



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 Institute is funded by the Alberta government through the Alberta Lottery Fund.

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 or phone 780.492.2856.

Panelists discuss the implications of Aboriginal casino gaming in Southern Alberta

by Rhys Stevens

ON NOVEMBER 4TH, 2005, a group of academics and community representatives from Southern Alberta presented their insights regarding the development of casinos on First Nation reserves at a forum entitled *Aboriginal Casinos: Who's Cashing In? Panel Presentation and Public Discussion*. The meeting was sponsored by the Royal Society of Canada in conjunction with The University of Lethbridge and was well-attended by members of the university community, City of Lethbridge delegates, First Nations leaders, and local citizens.

In his opening remarks, session moderator and Lethbridge Herald Managing Editor Doyle MacKinnon noted that there are a myriad of "complex social and economic issues" embedded in the topic. He also contextualized the issue by informing the audience that the Province of Alberta is considering casino applications from seven First Nation applicants and that there could potentially be three casinos operating by the end of 2006. After summarizing the status of Aboriginal casinos in other Canadian provinces, MacKinnon introduced panel participants Dr. Yale Belanger (Department of Native American Studies, U. of Lethbridge), Dr. Rob Williams (School of Health Sciences, U. of Lethbridge), Ms. Phyllis Daychief (Lethbridge Community College) and Mr. Chris Shade (Former Chief, Blood Tribe).



Aboriginal gaming is sometimes called the "new buffalo" by casino supporters.

**The use of
Aboriginal gaming
as an economic
development strategy
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River Cree Resort and Casino, Enoch Reserve west of Edmonton (Nov. 2005).

Photo provided by Alana Yim, Woodbridge Communications

Examining the origins of Aboriginal gaming in Canada [Belanger]

In his remarks, Dr. Yale Belanger set the stage for the three following presentations as he described the origins of Aboriginal gaming in Canada. Belanger's scholarly interest in casino gambling relates to how First Nations communities have attempted to employ them as an economic driver for their "nation-building" efforts. The use of gaming as an economic development strategy has had a somewhat turbulent history. The full story is related in a book that he is preparing about the history of Aboriginal gaming in Canada.

According to Belanger, the country's introduction to Aboriginal gaming can be traced back to 1984 when a Manitoba reserve held a small lottery. This watershed event was soon followed by attempts to introduce additional forms of unregulated gambling such as high-stakes bingos on reserve lands. Perhaps inevitably, such events had a short lifespan as disapproving provincial authorities conducted raids that were designed to snuff out these unlawful activities. Despite this inauspicious debut, strong lobbying efforts by the provinces themselves in the early 1990s were ultimately successful in allowing legalized First Nations gambling to emerge. By the mid-1990s, five casinos with varying levels of Aboriginal involvement were operating and producing significant economic benefits.

Belanger noted that plans are afoot for several more Aboriginal casinos to be introduced in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. He suggested that it may be difficult to anticipate how economically successful these casinos will be as there is presently very little research on the topic.

Research themes relating to the socio-economic cost and benefits of First Nations casinos [Williams]

Dr. Rob Williams, Professor in the School of Health Sciences and the Lethbridge research coordinator for the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, outlined in his presentation an interpretation of the socio-economic costs and benefits of First Nations casinos. He began by noting that there has been a long cultural history of First Nations gambling in North America for ceremonial, religious, and recreational purposes. There has also been "a different chronology in the evolution of casinos in Canada versus the U.S." and Williams suggested that this may mean that there will possibly be different outcomes.

Based on his review of the scholarly literature on the topic, Williams commented that most U.S.-based tribes have benefited significantly from casino gaming in terms of improved education, employment,

and decreased poverty. Social costs, however, often increased with respect to number of bankruptcies and incidence of crime. Intra-generational tribal divisions were also common regarding whether casinos were desirable to use as an economic development strategy. In Canada, though the amount of published literature has been sparser, Williams suggested that the economic benefits were still evident—most particularly to the First Nations that hosted Internet gambling web sites (e.g., Kahnawake First Nation in Quebec).

The three general themes Williams identified as having emerged from research studies are: 1) that economic benefits are often offset by social costs (e.g., high rates of problem gambling); 2) that there are clear features which differentiate successful and unsuccessful casinos (e.g., local gaming monopoly, proximity to urban centres, “destination-style casinos”), and; 3) that the commercial and micro-level benefits of casinos are evident but there are few macro-level benefits (i.e., casinos do not increase revenue on their own unless revenue is generated by gaming tourists instead of by local residents).

Community gambling survey on the Blood Reserve [Daychief]

A powerful example used by Ms. Phyllis Daychief in her presentation on problem gambling on the Blood Reserve was how residents commonly referred to the bridge leading off reserve as “Bingo Bridge.” Daychief is an educator with Lethbridge Community College and an active participant in the community life of the Blood Tribe. She also recently authored a summary report that describes a research project on gambling that was conducted by a women’s group from the Reserve.

The gambling project included the development of a survey that was administered to a non-representative sample of several hundred people on the Blood reserve. Based on the results obtained, individuals reported spending \$2,000 / year on gambling (four times the Canadian average) and 47% of survey respondents were considered to be “high-risk gamblers” (in comparison to 5% of the general Alberta population). Daychief made a recommendation in her report that members of the reserve acknowledge the community’s problem with gambling and that they “take a stand” to deal with it. She ended with the hopeful observation that a “grassroots” women’s movement has developed that seeks to minimize the negative social aspects associated with problem gambling.

Determining the viability of a Blood Tribe casino [Shade]

The Blood Tribe was one of the earliest First Nations to lobby the Alberta government to establish a policy on First Nation gaming. As former Chief of the Blood Tribe, panelist Mr. Chris Shade provided his unique perspective regarding the tribal administration’s experiences assessing the viability of on-reserve casino gambling. Shade noted that Premier Ralph Klein was an influential supporter of “destination-style” casino development and it was under his government in 2000 that a policy was formally developed. He also pointed to a 1997 study by

Diskin receives New Investigator Award

Kate Diskin was awarded the New Investigator Award “for outstanding research on the treatment of addictive behaviors” at the 11th International Conference on Treatment of Addictive Behaviors (ICTAB-11) in Sante Fe, New Mexico. This award is particularly prestigious as it has been bestowed upon Diskin by one of the most important conferences in the field of addictions. Her Institute-funded dissertation related to the “Effects of a single session of Motivational Intervention on Problem Gambling Behavior” and was co-authored by Dr. David Hodgins. This is the second award received by Diskin for her gambling-related research. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Calgary.

2006 conference program finalized

The Institute’s 5th Annual Alberta Conference on Gambling Research, “Social and economic costs and benefits of gambling” will be held on Friday, April 21st and Saturday, April 22nd, 2006 at the Banff Park Lodge, Banff, Alberta. Full details, including registration information, featured speakers, and conference program are available on the Institute’s website. The conference program has been approved for 12.75 credit hours by the Canadian Problem Gambling Certification Board.
<http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca/2006_conference.cfm>

the Canadian Tourism Council that the top two Albertan attractions for European travelers were to visit the Rocky Mountains and to experience Aboriginal culture.

After a pre-feasibility study showed little promise for casino gaming on the relatively remote Blood Reserve in the southwestern corner of the province, the tribe explored options to establish a casino closer to an urban centre. A Lethbridge location was ruled out because the market potential was considered only marginal. A Calgary-area location on lands purchased specifically for casino development was also nixed due to the fact that the parcel would be non-contiguous with reserve lands. Over time, the Blood Tribe slowly lost interest in casino gaming development. Shade recalled that his role ultimately became that of advocate for a policy of profit-sharing between *gaming* and *non-gaming* First Nations communities.

Shade suggested that he felt there was currently little community interest in utilizing casino gaming as an economic development strategy. In conclusion, he contended that it would be now be difficult to secure the necessary support of the local community in any such future initiative.

The panel presentation and discussion of Aboriginal casinos was part of the The Royal Society of Canada's series of university forums on "taboo topics." According to the Society, these forums were created "to provide citizens and policy-makers with a locus where thorny issues and taboo topics of national concern can be critically examined, discussed, clarified and summarized, and become a public resource." Additional information about the panel discussion is available from the Society's web site <<http://www.rsc.ca/>>

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