



# research reveals...

an update on gambling research in ALBERTA

## About The Alberta Gaming Research Institute

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Its primary purpose is to support and promote research into gaming and gambling in the province. The Institute's identified research domains include bio-psychological and health care, socio-cultural, economic, and government and industry policy and practice. The Institute aims to achieve international recognition in gaming-related research. It is coordinated by a Board of Directors working in collaboration with the Alberta Gaming Research Council. The Ministry of Alberta Gaming provides funding to the Institute.

### OUR MISSION:

***To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society***

Your comments and queries are welcome either by e-mail [abgaming@ualberta.ca](mailto:abgaming@ualberta.ca) or phone (780) 492-2856.

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## Making people "smarter" gamblers

GAMBLING RESEARCH was not in Robert Williams' plans when he received his PhD in Experimental Psychology from McMaster University in 1986. His interests and subsequent training, however, did include addiction research; and his work as a psychologist in northern Manitoba from 1986 to 1996 brought him face-to-face with the problems of substance abuse and the challenges of combating it. In 1996, when he accepted a position in the Adolescent Program of the Addiction Centre in Calgary, he began to work with David Hodgins, whose research into gambling addiction piqued his interest in this field. Like Dr. Hodgins, Rob recognized a similarity between addiction to substances such as alcohol or cocaine, and addiction to gambling. His initial research took him in the direction of how to prevent gambling addiction, working primarily with younger people.

Recruited in 2001 as Associate Professor in the University of Lethbridge's School of Health Sciences and the University's Node Coordinator for the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, Rob Williams is among a relatively small group of individuals doing research into gambling. Much needs to be done, he says, noting that the amount of published literature dealing with serious gambling research would "fill a small shelf," not much more.

Rob's work in Manitoba set the stage for his interest in researching effective methods of educating people about addiction. Rob says he discovered that awareness of, or being educated about, a substance abuse problem, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), did not necessarily eliminate the addiction. In fact, he found that knowledge about FAS had no relationship to whether a woman actually abused alcohol during her pregnancy. The challenge was – and remains – the design of effective programs.

Rob has several research projects underway, including one involving a statistics course at the University of Lethbridge. Designed by him and fellow researcher Dr. Dennis Connolly of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science (who teaches the course), the project is examining the impact an introductory statistics class studying gambling probabilities has on the actual gambling knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of first year university students. In the course, students, who are the subjects in the research program, are introduced to a specific casino game, such as roulette or craps, in their labs each week and thoroughly apprised of the probabilities of winning or losing at that game. "When students realize that the odds are on the casino's side for every game," says Rob, "they hopefully will be much more likely to think twice about heavy gambling."

The purpose of the course is to make people "smarter" gamblers. As well, it will assess the impact that knowledge of the odds has on gambling behaviour, and the level of risk a person will take in light of that knowledge. Risk assessment intrigues Rob: everything a person does every day involves assessing the risk of success or failure. What differentiates problem gamblers from other people is primarily skill at



**Everything a person does every day involves assessing the risk of success or failure**

risk assessment. For example, he says that investing in a university degree is a good risk – a good gamble. Skipping class or wagering money on things where the expected return is less than the initial investment is a bad gamble.

The statistics course aims to improve students' risk assessment skills. The course is very popular and will be offered, says Rob, likely until Dr. Connolly retires, thus allowing an ongoing evaluation of its impact. Rob expects that the course could soon be offered at other institutions, including secondary schools.

Rob says that the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, which funds his

position and much of his work, is instrumental in providing support for scholarly research into the many aspects of gambling. The insights and results the research yields, he feels, will have an ongoing impact on government and societal approaches to gambling and its effects.

The prevention and treatment of problem gambling will continue to be the focus of Rob Williams' research. He intends that his research have a practical effect, not just in Alberta but everywhere that gambling exists. He knows that people will gamble; what he wants is a gambler who can knowingly assess the risks and make the right decision.

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## Gambling, Law Enforcement and Justice System Issues, March 8-9, 2002

Timms Centre, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB

This two-day conference will focus on public policy and law enforcement issues related to gaming and gambling activities. It will include perspectives from international experts and be of interest to academic researchers, policy-makers, law enforcement personnel, regulators, gaming industry representatives, others in the industry or related areas, as well as students in related fields of study and the general public.

### Topics and speakers include:

- *Policing and gambling: related crimes:* Mr. L. Moodie Superintendent, Ontario Provincial Police; Det. J. Rorison, Calgary Police Service
- *Gambling industry crime concerns:* Sgt. R. H. McDonald, Division Intelligence Field Operations, RCMP, 'K' Division, Edmonton; Mr. B. Jones, Investigations, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission; Mr. B. Pritchard, Casino Edmonton
- *Gambling and crime: research issues:* Dr. H. Wynne, Wynne Resources, Edmonton; Dr. J. McMullan and Dr. D. Perrier, Dept. of Sociology and Criminology, St. Mary's University, Halifax
- *Criminal behaviour of problem gamblers:* Mr. B. Bernhard, Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Sociology, University of Nevada; Mr. B. Beresh, Beresh, DePoe, Cunningham, Barristers
- *Gambling law in Canada:* Mr. P. Teasdale, Q.C., Regional Director, Alberta Justice; Dr. C. Campbell, Dept. of Criminology, Douglas College
- *Internet gambling: legal issues:* Mr. M. Garber, Lazarus, Charbonneau; Sgt. G. Ouellet, Sureté du Québec
- *Policy making, social responsibility, and the gaming industry:* Hon. R. Stevens, Minister, Alberta Gaming ; Prof. J. McMillen, Executive Director, Australian Institute for Gambling Research, University of Western Sydney
- *Solutions to the problem gambling and crime connection:* Dr. H. Lesieur, Dept. of Psychiatry, Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital

Registration deadline is 28 February 2002. More detailed information, including a registration form, is available at the Institute's website ([www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca](http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca)) under Events.

## Alberta Gaming Research Institute Website Usage

Since April, 2001 the Alberta Gaming Research Institute website has experienced months of fluctuating activity. High activity periods have generally coincided with the release of AGRI documents of interest to researchers (e.g. 2001-02 Research Grant Guidelines in June and 2001-02 Institute-Funded Research Projects in November). Visits to the website also increased as content on the site was added. January 2002 visitors to date (111 as of January 11) indicate that this month could be the busiest yet for the AGRI website.

Most of the one-time visitors to the site were from Canada. A majority of the network and commercial users accessing the site are likely from within Canada and the United States. Also well represented were visitors from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The website attracted visitors from South Africa, Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Israel, Russia, Sweden, Greece, Finland, Germany, Austria, Mexico, and Venezuela.

More detailed analysis indicates that users accessing the site the most (visitors who use the site numerous times) are largely from within Alberta. The Universities of Alberta, Lethbridge, and Calgary are all represented in the top 10 domains accessing the AGRI website. Alberta Government users also visit the site regularly. Most of the others accessing the site use Internet Service Providers originating in Canada.

For more detailed information about this analysis, please contact Rhys Stevens, AGRI Librarian at [rhys.stevens@uleth.ca](mailto:rhys.stevens@uleth.ca) or 403.329 5176.

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