

GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

Calgary graduate student surveys First Nations gaming industry stakeholders

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

Much has been written in the media and elsewhere about the development of casino gambling on First Nations lands. Some of these portrayals have been enthusiastically positive while others have been decidedly less than flattering. A common thread amongst them, however, has been concern about representation of the First Nations viewpoint. It is precisely this perspective that is of special significance to University of Calgary MA (Sociology) student Josée Couture as she pursues an Institute-funded student research award investigating the impact of gambling in these communities.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Calgary, Couture was first exposed to the topic of First Nations gambling by sociology professor Dr. Cora Voyageur. According to Couture, the more she learned about the topic, the more she found it to be "current, meaningful, controversial, interesting and accessible." This interest eventually resulted in Couture interviewing First Nations leaders for her honour's thesis entitled *The History of Gaming and its Impacts on First Nations in Canada* (2007). Couture's current plans involve a continuation of this line of investigation as part of her graduate student research. She has provided the following answers to questions related to her research interests:

"It is important to take into account the history of First Nations relations with the Canadian government and society at large..."

How did you gain access to your First Nations interviewees for your undergraduate work?

COUTURE: I was lucky to have access to a number of people involved in the First Nations gaming industry as well as academics researching in this area through my supervisor, Dr. Cora Voyageur. In most cases, she let her contacts know that I would try to reach them about participating in the project. The process worked well and was an excellent way to learn the intricacies of conducting interviews.

Potential challenges facing the First Nations gaming industry

Couture indicates that First Nations gaming in Canada may face the following issues in the not-too-distant future:

- Saturation of gaming markets (i.e., limited growth opportunities)
- Challenges to the legality of provincial control over First Nations gaming
- Impacts of economic busts and booms
- Problem gambling
- Legislation challenging the provision of Internet gaming
- Disproportionate distribution of gaming profits among First Nations communities

Do you think the comments and opinions collected from your informants were representative of all First Nations people in Canada?

COUTURE: I believe that the interviewees expressed views, comments and opinions that are representative of First Nations leaders involved in the gaming industry. However, they may not be representative of the average First Nations citizen's views. Almost all the informants were directly involved in the industry and expressed mainly positive attitudes about the potential benefits of gaming in helping alleviate a great deal of financial, political and social hardships.

First Nations peoples in Canada have been disadvantaged for quite some time. From the vast amount of reading I did on the subject, I can confidently say that support for the involvement of First Nations in the industry of gaming is not universal across all communities or individuals. Many have serious doubts and are apprehensive of the dangers that come along with such endeavours.

Are you planning to extend your initial research investigation now that you're a graduate student?

COUTURE: My MA work will consist of the same line of study as my undergraduate project. I plan to use my previous research as a jumping off point to inform and to develop a more thorough, comprehensive, sophisticated and meaningful final thesis. I am ambitiously hoping to deal with both the issues of impact and control in the project because I find that they are inseparable in their real life consequences for First Nations peoples of Canada.

Why did you choose an interview methodology for your research investigation?

COUTURE: I wanted to include interviews in my initial project to learn about the process and to frame my project from the point of view of First Nations peoples. My goal was to present the materials in such a way that they are understandable to all regardless of whether one supports First Nations gaming or not. It is important to take into account the history of First Nations relations with the Canadian government and society at large, the laws that have greatly impacted their lives, and the situation they now find themselves in before passing judgment or forming an opinion on First Nations gaming.

Regarding methodology, I want to approach my MA project from a similar angle by presenting the materials from a First Nations perspective. However, I hope to convincingly introduce quantitative material, in the form of statistics and reports, to support the arguments that the interviewees share with me. I would also like to add comprehensive sections relating to health issues, assessing both positive and negative impacts that have resulted from the expansion of First Nations involvement in the gaming industry, and alternatives for economic development.

Any final thoughts you'd like to share about First Nations gaming?

COUTURE: I am, oddly enough, still not decided on which side of the [First Nations gambling] debate I rest. The conclusion I am coming to is that, as a member of Canadian society, I can have an opinion about First Nations gaming in our country. However, the ultimate decision about First Nations involvement in the gaming industry rests in their own hands.

Josée C. Couture is currently in the first year of her MA (Sociology) at the University of Calgary. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan with a double major in Archaeology and Anthropology and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology the University of Calgary. Ms. Couture has received a student research award from the Institute to examine gambling industry impacts on First Nations communities in Canada.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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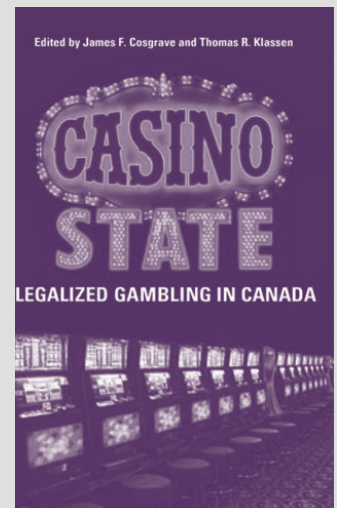


From the Institute Library...

A new and notable book on gambling in Canada has recently been published by the University of Toronto Press. *Casino State: Legalized Gambling in Canada* (2009) is an edited volume containing chapters on a range of gambling-related topics—including morality, risk, social policy, crime and youth problem gambling. Two chapters were contributed by Institute-funded researchers.

In Chapter 2, “Blood Money: Gambling and the Formation of Civic Morality,” William Ramp and Kerry Badgley examine the moral discourses around the place of chance in everyday life and the ways in which these discourses have changed in the twentieth century. In Chapter 8, “Gambling-Related Crime in a Major Canadian City,” Garry J. Smith, Timothy F. Hartnagel, and Harold Wynne provide a case study of the forms of crime that accompany legalized gambling in Edmonton, Alberta.

Cosgrave, J. F., & Klassen, T. R. (Eds.). (2009). *Casino state: Legalized gambling in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



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INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

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

Rhys Stevens	Writers
Josée Couture	
Vickii Williams	Editor
Epigrafix	Design/Layout
Media queries	780.492.2856

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2008-09 Research Grant Awardees

The following research grants were approved for funding in 2008-09:

- **Trauma and Female Problem Gambling: A Qualitative Grounded Theory Study** (Major Grant #50) – Dr. Ruth Grant Kalischuk (Principal Investigator)
- **Evaluating the Psychometric Properties of the Four Es Scale: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Factors Related to Gambling Behavior and Mental Health in Canadian and American College Students** (Major Grant #51) – Dr. Garry Smith (Principal Investigator)
- **Private Stigma of Disordered Gambling** (Small Grant) – Ms. Jenny Horch (Principal Investigator)

Winter Term Graduate Student Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to 2008-09 Winter Term scholarship awardees Scott H. Henwood (University of Calgary) and Lena A. Rinquist (University of Calgary). Both Rinquist and Henwood each received \$6,500 in scholarship awards and research funding allowances in the amount of \$1,500.