

# Chance Favors the Prepared Mind: Readyng the Fragrance Industry's Next Generation

How the once secretive and arcane process of entering the fragrance industry is evolving.

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Since before the Middle Ages, the fragrance discipline has been passed down through the relationship of master and apprentice in which one talented pupil with the right connections was chosen from the masses to study under the tutelage of a veteran. However, this dynamic, like many aspects of the fragrance industry, is changing. Where once the relationship of the master and apprentice was the only way to gain entrance, academic courses are now growing in influence.

In recent years, the fragrance industry has become increasingly salient in the mind of popular culture. From books such as Chandler Burr's *The Perfect Scent: A Year Inside the Perfume Industry in Paris and New York*, to increasingly available online information, what was once completely secret is slowly becoming more well-known. However, accurate information regarding the fragrance industry, when compared to info on other disciplines, remains rare and expensive.

## Academic Opportunities

Within the past few decades there has been an increase in the popularity and number of academic institutions that offer degree programs in fragrance and flavor. While they are dispersed throughout the world, notable examples include the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, and the Institut Supérieur International du Parfum, de la Cosmétique et de l'Aromatique alimentaire (ISIPCA; [www.isipca.fr](http://www.isipca.fr)) in Versailles, France.

ISIPCA's EFCM (European Fragrance and Cosmetic Master) program has been around since 2001, and is part of the world's longest running fragrance-oriented academic institution. It offers a dual competency in technical aspects and sound business acumen, which provides an outline of how the industry is organized. Learning this type of overarching framework is a crucial step in preparing oneself for making a difference in this field.

Taught in English, the EFCM is a two-year program spent in two countries. The first year is located in Versailles, France, where the coursework is focused on the technical aspects of the



fragrance industry. Coupled with practical laboratory instruction, topics include fragrance composition, cosmetic formulation, legislation and perfume history. Olfactory instruction includes the recognition of fragrance families and commonly used odorants. It is through these courses that students can hone their abilities—what was once just “flower” slowly becomes “rose” and then finally “*rose de mai* absolute.” A chemistry or related background is required for admission to the EFCM, which features training on thermodynamics and the use of GC/MS techniques such as headspace technology.

Numerous company visits are a built-in part of the curriculum. For example, the program involves field trips to Grasse, France, where roses being harvested and distilled can be witnessed in person. In addition, there are opportunities to view industrial manufacturing sites where fragrances and cosmetics are composed.

The second year of the EFCM is located in Padova, Italy. This year of instruction aids in developing a complete understanding of the business and processes involved in actually bringing a product to market. Topics include accounting and finance, management and organizations, supply chain management, as well as the development of a complete business plan. Through the use of three electives, the students have the

opportunity to personalize their education toward a chosen specialty and career goal.

## Internships

Theoretical competency is coupled with real-life application through mandatory internships at various fragrance and cosmetic companies. Students have been chosen for positions in companies including L'Oréal, Unilever, Givaudan and Firmenich. Through these internships there is the opportunity to see how fragrance and cosmetic companies actually work, through launching new products and composing perfumes, as well as assisting in marketing campaigns. In essence, they not only complete the program's educational aspects, but they also act as a bridge in order to gain access into the fragrance industry.

The internships also serve a strategic role for fragrance and cosmetic companies, providing the opportunity to get a first look at promising candidates as well as helping to develop a relationship with the network of ISIPCA alumni. Particularly for companies outside of Europe, these interns represent an influx of useful and verifiable knowledge and an international and multicultural perspective.

## Highly Competitive Atmosphere

With the increasing number of qualified applicants searching for a relatively static number of positions, to remain competitive, academic institutions must broaden their search for business partnerships. Not only must these partnerships continue to be established with the major fragrance and cosmetic companies within Europe, but academic institutions must continue to develop relationships with fragrance companies located throughout the globe. For example, according to a recent statement, Pascale Quefelec, ISIPCA's pedagogical assistant, wrote, "While the process of finding positions in Western Europe is taking more time than in previous years, there have been an increasing number of EFCM students finding positions in developing markets."

Currently, the maximum class size of the EFCM is limited to 20 students per year, and the interactions over the course of the program are an opportunity to develop strong relationships. Through these relationships, it is not only possible to expand knowledge of world cultures, but to make this industry truly work.

The French Society of Perfumers (Société Française des Parfumeurs; SFP; [www.parfumeur-createur.com](http://www.parfumeur-createur.com)), which is represented on the development committee of ISIPCA, must help students approaching their graduation, to integrate our industry. Recently, groups such as the SFP have worked with ISIPCA to help find positions for candidates. Seeing the benefit of supporting a continuous creative and professional influx for the industry, such partnerships are working to place students in creation, evaluation, regulatory, production, marketing export, applications, quality control, raw material analysis, finished product and other positions. Interested companies are encouraged to contact ISIPCA or SFP.

## Diverse Graduates

Since October 2001, 194 students representing 34 nationalities from five continents have attended the EFCM course. The graduating class of 2012 will be the 10th promotion of this program and upon graduation, students receive two diplomas: a Master of Science and Technology majoring in Fragrance and Cosmetics,

and a Master in Business and Management. During this past decade there has been a plethora of individuals with different upbringings, backgrounds and skills who have gone on to fill an equally diverse number of roles within the industry. However, they are united by the common desire of turning a passion for fragrance and cosmetics into a life goal.

The fragrance industry, perhaps more than most others, is subject to constant change. Just as legislation is in a constant state of flux, the same can be said for the changing way that individuals who have an interest in the industry will prepare themselves to enter it.

While the number of jobs in this sector will remain limited, the number of qualified and passionate individuals who are aware of these jobs will increase. This is indeed a boon for the industry and a boon for those who want to live and breathe fragrance. Some would say that entering into this increasingly competitive sector is just a game of chance, having the right combination of skills, tenacity, contacts and timing. However, to paraphrase a quote by French chemist Louis Pasteur: Chance favors the prepared mind.

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