



# 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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## How important is "place" in gambling?

A FEW YEARS AGO a high ranking Alberta politician commented in the press that the Banff area would be a great site for a major casino. Dr. Tom Hinch, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta whose research interests include the importance of place (or location) in tourism, began to think about that. Just how important is the destination or location of the casino to a traveler? "I'm interested in the relationship between people and place in the context of leisure based tourism," says Tom. "My primary focus has been on sport tourism as well as tourism and indigenous people. Casino gambling represents a growing tourism activity and it presents interesting questions related to the importance of place in the decision process of casino patrons."

Tom is intrigued by the fact that, unlike such natural attractions as Lake Louise, casinos are "built" attractions. Las Vegas, says Tom, with its massive, integrated theme-based hotels, casinos, and entertainment, is in a category by itself and so cannot be easily compared to other casino locations. Outside of Las Vegas, then, he wonders if geographic location is really that important to a leisure traveler who gambles. After all, the inside of one casino can look very much like another.

Dr. Gordon Walker is an Assistant Professor in the same Faculty; his research interests include cross-cultural aspects of leisure, outdoor recreation constraints, and the social psychology of leisure. He too was interested in how people become attached to "place" in their leisure pursuits. Gordon and Tom's interests converged when they applied to and received funding from the Alberta Gaming Research Institute for a study of the relationship between casinos and leisure travel, a project they felt might have practical and applicable outcomes.

*Casino Patrons, Travel Behavior, Place Attachment and Motivation: A Study of Albertans*, for which Tom is Principal Investigator and Gordon is Co-Investigator, is a comprehensive look at the travel behaviour of Alberta residents who are casino gamblers and the role that "place" plays in their travel experience. As Gordon noted, "we were interested in how place attachment, a concept that has received considerable attention in outdoor recreation research, may be both similar and different in terms of casinos."

In 1996 Tom published an article on casinos as tourist attractions with Dr. Garry Smith (now University of Alberta node coordinator for the Alberta Gaming Research Institute) which touched on place. They concluded at the time that the majority of Canadian casinos drew most of their patrons from within an 80 kilometre radius. Since that time, however, there has been a proliferation of casino developments throughout Canada. The research funding from through the Institute provided Tom and Gordon with the opportunity to address intriguing theoretical questions related to place and casino visitation. Tom explained that the project used a somewhat different



**"I'm interested in the relationship between people and places..."**



**"...how do people become attached to 'place?'"**

methodology from the one he undertook with Garry Smith. Garry's survey, said Tom, asked each respondent about casino visitation both in his or her home area and out of province, while the new one asked separate groups of individuals (more than 1,200 in all) about their casino experiences within 80 kilometres of their home or 80 km or more away from their home.

Although the study is not yet fully complete, the researchers have analyzed enough data to reach some preliminary conclusions. One of the most interesting findings concerned the importance of casino gambling as a trip activity. Only 9% of the respondents indicated that the casino visit was the primary reason for the trip; 20% said that it was an important but secondary activity; and the balance suggested that it was an incidental activity. Accordingly, these groups represent three quite distinct tourism market segments for casinos. Reinforcing this, in terms of the nature of their experience, 57% of the respondents emphasized the social interaction that they had with their companions, 25% indicated that their experience was dominated by their interaction with the place, and only 18% highlighted gambling activity. "We thought that the activity would be the main focus," said Gordon, "but the majority by far said it was the social experience of the casino."

While further analysis of the data is required to confirm it, it appears that there is little overlap between local casino patrons and those who visit casinos while they are traveling; that is, the possibility exists that there really are two distinct groups. Preliminary findings also reveal a significant age difference: 60 to 69 years was predominant in the traveler group while the 18 to 19 age group is predominant in the local group. A major difference also existed with respect to employment status: students employed part-time or full-time are more likely to be represented in the local group. There was no significant difference between the two groups in education levels.

Tom and Gordon feel that there is some useful advice in these findings for casino developers. More than ever, a careful examination of financial feasibility is required, since developers can no longer assume that "if you build it, they will come." With few exceptions, suggests Tom, the decision to build a casino should be based on local demand and patronage.

To attract tourists, Tom recommends

that developers first of all cater to visitors' desire to socialize with their travel companions on their trip (for example, offering entertainment options and packages designed for couples and small groups). They should also foster a sense of place that makes their casino unique and ties it closely to the destination, such as place-specific architectural themes and programming themes that are complementary to others in the destination. This, he says, is needed to decrease the chance of substitution by patrons of one casino for another. Finally, developers should recognize and develop separate marketing strategies for patrons who when travelling see casino visitation as a primary, secondary or incidental activity. Even this, say the researchers, may not be enough to draw repeat visits to the casino. It appears, notes Tom, that casino patrons who travel are not particularly attached to the specific casinos or the destinations where these casinos are located. This suggests that they would be willing to substitute casinos and/or destinations; that is, they won't be particularly loyal to a specific casino or destination.

The data gathered has yielded other interesting conclusions, which will be available in the near future. Tom and Gordon acknowledged the importance of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute in supporting research of this nature. Quite frankly, said Tom, although it is important research from both social and economic perspectives, it would very likely not have been even considered by some of the larger, traditional granting agencies.

Both researchers plan future research into gambling. In fact, Gordon has received funding from the Alberta Gaming Research Institute for another study, one that follows from this one. *The Effect of Culture on Gambling* has three objectives, says Gordon: (1) to describe the prevalence of gambling among Chinese/Canadians residing in Edmonton, Alberta; (2) to compare these findings with Anglo/Canadians who reside in the same community; and (3) to develop a cross-cultural model of gambling intentions, specifically Chinese/Canadians' and Anglo/Canadians' intention to purchase lottery tickets in the near future (i.e. during the next month). Gordon has already begun the project and expects to have it completed by the end of 2003. Like the study led by Tom Hinch, Gordon Walker's research will undoubtedly contribute new and useful information to the growing body of knowledge about gambling.

## Problem gambling prevention initiatives to be featured at institute conference

The upcoming Institute Prevention of Problem Gambling conference (March 27-28, 2003) at the University of Lethbridge will feature several prevention initiatives being undertaken across North America. You can obtain background information about these programs from the following web addresses:

- **Addictions Foundation of Manitoba:**  
[www.afm.mb.ca](http://www.afm.mb.ca)
- **Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission:** <http://corp.aadac.com/>
- **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – Problem Gambling Project (Ontario):**  
[www.camh.net/ets/problem\\_gambling/](http://www.camh.net/ets/problem_gambling/)
- **Harvard Medical School Division on Addictions – Facing the Odds:**  
[www.hms.harvard.edu/daa/](http://www.hms.harvard.edu/daa/)
- **North American Training Institute (Minnesota):** [www.nati.org](http://www.nati.org)
- **Prevention Source BC (British Columbia):**  
[www.preventionsource.bc.ca](http://www.preventionsource.bc.ca)
- **Saskatchewan Health – Problem Gambling Prevention and Education Programming:**  
[www.health.gov.sk.ca/problemgambling/pg\\_prev\\_educ.html](http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/problemgambling/pg_prev_educ.html)
- **YMCA Youth Gambling Project (Ontario):**  
[www.ymcatoronto.org/gambling](http://www.ymcatoronto.org/gambling)

Further information about Conference 2003: Prevention of Problem Gambling, being held at the University of Lethbridge March 27-28, including a conference agenda and registration form, is available on the Institute's website ([www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca](http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca)).

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