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In 1984, I was introduced to the National Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking in Atlantic City. This was the sixth conference Bill Eadington organized. Prior to that time, conference papers and a few people from the National Council on Compulsive Gambling (now called the National Council on Problem Gambling) who had attended meetings were my introduction to the conferences on gambling and risk taking. As a result of attending the conference, I got to meet researchers I had read about as well as avid advocates for gambling, adamant foes of gambling, and others who had systems they were convinced would make them rich. Ironically, one of these people appeared at a Gamblers Anonymous meeting several years later where I attended as a guest.

That first meeting was a blur, with many new people and names. Bill Eadington, the conference organizer, stood out head above the rest. His grasp on the big picture of what was about to become an explosion was insightful; his knowledge of the gambling industry encyclopedic. He was predicting widespread casino gambling at a time when only Nevada and New Jersey were on the map. There were no riverboats, no Colorado mining town casinos, and no Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in the US. No Canadian provinces had casinos; and terms like “virtual reel gaming technology” and “Internet gaming” were not yet born.

At that time, virtually everything written about gambling by academics, including unpublished doctoral dissertations, could be read in a few months. The meetings became a source of information about gambling in other countries and theoretical approaches taken to gambling. Bill Eadington’s ability to gather intellectuals from around the world was impressive. In a sense, Bill helped form what sociologists call an *invisible college* (Crane, 1972). The concept of invisible college implies communication

among scholars about a specific area of interest. As a result of this college, knowledge is disseminated, grows, and is improved. Ironically, things like academic journals help form such colleges, yet there was no broadly focused journal that would represent this one.

Perhaps the major insight I had at the Atlantic City conference was that there were many unpublished papers that deserved the light of day. In a real sense, that conference was an inspiration for the formation of the *Journal of Gambling Behavior* (later changed to the *Journal of Gambling Studies*). People from that conference and others to follow became reviewers and authors for that journal. The formation of this journal helped the invisible college coalesce. Many articles that were first presented at the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking have been published in the *Journal of Gambling Studies* as well as other journals.

The conferences produced intellectual stimulation as new ideas and methods were introduced and old ideas and methods were challenged. Often this led to intellectual debates. At other times, the sessions led to collaboration on different projects where people from different countries and disciplines met and began international studies that would not have been possible without the conference. These collaborative efforts were sometimes presented at the next international conference, thus enriching the field.

The conferences are a delight. After having attended several of the conferences (they became the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking), attendees look forward to seeing people from previous conferences and renewing friendships.

Some of the people who have presented at previous conferences have passed on. Robert Custer, Julian Taber, Rena Nora, Durand Jacobs and Michael Walker are some of those who enriched the conferences and continue to influence the invisible college. Now there are new faces; people who will wonder how this field began. It is a tribute to Bill that this invisible college will have newcomers to whom the torch is being passed. Bill Eadington, as president and founder of that college, deserves special recognition for his service to the field.

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References

Crane, Diana (1972). *Invisible colleges. Diffusion of knowledge in scientific communities*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.