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## Learning to lead in Champagne

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**LONDON, England (CNN)** -- Many people choosing MBAs hope to go on to enjoy the finer things in life. But one business school is taking a more direct route by actually studying one of the globe's true pleasures -- Champagne.

Reims Management School is based in the north-eastern French city of the same name, which itself is located in the heart of the Champagne-Ardenne region.

It is this area alone, under European Union rules, which is allowed to call its sparkling white wines by the Champagne name.

However, other wine growers around the world produce their own variants -- often available at cheaper prices -- which have placed the Champagne region's wine houses under increasing pressure in recent years.

With this in mind, the Reims school recently appointed an academic to the enviable post of the world's first professor of Champagne.

To the possible chagrin of local French experts, Dr Stephen Charters is British-born and was previously based in Australia. However, he brings wide experience of the global wine trade, particularly marketing, having taught wine marketing at a university in Australia.

Champagne, and the wider wine industry, is a massive business both in France and a series of other countries.

Already, Bordeaux Business School in the south-western French city of that name -- at the center of perhaps the most famous wine-producing region in the world -- has launched a one-year Wine MBA.

Now, Dr Charters has set about trying to help growers in the Champagne region decide the future of their industry, notably the trend towards smaller, more distinctive brands that reflect a particular "terroir" -- the combination of climate and soil composition that gives a wine its character.

Traditionally, the bulk of the Champagne trade has been in the hands of a handful of major houses like Mœt and Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Laurent Perrier and Pommery. Between them, these controlled around 70% of annual production and a whopping 97% of sales outside Europe.

Now, however, more and more grape growers are opting to produce their own Champagne for export, something Dr Charters says is an opportunity to bring grape growers and Champagne houses together to discuss their trade.

"The Champenois [people from the Champagne region] know very well what makes their wine special," he says.

"We want to help them understand in greater depth how it fits into a changing world of wine and how to maintain that 'specialness,' and we want to give them a chance to reflect on how their industry can best manage itself for a successful future."

He has created a new course called "Champagne's Future Leaders," to be offered at the school from the end of this month.

Targeted equally at growers and executives from Champagne houses, it involves 10 one-and-a-half day sessions over the course of a year, after which students can be considered for an MBA at the school, should they wish.

The course is intended to provide students with a global and international understanding of the issues faced by the profession, and to develop new skills relevant to the Champagne industry, as well as developing future leaders for the trade.

The 10 sessions will combine Champagne- and wine-specific topics with more general, practical business education, including marketing, human resources and brand management.