

“A Certain Idea of Wine [Economics]”

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Charles DeGaulle famously proclaimed that “Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France.” He probably had a certain idea of wine, too, and if he was like the rest of us his *idea* of wine was a lens through which he understood and evaluated both wine and perhaps other cultural artifacts, economic relations and social processes.

My course on “The Idea of Wine” at the University of Puget Sound explores competing notions of wine and society through lectures, readings, videos, winery tours and wine tastings, with a strong focus on the political economy of wine and global market forces. The goals of the course are for students

- to become aware of the social significance of wine, its history and geography;
- to acquire a basic understanding of viticulture and the sensory appreciation of wine as is necessary to appreciate the issues relating to wine and society;
- to understand the complex social construction of wine as both agricultural produce and industrial product, how its production entails both traditional craft and modern science, how its use embodies issues of health and nutrition, individual and society, and the construction of individual, social and national identity;
- to understand how economic forces influence the production and consumption of wine;
- to apply this understanding to an analysis of how the forces of globalization magnify the tensions inherent in wine’s multiple identities and different roles in society, with special emphasis on interdisciplinary aspects and tensions; and
- to apply this understanding to the analysis of a particular problem or issue related to wine and society, with special emphasis on interdisciplinary aspects and tensions.

My presentation will outline the idea of the course and its structure, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this approach given its particular student audience and consider how it might be adapted to other uses.