

## A Degree for a Horse Career

What is the right college degree for a horse career that you will love? From *Practical Horseman* magazine.

The horse business is big business. It produces annual goods and services valued at \$25.3 billion, according to a recent study commissioned by the American Horse Council (AHC). It directly employs more than 619,000 people, many of them in challenging jobs--such as marketing, facilities management, or equine health care--that require specific technical credentials. And it embraces growing fields in which horses have a therapeutic, rather than recreational or commercial, role.

In other words, you need to prepare just as thoughtfully for a career in the horse industry as in any other business. And you have more choices than ever before of college and university programs designed to provide technical knowledge and practical experience that qualify you for where you want to be in that industry.

### **TWO-YEAR DEGREE PROGRAMS: A SPRINGBOARD**

An associate, or two-year, degree in Equestrian or Equine Studies--look for a 'hands-on' program that requires several hours a day in the barn in addition to classroom time for General Education and core equine courses--can provide:

• a foundation in basics of riding, training, care, and management (plus core Liberal Arts courses) that helps you find an entry-level job--such as assistant manager or assistant trainer--with a good barn, where your education can continue.

"We get a lot of calls from employers who've hired our graduates in the past and think they have a good work ethic and the horse experience to match," says Robin Koehler, assistant professor and advisor to about 100 students in the University of Findlay's Equine program (Findlay, Ohio). "Even if they want to eventually work on their own, we encourage new two-year graduates to seek some sort of apprenticeship. It's a very competitive market and you need the experience of working with a good trainer to see what it's about." • internships and summer jobs that acquaint you with additional opportunities in the horse industry, helping to shape your educational plans.

• a chance to find out if you really enjoy working hands-on with horses full time. If you realize early on that this isn't the career you want, some or all of your equine credits can be applied toward a four-year (or more) degree that widens your choices. "I started with a two-year equine program at State University of New York's Morrisville College; I thought I wanted to be a veterinarian, but I wanted more hands-on," says Dr. Jennifer Nadeau. The experience helped her decide that equine veterinary practice's grueling physical demands were not for her; she transferred to a four-year University of Kentucky program, then continued her studies (in comparative and experimental medicine) at University of Tennessee. Now a Cooperative Extension equine specialist, she has a Ph.D. in equine nutrition and teaches in the University of Connecticut's Equine Program (Storrs, Connecticut), which offers two- and four-year Equine Science degrees. (The university also has an active equestrian program.) "It's great to work at a job that you love."

### **FOUR-YEAR DEGREES--BROAD-BASED PREPARATION FOR:**

Riding, Training, Teaching

"Nearly every student coming into our program hopes to become a trainer; few of them also want to teach," says Laura Ward; she's chair of the Equestrian faculty at William Woods University (Fulton, Missouri), whose four-year degree in Equestrian Science is designed for students interested in



An equine business degree helped Troy Hendricks find a good equine-industry job.  
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careers in training and managing horses, and/or teaching equitation. But as seniors, those students realize that the job market for four-year Equestrian Science graduates and would-be trainers consists largely of entry-level positions where "you end up being an instructor and a trainer and a barn manager and the person who buys feed and makes show entries."

"I can almost promise concerned parents that there will be a job out there when their child graduates with this degree," says Sue Coen, Associate Dean of Equine Studies at Lake Erie College (Painesville, Ohio). "Salaries in the Equestrian field aren't high, but you're also getting a lifestyle that you love." Still, she encourages graduates from Lake Erie's four-year program (which offers majors in Equine Facility Management, Equestrian Teacher/Trainer, and Equine Stud Farm Management) to continue their educations with a Master's degree in business--"They can even work on an MA at night school." As well as opening the door to business-related horse industry jobs, an MA can make graduates eligible to teach in a college-level equine program if their priorities change in the future. (More on both education and business opportunities below.)

The University of Findlay is one of the many schools that advocates (and offers) a four-year double major-in Equestrian Studies (English riding, Western riding, or Equine Business Management) plus Business, Technology Management, or another area of interest--as a way of ensuring career options. "Few of our students do only the Equestrian degree. In addition to the traditional training and barn-manager positions, our dual-major graduates take jobs with (for instance) breed associations, or marketing departments of equine companies," says Robin Koehler.

#### Education

A four-year Equine degree can be an entrée to a job at a private secondary school with an equestrian program. The directorship of the riding program at Academy of Sacred Heart (Grand Coteau, Louisiana) was deSaix Tankersley's first job after graduating from Virginia Intermont College (VIC) in Bristol, Virginia, with a four-year Equine Studies degree. "I teach beginners through advanced riders ages six to seventeen, and oversee the management of a boarding barn and riding facility. Not a moment goes by when I don't use something I learned in college," she says. A Lake Erie graduate directs the riding program at Foxcroft School, according to Sue Coen; others are teaching at the Andrews School for Girls.

#### Health Care

If equine veterinary practice, medical research, or health care is your goal, the four-year Bachelor of Science program--probably in a university's Animal Science department with an Equine concentration--is the base of your pyramid of learning that culminates in a Master's or even Doctoral degree. (A pre-vet program combined with Equine Studies is one likely avenue.) "Employers in the research field are really looking for people who not only know about horses, but know the scientific method," says Dr. Nadeau. Other possibilities in equine health, once you've completed the four-year degree, include becoming a product representative in the growing field of veterinary pharmaceuticals, or a veterinary technician.

#### Business

To "get on the farm without a pitchfork," says Robert Lawrence, Ph.D., chair of the University of Louisville's Department of Equine Business (Louisville, Kentucky), nothing does it like a solid business degree--as evidenced by UL's track record for placing graduates in well-paid horse-industry positions. "As long as they're willing to go anywhere, we'll get them a job--and it'll be at management level." In UL's rigorous four-year Equine program, students take "an Arts and Science core, then a Business core, then they take our courses. They may get hands-on horse experience on their own--galloping racehorses at nearby Churchill Downs or working at one of the local Thoroughbred farms--but the school itself has no barns, no riding facilities, and no horses." Growth areas that Dr. Lawrence sees in equine business employment:

Managers for new equine facilities. "There's a lot of new construction going on nationwide of show facilities with hundreds of stalls. Managers of those places need to know horses and horse people, understand finance, and be able to deal with the public."

Any job that requires dealing with numbers. Demand exceeds supply in this niche. "We get calls from the Breeder's Cup or a big farm: "We need an assistant comptroller!" says Dr. Lawrence. "They want someone who likes to work with data and wants to be on a horse farm." Many UL graduates find careers in the Thoroughbred racing industry; others have gone on to become attorneys with a concentration in equine law, write for equine publications, and work in marketing--for companies such as Summit Rubber Products (makers of stall mats and rubber curries), EquiSource (a horse products distributor), and Churchill Downs racetrack, and for organizations such as USA Equestrian (formerly American Horse Shows Association). With a four-year degree in Business Administration, points out Dr. Lawrence, "They're eligible for any job that requires that degree. That's a fall-back if the romance goes out of the backstretch in February, when the snow's blowing in at 4 a.m. At least they have some options."

### **CAREERS THAT HELP OTHERS THROUGH HORSES**

Therapeutic Riding: When St. Andrews Presbyterian College (Laurinburg, North Carolina) began offering a four-year degree in therapeutic riding (TR) in 1996, it was the first school in the US to do so. Several other schools now offer TR degrees, or a TR emphasis within an Equine program, says Pebbles Turbeville, director of the St. Andrews TR program, "and the career opportunities are growing, too. I had more contacts looking to fill job openings than I had seniors graduating from the program last year. There are so many TR centers around the country--some are small, just getting started; others operate year-round with full-time staff." Her school works closely with North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) and graduating seniors are prepared for NARHA certification.

St. Andrews' Equine Business degree program (offered through the School's Department of Business and Economics) provides a foundation for the TR program: "Students interested in TR who don't have the strong horse background they need can, if they're really motivated, get the knowledge from Equine Business courses." The best candidates for a TR degree, says Pebbles, are "compassionate and patient, enjoy teaching, and love kids as well as horses." The degree requires fundamental equestrian knowledge, plus a core of subjects ranging from Developmental Psychology to Human Physiology, and instruction in TR teaching techniques.

Equine-Assisted Growth and Development: The use of horses as aids to diagnosis and therapy, a relatively new trend in social work and psychotherapy, is the focus of a new minor concentration at Virginia Intermont College (VI), located in Bristol, Virginia. Students who incorporate the minor into a four-year degree in Equine Studies or Social Work receive certification from the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EGALA) and are qualified to assist licensed therapists using horses to work with children and families. Equine Studies graduates may also find the EGALA certification provides another service they can offer--therefor another source of income--when teaching in a riding program or running a barn.

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# Horse Career Possibilities—Choose Your Path

## I. What are your skills and areas of interest?

**English or History:** journalism, advertising, turf writing, publishing, author, pedigree researcher, announcer, etc.

**Math:** accountant, auditor, statistician, database manager, etc.

**Science:** chemist, geneticist, virologist, nutritionist, veterinarian, etc.

**Art:** photographer, musician, sculptor, painter, illustrator, graphic designer, motion picture director, etc.

## II. Careers related to the horse industry that you probably wouldn't think of:

**Medicine:** veterinarian, veterinary technician, first aid personal at events, therapist (physical, massage, acupuncture), dentist, chiropractor, etc.

**Business:** accountant, lawyer, executive for associations, farm management, management in an equine products company or equine organization, etc.

**Transportation:** horse trucking company, pilot service with equine specialization, trailer sales, etc.

**Industrial:** carpentry, engineering, clothing designer, manufacturing (tack, feed, facilities), etc.

**Technological:** computer program designer, website maintenance, computer management systems, etc.

## III. Careers that have daily contact with horses:

Veterinarian	Rehabilitation therapist	Riding Instructor
Veterinary Technician	Artificial Inseminator	Bloodstock Agent
Identifier	Rodeo Professional	Stallion Manager
Manager	Show Secretary	Judge
Trainer	Farm Manager	Mounted Police Officer
Breeder	Hot Walker	Farrier
Pony Person	Groom	Steward
Driver	Jockey	Jockey Valet
Jockey Agent		

#### IV. Careers that are related to horses:

Extension Horse Specialist	Dean of Agriculture, Vet Science, etc.	Actuary (insurance)
Association Executive	Lobbyist	Feed Manufacturer
Lab Technician	Director of Marketing	Director of Public Relations
Financial Advisor	Publisher	Architect
Engineer	Attorney	Accountant
Sales Person	Researcher	Clerical
Artist	Author	Motion Picture Writer
Clothing Designer	Toy Manufacturer	Water Truck Operator
Tack Store Owner	Landscaper	Human Society Director
Illustrator	Grounds Keeper	Reporter
Carpenter	Travel Agent	Tour Guide
Trailer Salesperson		

#### V. What does the horse industry offer?

**Horse Shows/Rodeo:** judge, course and jump designer, stock contractor, pick-up rider, event management

**Racing Industry:** steward, paddock judge, clocker, track superintendent, mutual clerk, catering manager, security, stable manager, track photographer, exercise rider, etc.

**Recreation/Pleasure:** park ranger, parks and recreation administrator, travel agent, event organizer, guide, boarding stable owner, etc.

**Support Services:** tack manufacturer, pharmaceutical sales, horse transportation, feed supplier, trailer sales, etc.

#### VI. *How much education will you need?*

Q: Will you need to have a bachelor's degree, advanced degree or obtain your PhD?

A: This depends on what occupation you choose. Your guidance counselor or University representative will be able to help.

Q: How do I find an equine college once I have chosen a career path?

A: A good website that ranks horse schools, can be found at

[www.horseschools.com](http://www.horseschools.com).

**To start your career in the horse industry consider the following five points and be prepared to follow them!**

- **Be prepared to volunteer:** There are volunteer opportunities in almost every aspect of the horse industry. The "trial run" and on-the-job-training that goes along with volunteering time and energy to an equine related career provides a basis to make informed decisions about a career you are thinking of pursuing. It also contributes to building your contacts for networking.
- **Start networking:** Start with the people you already know, and ask for their advice and suggestions. People who know and are interested in you can create a powerful web of contacts. Remember that while an introduction from a friend or contact is very helpful, once the door is opened, you'll need to be ready to act on your own, so do your homework.
- **Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses:** What are you good at and what do you like to do? Every job has aspects that are more fun than others, look for job openings that include a good portion of responsibility in your strongest areas and promote those strengths to potential employers. If you find an opportunity that fits your strengths, and also covers areas that you identified as weaknesses, don't give up, consider improving those needed skills.
- **Sharpen the ax and keep an open mind:** Consider classes, certifications, or degrees that might strengthen your skills and make you a more attractive candidate for the career of your choice. Also remember that a foot-in-the-door job might be the first step on the path to your ideal position.
- **Check the classifieds:** Both trade and lay publications routinely publish classified ads for positions in the horse industry. American Horse Publications is a non-profit professional association that maintains a web site that posts career opportunities specifically in equine publishing, but many organizations use their site to notify the industry at large of openings in associations and business. Their website is at [www.americanhorsepubs.com](http://www.americanhorsepubs.com)