Post: European vines could be making their way into Texas wines.

Hello everyone, I’m Sally Post, and this is AcademiCast, brought to you by Texas Tech University.

Texas Tech researchers in the Department of Plant and Soil Science are hoping to find out if wine grapes that flourish in Europe could also grow well in West Texas. The wine growing regions of Spain, Portugal, and southern France and Italy have similar climates to the South Plains. Dr. Ed Hellman, professor of viticulture at Texas Tech, is looking at the yield and quality of the varieties after harvest.

Hellman: So the real test is once we harvest those grapes, we conduct a chemical analysis to determine the sugar content, the acid content, pH, tannins, the color that’s in that fruit, and then we make experimental wines out of it. Ultimately, these are wine grapes, the ultimate product is wine, so to really truly evaluate the performance of the variety, we need to know what that wine quality is going to be like.

Post: Wine makers throughout Texas commonly purchase grapes from the South Plains, and they could potentially benefit from the varieties brought over from Europe.

Brain activity, oxygen, and optical imaging are terms you might expect to hear in a science building—not a business college. But, Texas Tech’s Rawls College of Business marketing department has a new lab that is studying exactly those things. Shannon Rinaldo, assistant professor of marketing, received a $55,000 grant from a private donor to open the laboratory.

Rinaldo: We purchased a fair amount of equipment, spending 100 percent of the money on the equipment, and the equipment involves physiological measures for marketing research. This allows us to actually directly observe physiological reactions to all kinds of marketing stimuli. So, this could be an advertisement. We could show them the advertisement, and we can watch their heart rate, we can watch their galvanic skin response, all of the peripheral nervous system. We can also look at actual EEG activity in the brain—where the brain is being activated, what part of the brain.

Post: Rinaldo says the new opportunities will help Texas Tech as it works to become a Tier One university.

We continue to feature integrated scholars on campus, which are those faculty members recognized for their outstanding contributions to research, teaching and service. Here’s Provost Bob Smith with Dr. John Poch, another 2010 integrated scholar.
Smith: English professor Dr. John Poch didn’t always want to be a poet, and certainly not a professor. He found passion for language only after studying in another completely different field.

Poch: I didn’t have any family who had ever been to college before, and I was sort of on my own, didn’t quite know what to do. I thought, ‘Well, I’m good at math and science, so I might as well be an engineer.’ I was accepted to Georgia Tech and began studying nuclear engineering. I wasn’t there very long. I dropped out of that program, because I found poetry. I had started writing poems maybe a few years before that and stories on my own and just began pursuing that in my spare time. But, I really fell in love with it, and I just thought, ‘I just want to do this all the time.’ So, I transferred to Georgia State and got into a class with a poet named David Bottoms. He really turned things around for me by asking a simple question, by asking, ‘What are you doing studying nuclear engineering?’ I didn’t really ask myself that question, ‘What am I doing?’ And so, I asked myself that question and knowing I didn’t really have a good answer, I decided to change my life and pursue something that I really loved, and I kept loving it.

Smith: Dr. Poch has written several books of poetry, including his most recent titled, Dolls. He also edits the prestigious poetry magazine, 32 Poems. He says he writes poetry of different lengths, covering different topics about things currently happening in his life.

Poch: I’m like most poets in that I write a different poem on a different day because of whatever has happened to me in my life and whatever things my daughter has said. I have a 5-year-old. I guess it was about a year ago she was looking out the window, and she said, ‘Daddy, look, the birds are pretending they’re airplanes.’ You know, and that’s a poem in and of itself. So I got my notebook out, and I wrote it down, trying to figure out how I’m going to fit that into a poem. But, I’m always listening to language and how people use it in interesting ways and how language offers a multiplicity of different things at once.

Smith: Dr. Poch believes that other poets need to bring their own lives into poems to find personal meaning—and share that meaning with others.

Poch: My poems are all clouded with the experiences of my own life. But, when I give you my poem, and it’s just the words on the page, then you have to bring your life to it. You don’t know all the experiences and the thoughts that I had. You just have the arrangement of those words on the page, and you have to make an experience out of that, that works for you. There are things that we share in common in language. A cat is this four-legged creature that meows, or it’s this big hulking machine that moves land and digs big trenches—Caterpillar. Or, it’s a Cool Cat, it’s a person who plays the trumpet really well. Or, it’s a multiplicity of other things. Language is subjective, but there’s an objectivity to it as well. It’s trying to figure those things out that’s part of the fun of it.

Smith: When teaching poetry, Dr. Poch has different approaches for his graduate and undergraduate courses.
**Poch:** You know, I love to mix it up, because at the lower levels you have students whose sense of discovery is much greater often times than students who are graduate students in their third or fourth year, because they’re seeing everything for the first time. It’s nice to see light bulbs going on for the first time. That’s exciting. But, then there’s a richness too when graduate students are working through their poems at a much deeper level, and the complexities and the beauties are abundant in their poems. That’s rewarding as well.

**Smith:** Our thanks to Dr. Poch for his contributions to Texas Tech. His professorial life represents a great example of an integrated scholar. Thanks for listening! I’m Bob Smith.

**Post:** Thanks, Dr. Smith. More than six months have passed since the explosion in the Gulf of Mexico that led to the largest oil spill in history. Although the media hype has declined since the well was capped, Texas Tech researcher Dr. Ron Kendall says the story of the spill’s impact is far from over. He and his lab continue to examine wildlife samples from the region.

**Kendall:** We are doing a variety of laboratory experiments looking at the effects of oil and oil dispersant mixtures on fish toxicology, amphibian eco-toxicology. We’re doing work with bird embryos. If instance, oil can be quite toxic for the developing embryo in an egg, so we’re doing work with that. We’re doing work with fiddler crabs. The crabs have shown evidence of accumulating the oil as well. So, we have a variety of experiments, which will continue to put science on the table as to what the oil alone and what the oil Corexit mixture will do in terms of the environmental toxicology.

**Post:** I’m Sally Post for AcademiCast.