

# How Bill Eadington Changed Our Lives

*David G. Schwartz, Ph.D.*

Since Bill Eadington's death in February, we've come to appreciate just how influential a figure he is in today's gaming studies world. Hundreds of academics, regulators, and gaming industry professionals have shared their stories of "How Bill Eadington changed my life."

There are some constants among those stories: we all seem to agree that without Bill, we might not be doing what we're doing. Bill began his career by asserting the validity of gambling, particular casino gaming, as an academic study. This was no easy feat; at the time, casino gaming was restricted to one U.S. state, was in the early process of legitimization and mainstream financing, and had at best a checkered track record in the court of public opinion; scarcely a decade earlier, the Attorney General of the United States had been persuaded by the slimmest of margins to call off a planned raid of Las Vegas's major casinos. Many felt that, unlike industries such as agriculture, auto-making, and construction, gambling wasn't of adequate overall economic and social importance nor sufficiently sophisticated in its managerial techniques to merit serious study. Since then, gaming in all of its forms has developed into a sector with direct revenues of \$100 billion in the United States alone, and several Nevada-based companies have become a part of the burgeoning Asian gaming sector. Today, few would doubt the significance and importance of gaming as a field of academic inquiry.

And, today, much of that field has been shaped by Bill. It would be difficult to overstate the impact of his work on the field of gaming studies. Over his four decades at the University of Nevada, Reno, Bill compiled a deep and wide-ranging record of publications, with an impressive collection of peer-reviewed articles, chapters in several important books, and editor or co-editor of twelve books, each of which is regarded as an essential work in the canon of gaming studies. It is a testament to his influence that nearly any work that considers the economic and social impacts of gambling—be it a doctoral dissertation, a refereed journal article, or a popular monograph—includes Bill's name in its footnotes. In our field, Bill is not just influential; he is omnipresent.

The impact of Bill's written work, alone, would be enough to make us all miss him. His journal articles unfailingly provided clarity about the complex issues surrounding gaming, and the collections he edited have presented the state of the art in the field in a variety of disciplines.

But the true influence of Bill's work isn't found on his own vitae; it is in the output of the thousands of scholars who have taken part in the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking, which he first organized in 1974 and which continues to attract an international audience of researchers to this day, the numerous industry leaders

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who were once his students, the hundreds of gaming executives who have attended his Executive Development Program since its inception in 1992, and in the companies, state, national, and trans-national governments, and academic institutions that he has consulted with.

Bill started the International Conference on Gambling in Risk Taking began as a gathering of academics in a variety of disciplines from around the United States who were interested in the impact of gambling from several points of view, ranging from analyses of mathematical questions about gambling, to the fundamentals of pathological gambling, to understanding business dimensions of gaming enterprises, to broader inquiries into the impact of gambling on society. Initially held in conjunction with the meeting of the Western Economics Association, this was the first scholarly gathering specifically dedicated to the study of gambling. As such, it has both given fledgling scholars a place to deliver papers and become familiar with the broader field of gaming studies, and a locus for the study of gaming that has attracted mature scholars with accomplishments in other areas of study. Now held every three years, with several hundred participants from across the world, this remains the most significant scholarly meeting in the field of gaming studies.

But Bill's influence transcends academia. During his four decades of teaching at UNR, several of his students have gone on to careers in gaming management and regulation. As such, he's had an influence on the actual practice of gaming, both operationally and administratively, that few academics can boast; he changed more lives inside and outside the academy than we can count.

In addition, for more than 20 years Bill led the Executive Development Program, a course of study for executives, senior managers, owners, board members, and regulators that helps attendees bring strategic analysis and a new focus to their organizations. What the International Conference has been for gaming-inclined academics, this has been for those within the gaming industry who seek a better understanding of the big picture. As a result, there are "Eadingtonians" managing casinos in states and on tribal lands across the United States, in Canada, Australia, Macau, Finland, Peru, and Kenya (to name a few locations), and regulating gaming in several US states and tribal lands, South Africa, Canada, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and other countries.

We are not likely to ever see another scholar with Bill's passion and impact, but his work is going to inspire others for a very long time. Here are a few reflections about how Bill changed lives from students and friends:

Dr. Eadington had a wry but quite effective sense of humor. During graduate school, I advised Bill that I was off to law school following my thesis. He spent the next couple of months convincing me that my talents would be wasted by the legal profession and that gaming would be a more enjoyable and personally rewarding path - this coming from a Ph.D. who taught the Dismal Science. It worked. While he never said it, I believe Bill was full of pride when he saw his students emerge in leadership positions in the industry.

During the ensuing 25 years in the gaming industry Bill was frequently a sounding board for me professionally. I appreciated that there were no angles with him. His views were typically quite clear and often included cautions and views I had not considered. He wanted his students to maintain his ambition that the gaming industry, while a profit minded emerging industry, had a greater long term responsibility to customers, communities and other stakeholders.

Our schedules were difficult to coordinate. As a way to lock in, Bill would invite me to teach one of his classes each fall that usually included a lunch or dinner. While the classes were rewarding in their own right, those one on one meals were a valued diversion from the nonstop pace of the industry.

*--Mark Liparelli, former chairman, Nevada Gaming Control Board*

Over and above his prodigious intellectual gifts (and energies!) Bill had extraordinary interpersonal skills. He was a model of courtesy to everyone he met, went out his way to help anyone who asked him, seemed to be completely unflappable no matter what apparent disasters were befalling his travel plans or the conference he was speaking at, and was equally at ease with, and well-liked by politicians, regulators, businesspeople, therapists as well as fellow educationalists and academics. On the other hand, he was fooled by no-one and his integrity was cast-iron.

On a more personal note, I first met him when I was doing work on public policy and the casino industry in South Africa in the mid-1990s. He was unfailingly generous with both his time and his extensive knowledge. It was, indeed, on his initiative that I eventually became the Director of the Salford Centre for the Study of Gambling in the UK, which he had been instrumental in founding. We collaborated closely on many projects, working with overseas governments and gambling companies as well as sharing lecturing engagements in places as varied as Macao, Beijing, Taiwan, Slovenia, the UK and South Africa, as well as in the USA.

He visited South Africa on several occasions and became a firm friend of post-1994 Governments and their Gambling Boards, both Provincial and National, with whom he generously shared of his extensive wisdom and experience. He also understood and liked the executives he met in the gambling industry in South Africa as elsewhere. They also liked him and were surprised and impressed with how well he understood their business. He was a particularly enthusiastic fan of the NRGP, commending especially the far-sightedness of the industry in funding us and the wisdom of regulators in ensuring our independence. He also assisted us unstintingly in anything to do with research and international comparisons – where his knowledge was unparalleled – believing that good policy and practice could only come from good, honest evidence.

I hope it is not impertinent to mention that, despite the stupendous volume of work he got through Bill was not someone whose work was his life. On the contrary he was exceptionally blessed in his domestic life: he was a wonderful husband to the equally wonderful Margaret (who I am delighted to say often travelled with him including to South Africa), as well as being a wonderful father and, more recently, a very happy grandfather.

The winner of countless honours and awards, Bill leaves behind him a giant's footprint in the terrain of gambling studies and, in conversation it was clear that his knowledge, shrewdness and enthusiasm went well beyond the world of gambling. But it is as a warm, funny, wise, honest, humble and exceptionally kind friend that I shall remember him most – and miss him most.

*--Peter Collins, veteran academic researcher and author, Gambling and the Public Interest*

Dr. Eadington had a significant impact on my professional and personal development. He was my teacher, mentor, and over the years a dear friend. His influence on my gaming career was one of the greatest gifts I ever received. His high standards, warmth of personality, keen wit, depth of knowledge and insight into the gaming industry were inspirational.

Like many of us, I knew little about gaming when I entered the industry over a decade ago via a corporate internship. Dr. Eadington's gaming management courses at UNR quickly spiked my interest. Over the years, he provided me invaluable mentorship and a tremendous perspective on global gaming. One of my richest learning experiences was his Executive Development Program held in Tahoe each year. As a participant and panel member the last few years, I was fortunate to gain great insight on Dr. Eadington's view on global gaming trends and development.

Personally, Dr. Eadington's friendship was also dear to my heart. He was the most humble, genuine, and loving man. He ALWAYS took a personal interest in the success and growth of young professionals such as myself who sought to build a gaming career. I'm very grateful for the knowledge, wisdom, and courage Dr. Eadington taught us. To me and many, he was and will always be our mentor and teacher

*--Annie Chen, Vice President, Premium Mass Marketing, Marina Bay Sands*

In short, Bill was largely responsible for one of the most intense periods in my working life. I was one of the many graduates of the UNR Executive Development Programme to keep in touch. In my case, the relationship with Bill and the Faculty continued, initially through the sharing of news on the European sector and occasional discussions, and latterly contributing to the programme itself over the past few years. When contemplating doing some further academic study, I sought Bill's advice and he asked me 2 questions. Firstly, did I need to do it, and secondly, did I really want to do it? After answering the second question in the affirmative, he provided inspiration through his usual undiminished enthusiasm and his unique ability as an educator. I subsequently went on to spend many late nights 'thanking' Bill for his encouragement but ultimately feeling fulfilled and rewarded by the experience.

If the same questions were asked of Bill, I think most would agree that he both needed and wanted Economics as a career. I have rarely met anyone so fulfilled in their professional life. Due to his ability to engage not only with students, but at a strategic level, his legacy will be the exponential shift in education standards in the gaming industry creating the leaders of the future.

*--Steven Myers, Managing Director, Development, Genting UK*

I was in Bill's first Executive Development Program class and also served as a judge for the Program for several years before I retired in 2010. Of course I met many people in my approximately 45 years in gaming, but those that I met through Bill, in spite, or maybe because of, their varied backgrounds, all seemed to be more insightful, with a broader perspective on the industry than those that I met in operations. There were regulators, attorneys, mathematicians, politicians, human resource leaders, security specialists, marketers, CEO's and on and on, and oh, what a wonderful collection of minds that he brought together to expand certainly, but also to examine and advance gaming.

Bill did not coerce, but rather he inspired through his behavior as a gentleman and the questions he raised that led us to look into, not only the core principles of gaming, but the many tangents that only touched on the various, but relevant, facets of the industry, as well.

Bill's legacy is a better industry because of the academic approach he brought to bear on it certainly, but more than that, it is an army of more enlightened people on the inside, and on the outside critically looking in that help keep it on the path he laid down for us.

*--Lee Skelley, veteran gaming executive*

Watching Bill lead the Executive Development Program was more like watching a maître d' in the finest restaurants. Just like a maître d' was concerned about the wants and desires of his diners, Bill was able to feed students the information that they personally needed in their jobs at a pace that ensured that they stayed interested but remained thoroughly challenged. He didn't just teach to the class as a whole. He had the unique ability to inspire the entire group of sixty students as if he was tutoring them individually. This allowed the class to prosper and grow as a whole even though there was extreme diversity. There were students that were CEO of US casinos while others were regulators from the other side of the globe. Some had advanced degrees while others only finished high school. Some were in the Gaming Industry for decades while others were relatively new. What a great ability and a great man! We lost one of the truly great educators with the passing of Bill. He will be missed by all.

*--Wendell Long, General Manager, Little River Casino*

In 1989, just months after Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, Bill Eadington, under theegis of the University of Nevada and the Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming held the North America Conference on the Status of Indian Gaming in Reno, Nevada. The conference lasted several days and covered all that was known at the time about the status of Indian gaming. It featured three distinct types of presenters, lawyers, academics and Indian tribal leaders, but no casino operators. I was one of two representatives of Northern Nevada casino operators in attendance. I learned a great deal from the conference and the lessons were career changing. I learned to see gaming in a broad, national perspective and not from my narrow, Reno-centric one. For the first time, I could see that gambling was on the verge of spreading far beyond the state of Nevada and that Reno was going to be very vulnerable. It was clear to me, that without changing my perspective, I would be as vulnerable as Reno.

That conference was important to me, but its importance to Indian gaming and the casino industry in general was much more significant. The conference helped to define Indian gaming, identify the major issues and set the stage for the national debate that has followed. Every two or three year throughout his career Professor Bill Eadington produced a conference like the one I attended in 1989, and nearly every one of those conferences did for others what that one did for me. The conferences demonstrate Bill Eadington's long-term influence on the development of the modern gaming industry. Prior to Bill's arrival, casino gaming was an individual, private and closely guarded industry of secret concepts and practices that almost amounted to superstitions. Bill brought everything out into the open, exposed gaming to the light of day and opened everything in the industry to debate and study. It is difficult to imagine a greater contribution to an industry; an industry present in all but two states, generating over \$100

billion dollars in revenue annually and employing more than half a million people. Bill Eadington cast a long shadow and now we have to hope the University of Nevada will pick up his torch and carry it forth into gaming's next era. There is still much work to be done and Bill left some very big shoes to be filled.

*--Ken Adams, Gaming Author and Strategic Analyst*

I met Bill Eadington when I was an 18 year old college student, and our association lasted for 44 years. It would probably be safe to say that he changed my life in a multitude of different and important ways. I would like to suggest, however, that Bill's greatest contribution to my life was the ways he did not change it. With Bill, it was absolutely okay for me to be who I was. I didn't have to look at things the way he did, I didn't have to approach things the way he did, and most importantly, I didn't need to agree with him. With me, as with so many others, it was absolutely fine to be who we were and Bill honored these differences in all of us. The only thing that really seemed to matter was that we cared. Bill seemed to think that after that, the rest was detail.

*--Richard Schuetz, Commissioner, California Gambling Commission*

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