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**Learning**

from the January 25, 2006 edition



**GLAMOUR GAME:** TV shows like this one featuring 'Desperate Housewives' actors, have popularized poker. Shown l. to r.: a dealer, Ricardo Antonio Chavira, Steven Culp, Doug Savant, and James Denton. PAUL DRINKWATER/BRAVO

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# Campuses slow to deal with growth in gambling

By **Matt Bradley** | *Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor*

When a local bookie demanded that Jay either pay up or take a beating, the University of Maryland student might have realized he had a gambling problem.

"I did actually go to Gamblers' Anonymous," says Jay, now 28, who asked that his last name not be used. "At that time, it was hard because I was a college student, and I couldn't relate to the problems [adult gamblers] were having with their families and wives.... I didn't stay because it didn't make sense to me. I just thought I was a college kid trying to have fun."

Amid the wide range of drug, alcohol, and rape-crisis counseling programs at his school, Jay found little help for his gambling problem, despite what he saw as an endemic betting culture on campus.

These days, the "hobby" formerly known as a vice is more glamorous than ever. College students are the prize

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demographic for arresting cable-TV poker competitions and glittery betting websites.

University administrators may finally be looking to address the trend. But pitched against a student body flush with easy credit, Internet access, and idle time, gambling's lure may have the better hand.

Among young American men ages 14 to 22, the number who said they gambled once a month rose by 20 percent from 2004 to 2005, according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Of the 2.9 million young people who gamble every week, 80 percent are men.

"At the college and university level, poker is pretty much the hottest thing going," says Mike Edwards, business development and marketing manager for absolutepoker.com. The Internet poker website caters to college students by offering to pay a semester's tuition for tournament winners.

"We want to embrace this, and we want to create a unique value proposition for students who are playing poker online," Mr. Edwards said by phone. The company is based in Canada, where gambling is legal. Online gambling is now a \$12 billion industry, up from \$3.1 billion in 2001, according to industry analyst, Christiansen Capital Advisors, with the majority of Internet casinos operating outside the US.

"In our view, much of the media glamorization of gambling has been done without any responsible gaming message," says Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling in Washington, D.C. "Can you imagine a world series of drinking?" he says, alluding to the televised "World Series of Poker." "It would have warning signs and responsible consumption messages. You see almost none of that with televised gambling shows."

One recent, though extreme, example of the problems gambling has created for college students involved Greg Hogan, the sophomore class president at Lehigh University, who last month robbed a bank in Allentown, Pa. Mr. Hogan had run up about \$5,000 in Internet gambling debts.

The private nature and deep penetrations of Internet gambling has rendered nearly unenforceable any rules designed to curb the campus betting culture. The prevailing social attitudes and typically permissive campus climates may also contribute to the lack of action.

"The vast majority of schools we talk to have no formal or informal

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policy [regarding gambling]," says Mr. Whyte. "They see gambling as almost a victimless crime. That's certainly the way it's treated by law enforcement. In general, there's a lack of awareness."

Extending the same counseling services to problem gamblers that are normally afforded to alcoholics and drug abusers, however, is a different story. Jeffrey Derevensky, codirector for the International Center for Youth Gambling Problems & High Risk Behaviour at McGill University in Montreal, says many campuses are behind when it comes to counseling strategies needed to meet gambling addictions.

"I don't think they can regulate it, but I think they should provide counseling services and be aware that this is a problem," says Mr. Derevensky. "Most counselors have very little training in terms of understanding what the issues are around gambling and what constitutes a gambling problem."

One of the first counseling efforts to treat problem gambling is in its infancy at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The new programming strategy aims first to address the lack of awareness among parents, staff, and students. Kim Dude, director of Missouri's Wellness Resource Center, anticipates playing a pioneering role.

"I'm excited about the fact that it's cutting edge," says Ms. Dude. "I wish there were other resources to tap into, but since there aren't, we're going to create resources for other campuses."

Experts recommend prevention strategies similar to those used with drugs and alcohol - namely, youth education. As with smoking, drinking, and illegal drug use, the earlier someone starts gambling, the more addiction-prone they become, says the National Research Council, a nonprofit policy think tank in Washington, D.C. A high school gambling habit can be exacerbated in an unsupervised college environment, says Whyte. Tackling problem gamblers before college students leave home - or enter high school - is a crucial preventive strategy.

"If you're not reaching kids by middle school, by the time [they] get to college, we can't do prevention campaigns anymore," says Whyte. "Most college kids have gambled. It's all about education."

But until antigambling education is the norm in grade school, the fact

#### Gambling stats

**2.9 million:** Number of Americans between the ages of 14 and 22 who gamble on cards at least once a week.

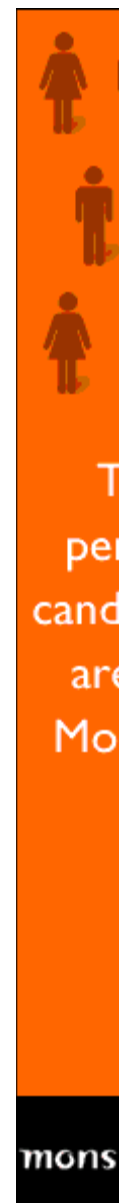
**50.4%:** Percentage of male college students who gamble on cards at least once a month.

**26.6%:** Percentage of female college students who gamble on cards at least once a month.

**\$3.1 billion:** Revenue generated from Internet gambling in 2001.

**\$12 billion:** Estimated Internet gambling revenue in 2005.

Source: The Annenberg Public Policy Center's 2005 National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth; Christiansen Capital Advisors, LLC



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that gambling appears to have taken off with the "beautiful people" won't help.

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