

# Baseline Study of Problem Gambling and Co-occurring Substance Use among Students at the University of Iowa

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## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to establish a baseline of college student gambling behaviors at the University of Iowa in order to allow for further research on the effects of casino development on a high risk taking college student population.

## INTRODUCTION

Until recently, topics that address college students risk taking behaviors, (Engwall, Hunter, & Steinberg, 2004; Winters, Bengston, Dorr, & Stinchfield, 1998) and the extent to which casino development affects college students has gone largely unnoticed by researchers and clinicians. However, since high risk behaviors tend to cluster, this is an important area for investigation, since an increase in one high risk behavior can lead to an associated increase in another. Thus, it has been found that gamblers are more likely than non-gamblers to binge drink, use marijuana and illicit drugs, and participate in unprotected sex, with the strongest relationship being between binge drinking and gambling (LaBrie et al, 2003).

The University of Iowa is attended by 29,000 students annually. The student population is known for its participation in high risk behaviors, as evidenced by two studies which found that 69.6% (n=1,468) and 74.9% (n=353) of students engaged in binge drinking two weeks before taking the survey in 1997-2001 and in 2003 respectively. The opening of a casino in a nearby city in August of 2006 provided the opportunity to study the effects of casino development on a college student population that engages in high risk behaviors.

Gambling activities engaged in by University of Iowa students twice a week or more

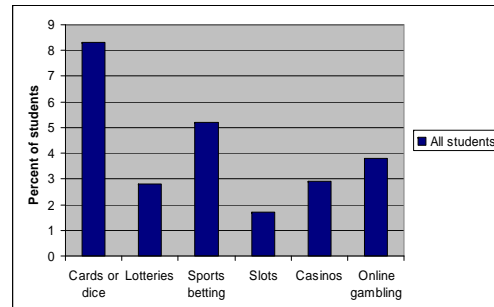


Figure 2

The aim of this study is:

To establish a baseline picture of college student drinking behaviors at the University of Iowa, to be compared to future biennial survey results, so that student's gambling habits can be monitored as the new casino further develops.

Gambling activities engaged in by University of Iowa students less than once a week or more

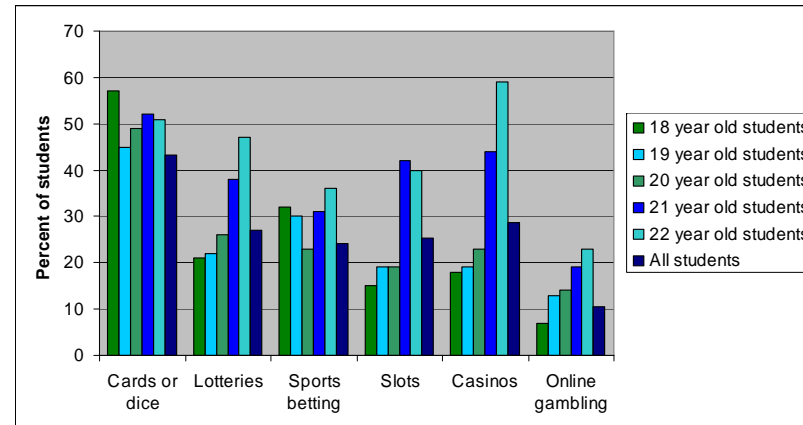


Figure 1

## RESULTS

### Descriptive

Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of students who engage in various gambling activities. They show that 43.3% of students have played cards or dice for money, 27% have bet on lotteries, 24.1% have bet on sports, 25.4% have played slots, 28.7% have gone to a casino, and 10.4% have gambled online for money. No more than 9% of students gambled more than once a week on a particular game.

### Prevalence of problem gambling

Figure 3 indicates that 15% of students may have a gambling problem, since 15.2% of students surveyed have felt a need to bet more and more money and 7.2% have lied to someone important in their lives about how much they have gambled.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. These results may reflect a baseline of gambling behaviors in the student group before a new gambling venue opens: the casino is 20 minutes away from campus.
2. Although students gamble infrequently during the week, 15% may have a gambling problem.
3. Since 57% of 18 year olds have gambled on cards or dice, 18% have been to a casino, and 12% may have a gambling problem, it could be beneficial to develop prevention programs which target first-year undergraduates prior to their attendance at the university.
4. Further studies will indicate whether gambling behaviors among students will increase or stabilize after the casino is opened.
5. Further studies of student gambling behaviors will indicate if there is a need to provide additional protection for college students due to their high rate of gambling as well as other high risk behaviors like binge drinking.

## METHODS

### Subjects

Eight hundred and twenty students enrolled in a mandatory health promotion class in October 2006 were solicited for participation in the study. The response rate was 96% with a total of 797 students completing the survey. Of the 797 students, 54.9% were female and 45.1% were male; 27.4% were freshmen, 20.2% were sophomores, 23.6% were juniors, 20.6% were seniors, and 8.1% were 5th year seniors and graduate students. The age distribution of participants ranged from 18 to 25 or older, with 18.1% being 18, 22.7% being 19, 21.9% being 20, 20.1% being 21, 9.3% being 22, and 7.8% being 23 or older. The composition of the sample was also an accurate representation of the ethnicity of the student population at the University of Iowa, with Caucasians representing 90.3% of the sample, African Americans 2.7%, and Hispanic or Latin Americans 1.7%.

### Questionnaire

Eight gambling-related items taken from two previously validated screening tools, the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) and the Lie/Bet Screening Tool, were included in a pre-existing 100-item student health survey.

The items from the SOGS were used to gather descriptive data on general gambling behaviors by students at the University of Iowa. These questions assessed how frequently each student engaged in the following activities: (1) playing cards or dice for money, (2) betting on lotteries, (3) betting on sports, (4) playing slot machines, (5) going to casinos, (6) gambling for money online.

The items inserted from the Lie/Bet questionnaire were used to assess the prevalence of problem gambling at the University of Iowa. The two items from the Lie/Bet questionnaire are as follows: (1) have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money? (2) have you ever lied to people important to you about how much you gamble?

Prevalence of problem gambling among University of Iowa students

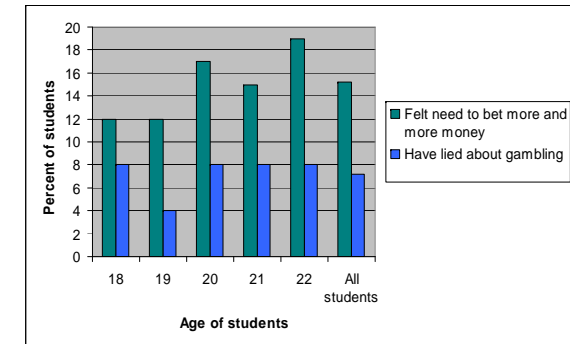


Figure 3

## DISCUSSION

The results indicate that a higher percentage of students at the University of Iowa have engaged in gambling behavior than previously reported for undergraduates by Shaffer, Hall, and Vanderbilt (1999). Furthermore, with the 15.2% of students admitting to having felt the need to bet more and more money, and 7.2% admitting to having lied to someone about how much they had gambled, these findings may indicate that up to 15% may have a problem with gambling.

### Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest:

The authors of this presentation have no financial relationships that relate to the topic of this presentation.

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