

GAMBLING RESEARCH

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INSTITUTE



Institute Conference 2014 “Controversial Topics in Gambling”

The Alberta Gambling Research Institute and the University of Alberta are co-sponsoring the thirteenth in a series of special interest conferences in the area of gambling studies. The conference will take place **Thursday, April 3 to Saturday, April 5, 2014 at the Banff Centre** in Banff, Alberta. The conference will examine ongoing contentious and controversial issues related to gambling policy and regulation with the aim of seeking a consensus on guidelines for ensuring that commercial gambling is operated such that it provides a net benefit for society.

What Are Considered Gambling Controversies?

In describing the theme of Conference 2014, program organizer Dr. Garry Smith notes that the rapid and radical expansion of legalized gambling in Canada over the past four decades has produced economic benefits for provincial governments, the gambling industry and charitable groups. It has also been a source of entertainment for citizens that partake in the activity responsibly. Provinces have frequently used a gambling expansion strategy to combat changing economic circumstances which could be considered

a voluntary tax that generates government revenues and a fiscal stimulus for local and regional economies. Notwithstanding the proliferation of permitted gambling opportunities, Smith contends that the activity remains contentious and politically charged as witnessed by the recent turbulence over whether or not to place a casino in Toronto, Ontario. In addition, opinion surveys indicate that attitudes toward gambling in most Canadian jurisdictions remain tepid at best, as citizens question whether the social costs of widespread gambling outweigh the economic benefits and whether convenience gambling adds or detracts from the quality of life in a community.

Confirmed Conference Speakers and Topics

- **“Challenging the Medicalization of Problem Gambling”**
– Brian Castellani, Kent State University
- **“Wellbeing, Gambling and Problem Gambling”**
– David Forrest, Salford University, UK
- **“Gambling and Debt”**
– Carolyn Downs, Lancaster University, UK
- **“Problem Gambling and Family Violence”** – Alun Jackson, University of Melbourne, Australia

The primary aim of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute, a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge, is to support academic research related to gambling.

MISSION

To facilitate evidence-based broad research that informs gambling public policy and educates Albertans and the wider audience about the effects of gambling.



- ***“EGMs: Are They Really the Most Hazardous Gambling Format?”*** – Garry Smith, U. of Alberta
- ***“A Critique of Ontario’s Gambling Modernization Plan”*** – Rob Simpson, Guelph, Ontario
- ***“Illegal Gambling in Canada and the Influence of Organized Crime”*** – TBD
- ***“Using Customer Loyalty Programs to Prevent Problem Gambling”*** – Tracy Schrans, Focal Research, Halifax, Nova Scotia

The complete Conference 2014 program is available from the Institute web site.

Conference 2014 Registration

Earlybird Registration \$495 (on or before February 14); Regular Registration \$650 (deadline for registration is Friday, March 14, 2014 or to a maximum of 140 delegates. No registration will be accepted after this date). Registration forms available from Institute web site.

Call for Poster Submissions

Poster presentation sessions will be held during the conference. Researchers should email a 150-200 word abstract to **Dr. Garry Smith (garry.j.smith@ualberta.ca)**. Abstracts should include: title of research, names of author(s) with the presenting author underlined, author affiliation, and contact information. The submission can address any area of gambling research. A best poster presentation award will be adjudicated during the conference and awarded during the closing session. Submission deadline is **Friday, January 31, 2014** (with peer review process and decision notifications by February 12). All presenters must register for the conference. Note: **Maximum poster dimensions = 6 feet (width) x 4 feet (height)**.



Pre-Conference Workshop on Knowledge Translation for Gambling Researchers

In conjunction with the Institute conference, the Canadian Consortium for Gambling Research (CCGR) is organizing a pre-conference workshop on knowledge translation for gambling researchers to take place Thursday, April 3, 2014. This event will continue the CCGR’s successful series of annual workshops by providing a forum for gambling researchers to explore how to improve the translation of their work into policy and practice. Ultimately, this workshop will help bridge the gap between academic research and gambling policy, treatment and industry by giving researchers strategies for applying their work to improve gambling policy and the prevention and treatment of gambling-related harm. The workshop will include facilitated discussions and profile examples of successful knowledge translation from within and beyond the gambling field, with the goal of incorporating knowledge translation practices in the full research process.



Institute Research Director Receives Award From Spanish Society of Dual Pathology

Dr. Nady el-Guebaly, the Institute's Research Director, was recently recognized for his outstanding contributions to the field of behavioral additions (and pathological gambling specifically) with an Honorary Membership from the Spanish Society of Dual Pathology (SEPD). He was one of only three individuals to receive such an award at the Third International Congress on Dual Pathology. This event took place October 23-26 in Barcelona, Spain and brought together more than 2,000 experts in mental health and psychiatry from 74 countries.



Lethbridge Graduate Student Developing Measure of Poker-Playing Skills

At the November 2013 meeting of the University of Lethbridge Gambling Research Group, Psychology graduate student Carrie Leonard presented on the topic of "Characteristics that Delineate Good Poker Players." As part of her M.Sc. thesis research, Leonard investigated the skills involved in the gambling-related game of Texas Hold 'em poker. She indicated that player profitability is a reliable indicator of an individual's poker skill level but tens of thousands of separate hands are necessary to

make this evaluation¹ which makes it impractical for use in a laboratory setting.

Leonard's research has involved shortening the evaluative period by creating a "scenario-based" skill assessment named the Poker Skills Measure (PSM). This measure aims to standardize how skillfully individual poker players react in particular poker situations². A total of 100 university student participants with knowledge of Texas Hold'em poker were recruited to take the PSM as well as other personality measures. To evaluate the validity of the PSM, Leonard had participants play a computer-based poker game simulation involving approximately 30 poker hands. The instrument's validity was established with moderate associations expected and found between PSM scores and playing assessment, playing experience, and player self-assessment.

Leonard found that the following attributes were related to higher poker skill among participants: gender; financial risk tolerance; greater social intelligence in the social information processing domain; greater resistance to gambling fallacies, and; involvement (e.g., practice). In concluding her presentation, she noted that these attributes are apparently necessary, but no single characteristic alone is sufficient for poker skill.

Calgary Graduate Students Present @ Alberta's Responsible Gambling Stakeholder Symposium

'New researchers' and scholarship recipients, Jennifer Swan and Igor Yakovenko, both from the Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, made noteworthy contributions to the AGLC/AHS '9th Annual Problem and Responsible Gambling Stakeholder Symposium' which was held on October 22, 2013. This year the symposium had an industry focus and attracted several hundred delegates from all corners of the province. Jennifer contributed to the theme by introducing the attendees to her research project 'Internet-based motivational enhancement for problem gambling' which is currently in its preliminary phase. Similarly, Igor informed the audience about his upcoming study on 'Cognitive distortions and chasing behaviour in gambling: current research and unanswered questions.' Both presentations were very well-

received and interest was expressed in hearing about the research findings at next year's symposium.

- 1 *Poker forums suggest that 20,000-100,000 hands must be played before analysis of skill based on profit. The exact number of hand actually required has yet to be established.*
- 2 *The Poker Skills Measure (PSM) uses a multiple-choice answer format to evaluate a poker player's decision-making ability in 35 different poker game scenarios. It was created in by Leonard in collaboration with a professional poker player. Best answer in each PSM scenario was determined through unanimous rater agreement of three professional player "judges" and further validated by statistical probabilities.*

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