



## **Connection During COVID: Online Wine and Beer Tasting Courses at UAlberta's Faculty of Extension**

**Non-Credit programming under 48 hours**

### ***Abstract:***

Community Engagement sits at the heart of everything UAlberta's Faculty of Extension does. When the COVID crisis began, we felt strongly that we had a duty to our learners to think of creative ways to keep people engaged and connected during what was otherwise a very trying time. We encouraged our teams to think outside the box and come up with innovative program ideas that would add experiential value for our learners while ensuring Extension's financial objectives continued being met.

One initiative in particular did exactly that. Extension's Communications & Design team wanted to try something completely different and decided to host a wine tasting class online. Within six weeks of the pandemic starting, Extension's first "Wine Online!" course was offered in partnership with local businesses and wine experts. Since then, over twenty sold-out classes have been offered, welcoming an incredible 700 households to join Extension virtually while meeting new people and learning more about Alberta's local wine and beer scenes. Further, these classes allowed Extension to reach a whole new audience of potential learners for our other classes. Many participants attended multiple wine and beer courses, and we know of one learner who even went on to enrol in a full certificate program at Extension.

### ***Program Descriptions:***

*\*Note\** Extension has offered ten unique classes, with each class being offered twice. Each unique class has focused on a different aspect or type of wine or beer. The description examples below are for one wine class and one beer class.

### **Wine Online! Tasting Components**

This online course combines virtual learning with real world wine tasting—safe from your own home!

Join sommelier and wine educator Stacey-Jo Strombecky (courtesy of Renaissance Wine Merchants LTD) for a five-week online homeschool of wine tasting, presented by the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, with thanks to our community partner Color de Vino.

A new offering in Extension's "wine series," this course will cater to those who wish to have a deeper understanding of major tasting components, and the opportunity to develop their wine tasting skills.

Learn about the foundation of wine tasting as you compare and contrast its five major components: body, tannin, acidity, sweetness, and alcohol content. Within the construct of comparison, you will also explore areas such as climate/geography and wine mapping, use of oak, use of applied viticultural and vinification practices, and stylistic preferences for the given components.

A selection of wines for tasting during class as you examine the different components will be available for purchase from Color de Vino prior to the course start date. The cost is approx. \$300 for 10 full-sized bottles and is not included in the course registration fee. Once registered in the course, the University of Alberta program office will email you the link to purchase your kit as soon as it becomes available.

Each 90-minute class includes 45 to 60 minutes of live instruction, the comparison of two wines, and time for discussion to follow.

You must be 18+ to register for this course.

This course is a general interest course intended for casual learning and socializing and is NOT affiliated with, nor recognized by, any official certification such as WSET, sommelier & professional certifications

Additional Costs: A selection of wines for tasting during class as you examine the different components will be available for purchase from Color de Vino prior to the course start date. The cost is approx. \$300 for 10 full-sized bottles.

### **Old World and New World Beer: Evolution and Innovation in the Industry**

Join UAlberta, Sherbrooke Liquor, and beer educator Jason Foster, for a four-week education (and tasting) of beer!

A new offering in Extension's "beer series," this course will cater to both novices and those who attended our previous classes.

Some beer styles have a long, storied history complete with tales of Russian empresses, ships to India, or town beer uprisings. Others have a much more recent heritage, arising out of the innovations of creative modern craft breweries. Old and new world beer styles are linked together, since much of what we see today in North America has its origins in European traditions.

In this online learning, at-home tasting course, you will learn about the evolution of some of the most popular beer styles and track their path from the old world to the new. You will also find out about recent innovations in North American craft beer that are turning traditional styles on their

head and influencing beer back in Europe today. Beer tasting will include a range of styles, from classics to modern upstarts.

Your beer course pack will be available for purchase from Sherbrooke Liquor (Edmonton) prior to the class start date. The cost is approximately \$100.00 for 16 full sized beers and is not included in registration fee. Once registered in the course, the University of Alberta program office will email you the link to purchase your specially priced full sized beers, all in one course pack, as soon as it becomes available.

Each one-hour class includes 30 minutes of live instruction, with discussion to follow, and will be taught in English.

Please note, you must be 18+ to register for this course. The course pack beers are full-sized, not taster samples, so a household of 2-4 can easily share.

### ***Program Statement***

Extension's online wine and beer courses delivered exemplary value for various stakeholders in four distinct ways:

1. They offered people of all backgrounds the ability to connect and engage in a fun and affordable way with like-minded peers during a time when isolation and loneliness was at its peak.
2. They supported local businesses and leveraged local expertise (supplier partners and instructors), and connected these experts directly to a larger community of learners.
3. Their popularity has resulted in almost \$90,000 in revenue for Extension during a year where revenue expectations were difficult to predict.
4. They proved that we should be looking at our learners holistically. Continuing Education learners may generally be professionals, but they also have many other hobbies and interests that we can support. Offering these classes gave Extension exposure to an audience we may not have otherwise connected with.

These classes were not overly complex in terms of their delivery, but did require some very innovative and quick thinking in order to run them outside of our typical registration systems and classroom/bookstore-based infrastructure. There was also added complexity in terms of speed to market. These courses were created, sold out, and ran within six weeks of the pandemic starting. Some complexity considerations are outlined below:

1. These classes are atypical and do not meet the requirements for Campus Solutions (Extension's enrolment management system). Instead, each of these classes has to be set up in Eventbrite to take registrations and payment.
2. Multiple supplier and instructor negotiations had to take place extremely quickly. The "supplies" for these classes were wine and beer kits from local suppliers and fulfillment was complex because of COVID restrictions. We were lucky to have great community

partners who wanted to see these classes succeed; they offered delivery options for those who could not pick up supplies in person.

3. Marketing needed to be conscientious--Extension has a strong reputation for academic excellence and we understood the many difficulties people were facing because of COVID . It was important to ensure these classes were presented as the community-building and learning activities they were, rather than focus on the wine or beer themselves.

Nothing says “ingenuity and innovation” like a University offering online wine tastings, and this was proven by the media coverage these classes received. Extension was one of the first organizations in Canada to offer tastings and classes like this, and earned praise from media outlets like the [Edmonton Journal](#) and [Canadian Beer News](#). In addition, two instructors were invited to talk about the classes on CBC radio. The classes were also ingenuitive because of the way they integrated community partnerships and local businesses, which also prompted a significant amount of social media activity (more likes, shares, comments, and mentions than any other Extension course or program in 2020).

Class delivery was innovative based on the amount of collaboration needed from multiple stakeholders in order to execute. Extension was responsible for course registration, payment, marketing, and setting up the online classroom, local wine and craft beer suppliers were responsible for packaging supplies and delivering them to learners, and local community experts in wine tasting and craft beer were responsible for instruction and facilitating engaging learning experiences. Perhaps the best measure of ingenuity and innovation can be found in the comments we have received from participants:

- “Do more courses!”
- “There was nothing elitist or snobby about the course. It made wine both interesting and accessible”
- “The interactive environment was excellent. The students and instructor were very friendly”
- “This course has inspired us to expand our wine knowledge and to enjoy wine with all our senses.”
- “A nice community!”
- “I just completed Jason Foster's four week online beer course and wanted to advise it was everything I had hoped it would be. It has been a definite highlight of the last several months enduring COVID. If given the chance, I would gladly participate in a follow up class (I am sure my classmates would agree). Thank you to the U of A Faculty of Extension for offering this course. I hope it can continue going forward.”

Finally, Extension’s wine and beer courses have proven to be a great gateway to other Extension Continuing and Professional Education courses. Because these courses were open to all adults, and were based around fun and connection, we were able to welcome over 700 participants who would not typically visit the University. In addition to a significant revenue contribution (over \$90,000 and counting in less than a year), we also know of participants who

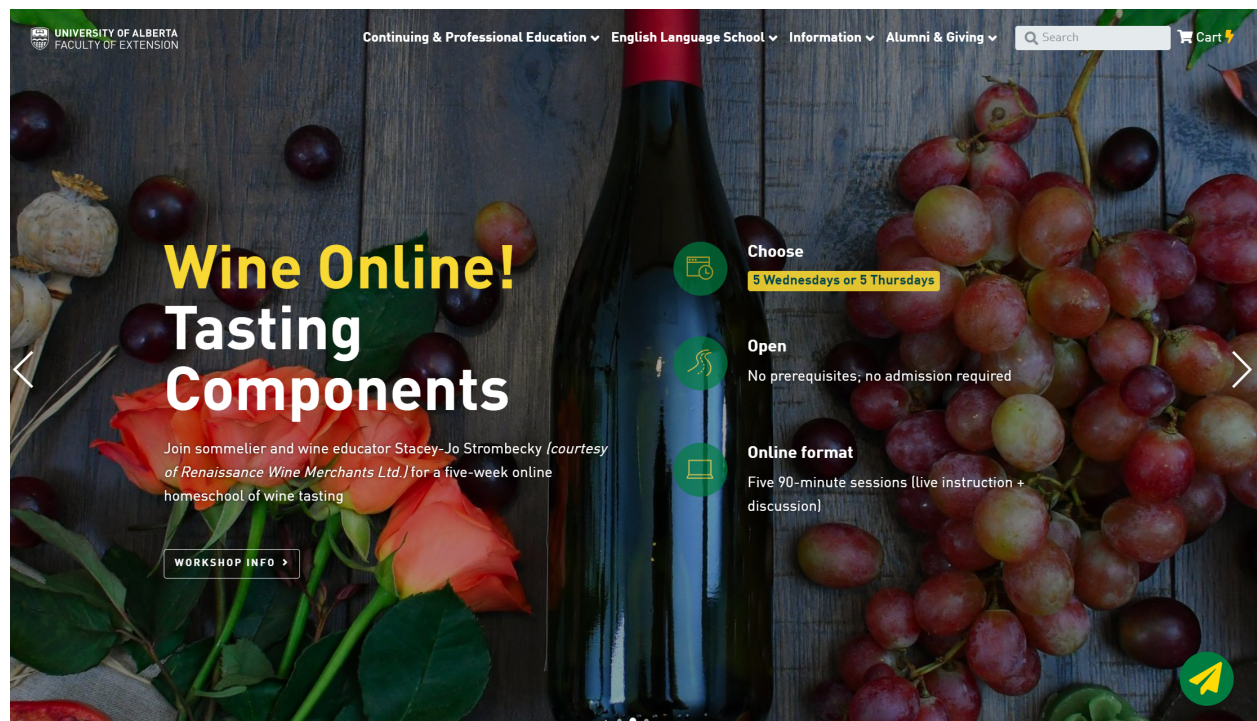
are now enrolled in other Extension courses (including one learner who has now enrolled in our new Social Media Certificate). Their original inquiry is below:


- “I am interested in the Fundamentals of Social Media Marketing (EXSM 5510) course you offer, and potentially a certificate in Social Media. I have never taken anything from the UofA other than a Beer Course through the Faculty of Extension, so I want to understand the format.”

We also believe these courses speak directly to our informal mission here at Extension, which is “to bring the University to the people!” We know that sometimes people view Universities as inaccessible, and these courses were a way for us to connect with our community in a very accessible, fun, engaging way while helping to create lasting relationships.

### ***Promotional Materials:***

Promotion was entirely digital (website, social media, and email), with very little paid budget. We saw extremely high levels of organic social media engagement which resulted in every single class selling out with the exception of one. Many participants also came back to take additional classes meaning some classes were almost full before we even had a chance to promote them. Our local business and instructor partners also helped us to promote these events on social media. They are well-known in our community and have a large following that helped to garner interest in the classes.









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Looking for the perfect Valentine's Day gift? Enjoy one of our cocktail or wine courses with your loved one.

These courses take place over 5 weeks and are fully online.

"Amaro: Italian Bitter Cocktails" (with Mike Angus of [Pip Food & Drink](#)) has Monday or Tuesday night courses available (both dates are almost sold out). <https://ext.ualberta.ca/news/amaro>

"Wine Online! Tasting Components" (led by Stacey-Jo Strombecky) has Wednesday and Thursday evening courses available. This course was just released and is expected to sell out. <https://ext.ualberta.ca/news/wine-21spring>







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**AMARO:  
Italian Bitter  
Cocktails**

Part-time.  
Fully online.

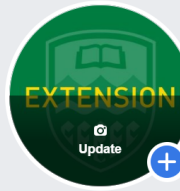




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**Wine Online!  
Tasting Components**  
with Stacey-Jo Strombecky





Fully online!



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New courses to announce!

- Brewed in Canada: Exploring Canada's Craft Beer Industry (taught by Jason Foster) <https://ext.ualberta.ca/news/brewed-in-canada>
- Amaro: Italian Bitter Cocktails (taught by Mike Angus) <https://ext.ualberta.ca/news/amaro>
- Old World & New World Beer: Evolution and Innovation in the Industry (taught by Jason Foster) <https://ext.ualberta.ca/news/world-beer>







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**BREWED IN  
CANADA**

Join beer expert, Jason Foster (CBC Radio), for an online, four-week education (and tasting) of beer! This course will explore the best the Canadian craft beer industry has to offer.

Presented by:







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**WORLD &  
OLD BEER**

Join beer expert, Jason Foster (CBC Radio), for an online, four-week education (and tasting) of beer! This course will explore the evolution of popular beer styles and track the evolution of old world to the new.

Presented by:

