

**A Model for Cannabis Education: A Land-Grant Tribal College and Private University
Partnership**

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Introduction

The cannabis industry in the United States has seen extensive growth in the last several years, stemming from recent federal and state legalizations of varying forms of cannabis. The 2018 Farm Bill federally legalized the cultivation and processing of hemp (USDA, 2019), a version of cannabis with 0.3% or less tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Marijuana, classified as cannabis with more than 0.3% THC, has become legalized in many states. The use of medical marijuana is now legal in a majority of states and adult-use or recreational marijuana has been legalized in 18 states (Mayorquinn, 2022). This legalization has led to U.S. hemp sales surpassing \$820 million in 2021 (USDA, 2022), and the U.S. marijuana industry accounting for an impressive \$14 billion in sales during 2019 (Marijuana Business Daily, 2019). However, the unprecedented growth of the cannabis industry has led to a severe shortage of qualified workers. Educational programming and workforce development on cannabis is needed (Black, 2020; Reid et al., 2022). Many institutions of higher education are rushing to fill this gap, as can be indicated by over 75 institutions offering cannabis-related programs in 2022 (Cornwell, 2022). Black (2020) argued that cannabis education must be innovative and nimble to navigate the complex and rapidly changing industry. Unique partnerships between institutions of higher education and between the cannabis industry can foster educational programming to meet the needs of those desiring credentials to enter the cannabis workforce. This innovative idea submission describes a partnership between Doane University, a private liberal arts university, and Little Priest Tribal College, a Land-Grant College in Nebraska, to develop and deliver cannabis education and credentials. The lens of this discussion will gravitate toward the experiences of the author on teaching one of the courses in the program - Hemp Cultivation.

How it Works

Doane University and Little Priest Tribal College formed a partnership to deliver seven unique online cannabis courses in hemp cultivation, testing, regulation, processing, and more (McCue, 2021). These online courses are taught by faculty at Doane University and are open to students from both institutions. Students from Little Priest Tribal College completing these online courses and other general education courses offered by the college, receive an Associate in Applied Science in Cannabis Studies Degree. Loretta Broberg, vice president of teaching and learning at Little Priest Tribal College, described the benefits of the partnership by stating, “students will be able to apply the newly acquired skills, as future jobs within the tribal community develop and to support Ho-Chunk Farms hemp production ... we can become leaders in the hemp industry in Nebraska and nationwide” (McCue, 2021). To better illustrate how the program works, the author of this submission provides a detailed look into the hemp cultivation course they teach within the program.

The hemp cultivation course was designed to meet the needs of students from both institutions. Students from these two institutions take the 16-week course online at the same time within the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). The course is broken down into 8, 2-week learning modules that include: (1) introduction to hemp; (2) soil and nutrient fundamentals; (3) the growing environment; (4) propagation and monitoring the crop; (5) common pests in hemp production; (6) integrated pest management; (7) harvesting and storing hemp; and, (8) the future of cannabis as an agricultural commodity. Each module includes short recorded lectures, discussion boards, readings, and a low-stakes quiz. The crux of the course includes four project assignments that require students to design a hemp cultivation plan from site selection through harvest. Students first identify the targeted hemp product (cannabinoids, fiber, grain, dual-

purpose) for their growing operation. For each project assignment, students complete a draft and peer-review, and receive detailed feedback from the instructor. The assignments build upon each other, and for the final project, students combine assignments 1 through 4 to submit a polished hemp cultivation plan. The course is also designed with cultural relevance in mind. Students have the opportunity to design their hemp cultivation plans in ways that adhere to cultural norms and practices.

Results to Date and Implications

The partnership between Little Priest Tribal College and Doane University is in its second year. The hemp cultivation course completed its second year of running. In the spring 2022 semester, 21 students took the course (10 students from Little Priest Tribal College and 11 from Doane University). A total of 19 students completed the course in spring 2023 (9 students from Little Priest Tribal College and 10 from Doane University). The course has had excellent results to date. The online discussion boards provide students the option to submit video or text to specific prompts. The positive interactions between diverse students have created a unique and supportive course atmosphere. Students have enjoyed the opportunity to interact with peers who share similar interests in the hemp industry, and also have been encouraged to bring forward cultural practices and norms within their discussion and cultivation plans. Students have also found the peer review process interesting and helpful. Several students have expressed that the course projects are particularly valuable as they are currently working in or plan to immediately enter the hemp cultivation industry where they can put their cultivation plans to practice.

Future Plans and Advice to Others

A few unexpected challenges arose during the offerings of this course, leading to advice and future plans. The technical process to enroll students from multiple institutions into the same LMS course shell proved difficult. Student issues accessing the LMS were common at the start of the spring 2022 semester, leading to a loss of class time for some students. A solid technical plan should be put into place anticipating LMS complications and other logistical items (e.g., calendar scheduling between two institutions). Due to the online nature and programming offered by both institutions, several students were taking the course from areas other than Nebraska. The course was designed specifically for hemp cultivation in the Midwest, especially in areas pertaining to cannabinoid testing, regulation, and cultivar selection in Nebraska. Students from other states or countries were at a disadvantage. These portions of the course may be reorganized in the future. These cannabis course offerings are planned to continue. When seeking such partnerships, it is advised to be as transparent as possible and agree on a shared vision for the program. It is essential to listen to and meet the needs of both institutions, as well as their students and industry stakeholders.

Resources Needed

Many resources were utilized in the development of the cannabis courses and program. Supportive administration is essential, as well as proper infrastructure for online program development and delivery. One of the largest, unmet resources we initially faced was a lack of trustworthy and economically priced educational materials (e.g., textbook) on hemp/cannabis. Additionally, misinformation on this topic is rampant online. Therefore, the faculty team teaching these courses worked together to create a two-volume textbook on the hemp/cannabis topics taught. The chapters on hemp cultivation were written based upon peer-reviewed literature. The textbook, used in the seven courses, provides an affordable option to students entering the program. The textbook can be purchased on Amazon as a hardcopy for \$40 or as a digital version for \$9 (Amazon, n.d.).

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