Pot moves from dorm to classroom

Universities and colleges around the state are starting to consider what programs and course offerings would be most helpful to students interested in participating in the cannabis industry, which Massachusetts legalized adult-use marijuana in 2016.

"I think it's a great opportunity for academic institutions to reach out, understand and become part of the shaping of this industry," said Marion McNabb, co-founder and CEO of Cannabis Community Care and Research Network, or C3RN. "It's essential because the academic sector has been prohibited from studying, educating and understanding cannabis recreationally and medicinally."

McNabb worked with Holyoke Community College to open the school's cannabis education center last month. The new center will host industry events, provide education and workforce training opportunities to people in the Pioneer Valley who want to work in the cannabis industry. McNabb hopes C3RN can be a resource to more schools to help them build new programs in the cannabis industry.

"We have the opportunity to collaborate and share information — it's a new industry and a new technical field, so I think Massachusetts is uniquely suited to create a collaborative mega-center of excellence that can put this state ahead of others and put us on the global map," McNabb said.

Meetings with municipalities and local government officials last year spurred Clark's School of Professional Studies to create the graduate certificate in regulatory affairs for cannabis control, said John LaBrie, dean of the School of Professional Studies and associate provost for professional graduate education.

LaBrie said the new certificate program, which is offered online, will help students understand public-policy issues involved in the cultivation, distribution, sales and regulation of medical- and nonmedical-use of cannabis. The state is trying to "take something that was once illegal and move it to legal framework," LaBrie said. That means there are educational opportunities to train a workforce as the new, legal industry grows, LaBrie added.

There are 20 students from around the country currently enrolled in Clark's new certificate program. LaBrie said Clark will likely expand its cannabis course offerings and programs down the line. The school will also offer public events, including one with the Worcester Chamber of Commerce Nov. 13 called Cannabis Implications for Business, Community and You.

Mount Wachusett Community College started offering an online certificate program for cannabis studies in early 2017 with a partner called Online Cannabis Education. There are currently 24 students enrolled in the program, which results in a "master of marijuana" certificate.

"We try to be a little ahead of the curve with workforce needs," said Rachel Frick Cardelle, the college's vice president of lifelong learning.

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Marion McNabb, co-founder and CEO of Cannabis Community Care and Research Network

$9 million gift from alumnus Charles Broderick earlier this year to research the science of cannabinoids.

Still, Jennifer Flanagan, commissioner at the state's Cannabis Control Commission, remains skeptical of Massachusetts colleges and universities offering classes on cannabis.

"I think each individual institution needs to take a temperature on where they would like to be in this space, given fact it is still federally illegal and students do receive financial aid," Flanagan said. "They certainly need to know all of what goes into it. Some schools have certificate and professional development programs rather than degrees — each school needs to make that decision for themselves."