

HOLYOKE

## HCC center aims to develop biotech workforce

State life sciences grant helped create center, programs

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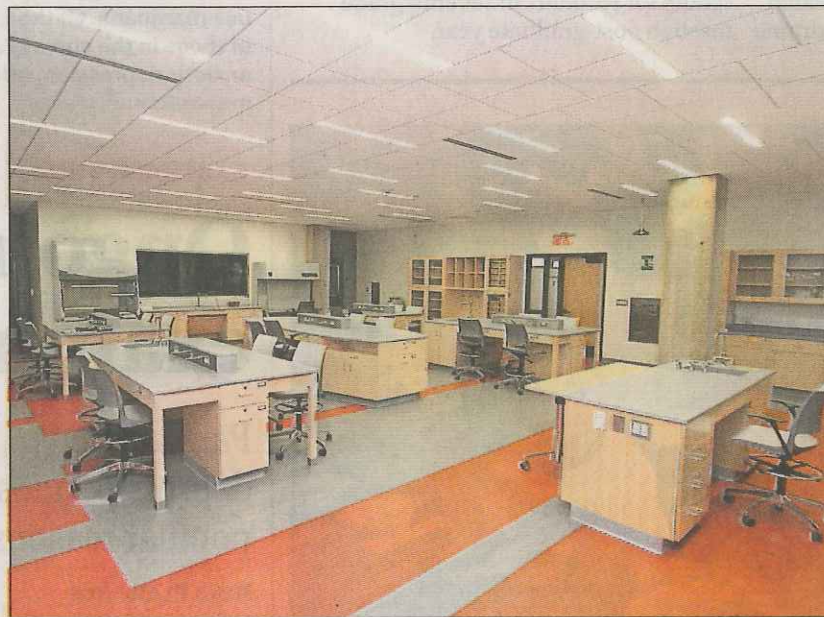
Holyoke Community College's new \$4.55 million Center for Life Sciences will feature a clean-room training facility, a first for Massachusetts two-year institutions.

The 13,000-square-foot Center for Life Sciences, part of the Marieb Building, is set to open today. The college plans to use the center for courses in biotechnology, genetics and microbiology, in keeping with the growing demand for biotech workers.

The project was funded through a \$3.8 million Massachusetts Life Sciences Center grant and \$750,000 from the college foundation's Building Healthy Communities Campaign.

According to the college, the cleanroom will have an ISO 8 certification, representing air containing at or less than 100,000 particles per cubic foot. Cleanrooms are essential for high-tech and biotech companies.

The grants also paid for lab equipment, including a fluorescence microscope, a microvolume spectrophotometer, which measures tiny



Holyoke Community College's new Center for Life Sciences opens today. It features state-of-the-art teaching labs like this one, which features an instructional cleanroom like those used in the biotechnology industry. The \$4.6 million center was funded, in part, by a \$3.8 million Massachusetts Life Sciences Center grant. (HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PHOTO)

**An grand opening celebration of the new center is planned for later in the fall semester.**

amounts of genetic material, and an electroporator, used in genetic engineering.

The college will offer an introductory, noncredit course in cleanroom technology. Similar courses are in the works.

William J. Fogarty, vice president



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William J. Fogarty, HCC vice president of administration and finance

of administration and finance, said the initial grant was awarded in 2015, with the cleanroom as the anchor for the project. The cleanroom will teach students proper protocols for working in such an environment.

The college consulted with industry representatives on the essentials needed for the training program. Fogarty said the experts told HCC a fully functioning cleanroom would be costly.

"We went with their advice on what components we needed to put into this," he said, "for a training room."

An instructor can observe students performing tasks inside the cleanroom through a window.

Biology professor James Knapp took a six-month sabbatical at a company to learn how cleanrooms operate. The level of training will be for someone pursuing an associate degree or noncredit certification.

While the training will occur at HCC, Fogarty said graduates will attract likely employers from the Boston area or other tech and biotech centers. "There's a constant need for entry-level people in the industry. It's why we're focusing on what people really need," he said.

He added that HCC encourages students to pursue a four-year degree, a necessary step for career advancement. The college has forged transfer agreements over the years with private and public colleges in Massachusetts.

The program will also be structured for people who need to retool or re-enter the workforce. "We're trying to work on stackable certificates in a lot of areas," he said.

Fogarty said the school envisions dedicating the entire Marieb building to life sciences. The college will continue to pursue funding for such an expansion.

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