

Viewpoint

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Recently, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission concluded its site visitations to gaming jurisdictions in the United States with two days of hearings in Las Vegas, Nevada. A number of issues and concerns were discussed during the testimony; however, rhetoric regarding problem and underage gambling echoed the loudest. Not only was the focus on casino gamblers who develop problematic tendencies, but there was also significant dialogue regarding underage gambling at casinos, on the Internet, on university campuses, and gambling on collegiate athletic events.

The Commission submitted its final report and recommendations in 1999, and certainly the issues of problem gambling and underage gambling surfaced as paramount items. The expectation is that the gaming industry must continue to take the leading role in the area of responsible gaming awareness, but this should not be an exclusive role. Gambling exists beyond the walls of casinos and, as was made evident in the hearings, young people/students represent a segment of our society who legally cannot gamble in casinos, yet some do develop problems with gambling. Gambling occurs on university campuses in several forms, from "dormitory gambling" to situations that make national headlines, such as point-shaving scandals involving collegiate athletic events.

Educational institutions now have an opportunity and obligation to make significant contributions in the area of research, training, seminars, and classes dealing with the sociology of gaming and consumer behavior, as well as problem and underage gambling. This needs to be an academic priority. This is especially true for educational institutions located in gaming jurisdictions where casino-style gaming is readily available and those that offer courses on casino management. In fact, this same mindset should be used in business management and social science curricula to ensure a broad base approach. More specifically, strategies should be devised to integrate information about problem and underage gambling into existing gaming, and, as applicable, non-gaming courses. Institutions offering casino management classes can review course offerings to determine how and to what extent these issues may be addressed in first year through senior level and graduate courses. Guest speakers from the National Council on Problem Gambling, Gamblers Anonymous, clinicians, academic and medical researchers, and recovering problem gamblers who speak from an experiential viewpoint can truly enhance course informa-

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tion. Field-based experiences, co-ops, and internships can include components designed to heighten awareness of how gaming operators are addressing these issues and what agencies are available to help people with gaming-related issues. Certainly, research papers and class team projects will cause students to do a review of literature on these topics. A fully developed integration program would also include a strategy to help educators take this message onto high school campuses and at PTA meetings.

The educational goals are threefold: First, students who enter the gaming industry need to know about a problem some guests and employees may develop. An analogy may be drawn to students who will eventually work in the beverage/tavern business. A number of their guests will overindulge and, as operators, they must know how to serve alcohol with care and when to make their employees aware of a company's Employee Assistance Program (E.A.P.). Second, students need to understand that this problem can affect them, their families and friends, and that there are resources for assistance/treatment. Third, students must be made aware, and this was a key point in the Commission hearings, that gambling does not occur only in casinos. Again, the point-shaving scandals relating to collegiate sports serve as a case-in-point. Addressing the sociological issues of gambling with young people serves as a foundation for a responsible educational awareness program and, in some cases, will hopefully serve as an ounce of prevention.

By virtually all accounts, the number of people who develop problems with gambling represents a small percentage of the whole. However, those who are impacted can be personally and financially devastated. The gaming industry and educators share a responsibility to educate workers and students, to foster research in this area, and take leadership roles. These roles take on greater significance and importance as gaming continues its growth both nationally and internationally.