

"Motivating Students to Study in the Absence of Grades: Experiences From a College Course 'Economics, Geography and Appreciation of Wine'"

Peter Pedroni,

Williams College

Williamstown, Massachusetts

peter.l.pedroni@williams.edu

In this study I describe my experiences and the pedagogy that I have developed over time to teach a wine course at Williams College, which by most accounts is an extremely popular course. The course is based on lectures and discussions, and typically includes tastings of 6 to 9 wines per lecture, which are intended as examples of the principles expounded in the particular lecture. It is taught as a geographic, terroir-based course, which ends with a blind tasting exam and student presentations of a wine of their choice. The course is offered as a special "winter term" elective course, which implies that although students obtain credit for the course, students do not receive standard grades that impact their GPA. The challenge for this course is to motivate students to learn the material in depth, despite the fact they are not graded and do not face a standard written exam. Yet, based on informal oral questioning, student retention of knowledge both during the term and long after the term has ended remains extraordinarily high, and performance on the blind tasting exam is impressive. This study describes in detail the course structure and the method of instruction