

GROWERTALKS

Corr on Cannabis

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Continuing Education in Cannabis

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My first boss was Fred Busse, an old German grower who was kind enough to hire me as a high school kid who knew nothing about working in a greenhouse. The work was hard, but Fred took time to educate about why we were doing what we were doing.

Sometimes when things weren't going quite right, and it took multiple tries to get something done, Fred would say, "Why do we get so soon old and so late smart?"

Successful people work every day at getting smart before they get another day older. How do people work at getting smart about cannabis production?

The traditional educational paths to learn about production of almost any other crop aren't available for cannabis. Because the United States government lists cannabis as a schedule one substance, it's federally illegal to produce cannabis, regardless of state regulations. Public universities, and many private ones as well, receive federal funding that is at risk if the university violates federal law by teaching about production of an illegal crop.

Some U.S. universities offer classes (though not entire degree programs) that aren't specifically about cannabis production, but address medical use of cannabis, tax implications or legal issues. Discussing these topics isn't specifically against federal law.

For example, the University of California at Davis has an undergraduate course on the Physiology of Cannabis, the University of Denver offers a course on the Business of Marijuana, and Vanderbilt University has a class on Marijuana Law and Policy. The University of Vermont College of Medicine has programs related to the medical use of cannabis.

Northern Michigan University in Marquette comes closest to a U.S. "cannabis degree" with Medicinal Plant Chemistry, a four-year undergraduate degree that focuses on herbal products, especially marijuana. The degree is strongly focused on analytical chemistry (more than half the degree requirements are in Chemistry without even one horticulture class). The cannabis industry needs good chemists to run the testing labs that ensure cannabis product safety. The NMU website describes the program in this way: "No other four-year undergraduate degree program in the world combines rigorous coursework in chemistry and biology with research and hands-on instrumental analysis built into the curriculum to prepare its graduates for a career in

the cannabis industry.”

Other colleges and universities are taking a similar approach. Hocking College, a two-year technical college in Athens County, Ohio, has been certified to test medical marijuana and plans to offer related courses to students interested in cannabis laboratory skills.

Canadian universities don't have the same restrictions as their U.S. counterparts. Perhaps the most extensive cannabis education program in North America will be offered by the Niagara College School of Environment and Horticulture. Starting in autumn of 2018, they'll offer a year-long Commercial Cannabis Production certificate program at their beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake campus. This certificate is for students who already possess a degree or diploma in fields such as agriculture or horticulture and will teach traditional production topics like plant nutrition, lighting, climate control, pest control and cultivar selection.

Of course, traditional universities aren't the only places a person can seek out knowledge. In the absence of traditional university programs, the cannabis industry developed its own centers for education.

Perhaps the first and the best known is Oaksterdam University (based in Oakland, California). Founded in 2007, Oaksterdam has faculty that are well-known in the cannabis industry, such as Ed Rosenthal, and lawyers specializing in cannabis law. Oaksterdam claims to have 30,000 alumni across the world.

For learners who require flexible online options, there are programs offered by Cannabis Training University, THC University and many others. Students can complete certificate programs in three to six months, but can take longer if necessary.

It's important to note accreditation of these institutions varies. They aren't eligible for federally guaranteed student loans. Most offer certificates, which indicate completion of the program, but aren't degrees. Classes taken at one institution don't transfer to other institutions.

As mentioned in the last column, many future cannabis growers are learning the fundamentals of crop production at the many universities with traditional production horticulture programs, then taking that knowledge and applying it to cannabis production.

Finally, just as I learned the basics of horticulture production from Fred Busse, there's no substitute for hands-on learning. Fortunately, for those starting in the cannabis industry, there are ample opportunities to find employment. Just be sure to combine the hands-on with a solid, scientific education. We cannot change how fast we get old, but perhaps we can get smart a little faster. **GT**

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