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University News & Information

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Cal Poly Launches Wine and Viticulture Degree Program

SAN LUIS OBISPO – The Cal Poly College of Agriculture is offering a new bachelor's degree in wine and viticulture, effective spring quarter 2004.

The new wine and viticulture major will focus on blending viticulture, enology and the business aspects of the wine industry in a degree program aimed at producing graduates ready to step right into careers in

California's multibillion-dollar wine industry, said Cal Poly Dean of Agriculture David Wehner. California is the fourth largest grape producer in the world after France, Italy and Spain and accounts for 90 percent of America's grape production.

"With the addition of the wine and viticulture major, Cal Poly's College of Agriculture is now poised to offer students a unique and powerful hands-on education in all aspects of the wine industry," Wehner said. "This program represents a campus-wide academic alliance of our polytechnic strengths in the applied sciences, production, food processing, marketing and business supported by solid industry partnerships," he added.

California State University Chancellor Charles Reed granted Cal Poly approval for the program in a Feb. 13 letter to Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker. Cal Poly added a wine and viticulture minor in 1999 that now has over 127 graduates. The college has been building program facilities and planning the curriculum for the wine and viticulture program for the past six years with support from industry partners.

The college is currently partnering with E&J Gallo on a 152-acre, state-of-the-art vineyard on Cal Poly lands. It also offers a wine analysis laboratory certified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Students in the new degree program will have the use of both.

The university's location in the heart of one of the state's premium wine growing areas can only strengthen the advantage it offers students and industry, added Wehner.

The university is surrounded by California's Central Coast wine country, which has gained increasing notice since the 1990s as one of the nation's emerging premium wine-grape-growing regions. The Paso Robles, Edna Valley, Arroyo Grande Valley, Santa Maria and Santa Ynez Valley wine regions are within easy reach of students and instructors.

"The diversity of climate regions on the Central Coast makes it an ideal area for producing a broad range of varieties, from heat-loving zinfandel to cool-climate pinot noir," said Cal Poly Agribusiness Professor Phil Doub.

Students in the new degree program will have the advantage of being able to do senior projects, internships and fieldwork at area wineries and vineyards. The experience will enhance the learning process for students

and provide local wineries with an educated labor pool, said Cal Poly Viticulture Professor Keith Patterson.

"Our curriculum requires a mandatory industry internship. That's one thing that will really set our program apart," Patterson stressed. "All

of our students will work through summer and spend one quarter working through the crush and harvest to gain actual experience. That's one of the great things Cal Poly offers – that learn-by-doing tradition is still in operation here."

With the addition of the new degree, Cal Poly joins UC Davis and Fresno State University in offering viticulture and enology programs. Both universities have well-respected programs, Wehner noted, adding that Cal

Poly already has a formal partnership with UC Davis in graduate agricultural education programs.

The unique focus of the Cal Poly wine and viticulture degree will be the

blending of practical hands-on experience in the vineyards with both enology science and business and marketing courses, College of

Agriculture officials explained.

“By the time they graduate from Cal Poly,” Patterson explained, “students interested in going into enology will also know how to market and sell wine, and students interested in the business side of the wine industry and wine marketing will know how to grow grapes and make wine.”

For more information on the degree program, visit the College of Agriculture web site at: <http://calpolyag.com/>.

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