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A Perfect Educational Pairing

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A perfect educational pairing

WSET classes at Linfield offer an approachable entry to a globally recognized wine program

By Kathy Foss



WSET
APPROVED
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It's not every day you walk into a modern science classroom and see the tabletops set with white placemats and rows of freshly cleaned wine glasses. Four at each setting, to be exact. But early on a recent Saturday morning, ten people walked into Linfield University's state-of-the-art science complex

to learn about and taste wines as part of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Level 1 Award in Wines course.

"Because of the affordability of the program, the Level 1 class attracts a wide range of students," instructor Stephanie Mitchell '23 said. "It really is a place for everybody – not just the professional or the major enthusiast – to learn more about wine and the wine industry."

That turned out to be true of the diverse group of students assembled on this day. Among them was a tasting room employee looking to advance her career, a real estate agent wanting to make a career change, a doctor whose friend – a winery owner – recommended the class, a server from a Portland restaurant, a casino food and hospitality manager, and an enthusiast who just wanted to learn more.

Throughout the day, this group of strangers would bond over testing their ability to taste sourness via pH strips, reciting in unison the various mnemonic devices to remember facts for their exam ("it's Blended in Bordeaux" and "CHablis is made from CHardonnay") and exploring pairings of salty, sweet and savory snacks on ten wines.

"Linfield started offering WSET qualification courses as an enhancement to the wine studies program and to educate the Willamette Valley wine industry and consumers.

Everyone wins when they choose Linfield University to take their WSET courses."

–Stephanie Mitchell '23, WSET instructor

The Wine & Spirit Education Trust is a globally recognized provider of wine, spirits and sake education and qualifications (a type of educational certificate). The organization was founded in the United Kingdom in 1969, and started offering programs in the United States in the 1990s. Today, there is a worldwide network of more than 900 WSET course providers in 70 countries, known as Approved Programme Providers (APPs). Linfield, which has been an APP since June

AN EDUCATION IN GOOD TASTE: The WSET Level 1 Award in Wine offers a beginner-level introduction to wine and covers everything from fermentation to pairings.



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What is Wine?

Wine is fermented grape juice. The grapes are crushed to release their sweet juice. Alcoholic fermentation is needed to change the grape juice into wine.

Types of a Grape

There are two principal types of grapes: white grapes and black grapes. On the whole, black grapes look very similar. The key difference between them is that black grapes have deeply coloured skins that also contain stems.

Grape Skins

This is a thick grape, which has a deeply coloured skin. The skin also contains tannins, which can make your mouth feel dry. The skin of white grapes has a golden colour.



Pulp

The pulp of a grape is soft and fleshy. The colour of the pulp is the same regardless of the colour of the grape skin. The pulp contains the grape juice, which is mostly made up of water, sugar and acid.

Alcoholic Fermentation

In order for alcoholic fermentation to take place, yeast must be added. Yeast are microscopic organisms that eat sugar and convert it into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. In most cases, the yeast is added to the juice before it is fermented. The sugar that the yeast eat is converted into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. The alcohol is then distilled into the wine. The carbon dioxide gas is released into the atmosphere.



2019, is one of only four in the Pacific Northwest offering such courses.

“Linfield started offering WSET qualification courses as an enhancement to the wine studies program and to educate the Willamette Valley wine industry and consumers,” Mitchell said. “Everyone wins when they choose Linfield University to take their WSET courses.”

Different from the Court of Master Sommeliers (CMS) certification, the WSET qualifications are designed for a broader range of individuals. While many consider the CMS as a service-oriented pathway, WSET is viewed as more communications-oriented, appealing to enthusiasts, sales representatives and educators.

Linfield has a team of 10 instructors leading WSET courses. This includes Linfield wine studies’ instructor Toni Ketrenos, who earned her Diploma in Wines – the highest WSET qualification offered – and other leading wine industry professionals.

Since 2019, more than 500 people have taken WSET courses through Linfield. Mitchell estimates that around 200 students took courses during 2023 alone.

“Our class offerings more than doubled [in 2023],” Mitchell said. “But there is definitely still room for expansion.”

In June 2024, Linfield began offering Level 1 and Level 2 courses at satellite locations in the Columbia Gorge.

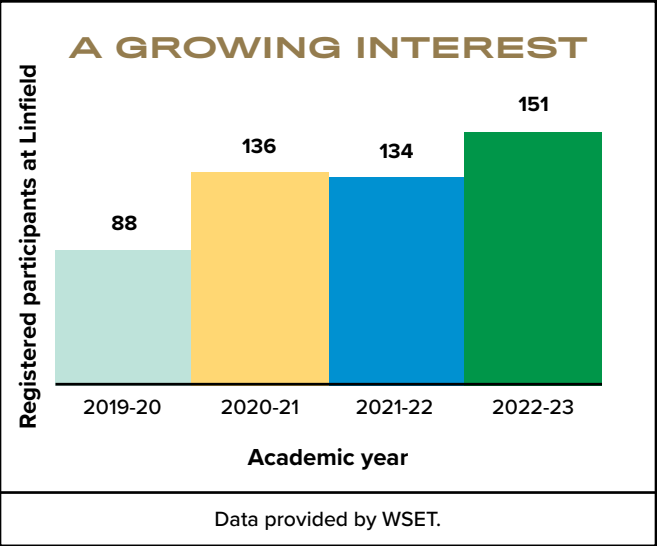
Some other ideas floating around? Linfield’s team is exploring adding qualifications in spirits, sake and beer. They are also considering teaching courses in Spanish as well as English.

“We’re being really intentional in the way we want to move forward,” Mitchell said.

For now, the program continues to be a way for the Linfield University Center for Wine Education to offer high quality wine-related programming to the community, both near and far.

“We get people from all over the area taking WSET courses through Linfield,” Mitchell said. “A couple even flew in from Utah for the Level 1 Award in Wines and make a wine tasting weekend out of it.”

Learn more about the WSET qualifications at linfield.edu/wset.



WSET courses taught by Linfield

LEVEL 1 AWARD IN WINES

One-day weekend intensives or weekly classes.
In-person sessions in McMinnville or the Columbia Gorge.
Also available in an online go-at-your-own-pace course.

LEVEL 2 AWARD IN WINES

Two-day weekend intensives or weekly classes.
In-person sessions in McMinnville or the Columbia Gorge.
Also available in an online course with a live instructor.

LEVEL 3 AWARD IN WINES

Four-day intensive sessions or weekly classes.
In-person sessions in McMinnville.
Also available in an online go-at-your-own-pace course.
See registration and course dates at linfield.edu/wset



SHANE FARNOR

Tasting room manager, Elk Cove Vineyards

WSET Level 3 Award in Wines

Grow your wine knowledge – and career – at Linfield

Shane wanted to boost his confidence when tasting, talking and writing about wine. He opted to advance his career at Linfield University.

“I have a better appreciation for and understanding of wines from different climates, which has helped me better understand how Oregon fits into the greater world of wine. The WSET Systematic Approach to tasting has helped me communicate about wines to my team, peers and customers.”



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