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Higher education key to Anheuser-Busch employee development

MANHATTAN, KAN, August 1, 2007 – While filling a temporary position with Busch Agricultural Resources, Inc., Zach Gaines developed an interest in the beer industry and agriculture. With an undergraduate degree in English and little background in agriculture, Gaines, a Research Technician in Fort Collins, Colo., knew he needed to learn more about the industry to be successful. His answer: the Kansas State University Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance program.



“I was a guy with a liberal arts degree working for the largest beer producer in the U.S. That was a big motivational factor in the decision to continue my education,” Gaines said. “I wanted to learn more about the company and its role in the beer industry.”

Gaines chose the MAB program because of its agribusiness focus, the direct application of coursework to current work situations and the ability to complete a master’s degree without being on campus full time. The program has met those expectations and more. After receiving his MAB degree, Gaines was promoted to the position of Brewhouse Group Manager at the Los Angeles Brewery, Anheuser-Busch, Inc.’s second-largest brewing facility, which produces more than 12 million barrels and 19 brands of beer a year.

“The Master of Agribusiness program helped bridge a gap between where I was and where I wanted to go. The skills I learned allowed me to make the jump between research and brewing production management. It has made me a greater asset to Anheuser-Busch and I’m beginning to better understand the complex relationship between the two distinct sides of the business: raw materials and production,” Gaines said.

As a Group Manager, Gaines is responsible for front-line brewery management and oversees the day-to-day operation of the brewhouse. He also makes sure the brewhouse is stocked with adequate amounts of raw materials and analyzes data to optimize the brewery’s performance. Being able to analyze data is crucial to the entire supply chain.

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“I couldn’t do my job without the knowledge I learned about spreadsheet modeling in all of my MAB courses. From evaluating breeding programs for brewing quality to analyzing and trending data to find out what is going right or wrong with our beer, solving problems by looking at numbers is a big part of what Anheuser-Busch does,” Gaines said.

Gaines’s decision to begin the MAB program was encouraged by Anheuser-Busch for several reasons. One key reason is it gives students a broad knowledge of the agricultural industry that isn’t found in a traditional MBA program.

“We’ve had other employees in the program and it has been highly beneficial for them and Anheuser-Busch. It helps create successful ‘next-level’ managers,” Tom Loch, Director of Human Resources of Anheuser-Busch, Inc., said. “The employees’ respective divisions as a whole have benefited from the perspective and skills they bring back.”

The ability to complete the program and continue working at the same time is also a big plus for both employee and employer. Since students attend class online, they do not have to take time away from work.

“Zach could do coursework online during the evenings or weekends so it didn’t impact his workday and the two-week commitment to come to campus each year didn’t cause any problems either,” Loch said.

Both agree the thesis project Gaines completed analyzing the impact of the growing popularity of microbreweries addressed an issue important to the traditional beer industry.

“Zach’s thesis about microbreweries and their affects on traditional beer was very insightful. He was able to research a current topic and put together a good piece of work that has been shared with several individuals within our company,” Loch said.

K-State’s Master of Agribusiness is an award-winning, distance-education degree program that focuses on food and agribusiness management. Students in the program are located in more than 30 states within the United States and 20 countries abroad. They range in age from 25 to 55 and work in every sector of the food and agribusiness industry.

The program, launched in 1998 and now in its 10th year of agribusiness education, was the first graduate agribusiness program in the nation to be offered through distance education. The executive-style, distance education delivery breaks down barriers associated with earning a master’s degree, such as access to a university campus, job changes, relocations and job-related travel. For more information about the program please call 785.532.4495, email mab@agecon.ksu.edu or visit our website at www.mab.ksu.edu.