Gaming at a new level

LUKAS EGGEN/ Itemizer-Observer

Western Oregon University's eSports Club has primarily played "League of Legends" since the club's creation in 2014. The club offers membership to any WOU student.

WOU student club provides outlet for fans of 'League of Legends'

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Two teams were locked in battle. Shouts of joy, frustration and laughter filled the room.

Welcome to "League of Legends."

The Western Oregon eSports club, founded in 2014, is open to any video game, on any gaming console, but the game "League of Legends" has dominated weekly meetings.

"It's the game I've played the longest and most consistently," Western Oregon senior Tyler Potter said.

Now, the club is bringing the game into the limelight at WOU.

When WOU eSports Club President T.J. Vice, along with a group of friends, decided to form the eSports club, it was the result of years of discussion.

"We've had the idea since freshman year," Vice, a senior, said. "We decided to go for it and went through the process (last year)."

The club was approved by the university, but the first meetings were far from ideal.

"We didn't even have a room to meet in," Vice said. "We ended up meeting in some random room in the Werner Center. We used the Wi-Fi there and it was terrible. We had a 5-second delay to everything we did, it was really bad."

The club moved into the school's computer lab in the Instructional Technology Center building, where they've averaged about 20 students per meeting. The club will host a "League of Legends" tournament on Feb. 21, a game that has the club members addicted.
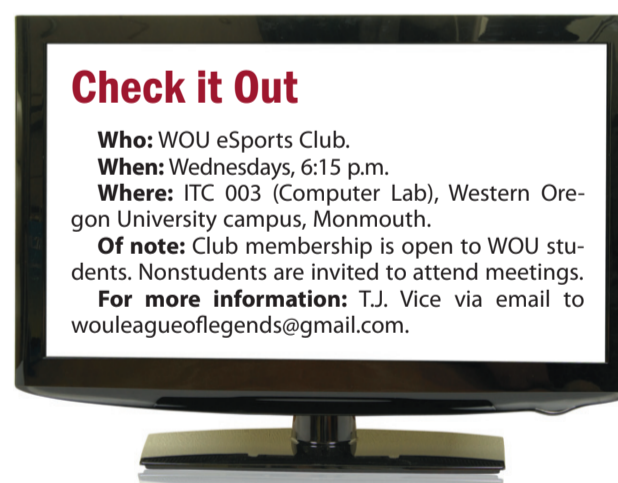
"League of Legends," a multiplayer online game, was released in 2009. In 2014, it had 27 million active daily players, according to the game's publisher, Riot Games.

"I didn't know what it was, but I swore I would never play it (because I didn't understand it)," student Jose Fernandez said. "People were like, 'League of Legends' this, or 'League of Legends' that. When I learned

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Junior Kit Rodewald plays "League of Legends", while all the action is being shown on projectors for other club members to watch. The WOU eSports Club was founded in 2014.

Check it Out

Who: WOU eSports Club.
When: Wednesdays, 6:15 p.m.
Where: ITC 003 (Computer Lab), Western Oregon University campus, Monmouth.
Of note: Club membership is open to WOU students. Nonstudents are invited to attend meetings.
For more information: T.J. Vice via email to wouleagueoflegends@gmail.com.

about it, I got into it. It's so easy to understand."

Each game pits two teams against each other, up to five vs. five. Players control a champion with the goal of destroying their opponent's Nexus, a building located in their opponent's base.

"What keeps me drawn is how different every game is," Vice said. "You play as different champions and you never max out your skill. You're always improving."

"League of Legends" also helps dispel a notion about games that have existed for years.

"We all had the battle with our parents of 'Why aren't you outside playing with your friends?'" Potter said. "I think online games bridge that gap. You're interacting with people. Video games used to be anti-social. Now it's a social medium."

The social aspect helps make gaming an invaluable experience.

"I'm a pretty involved student, so it's nice to schedule time to play video games," Potter said. "I don't have a lot of free time, so it's fun to have a club I can schedule around."

The club hosts and attends tournaments for those looking to get serious, but members are welcoming to people of all skill levels and new games.

Just get ready to get your game on.

"If you're into video games, or even if you're not, this club is a fun way to hang out with cool people and nerd out for a little bit," Potter said.

New debate: Is playing video games a real sport?

MONMOUTH — Electronic sports (eSports) is a growing activity across the world, including a "Call of Duty" tournament at the Summer X-Games 2014.

Its growth sparked a new debate: Should playing video games be considered a sport?

The answer seems to be generational.

"Most people think games are for a younger age," Western Oregon sophomore and eSports club member Jose Fernandez said. "That's basically been true because it's for our generation. The only thing we need is time. Video games that have been popular for 25 years, those gamers are in their 30s. We need them to hit 40 and you'll start to see a majority of the population who grew up with video games."

In 2014, Robert Morris University in Chicago offered partial athletic scholarships to "League of Legends" players, resulting in 30 students.

"'League of Legends' had so many similarities to traditional sports — like teamwork, skill, strategy, different positions, etc., that I thought why not give athletic scholarships to attract the best players to RMU to compete as a varsity sport?" Kurt Melcher, RMU associate athletics director and eSports coordinator, said.

Supporters say that games require more than pressing buttons.

"For me, games are like martial arts," Fernandez said. "You use both your mind and your body. You have to think fast and think critically at the same time."

Yet, eSports face challenges that traditional sports don't.

"I think 'League of Legends' will go away within the next 10 years," Fernandez said. "Unfortunately, every game has its time. They need to find a way to solidify things and find their space."

RMU remains alone in offering gaming scholarships, but players hope this is just the beginning.

"That shows me that video games have hit that next level, that people are going out of their way to watch it and (it's) going from a hobby to something in the media and is talked about," WOU senior Tyler Potter said.

—Lukas Eggen

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Western Oregon sophomore Jose Fernandez focuses during a "League of Legends" match on Jan. 28. The WOU eSports Club meets each Wednesday on campus at 6:15 p.m.

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Western Oregon senior Tyler Potter (front) attempts to help his team to a victory on Jan. 28. Potter is one of about 20 regular WOU e-Sports club members who attend weekly meetings.