

Global Intellectual Capital

How Universities Can Make Us Smarter

By Bo Bernhard

In his 2013 “State of the State” address, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval expressed genuine optimism as he outlined his vision for the future of the state. Sandoval noted the continued evolution of Las Vegas as a world-famous destination and pointed out that the city’s tourism industry seemed to be emerging from the Great Recession. However, Sandoval also cautioned against complacency. After all, cities that have neglected their primary industry (often in an understandable and noble attempt to encourage diversification) have struggled through a “lost generation”—think Detroit or Pittsburgh, both of which have experienced revivals, but only after significant downturns when their primary industry went into the tank.

This brings up an important question—one that is too often posited as an either-or proposition: should our leaders pursue economic diversification, or should they “water the green spots” and build upon an economy’s existing strengths? Complex as this question may seem, the answer—at a superficial level, at least—is strikingly simple.

The answer is “yes.” Clearly, *both* are needed. We should encourage the growth of exotic new plants in our figurative garden, and we should also water the green spots that serve as the engines of economies.

The vision that Governor Sandoval advocated on that day, against an uncertain backdrop of a palpable but fragile recovery, was brilliant: let’s develop Las Vegas’ status as a global intellectual capital. After all, none of us knows what tomorrow brings (be wary of the dozens upon dozens of presentations, delivered with certitude, on the “casino floor of the future”!) But what we *do* know for certain is that we will be better off facing those uncertainties if we are armed with the brightest minds and the intellectual capital to respond to (and yes, anticipate) the inevitable changes.

This is where higher education can come into play—where we at the UNLV International Gaming Institute, can contribute intellectual capital with our team of bright and diverse minds. As Doris Kearns Goodwin famously posited in *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, this “diverse and sharp minds together” strategy maximizes chances of positive outcomes during uncertain times (and they are *all* uncertain times).



Ultimately, this was the very charge that Governor Sandoval put forth on that day: bring together a range of experts with significant intellectual capital, and unite them with the goal of building a “global intellectual capital.” After all, a university’s unique spaces, dedicated to objectivity, teaching, and a research-based approach, can help prepare individuals, organizations, and communities for the complex twists and turns that await us all in the future.

Three years after that fateful speech, the International Gaming Institute has answered Governor Sandoval’s call with a number of important initiatives, each led by colleagues with deep and diverse intellectual capital. The IGI’s first initiative belongs firmly in the “New Nevada” economy: our new Center for Gaming Innovation. This Center takes aim at the oft-expressed lament that today’s gambling games simply do not appeal to millennials. Fortunately, this is one thing that universities boast: millennials (and lots of them—more than 20,000 alone at UNLV!)

Recognizing this, our innovation team (led by former ShuffleMaster CEO Dr. Mark Yoseloff and former Las Vegas Sands executive Robert Rippee) created the world’s first academic center dedicated to the invention of new gambling games, followed by the world’s first academic center dedicated to non-gaming innovations in the rest of the property. Unsurprisingly, these two entities have found much to collaborate on, as the lines between “gaming spaces” and “non-gaming spaces” are becoming increasingly blurred in today’s integrated resorts. For

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instance, this fall, we are launching an eSports lab, housed within our casino lab, but with a number of conventional hospitality touches. This new lab blends diverse types of expertise (with law, engineering, and management instructors all contributing), in hopes of better understanding what feels like the (near) future. Meanwhile, more than three dozen students have invented new gambling games in various stages of the patent process, with a half dozen of those ideas already coming to life on casino floors around the world.

Of course, even the most innovative can screech to a halt when confronted by regulatory structures that are overly burdensome. Gaming regulators have grappled with this tension for years, of course, and many are dedicated to finding meaningful solutions. To this end, the IGI is seeking to help inform and support this innovation-regulation nexus by launching another first—the first academic center dedicated to the study and dissemination of gaming regulatory best practices.

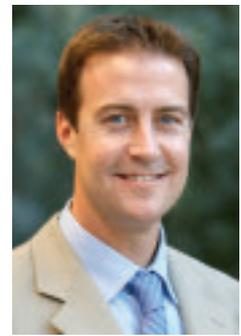
Our new International Center for Gaming Regulation is led by Andre Wilsenach, a famously sharp regulator to whom the gaming world has listened so attentively for so long, and on subjects as diverse as the use of integrated casino resorts as a nation-building tool (in his native South Africa) and the evolution of Internet gambling (most recently in Alderney). Together, the IGI’s “bring lots of great minds under one roof” philosophy is already providing hope for those who long for days when innovative new ideas spring to life in the gambling spaces of tomorrow, overseen (and indeed, facilitated) by regulators that understand the importance of well-monitored innovation.

Several of these cross-disciplinary initiatives enjoyed a positive and animated reception at the recent 16th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking (forever and affectionately known as the “Eadington Conference”), held June 6-10 at The Mirage in Las Vegas. The conference kicked off with an energetic opening keynote by Steve Wynn,

who returned to the house that he built more than a quarter century ago. Afterwards, a record-breaking 610 attendees from 31 countries (and more than four dozen academic disciplines) debated the key issues facing these kinds of gambling houses—and any number of other gambling environments that have emerged since the days when the gambling act was hosted solely within physical confines. This is the conference spirit that our founder Bill Eadington intended: bring lots of bright minds together, from diverse backgrounds, all under one roof, and turn them loose. The result: new ideas, and more importantly, new collaborations.

This “Eadington spirit” was reflected in a multi-disciplinary conversation that began at the conference and that culminated just two months later in a historic agreement signed on August 1, 2016, in Sydney, Australia. At the conference, the University of Sydney’s famed gambling researcher Alex Blaszczynski started discussing the ways in which psychology researchers could lend a hand when trying to prevent match fixing—specifically, by developing profiles of those who might be vulnerable to engaging in match fixing behaviors. This field of study is grounded in the burgeoning study of the psychology of the gambler. Regulatory leaders at the conference, meanwhile, expressed a strong interest in understanding what could well be a preventative science—or at the very least, understanding, scientifically, the way that the match fixer’s mind works. Together, this legal-regulatory-psychology-policy collaboration might well provide some solutions and safety nets. Indeed, today, the questions that challenge us are so multi-faceted, they almost mandate these kinds of multi-disciplinary approaches.

Appropriately, Governor Sandoval—himself a proud “student of Bill’s” during his undergraduate days at the University of Nevada, Reno—was on hand in Sydney when the agreement was signed between the UNLV International Gaming Institute and the University of Sydney’s Gambling Research Clinic. This is what universities, at their best, are good at: convening sharp minds, exploring difficult questions, and disseminating answers through strong teaching efforts. They are good at producing reliable research, and they are good at spreading research-based knowledge through teaching. This is what great educators like Bill Eadington leave to us, as their most lasting gift. After all, we cannot know what the future brings, but we can be more confident knowing that those “in the know” will work together to help figure it all out. ♣



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Over his twenty-year career examining the impacts of the global gaming industry, Dr. Bo Bernhard has worked on all six inhabited continents and in more than 50 jurisdictions overall. In his current role as Executive Director at UNLV's International Gaming Institute, Bo has delivered over 200 keynote addresses to global government, industry, regulatory, and policy leaders.

He has published in the top journals in both the business sciences (including Cornell Quarterly) and the social sciences (including a guest edited special volume of American Behavioral Scientist), and he currently serves as an Executive Editor for a leading peer-reviewed gaming journal, Gaming Research and Review.

In 2013, he took over the leadership of the gaming research field's largest, oldest, and most prestigious international research conference, the International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking, an event founded in 1974 by Dr. Bernhard's mentor, Dr. Bill Eadington.

Over the course of his career, Dr. Bernhard's teaching and research work has earned him several awards. In 2016, he was given the prestigious Philip G. Satre Chair in Gaming Studies at the University of Nevada Reno.