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Introduction

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Introduction

Welcome to Volume 16 of *Major Themes in Economics*. All papers in *Major Themes* are written by senior economics majors at the University of Northern Iowa. Complete funding for this issue was provided by a generous contribution from Ron Rolighed, '89, a past author whose article appeared in 1989 in a previous incarnation of *Major Themes*.

The debate about whether to build more casinos continues to rage in Iowa and across the nation. Proponents of casinos claim that casinos can help lower the unemployment rate. **Amber Irmeier** looks at data from 1990 to 2012 on 56 Midwestern counties that host casinos. Her findings are consistent with the claim that casinos reduce unemployment. Whether this is sufficient to compensate for the external costs of casinos is left for others to decide.

Every year the United States Agency for International Development distributes large amounts of food to the rest of the world. The stated purpose is to alleviate hunger, but some claim that it may not necessarily go to the countries that need it the most. **Beth Monnier** examines how food aid was allocated in 2012 and finds that countries with higher death rates from malnutrition received more aid than other countries.

Even the President of the United States has been known to fill out a bracket for "March Madness." **Cameron Fuqua** has developed a model to predict which teams are likely to reach the "final four" of the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament. His model predicts the "final four" better than any other known published rating system; it is an impressive feat.

In 2007, a referee in the National Basketball Association pleaded guilty to providing inside information to gamblers who bet on NBA games. He also admitted that he bet on NBA games himself. **Travis Buhrow** wanted to know what effect the scandal had on the business of professional basketball. He discovers that, all else equal, NBA franchise revenues actually increased after the scandal. He also speculates on why that may have happened.

Technological change has produced enormous benefits to humanity. It has made work less arduous and raised standards of living. In the process, it has destroyed old jobs and created new ones. Some have worried that the destruction might outpace the creation, leading to rising unemployment. In the past this has not happened, and the benefits of better technology have been widely distributed. Yet as machines become capable of doing increasingly sophisticated tasks, growing numbers of people may find themselves unemployable. **Loren Nerhus** speculates on the future of the labor market.

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