

Graduate course designed to teach students about Texas' growing beer industry

<http://utdmercury.com/jsom-offers-new-beer-class/>

A new craft brewing course is now available at UTD, offering students a unique insight into the beer industry.

Graduate student Rachel Johnson's husband, who enjoys home brewing, introduced her to the industry. Taking this class, Johnson said, would help her know more about craft beer, and at the same time, help her network with contacts for her husband.

"I understood from another professor that special topic classes are rare, they don't come up real often. Also, it is something different," Johnson said. "I hope that it will be a more in-depth perspective on 'How do you turn passion into business?' because a lot of people have it just as a side hobby but the craft-brewing industry has just exploded."

Richard Harrison, an associate professor in management, strategy and international management, initiated the course and holds a class for nearly 20 students every Tuesday evening. While the class focuses on the beer industry, it also covers general organization principles of financing, logistics and operations that are effective across organizations.

"I was surprised to know what a big business it was. In Texas, it accounts for nearly \$4 billion of the economy and that's why I decided to create this course," Harrison said. "I thought there would be sufficient economic relevance and sufficient local interest that it would be worth a course."

While students are learning about the craft-brewing industry, drinking in class is prohibited, according to UTD regulations. Harrison said this also limits brewery site visits for the students, as it would be unfair to take students to a brewery and not let them taste the beer.

"I teach another course called managing organizations, and in that course, we talk about a lot of different industries," Harrison said. "I have one week where we talk about the beer industry and that's always been something students have really enjoyed. There has been so much interest in that part of the course that it would be nice to expand that."

Graduate student Alison Ayrea said this course is a nice break to her otherwise hectic schedule.

"For me, it seemed like an interesting course and seemed to be a good opportunity. I have been interested in wine law and so I thought there will probably be a lot of similarities with beer law and more craft beer-based startups," Ayrea said. "I (expect) to have more in-depth appreciation for this startup and into entrepreneurial business generally."

Harrison has 11 guest speakers currently lined up for the course. Three of them are UTD graduates who own craft breweries and will share their experiences of beginning brewery businesses. Other speakers include brewery consultants, a craft beer journalist, the president of a craft beer distribution company and the owner of a beer bar.

The class had its first guest-speaker with Geoffrey Westapher, who has more than 50 years of experience in the industry and currently works as a beer industry consultant.

“The craft beer side of the beer industry is very dynamic and a growing industry and access to market and access to getting into the business is relatively easy,” Westapher said. “The model today is a good business model. All (business) schools have studied all forms of industry, and they have concluded that being in the beer industry has the least risk of failure. So, it makes good sense to get into it.”