

UCT business school drives strategic collaboration to fund bursaries in SA's wine industry

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The UCT Graduate School of Business has teamed up with key industry stakeholders to offer several bursaries for its Business of Wine short course this May.

"If you want positive change, if you want to take the wine industry – or any other industry, on a new trajectory, speak to people who don't look like you," says Philip Bowes, Transformation and Development manager at VinPro – the mouthpiece of South Africa's wine industry.

The VinPro Foundation is one of several industry leaders that have teamed up with the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) to fund transformation in the wine industry by creating bursaries for previously disadvantaged individuals on the groundbreaking Business of Wine short course offered by the school. Now in its second year, the course is the only one of its kind in the country that focuses on the business aspect of wine looking across the wine business value chain.

"It really is about unlocking inclusive growth across the entire industry," says Jonathan Steyn, Business of Wine course convener at the GSB. "And I can't see how we can achieve this without transforming decision-making structures and without ensuring that wine professionals across the value chain are equipped with relevant business skills."

Difficult global conditions mean that wine industry professionals will need specialised skills – and a diversity of ideas – in the coming years to cope with the challenges, Steyn says.

"The VinPro Foundation has its own strategic objectives for funding these bursaries, but the main purpose is that we want to develop authentic black leadership in our industry," agrees Bowes. He explains that one of the core mandates of the Foundation is to develop a pipeline of young black talent who can take the industry into the future.

The wine sector remains one of the most untransformed in the country. In Junior, middle, and senior management, there is a glaring under-representation of previously disadvantaged individuals – approximately 1.5% of land is in the hands of black producers. VinPro's Wine Industry Strategic Exercise (WISE) target is to achieve 15% by 2025.

"Students come out of this course with an enhanced understanding of how the industry works across the value chain and with the confidence to pursue jobs and other opportunities for growth. I can't make someone hire another person, but we can make sure there are no longer the excuses that employers 'can't find people,'" says Bowes.

Pearl Oliver, former sommelier and now beverage manager at the Taj Hotel, is a case in point. A recipient of the Graham and Rhona Beck Foundation scholarship in wine business management in 2016, she says that as a sommelier, your focus is mainly on the product, but when you combine that with a broader understanding of business, you're able to easily link what you are doing with other things: "The opportunity just keeps on growing, there's no limitation."

"The key skills included in the course allow one to turn industry challenges to opportunity thus creating value and sustainable growth," agrees Ndabezihle Dube, a 2016 VinPro bursary recipient.

"The feedback from students has been really positive, they were really challenged by the amount of information and amazed at how broad and how deep the industry really is," says Bowes.

"The SA wine industry has significant potential to grow its local market and continue to be a leading job creator," adds Steyn. And a successful transformation is key to this, he argues.

For example, a more representative wine sector would help bridge the gap in understanding and culture between the industry and the local market that many believe is inhibiting its growth because just not enough South Africans want to drink wine. Local consumption of wine as a category is low in comparison to, for example, beer, distilled alcohol, and ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages.

And the recent launch of the Black Cellar Club (Blacc) is evidence, Steyn believes, of exactly the kind of shift the industry needs. Started by a group of young black professionals working in the wine industry – including Pearl Oliver and another classmate from the GSB Business of Wine programme, Greg Mutambe – Blacc is reaching out to black Africans interested in furthering their wine knowledge in order to win more converts.

“Black Africans are the majority in SA yet wine consumption in this segment has been stagnant and extremely low, imagine if only 10% of this segment start to choose wine as their beverage of choice! This will grow domestic wine consumption, therefore increasing local demand. Reduction in bulk wine exports will be one of the great benefits to the industry amongst many others,” says Mutambe, who is the head sommelier at the Twelve Apostles Hotel and Spa in Cape Town.

Mutambe says the Blacc is one of the fruits of the Business of Wine course at the GSB. “The programme teaches delegates to have a holistic approach to the wine industry. It’s a prerequisite if one needs to be successful in the wine industry.”

Bowes says that initiatives like Blacc and others across the sector are helping to show the industry that it needs to move beyond the idea that transformation is a threat or a punitive imperative hovering over the heads of white farmers, towards a conviction that transformation is a vital key in unlocking more vibrant growth in the sector: “In transformation, what we’re talking about is a diversity of ideas and opportunity.”

The GSB course on wine business management is offered at NQF 8 affording 25 UCT Professional Development credits (250 notional hours of work). For more information about the course or to apply for a bursary please contact: ann.wium@gsb.uct.ac.za or visit the website: <https://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/e.asp?c=887>

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