**VIDEO GAMES: A COLLEGE SPORT?**

**HOMEWORK: Read and annotate the article. Next, write a multi-paragraph essay (Five paragraphs: Intro, three body paragraphs for the three reasons, conclusion) arguing whether videogames are more harmful or more helpful to young people.**

**ST. LOUIS, Missouri** (Achieve3000, November 29, 2017). Being gifted in a sport like football or track and field can help a student get into college. That student might even receive financial aid. But what if a student can score the most points in a video game such as *StarCraft II*, *Overwatch,* or *League of Legends*?

Traditionally, a gamer wouldn't be asked to play for a college or university. The student wouldn't get financial aid. However, things have changed. Today, playing video games is the newest varsity sport at some colleges. These electronic sports are known as esports. Some gamers even get financial aid.

This is good news, according to officials at the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE). The group was formed in 2016. It promotes the growth of college esports. It also establishes rules for these games.

Michael Brooks heads NACE. He says that in 2014, only about seven colleges and universities in the U.S. had esports programs. That's changed. By the end of the 2016–2017 school year, nearly 30 schools with new esports programs had joined NACE.

Just as they do with traditional athletes, schools invite the best players to join esports teams. And like traditional athletes, esports players must keep up their grades. Playing esports can lead to the chance to play professionally after college.

The game *League of Legends*, for example, was the centerpiece of the 2017 Mid-Seasonal Invitational. It was a professional tournament. Players from 13 regions played for a title. The winning team was from South Korea. It won nearly $700,000. That kind of money may make students want to set up careers in gaming.

But Tom Brock questions gaming as a form of work. Brock is a professor at Manchester Metropolitan University. He said that games do help players develop a set of goals. It gives them a sense of accomplishment. But there are downsides. Few esports groups pay salaries. Gamers rely on prize money for pay. Brock said this can cause players to socialize less to get more playing hours. This has been shown to have a bad effect on well-being. He also says that, like a traditional sports career, a career in gaming will probably end at a young age.

But there's no denying that the esports community is growing. For college students, esports do offer new opportunities. Kenneth Lam works with the esports program at Maryville University in St. Louis, Missouri. Lam says the five-member video game team at Maryville works hard. Members practice for three hours at a time. They do this up to three nights a week. That effort has paid off since the school started its esports program in 2015.

As an audience watched the action unfold on a large screen, Maryville's team defeated eight other North American schools to win the *League of Legends* College Championships. That was May 2017. Months later, the students from Maryville won third place at the *League of Legends* International College Cup in Wuhan, China.

"It's really exciting to see how much we have [been able to do] for the past two years," Lam said.

Lam believes that esports are going to increase in popularity. One sign of this is that esports competitions are now being shown on TV.

Colleges that have tapped into the growing popularity of esports are already seeing the rewards. For example, the number of new students attending Maryville grew by 45 percent between 2015 and 2016. Lam said he credits that increase to esports.

*Voice of America contributed to this story.*

**Dictionary**

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| **financial aid** *(noun)*    money that is given to a student to help him or her pay for school |
| **professionally** *(adverb)*    as a job, not just for fun |
| **promote** *(verb)*    to help make something happen |
| **socialize** *(verb)*    to do things with other people |
| **varsity** *(noun)*    the main athletic team representing a college or other school |