

In 1996, I was finishing Ph.D. coursework in economics at Auburn, looking for a dissertation topic. I had been interested in the casino industry because casinos had opened in Missouri in 1994, just a year after I left Kansas City to go to graduate school. In doing background research for my dissertation, the most common economist's name I came across was Bill Eadington. When I contacted Bill, of course he gave me good advice and feedback on my research. He also let me know about his upcoming conference – the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking (ICG&RT). I was very surprised to learn of a conference dedicated to gambling issues.

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The first ICG&RT I attended was the 10<sup>th</sup>, in 1997, held in Montréal. This was the first academic conference at which I presented papers. I can still remember how offended much of the audience and fellow panel members seemed to be at my presentation on “the social costs of gambling.” What was fairly straightforward and uncontroversial among economists was anything but that to this interdisciplinary audience. In finding this controversy and debate at a conference focused on gambling, I knew then I would dedicate my career to studying the economic impacts of gambling. I have attended each of Bill's conferences since 1997, and it has always been the most productive conference for me, in terms of getting good feedback and discussion with other researchers with similar interests.

I imagine that many other young academics, or researchers taking an initial look into gambling behavior or the industry, have similar memories of the first ICG&RT they attended. The conference is unique because it brings together an ever-changing group of researchers from different disciplines, including psychology, medicine, economics, public policy, sociology, public administration, hospitality management, and probably many others. One might think that having all psychologists or all economists might be better because of specialization. But I have found the opposite to be true because the differences in disciplines help to keep the research widely relevant. That is, researchers may be more inclined to consider different perspectives in their research design, empirical analysis, etc. So a paper in economics may be interesting to psychologists, and vice versa. Aside from this, I have learned so much about problem gambling, diagnosis, and treatment that I would have never been exposed to at economics conferences. Even though I am certainly not an expert in any of those fields outside economics, having been exposed to

them and being familiar with work in those areas has certainly improved the quality of my research in economics.

Although there are now other international conferences dedicated to gambling, the ICG&RT is still the best and best-attended. This is probably because of the long history of the conference series. One can look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones every three years or so, along with seeing the latest work in the field. It is the once

conference I most look forward to attending.

Simply put, the importance of Bill's conferences in the development of the gambling research field cannot be overstated. Bill deserves credit for bringing together interdisciplinary researchers who all have an interest in some aspect of gambling – since the early 1970s. The conferences have facilitated collaboration among a large number of researchers over the years. The explosion in the number of papers published in the topic, as well as the number of relatively new gambling journals are both indicators of how much the field has grown. This growth is certainly partially due to the explosive growth in the casino industry during the past two decades. But the quick growth and development of research must also be attributed to the ICG&RT, which, more than any other outlet, has help foster gambling research.

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