



Recruiting for Graduate Programs: One Size Does Not Fit All

Chad Johnson*, PhD; Andrew Coop*, PhD, Leah Sera*, PharmD, MA, BCPS, Annamarie McCormick-Howell**, M.Ed., Kristina San Juan**, MBA

*University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, Masters in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics Program

**University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, Office of Graduate Programs

Background and Objectives

Higher education struggles to maintain pre-pandemic student enrollment, so graduate program recruitment is a key issue for graduate and professional campuses with unique prospective student populations. Typical recruitment efforts use a variety of digital advertising strategies, including advertising, online communities, e-mail lists, and social and professional networking platforms to supplement traditional recruitment activities like student events and open houses.

The UMSOP Graduate Studies in Medical Cannabis Program attracts students from varied professional backgrounds interested in the cannabis industry with a specific focus on under-represented populations. This poster contrasts recruitment strategies for cannabis with those utilized for the PharmD program.

Methods/Results

A recruitment strategy was created focusing on return on investment (ROI) by measuring prospective student contact. Customized QR-codes were used to measure analytics for each recruitment effort to evaluate the cost-benefit compared with current recruiting efforts for the PharmD program.

While both programs used targeted online advertising, maintaining an active social media presence, attending conferences, and hosting open houses, cannabis recruitment efforts included mailing personalized letters and FAQ sheets to cannabis dispensaries, advertising on Reddit, speaking at local rotary clubs, and attending panel discussions at local colleges and HBCUs. QR codes and customized application questions asking “how they heard” about the program outperformed traditional recruitment efforts, resulting in more website traffic, attendance at open houses, and application conversion - demonstrating that recruiting efforts are not a one-size-fits-all but should be tailored to the individual program (and student).

Discussion

Recruitment continues to be a top priority for many graduate and professional programs. As each graduate program targets a specific type of applicant, strategies should be thoughtfully implemented and analyzed routinely for their effectiveness and overall cost.

Effective recruitment is not one-size-fits-all—do not be afraid to try something new and “out of the box!” Tailored approaches that integrate ROI evaluation provide opportunities to stretch marketing budgets, allowing programs to reach out to under-represented populations that have not been previously targeted.

Recruitment Strategies (One Size Doesn't Fit All!)

Conferences/Public Meetings:

- Targeting Undergraduates/Career Fairs.
- Focus on targeting new audiences and under-represented populations
- Make yourself (and your program) visible!
- Partner with outside organizations

Community Advocacy:

- Focusing on under-represented populations
- Public Service
- Rotary Clubs
- Advocating for new legislation
- Student-led events

Other:

- Advertisements/QR codes
- Social media
- Podcasts
- Virtual information sessions

Description of the Graduate Studies in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics Program

The pioneering **MS in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics** is the first graduate program in the United States dedicated to the study of medical cannabis. The two-year program based at the Universities at Shady Grove in Rockville, Md., blends online instruction with face-to-face experiences with our award-winning faculty. Students will have the opportunity to meet and interact with experts in the science, therapeutics, and policy of medical cannabis at live symposia, while online coursework will allow them flexibility when completing assignments.

The **Graduate Certificate in Medical Cannabis Science, Therapeutics, and Policy** is a two-semester, 12-credit program that provides a foundation in cannabis pharmacology and clinical science, historical context, and current policy landscape. The entirely online certificate provides a more **limited course of study** than the MS degree program.

MCST Program Link



MS in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics



We now have ~700 alumni of the program, ranging from ages 21-72, representing all 50 states and over 20 countries, from a variety of different educational backgrounds



Left: Drs. Coop, Sera, and Johnson keynote seminar at Cannabis Science Conference East on Psychedelics

Dr. Johnson at ACS MARM undergraduate luncheon

Dr. Johnson and Karen Jaynes (MCST Class of '23) poster presentation at CSC East



Above left: Dr. Coop and Annamarie-McCormick-Howell at recruiting event in Laurel, MD. Above right: Dr. Johnson with panelists at the University of Baltimore Cannabis Literacy Event

Right: Dr. Coop and others at bill signing for psychedelics task force

Right: Cannabis Education and Expungement Clinic put on by our MCST student organization (MCSA) with their faculty advisor (Dr. Tiffany Buckley)

Drs Johnson and Sera as panelists for the Americans for Safe Access Conference (Advocacy Event)



Dr. Coop testifying at the Senate HELP Committee (above), and speaking at a local Maryland Rotary Club (below)

