

Study will try to make video lotto less attractive

BY PHIL E. LEWIS

What is it that drives people to mortgage their homes in hopes of winning big? Perhaps video lotto terminals are just too damn attractive.

As a result, the provincial government is funding a study through Dalhousie's psychology department to explore ways of making video lottery terminals (VLTs) less appealing to problem gamblers.

The project is headed by professor Jim Blackburn, in association with professors Pat McGrath, Sherry Stewart, and Ray Klein. These academics will be studying what components of the VLTs cause some gamblers to become addicted.

The initial phase involves negotiations between Spiello (a video chip manufacturer) and the various levels of gaming organizations in the provincial government.

Spiello will create specially designed VLTs for the experiment. These VLTs will be the same as the standard ones, except scientists will be able to alter certain variables.

"We hope to have the machines ready for Jim [Blackburn] within the next month," said John LaRoque of the Nova Scotia Department of Health. The type of machines Blackman and associates will be working on are referred to as the Big Bertha style.

"We're going to single out all the bells and whistles in the machines to determine what is enticing to problematic gamblers," Blackman said.

One of the central variables that will be tested is the speed of play. The researchers hope to manipulate these variables in "problem" players against a control group. If the effect is significant, then the researchers may be able to infer which variables separate the people who can play

occasionally for sport and those who become dependant.

The subjects will be chosen from an already completed phone survey which quizzed candidates about their frequency of play.

VLTs pay out 95 per cent of the funds put into them. LaRoque says that players do not realize the rules of randomness.

"Most players believe that if they sit at the same machine for three hours they will have a better chance than if they were to leave and come back," he said.

In 1995, the government passed bill 120 which forced the Sheraton Casinos to pay \$1-million to the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation. In conjunction with this, the NS Gaming Corporation receives \$600,000 from the VLTs.

In perspective, the government's share only accounts for one per cent of the total revenue from the machines. This money goes towards efforts to help problem gamblers as well as projects to help deter future addicts.

Dalhousie's study is receiving \$100,000 from the provincial government to finance its research. This project is of particular interest because it is the first of its kind to be attempted.

There has been research involving

what kind of characteristics are common to problem gamblers, but not on the characteristics of the

Psychiatric Association as an addictive disorder," LaRoque said.

Past research has led to the belief that gambling addicts have a tendency to be from lower education and economic situations as well as having certain habits that may make them more susceptible.

"The tendency is especially strong in males if they start playing games such as cards when they are young with their parents," LaRoque said.

There are 40 dependency centres across the province, with counsellors that are specially trained to help gambling addicts.

There are some similarities between counselling gambling addicts and other substance abusers says LaRoque.



VLTs may be re-designed to be less attractive to gamblers. (Photo by Matt Barrie)

machines that draw people in.

"It has only been within the last five years that gambling has been identified by the American

"The major difference between gambling addictions and other addictions is that you don't put a substance in your body," he said.

Street Feat a new twist on panhandling

BY LAURA GRAY

City counsellors are in the discussion stage of a by-law which would restrict panhandling in Halifax — but *Street Feat*, a newspaper sold by panhandlers, has other ideas.

The by-law, although still in preliminary stages, would place limitations on where and when people would be allowed to panhandle in the city.

Nadine Smillie of the Halifax Regional Municipality legal services

says that at this point, the issue is merely "something that's being looked at."

"Until we get an idea of what people think is reasonable, we won't get anything down on paper to send to council," she says.

To get this sort of feedback, discussions are being held between community representatives, police and store owners.

Smillie says that this is an "issue that's raised fairly regularly". Many involved in the possible legislation

are interested in the effects of panhandling on tourism and the disturbance of those walking the streets.

Marie Koehler of *Street Feat* newspaper has a different perspective.

"Poverty is a systematic problem and we need to solve it in a large way," Koehler says.

She says that *Street Feat* is doing its part in a small way by providing alternatives to panhandling.

The newspaper, started by two volunteers, is partially funded by Human Resources Canada, but also receives support through sales, both on the street and through subscriptions. Many people sell *Street Feat* as an alternative to panhandling.

Koehler says that although it hasn't yet happened, the newspaper is also interested in having some of these people write stories to give an account of life on the streets.

MacLellan interrupts dinner

BY GREG MCFARLANE

Students have little to go on in next month's provincial elections, but Premier Russell MacLellan hopes that he gets their votes.

The Nova Scotian Liberal leader stopped by Shirreff Hall and Howe Hall on Tuesday night to share his ideas while students were eating dinner. Foremost on his mind, and the minds of students, was the issue of student debt.

Although MacLellan has taken some steps toward easing the pressure of student debt, he says he is waiting on Canada's federal budget, due to be released on Feb. 24, to provide students with real relief.

"We feel that a lot of students are working hard and coming out of school owing too much money. It is very difficult for them to get a start in life with that kind of a debt hanging over their head," MacLellan said.

"As a province, we've put some money forward to reduce [student debt], and we're asking the federal

government to do the same."

MacLellan says that Nova Scotia is getting the short end of the stick when it comes to education funding. Twenty-four per cent of students in Nova Scotian universities are from other provinces — the national average in that category is seven per cent. MacLellan wants to see the funding formula revamped so that it better reflects where students go to school, as opposed to where they are from.

"The funding that is given by the federal government is given to the provinces where the students live. This is costing Nova Scotia \$25-million a year," MacLellan said.

"Our post-secondary institutions are national institutions for the benefit of the whole country. Students in Canada should be able to select a university in any part of the country, and not have that university suffer financially. So we are asking for a reassessment of that formula."

Last year, the Quebec government raised the tuition fees for out of province students. While a similar move here would help to cure Nova

Scotia's current woes, MacLellan hopes that his government, if elected, would not have to enact such measures.

"That is putting up provincial barriers to education. I think that's wrong," MacLellan said. "What we want is across the board fairness in funding from the federal government. If that can be in place, then we want to welcome students from outside of Nova Scotia."

"[People from other provinces] want their sons and daughters to [get their education in Nova Scotia]. We have great education, good communities, and it is safe — why shouldn't they come here? However, we feel that if they do come here, we should get credit for that by the federal government."

Nova Scotia's provincial election will take place on Mar. 24. MacLellan visited students at Dalhousie as part of his campaign, a step that Jim Rossiter, the treasurer of the Dalhousie Liberal Association, feels is especially important for the student-heavy riding of Halifax Citadel.

"The residences are key. People in residence talk to each other so much; they are able to influence each other," Rossiter said. "Strategically, they are very important for the Liberals."



News in brief

New computers stolen from campus

Brand new computers were stolen from university departmental offices earlier this month.

The departments of English and History were broken into, and a number of top-of-the-line computers were stolen — one still in its packaging. Dalhousie's public relations officer Michelle Gallant says that she can confirm computer components were stolen from the departments of History and English earlier this month, but cannot release any further details. "Even confirming number and specifics can make it impossible to track down the stolen items, and this is obviously a critical matter," she said. "Our interest right now is to: A, try to get back the equipment and B, get the people who have taken it."

Peter Brown, of Dal Security, backed up Gallant.

"The break-ins are under investigation by the Halifax Regional Police, so we cannot comment at this time."

Protest against Canada-US action against Iraq

An on-campus protest against Canada's backing of US military action against Iraq could prove successful as the result of a mass e-mailing blitz. The World University Service of Canada, among other campus organizations, has sent out e-mails to all students on campus informing them about a protest to be held Friday, Feb. 20.

"Several local groups, opposed to Canada's participation in another Gulf War, are holding a peaceful demonstration," the message states. Those interested are asked to meet in front of the Dal Student Union Building at 2 pm, and to bring banners and placards.

Demonstrators will march into downtown Halifax from the campus. In addition to Friday's protest, the Prime Minister's office is accepting phone calls and e-mails from Canadians wishing to express their opinion about Canada's stance on the backing of a US-led military attack on Iraq. Those interested can call the PM's office at (613) 992-4211 or e-mail him at pm@pm.gc.ca.