relationships between the players? In other words, from a perch a bit removed as an adviser, what's the glue of the club?

B: You would probably want to ask Dylan Beal, our club's president, this question. It might vary based on division.

T: Do you feel that esports are something new in the academic fabric of life or just an intensification or alteration of the play and relaxation that's always been available at the college campus?

B: This is an interesting question! I'm not sure what I believe yet, but I do know our club, at least the LoL division, is very interested in moving their division to look more like a club sport; our LoL team would travel to other campuses to compete, or compete online through the 'official' college tournaments and leagues for LoL. Our athletic department also has some interest in seeing something like a Big 10 LoL division and championship created at some point in time, but we're a long way from that. Ten years from now, eSports will probably fill a variety of roles on a campus, from social and relaxing to high-stakes tournaments, where players might even be receiving some level of scholarship funding to participate on a team that competes within athletic conferences.