

# The New Criterion

Notes & Comments September 2004

## Meanwhile in the ivory tower

*On the new trend of “casino and gambling majors” in universities across the country.*

One of the things middle-class parents worry most about is saving enough money to pay for Junior’s education. We won’t even mention how much it costs to go to private college because by the time you read this the figure will be out of date. It is reassuring, then, that college is a place of rigorous study where students steep themselves in the riches of the past in an environment conducive to building good character and responsible citizens. Consider the news report from the Associated Press about the recent vogue of “casino and gambling majors.” No, we are not making this up:

In the last five years or so, the courses and majors have cropped up at colleges including San Diego State University, Michigan State University, Tulane University’s University College in New Orleans, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. They join the pioneering University of Nevada at Las Vegas and Reno ...

Courses range from the study of gambling laws around the country to operating on sovereign Indian land, plus biometrics and “facial recognition” for casino security. Other courses train students to be pit bosses, dealers and slot machine repairers.

It gives a whole new dimension of meaning to the old song from the *Carmina Burana*: “O Fortuna, velut luna.” Note, by the way, that many state institutions are going in for “casino studies,” which means that your tax dollars are spent making teenagers more avid and better informed gamblers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the eldest Bennet daughter, the beautiful and mild Jane, is finally shocked when it transpires that Wickham has not only run off with her youngest sister but has left gambling debts behind him. “A gamester!,” she cries in horror. But that was before the age of “casino studies” and, besides, who reads Jane Austen anymore?

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