



GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

Building research capacity in the field of gambling in Alberta

As the Institute nears its 10th year of existence, this issue presents a 'snapshot' of recent gambling-related research activity at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge. Each partner university has designated a 'node coordinator' to serve as a liaison between its faculty and the Institute. Coordinators provide a researcher perspective to the Institute Board, media representatives and other stakeholders on a wide range of gambling-related issues. Another important function of these coordinators is to serve as the principal program planner, on a rotational basis, of the Institute's annual conference. The position of 'Institute Librarian and Information Specialist' provides another of the important capacity-building functions in the promotion and dissemination of credible and authoritative gambling-related research information.

Remembering the origins of the Institute

In 1998, a key recommendation made at the 'Gaming Summit' public consultation on gambling held in Medicine Hat was that Alberta's public policy should be developed within the context of independent, academic research. The provincial government's innovative response to this particular recommendation was to provide funding support to Alberta's three research-based universities (University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge) to jointly establish a university-based gambling research institute. In November 1999, an historic funding agreement was signed that officially created a research consortium called the Alberta Gaming Research Institute which was to be administered and governed by the three universities themselves.

From the outset, through funding support to the *Institute* universities, the Institute encouraged researchers to establish and/or to migrate their research programs towards the various research domains of this emerging field. Special significance was also given to research projects that were interdisciplinary, collaborative, or being undertaken by researchers new to the field. At its inception, there were only three researchers at these universities fully engaged in gambling-related research. Moreover, worldwide there was a dearth of gambling-specific research activity. Foresight on the part of the original planners to work on building the range, scope, and volume of high quality, internationally recognized research through focusing effort on the strengths of each of the partner universities has indeed paid off. The estimated number of faculty researchers at the Institute universities has grown exponentially since the establishment of the Institute. Together with their collaborative partners from other jurisdictions and organizations, 'new' researchers (including graduate and doctoral students and research assistants) now number well over 100!

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.*

OUR MISSION

To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society



From the Institute Library...

by Rhys Stevens

Canadian Gaming News

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute Library has made available a freely accessible online archive of 140 issues of the Canadian Gaming News (1994-2007) industry publication. The archive can be searched by key-word or browsed by issue and is accessible from http://www.uleth.ca/lib/digitized_Collections/cgn.asp.

Canadian Gaming News holds the distinction of being Canada's first gaming publication and, for most of its life, the country's only gaming publication. It is the only source that has recorded the birth and growth of this industry. Permission to digitize this content was obtained by the Alberta Gaming Research Institute from Canadian Gaming News creator Ivan Sack. Content is being hosted by the University of Lethbridge Library.

Gambling research at the U of Alberta

by Dr. Garry Smith

Gambling-related research at the University of Alberta over the past year has focused on social science and public policy topics, however with the hiring of Economics of Gambling Chair, Dr. Brad Humphreys, the University of Alberta will soon be a leader in economics of gambling research. AGRI funded studies currently underway include the gambling patterns and behaviors of certain ethnic groups (Chinese immigrants in Calgary and Alberta First Nation bands in Hobbema) to determine the role that gambling plays in their societies and the impact it has on those communities. Other studies include the extent to which amateur sports groups are reliant on gambling funds and the benefits and drawbacks of this arrangement as well as gambling amongst prison populations (the nature and scope of prison gambling and how it is dealt with by prison authorities).

Two University of Alberta Faculty members (Dr. Don Schopflocher and Dr. Garry Smith) are part of the Leisure, Lifestyle, Lifecycle Survey—a five year longitudinal study of Albertans gambling habits and characteristics. Year Two data collection has just been completed, so there will soon be scholarly articles emerging from the mountain of data that is being amassed.

The University of Alberta hosted the recent 7th annual conference: *Gambling in Society: A Question of Balance* which dealt with such leading edge public policy issues as consumer protection, accountability and social responsibility, the need for cost/benefit studies of legal gambling, the status of On-line gambling and the mass media's role in covering gambling stories. Presenters included both the Ontario and British Columbia Ombudsman and internationally recognized gambling studies scholars from Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Great Britain.

[For further information on the conference—a summary is posted on the Institute website and the previous issue (April/May 2008, v.7 #4) of 'Gambling research reveals...' is dedicated to coverage of the conference presentations]

Chair in the Economics of Gaming, Department of Economics, U of Alberta

by Dr. Brad Humphreys

In the 2008 Winter term, I taught a graduate course on the economics of gaming for the first time. This is the only full-term graduate level course on the economics of gaming in the world. Course topics include: economic theories of gambling, an overview of the economics of betting markets, racetrack betting, sports betting markets, the hot hand and gambling, the favorite-long shot bias, lotteries, the economic impact of gaming, and gaming in a cost-benefit context. Seven graduate students were enrolled in the course, and there has already been one capstone research paper proposal submitted on the economics of gaming from students enrolled in this course.

In terms of research and graduate training, as a co-principal investigator (together with Dr. Rob Williams, U of Lethbridge), we obtained final funding approval from the Alberta Gaming Research Institute and began preliminary work on a major grant project examining the socioeconomic impact of gaming in Alberta. I am in the process of finishing editorial work, as guest editor, of a special issue of the *International Journal of Sport Finance* on

"Sports Gambling". It will contain four papers on sports gambling, and is to be published in August 2008. Finally, in conjunction with the University of Alberta and the Department of Economics, I have obtained funding for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship in the Economics of Gaming. This position will be filled by a new PhD in economics who will work under my supervision to begin a long-term research program related to the economics of gaming, and will be an invaluable tool for building research capacity in his area. Initial funding is available for two years, the position has already been advertised, and I anticipate it will be filled by August 2008.

Gambling research at the U of Lethbridge

by *Dr. Rob Williams*

There are approximately 11 faculty members from 7 different disciplines currently doing gambling-related research at the University of Lethbridge. In Neuroscience, Dr. Mathew Tata is using neuroimaging to better understand the neurological basis of pathological gambling. In Psychology, Dr. Martin Lalumiere and Sandeep Mishra are conducting laboratory investigations studying the relationships between gambling, risk-taking, and decision-making. In Sociology, Dr. Rob Wood (along with Dr. Robert Williams) is studying Internet gamblers to better understand the nature and risks involved in this form of gambling. Dr. Bill Ramp, also from Sociology, is using archival research to understand the current conceptualization of gambling in modern society. In Health Sciences, Dr. Robert Williams is spearheading a province-wide analysis of the social and economic impacts of gambling. As part of this team, Dr. Yale Belanger, from Native American Studies, is specifically looking at the impact of gambling on First Nation communities. Dr. Williams is also involved in a couple of large scale longitudinal studies of gamblers in Ontario and Alberta that should shed light on the etiology of problem gambling. Dr. Gary Nixon, a member of the Addiction Counseling faculty, is looking at the underlying 'meaning' of gambling to pathological gamblers. Dr. Bonnie Lee, also part of the Addiction Counselling faculty, has a research program that investigates the efficacy of congruence couple therapy for problem gambling. In Education, Dr. Noella Piquette-Tomei is doing research into group therapy for women problem gamblers. Ms. Bev West, in Health Sciences, has recently completed a pilot study investigating the effectiveness of vouchers for the treatment of problem gambling. Dr. Ruth Grant Kalischuk, in Nursing, has recently completed a study of the impact of problem gambling on families.

Gambling research at the U of Calgary

by *Dr. David Hodgins*

At the Addictive Behaviours Lab in the Department of Psychology at University of Calgary, we are developing brief treatment approaches using a motivational approach. Our brief treatment development work has three underlying assumptions: First, we know that many people recover from substance abuse and other addictions without the help of formal treatment. For example, it is clear that the most common pathway out of an alcohol problem for Canadians is "self-recovery". We assume that this is also true for people with gambling problems, although we know that people will often not initiate the process of changing until they have suffered significant problems for a significant period of time.

Second, we also know that very few problem gamblers, as few as three percent, will attend formal treatment. Third, we also know from studies of self-recovered gamblers, that the

New Institute Liaison Librarians

As of August 1, 2008 Grant Kayler of the John A. Weir Memorial Law Library will take over from Maureen Beristain as the Institute library liaison for the University of Alberta. Researchers are encouraged to contact Grant (780-492-3535) with suggestions for library gaming collection purchases and for assistance with reference-related questions.

We also wish to introduce and extend a warm welcome to Laura Koltutsky, the new AGRI liaison librarian at the U of Calgary. Laura commenced her responsibilities as the Social Work and Psychology librarian in early July. As a component of this role, she will oversee acquisition and reference services for the gambling-related research collection. Laura can be contacted by e-mail (ljoltut@ucalgary.ca) or phone (403-210-6381).

In addition to serving as the U of Lethbridge's liaison librarian with the Institute, Rhys Stevens continues to serve as the 'principal' information provider for general and researcher queries. He is also responsible for maintaining and developing the Institute's website; writing and editing of the bi-monthly newsletter, producing special topic bibliographies, and developing and providing access to the multi-faceted gambling-related research collection. You are invited to contact Rhys by e-mail (rhys.stevens@uleth.ca) or phone (403-329-5176).



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University of Alberta:
Dr. Garry Smith
(garry.j.smith@ualberta.ca)

University of Calgary:
Dr. David Hodgins
(dhodgins@ucalgary.ca)

University of Lethbridge:
Dr. Robert Williams
(robert.williams@uleth.ca)

INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

Rhys Stevens
(rhys.stevens@uleth.ca)

Your comments and queries are welcome
either by E-MAIL: abgaming@ualberta.ca
PHONE: 780.492.2856

Vickii Williams Writers/Editors
Garry Smith
Rob Williams
Brad Humphreys
David Hodgins
Rhys Stevens

Epigrafix Design/Layout
Media queries 780.492.2856

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change strategies that they use (e.g., avoiding cues to gamble, self-instruction) are similar to those used by individuals attending treatment.

The challenge in helping greater numbers of problem gamblers than currently attend formal treatment is to foster the early use of these strategies without requiring that the individual attend a program. Our strategy has been twofold—we have incorporated practical information about recovery strategies into a brief self-help workbook and we have provided individuals interested in using a self-help approach with *brief telephone support* that focuses on their motivation to implement the change strategies.

We have conducted one clinical trial of this brief intervention and are currently conducting follow-up assessments for a second nationwide evaluation. In our ongoing trial we are used newspaper and television ads to recruit problem gamblers who want to recover on their own. The purpose of the study is to determine more specifically what type of individual with which type of gambling problem is best helped by “promoting natural recovery[DCH1].”

The AGRI funded research at the University of Calgary reflects the wide diversity of perspectives on gambling. David Crockford and colleagues are conducting neuroimaging studies exploring the brain regions involved in gambling. Daniel Lai, in contrast, is examining cultural influences in gambling. Tom Strong is examining the role of language in gambling in recovery. Over the past few years, research has been conducted in almost every faculty—Medicine, Social Science, Social Work, Education, Engineering and Business. This interdisciplinary approach to gambling is also reflected in the wide focus of the Leisure, Lifestyle, Lifecycle Survey—a five year longitudinal study of Albertans gambling habits and characteristics. Dr. David Casey, the Project Coordinator, and Drs. El-Guebaly and Hodgins from the University of Calgary along with colleagues from the Universities of Alberta and Lethbridge are spearheading this exciting project.

A number of the research grants at the University of Calgary are funding doctoral graduate student research. Supporting graduate students is one way to develop “capacity” within Alberta to address gambling issues from a evidence-based perspective. At U of Calgary, Alice Holub is looking at the role of different aspects of impulsivity in gambling problems. Does quick decision making, failure to anticipate the future or distractibility play a role in gambling decisions? Will Shead is also looking at motivations to gambling, but from an emotional perspective. How do gamblers who gamble to enhance positive emotions differ from those who gambling to relieve negative emotions? Nicole Peden is working to develop a treatment for family members of problem gamblers to help them deal effectively with the gambling issue.

For more information on any of the Institute funded research projects and capacity-building activities at the Institute universities, please visit www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca