

# AN EXAMINATION OF GAMBLING IMPACTS AT AN UPSTATE NEW YORK COLLEGE

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**Abstract.**—The purpose of this study was to examine gambling participation at the State University of New York, Cortland, in upstate New York. Three hundred sixty-two students were involved in the study. More than 76 percent of the respondents reported that they had gambled at least once during the last school year and 5.6 percent of them had gambled weekly or more often, indicating that gambling participation was prevalent on this college campus. In addition, 77.6 percent of the respondents knew about Turning Stone Resort and Casino, the casino closest to the campus, and 38.7 percent of them had been there, suggesting that gambling has an impact on students' leisure lifestyle. Male students were more likely to gamble than female students. The primary motivations for gambling were to have fun and to make money. This study provides a better understanding of college students' gambling behavior in the leisure context.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since Nevada legalized casino gambling in 1931 (American Gaming Association 2006), Americans have never stopped gambling. Welte et al. (2002) revealed that 82 percent of Americans aged 18 or older reported having participated in gambling in the past 12 months. Playing the lottery was the most popular activity for gamblers, while “casino

gambling accounted for the largest extent of gambling involvement” (Welte et al. 2002, p. 313).

Since college students are the frequent targets of pro-gambling advertising, it is not surprising that many such students participate in gambling-related activities during their leisure time. However, research on high school and college administrators' awareness of students' gambling-related problems showed “an important discrepancy between the prevalence of gambling-related problems among young people and the awareness of these problems among educators” (Shaffer et al. 2000, p. 93). Shaffer et al. (2005) reported that only 26 schools (22 percent) out of 119 scientifically selected colleges included in the 2001 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) had a gambling policy, while all of the schools in the sample had a student alcohol use policy.

Many other studies have indicated that gambling on college campuses is commonplace (for example, Winters et al. 1998, Platz and Millar 2001, Neighbors et al. 2002, Engwall et al. 2004). Some research has also found that gambling is a real problem on campuses and that a substantial proportion of students can be considered pathological gamblers (Platz and Millar 2001, Shaffer and Hall 2001, Engwall et al. 2004). On the other hand, some researchers focus on the relatively low rate of diagnosed pathological student gamblers and argue that people may overestimate college student gambling (Browne and Brown 1994, Winters et al. 1998, LaBrie et al. 2003, Slutske et al. 2003).

While most of the recent research on college student gambling was conducted in relatively large cities, this study was conducted in a small city with a population of less than 20,000 in upstate New York with a nearby land-based casino, Turning Stone Resort and Casino (TSRC). Five research questions guided this study: (1) Are gambling activities prevalent on the State

University of New York (SUNY) Cortland campus? (2) Does TSRC impact students' leisure lives, and if so, what effects does it have? (3) What are the primary motivations that draw students to gambling? (4) Is there a difference between recreational student gamblers and students with a gambling problem in the type of gambling activities in which they participate? (5) Is there a relationship between gambling participation and students' gender, age, grade point average (GPA), and household income?

## 2.0 METHODS

The sample was composed of SUNY Cortland students who were enrolled during the 2007-2008 academic year. Three hundred sixty-two valid questionnaires were collected between October 2007 and March 2008; this total represents about 5 percent of the student population at the college. The sample was evenly split between males (50.7 percent) and females (49.3 percent).

Three primary methods were used to approach students: (1) handing out questionnaires from a table set up in a major student-activity location such as the Student Union, athletic center, library, or dining hall; (2) approaching students near or in residence halls; and (3) approaching students in classrooms. The survey administrator emphasized to each student that participation was absolutely voluntary and that those who preferred not to participate could simply refuse with no consequences.

## 3.0 RESULTS

### 3.1 Socio-demographic Information

Table 1 shows the specific socio-demographic breakdown of the sample by gender, ethnicity, age, GPA, employment, year in school, and student athlete status. About one-third of the participants were juniors, 24.7 percent were seniors, 20.5 percent were freshmen, and 17.2 percent were sophomores. Most of the respondents were Caucasian (87.1 percent), which is consistent with the overall student population. About 68 percent of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old.

## 3.2 Research Questions

### 1. Are gambling activities prevalent on the SUNY Cortland campus?

The majority of students (76.2 percent) reported that they had participated in gambling in the past. Among students who had gambled before, 5.6 percent reported gambling weekly or more frequently; experts consider this level of participation in gambling to be pathological or potentially pathological (LaBrie et al. 2003). Students who gamble less than weekly were defined as recreational gamblers (see Table 2).

### 2. Does TSRC impact students' leisure lives, and if so, what effects does it have?

Table 3 displays students' knowledge of TSRC. About 80 percent of the respondents had heard of TSRC. Among the students who had heard of it, more than 80 percent thought that TSRC was not far away from campus. Despite rising gasoline prices, almost 60 percent of the respondents said that distance did not influence whether or not they chose to visit TSRC. Almost 40 percent of them had actually been to TSRC. Among the students who had been to TSRC, 85.7 percent had participated in gambling there, 40.7 percent had dined, 26.4 percent had watched shows, 20 percent had stayed there overnight, and 7.1 percent

**Table 1.—Demographic characteristics of the sample**

|                  |       |         |
|------------------|-------|---------|
| Gender           |       |         |
| Male             | 50.7% |         |
| Female           | 49.3% |         |
| Year of school   |       |         |
| Freshman         | 20.5% |         |
| Sophomore        | 17.2% |         |
| Junior           | 33.8% |         |
| Senior           | 24.7% |         |
| Other            | 3.9%  |         |
| Ethnicity        |       |         |
| African American | 3.4%  |         |
| Native American  | 1.4%  |         |
| Caucasian        | 87.1% |         |
| Asian            | 2.5%  |         |
| Hispanic         | 3.9%  |         |
| Other            | 1.7%  |         |
| Student-Athlete  | 16.9% |         |
| Average Age      | 21    | SD=3    |
| Average GPA      | 3.12  | SD=0.48 |

**Table 2.—Student gambling participation categories**

|                                                               |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Nongambler<br>(did not gamble at all)                         | 23.8% |
| Recreational gambler<br>(gambled less than one time per week) | 70.6% |
| Problem gambler<br>(gambled one or more times per week)       | 5.6%  |

had played golf. These statistics reveal that TSRC does impact the students' leisure lives. They know about TSRC and many have actually been there to participate in a range of activities.

*3. What are the primary motivations that draw students to gambling?*

The top two reasons for gambling activities were to have fun (66.3 percent) and to win money (59.9 percent), which is similar to the findings of Neighbors et al. (2002). Other motivations for gambling included excitement (35.8 percent), escape from school or work (8.2 percent), and other (1.1 percent).

A Chi-square analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between gender and the motivation for winning money ( $p < .001$ ) (Table 4), but there was no significant relationship between gender and seeking fun, excitement, or escape from school or work. However, significant relationships were found between the non-gambling and gambling participants for all the gambling motives except escape from school or work. In addition, statistical relationships were also found between the group of recreational gamblers and the group of problem gamblers and motivations. This result is congruent with Platz and Millar's (2001) finding that problem gamblers rated various motives as significantly more important than recreational gamblers.

*4. Is there a difference in the type of gambling activities that students participated in when comparing recreational student gamblers and students with a gambling problem?*

Table 5 lists a variety of gambling-related activities and the frequency with which students participated in

**Table 3.—Questions about Turning Stone Resort and Casino (TSRC)**

| Questions:                                                                                  | Yes   | No    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Have you heard of TSRC?                                                                     | 77.6% | 22.4% |
| If you have heard of TSRC, do you think TSRC is far away?                                   | 17.8% | 82.2% |
| If you have heard of TSRC, does the distance to TSRC influence whether or not you go there? | 42.4% | 57.6% |
| Have you been to TSRC?                                                                      | 38.7% | 61.3% |

**Table 4.—Relationship between winning money and gender**

|           |                 | Gender |        | Total  |
|-----------|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|
|           |                 | Male   | Female |        |
| Win money | No              |        |        |        |
|           | Count           | 45     | 66     | 111    |
|           | % within Gender | 29.0%  | 53.7%  | 39.9%  |
| Yes       | Count           | 110    | 57     | 167    |
|           | % within Gender | 71.0%  | 46.3%  | 60.1%  |
| Total     | Count           | 155    | 123    | 278    |
|           | % within Gender | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

these activities during the past school year. Playing cards, dice, and other games of chance were the most popular type of gambling activities among students, with 49.6 percent reporting some level of involvement. Among all these activities, a significant relationship ( $p < .001$ ) was found between gambling status and frequency of gambling in each activity (see Table 6). In all cases, students with a gambling problem participated in gambling activities more frequently than the recreational gambling group.

*5. Is there a relationship between gambling participation and students' gender, age, GPA, and household income?*

Figure 1 shows the frequency of gambling in general, broken down by gender. Male students were more likely to gamble than female students. Students who gambled more frequently had lower GPAs than students who gambled less (Fig. 2).

As in previous college-based studies, the rate of problem and pathological gambling was significantly

**Table 5.—Percentage of participants engaging in each gambling activity during the past school year by frequency**

| Gambling Activity            | Never | A few times/year,<br>< monthly | Monthly,<br>< weekly | ≥ weekly |
|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Professional sports          | 66.2  | 24.4                           | 4.00                 | 5.4      |
| College sports               | 75.2  | 18.8                           | 2.60                 | 3.4      |
| Horse/dog races              | 87.1  | 11.1                           | 0.30                 | 1.5      |
| Casino gambling              | 58.5  | 33.2                           | 6.30                 | 2.0      |
| Lottery/numbers              | 46.6  | 39.1                           | 10.9                 | 3.5      |
| Internet gambling            | 86.5  | 8.30                           | 2.90                 | 2.2      |
| Betting with a bookie        | 94.0  | 3.40                           | 0.60                 | 2.0      |
| Cards, dice, games of chance | 50.4  | 28.8                           | 13.7                 | 7.1      |

**Table 6.—Chi Square for different levels of gamblers on different types of gambling activities**

|                          | Professional sports          | College sports               | Horse/dog races               | Casino gambling               | Lottery numbers               | Internet gambling             | Betting with a bookie         | Cards and dice games         |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Recreational vs. problem | $\chi^2 = 107$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 140$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 32.4$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 86.6$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 69.0$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 87.2$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 79.0$<br>$p < .001$ | $\chi^2 = 111$<br>$p < .001$ |

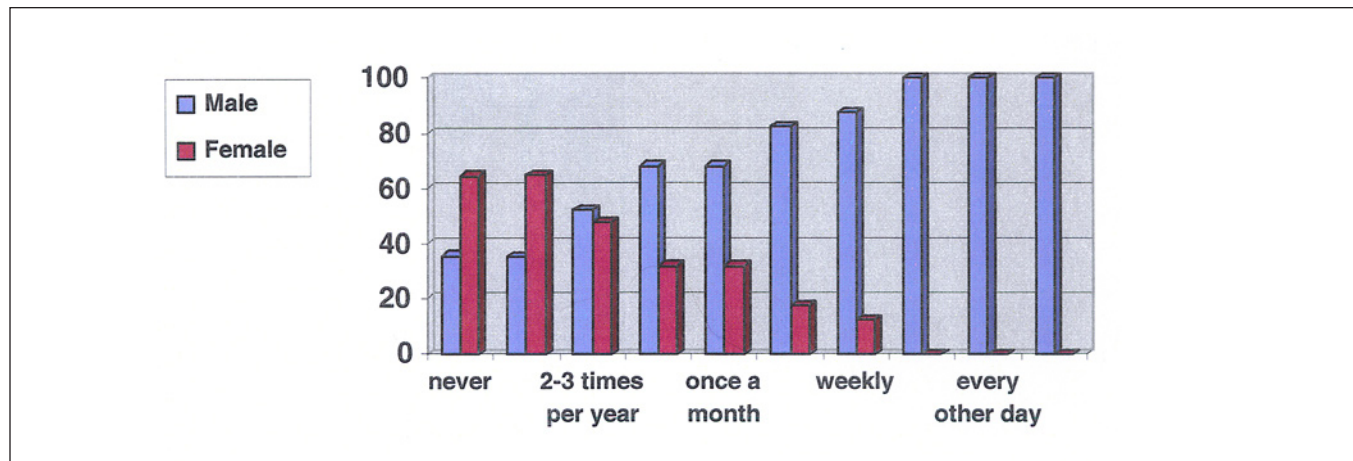


Figure 1.—Comparison of male and female gambling frequency.

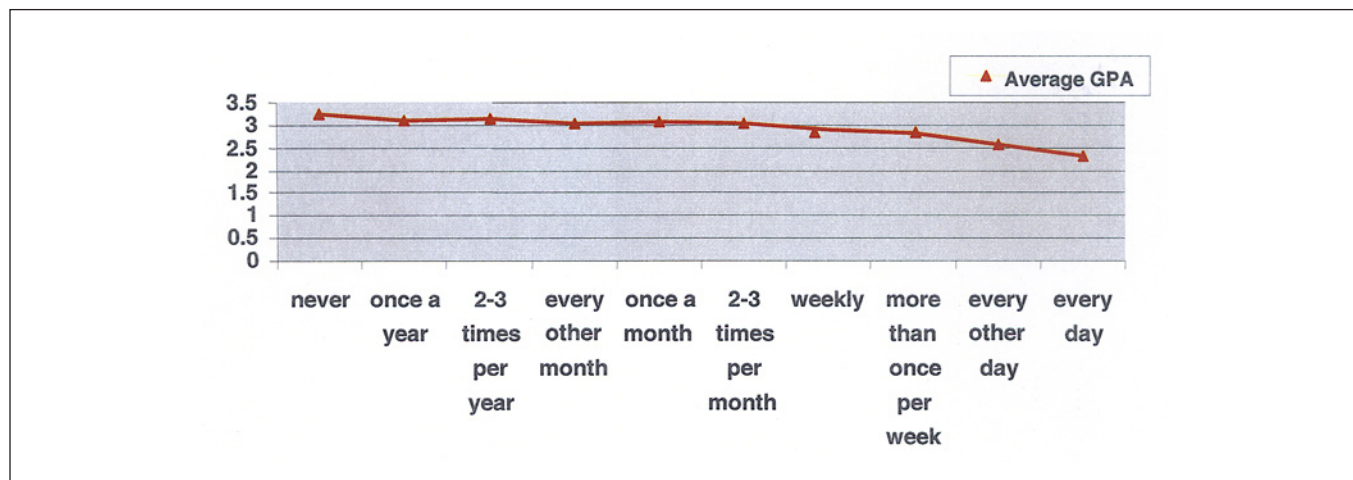


Figure 2.—GPA of students by frequency of gambling



higher for male students than for female students ( $\chi^2 = 16.224$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ .) The percentage of male students in the problem-gambler group was 10.5 percent versus only 0.6 percent for the female students.

Table 7 lists the amount of money that was actually spent on gambling by study participants in the past school year. There was a strong positive relationship between this variable and the frequency of gambling in general ( $r = .803$ ), which is consistent with the finding that students who reported gambling more frequently spend more money on gambling. Moreover, male students spend more money than female students ( $\chi^2 = 53.320$ ,  $p < .001$ ), consistent with the fact that male students are more likely to gamble.

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study found that gambling-related activities are popular and prevalent on this college campus. The majority of students (74.7 percent) participated in various forms of gambling, but most of them were recreational gamblers, with only 5.6 percent of the sample falling into the category of pathological or potentially pathological gamblers. This finding is consistent with the range of 4.67 to 6.56 percent in general among college students reported by Shaffer et al. (1997).

As found in previous studies, male students are significantly more likely to gamble than female students (Winters et al. 1998, LaBrie et al. 2003, Engwall et al. 2004), to spend more money on gambling, and to be more highly motivated to gamble for money. In addition, more male students than female students have been to TSRC.

Having fun and winning money are the primary motivations for gambling, as confirmed by the significant differences found between the gambling group and the nongambling group. The students went to TSRC more frequently for gambling than other activities, which reveals that the presence of TSRC has a great impact on these students.

**Table 7.—Money spent on gambling during the last school year**

| US Dollars   | Percent | US Dollars     | Percent |
|--------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| Less than 25 | 55.6    | 300-500        | 3.1     |
| 25-50        | 15.7    | 500-700        | 1.1     |
| 50-100       | 9.0     | 700-1000       | 0.3     |
| 100-200      | 7.6     | 1000-2000      | 0.8     |
| 200-300      | 3.7     | More than 2000 | 3.1     |

Since most schools have an alcohol use policy but do not have a gambling policy, this study provides valuable information to college administrators for deciding whether to institute a gambling policy. Specially, the findings of this study could be used by Student Affairs coordinators and campus counselors to plan activities and offer counseling services more effectively.

Volunteer samples were used for data collection because the students could be easily approached on the small campus. A random sampling method is suggested for future studies on larger populations. Qualitative methods are recommended for future studies because they may yield more details about students' gambling behaviors.

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