John Wayne, James Bond and most other iconic gunslingers all have one very important thing in common: They’re male.

Shooting always has been a male-dominated sport, but a growing interest among women has prompted many female Truman State students to join the Sharpshooters club, an organization that teaches gun safety and proper shooting techniques.

This is the first full year of Sharpshooters’ existence, and since its membership has reached 60, making it one of the largest organizations on campus, said first lieutenant Dan Hamlet, a military science professor. More than half those members — roughly 60 to 70 percent — are female.

“Shooting and hunting tends to be more common among males,” Hamlet said. “A lot of females don’t have easy access to learn about shooting, but female gun clubs are popping up all over the country to meet the very real demand for a safe introduction to the sport. This club meets that demand.”

Hamlet said there are differences in how members approach shooting and guns based on experience level, not gender — however, there tends to be experience level gaps between males and females. Experienced shooters want to share their knowledge and approach the organization from a mentor and educator position, Hamlet said, while inexperienced members are there to learn.

“Some of the women who join don’t have as much experience, and a lot of the men that join do,” Sharpshooters member junior Katelynn Geisinger said.

Once members gain more experience, gender does play a small role in determining the best shooters. Based on her observations, women tend to be more patient and tend to become less frustrated when they aren’t shooting well. Men tend to have more experience and are better able to support the firearm in certain shooting positions, like when they’re standing, she said.

“It all comes down to who practices more,” Sharpshooters president sophomore Jacob Pipta said.

Once, a female in the club challenged one of her male counterparts to go head-to-head in a shoot, he said, and the woman won. The competition is all friendly, though, and Pipta said he’s never had to deal with any gender-difference issues in the organization.

“They’re there to learn something, just like I’m there to learn something,” Pipta said. “We’re all just there to have fun.”

Pipta said he’s happy to see people trying new things, and it is good for the club. Watching new members familiarize themselves with firearms and shooting is a rewarding experience, he said.

“My goal is to make sure no one has a negative experience with firearms or with us,” Hamlet said. “The more people understand guns, the less negative things we hear about guns and gun culture — which, Hamlet said, is especially relevant in Kirksville, where hunting and shooting are popular sports.

Hamlet said Sharpshooters can give students the lifelong skills they need to ensure they practice shooting safely. Even if students never shoot again, they will have a better understanding of gun culture — which, Hamlet said, is especially relevant in Kirksville, where hunting and shooting are popular sports.

BY EMILY BATTMER, STAFF REPORTER