

# TOOLS FOR TACKLING irresponsible gambling



A major new research project at the Faculty of Economics and Business aims to provide gamblers with strategies for overcoming the flaws in their thinking that lead them to gamble irresponsibly.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Elizabeth Cowley, who is an expert on memory distortion, and her colleague Christina Anthony have received more than \$300,000 in ARC Discovery Grant funding for their three-year research project, which is targeted at people who sometimes spend more than they intended to on gambling. Irresponsible gambling of this kind has been rising steadily in Australia since the 1990s, when government policy changes opened up the legalised gambling industry.

As Cowley explains, the research project aims to help irresponsible gamblers overcome one of the main errors in their thinking: the way they remember gambling situations in a distorted manner.

“One of the ways people justify things they know they shouldn’t be doing is by reconstructing their memory of past experiences,” she says.

“In previous studies funded by an ARC Linkage Grant with industry partner Russell Corporate Advisory, we found that gamblers distorted their memory after gambling to convince themselves that they had a better time than they really did. The biased memory is then used to justify potentially irresponsible gambling decisions.”

Building on that previous research, Cowley and Anthony will now develop practical tools for helping gamblers overcome their flawed thinking in order to avoid making decisions they regret later.

“It is about empowering people to control their own consumption behaviour by providing them with new ways of thinking about or ‘re-thinking’ the situation,” she says.

The study is one of a number of research projects Cowley is currently involved with. In collaboration with colleagues at HEC Paris, she is researching how people cope with ambivalent feelings, while in another collaboration with Erasmus University in Rotterdam, she is exploring the nature of prospective memory, or how we remember to do things.

In addition to her own studies, Cowley also oversees the Faculty’s doctoral program in her role as Director of Doctoral Studies. The PhD and Master of Philosophy programs together include more than 200 students.

