

Horses and Academics

A look at four programs specializing in the horse racing industry

BY AMANDA DUCKWORTH

THE HORSE RACING industry is a multifaceted business that requires its participants to be well-versed in a number of skills, ranging from animal husbandry to long-term economics.

Education and experience are important for those looking to make a living in the sport. While there are numerous internship opportunities, it is also possible to receive a college degree based on a passion for horses. Here is an update on four well-known programs in the United

States, all of which have their own unique approaches to combining horses and academics.

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

While the heart of horse racing in America might be located in Kentucky, when it comes to formal education concerning the industry, the University of Arizona is actually at the forefront.

Its Race Track Industry Program was established in 1973 and is well respect-

ed for its curriculum on bloodstock and pari-mutuel racing. The RTIP came to be when the late Frank Vessels Jr. championed the concept of a collegiate program to educate future leaders in the racing industry.

“It’s interesting because we have always had more out-of-state students than we have in-state students,” said Wendy Davis, the program’s director as well as one of its graduates. “Generally, our students come from places that have a vibrant racing industry. We are really supporting the whole industry as much as specifically here in Arizona.”

The RTIP offers both a bachelor’s and master’s degree centered on the racing industry. The list of alumni reads like a who’s who of industry leaders, including trainers Bob Baffert and Todd Pletcher. Beyond the available degrees, the RTIP is also well known for its Global Symposium on Racing, which has been held since 1974.

“If we look at the landscape 25 years ago, there were so many more conferences that were racing related,” said Davis. “The more others drift away, ours becomes even more important. It’s the place where everybody can come together to



Steward Luis Jauregui at the University of Arizona Race Track Industry program

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MESSAGE FROM THE GRAYSON-JOCKEY CLUB RESEARCH FOUNDATION

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARDS ADD DEPTH TO EXPERTISE



Grayson-Jockey Club
Research Foundation

BY EDWARD L. BOWEN

Dr. Hiram Polk has been a board member of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation since 1997. In addition to his years as a breeder and owner of Thoroughbreds, he has extensive credentials distinguishing him in the fields of medical practice, management, and education. There are three veterinarians on the Grayson board, Dr. Larry Bramlage, Dr. Gary Lavin, and Dr. Rick Arthur, but Polk is the only doctor in human medicine. Therefore, he was in position to make a suggestion that was later adopted and quickly began benefiting the world of equine research both in terms of careers of individuals and enhancing the health and soundness of horses.

From his experience in his own career, Polk recognized that the foundation, by creating a career development award, could boost young scientists at a stage when they were facing career decisions. Encouraging them to choose/maintain a career path in equine research would have the twofold benefit of helping young careers and creating successors for today's depth of expertise in the field.

Thus was born the Storm Cat Career Development Award, which in due course was joined by the Elaine and Bertram Klein Development Award.

When the career development award plan was approved by the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation board of directors, Mrs. Lucy Young Hamilton stepped forward to underwrite the award personally. Hamilton is the daughter of distinguished horseman W.T. Young, who also had been a director of Grayson. She chose to name the award in honor of her father's homebred Storm Cat, who had been a major winner and became a pivotal stallion at the family's Overbrook Farm. Young has funded a Storm Cat Award each year since the launch of the program.

In 2015 the family of the distinguished horsewoman Elaine Klein of Louisville came forward to initiate a similar career

development award. The Klein Award was renamed the Elaine and Bertram Klein Development Award after the subsequent death of Bertram Klein.

To date Grayson has awarded 21 of these \$15,000 awards for a total of \$315,000 since 2006. Of those recipients, 19 have had time to finish their Ph.D., and 16 (84%) of those have chosen academic/clinical research for their career paths. The awards have become recognized in the research community, and for 2019 the foundation received nine applicants from seven institutions.

Integral to the selection process of projects to be funded by Grayson is an elaborate evaluation system involving the Research Advisory Committee. This committee is made up of 32 researchers and veterinarians representing many specialties and hailing from various regions of North America. Selection of the career development award winners incorporates some of the RAC members who are asked by the foundation's veterinary consultant, Dr. Johnny Mac Smith, to evaluate the proposals, which are received by Grayson by Nov. 1 annually.

The five RAC members asked to help reflect the areas of specialties represented by the year's applications. In following the criteria described above by Dr. Bramlage, Dr. Smith and his cohorts

place emphasis on how effectively an applicant has designed and planned the year for which he/she is requesting the \$15,000 income supplement. Also, it is important that the principal investigator working with the young candidate verifies the program has been allotted sufficient funding by the home institution.

As is the case with all research funded by Grayson, the committee recommends the best candidates from the career development applicants, and the full board makes the final decision.

One measure of the success of the career development programs is that six recipients already have moved ahead in their careers sufficiently to have a full-fledged project funded from Grayson's principal budget for research. Each of the six has been funded either as a principal investigator (PI) or co-PI of a project.

Illustrative of scholastic experience that leads some candidates toward the specific career of equine research is the following description by former career development award winner Stephanie Bond:

"I found the deductive reasoning and problem solving required to practice medicine on animals intellectually rewarding. I then organized placement at an equine hospital which solidified my decision to become an equine veterinarian.

"Half-way through my veterinary degree, I undertook a research year. It was during this time I realized that, while I enjoy clinical work, research enables me to make a positive impact on far more horses than I could ever treat in clinics."

"The career development awards are a vital key enabling researchers to

bridge the difficult gap between finishing their Ph.D. and starting their own research laboratory,” noted Bramlage. “Bridging that gap makes it possible to stay in the research field for some young researchers and eventually produces the vital research that we need for the horse. This award develops the researcher, not the scientific papers.”

ON DR. HIRAM C. POLK JR.

Hiram C. Polk Jr., a native of Jackson, Miss., is an alumnus of Millsaps College and the Harvard Medical School. Polk trained in surgery at Washington University in St. Louis and was a fellow at the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine in London before receiving an academic appointment at the University of Miami. He became a full profes-

sor and director of pediatric surgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital (Miami). In 1971, at the age of 35, he was recruited to the University of Louisville as chairman of surgery. When he stepped down as chairman, the University of Louisville department of surgery was rededicated as the Hiram C. Polk Department of Surgery and an endowed chair was established in his name. Advances when he was chairman include the development and first implantation of the AbioCore artificial heart and the organization of one of the world’s first hand transplant programs. Polk trained more than 230 surgical residents. All hold board certification in general surgery, and some of the surgical residents have become academic surgery chairmen at medical schools.

talk about common issues. We take that really seriously. Additionally, so many internships and job opportunities come out of our mentor lunch. Our students each become a name, a face, and a person, not just a résumé.”

Last year the RTIP refocused on the bloodstock side of things by introducing its Bloodstock Project, which resulted in students in the program helping to select two pregnant mares out of the Keeneland November mixed sale.

“We got a wonderful donation, and the intent for that money was to use it to go through the entire process the first time and then hopefully continue it for those students who want to be involved on the bloodstock side,” said Davis. “Both mares were in foal and have foaled out. It’s been really fun because it’s letting students see the real world of the bloodstock side and what the costs really are. We’ve really

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Equine Studies

enhanced the hands-on side of it.”

Students interested in a degree through the RTIP choose between the business path or the equine management path, depending on where their interests are strongest. About 30 students are usually in the program at any given time. A field trip to Kentucky that will encompass both offered paths is in the works this fall.

“We certainly understand that we are unique, and one of the positives is that we sit in Arizona, which is neutral territory,” said Davis. “However, we are going to spend time back where the heart of so much of the Thoroughbred business is based and try to negate some of the negatives of being in the desert.

“Just by the nature of our program, we have far more transfer and second-degree students than we have freshman. They come, they do their thing, and they get out in the industry. We work really hard to help people. Most of our folks aren’t fresh out of high school,



Brushing up on extracurricular activity at the University of Arizona Race Track Industry Program

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and their parents aren’t funding their education. We just want to make sure we give them everything they need while they are here, so they are successful when they walk out that door for the last time.”

MIDWAY COLLEGE

When it comes to Kentucky schools, it was not one of the large universities, but rather Midway College that was the first in the state—and one of the first in the country—to get on board with the concept of an equine degree.

“Our equine studies program, one of the first in the nation, has been at Midway since the 1970s,” said Dr. Janice Holland, the coordinator and an associate professor of the equine studies program. “The location, in the heart of horse country is perfect, and it attracts students from around the United States as well as internationally. The program has evolved over the years to meet the developing demands of the equine industry.”

One major change for Midway overall came in 2016, when for the first time in its 169-year history it began accepting men to its daytime undergraduate programs.

“The switch to co-ed has not had as major an impact on the equine studies program as the other majors, but we will be graduating our first male students, ever, next May,” said Holland. “We are about 10% male students currently, and this is pretty close to the average in equine studies programs across the country at other universities.”

About 50 new equine studies students are expected to begin their courses at Midway this fall. The programs they will be entering remain similar to those in recent years, which have had a focus on practical experience.

“Based on industry feedback, we modified the curriculum several years ago to reflect skills needed in our graduates,” said Holland. “A key part of this included incorporating as many

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hands-on opportunities in our classes as we can.

“For example, students in the management concentration work their way through courses where they start as farm workers and then end up managing the student farm workers. Students in the health and rehabilitation concentration are assigned school horses each semester to work on and keep healthy for our riding program. Once we believe they are proficient on campus, they will complete internships off campus.”

Midway also offers a general bachelor’s in equine studies as well as an equine studies degree with a science concentration. Additionally, students can minor in equine studies and graduate level students can get an MBA with an equine management concentration.

“We are exploring additional majors to complement those we already have,” said Holland. “We are continuing to develop relationships with farms and other equine businesses in the area for placement of our students during their internship semesters.

“We are looking for students who have a strong work ethic. They need to be willing to be in the barns no matter what the weather, and they should always be looking for the next job that needs to be done without being constantly told what to do. Our incoming students don’t need to be the best horse handlers, but they need to be willing to learn.”

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Although its inspiration came from the trying times of the late 1980s, today the University of Louisville’s Equine Industry Program is unique among its counterparts. Its College of Business offers the only equine degree in the world in an AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) accredited college of business.

“Having that accreditation really is something for us to brag about,” said Terri Burch, the coordinator of the EIP. “It’s important. The program started in 1987, and the funding started in 1986. There had been a major tax law change



STEPHEN PATTON

College programs offer text book and hands-on learning



UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE PHOTO

The study abroad program is popular with University of Louisville students

that really shifted the way people could write off their business. It caused an upheaval in the horse industry, and a lot of farms went out of business.

“The general assembly really felt we needed a business program to educate people on the business side of the industry because it’s so important to Kentucky. We can’t afford to lose it.”

Currently, the EIP covers topics such as equine economics, equine marketing, equine law, equine taxation, organization and administration of equine operations, and equine financial management. Research has also once again become a major focus.

“We are going back to a research

focus,” said Burch. “We are getting our students more involved and giving them more opportunities because it’s really important to look at the economics of it and how it works. We used to have them do a research paper and that kind of went away, but now it is back. Students are expected to look at something in the industry and then do a research paper on it. The last two years we’ve actually given an award to the best topic.

“Students who are really interested in the business side of the industry or want to have their own business, then we are a great fit for that.”

Each incoming class has around 25 students. Another area the EIP champi-

ons is study abroad, since the Thoroughbred industry is global. Additionally, every other year the program takes an international trip. In 2017 students went to England and France, and later this summer they will be going to Argentina and Uruguay.

“We have a lot of connections in the industry, and our students have always said the best thing about our program is the incredible amount of networking opportunities,” said Burch. “They want to do everything they can to give these young people a leg up in the industry, and they have been so good to our graduates over the years. They also end up getting really good workers out of it, so it’s a win-win.”

The EIP is also in the beginning stages of offering online courses for those unable to move to Louisville. While it is still in the works, there is a lot of



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University of Kentucky students at the Maine Chance Farm research center

excitement surrounding it.

“You will be able to do it as a stand-alone or with the MBA,” said Burch. “We are going to be offering that in the not-too-distant future. We’ve had a lot of in-

ternational students, but we also get a lot of email from people around the world who can’t really come here but want to understand the industry better. Really, racing is racing, and we may have dif-

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ferent rules in different places, but the economics of it all is similar.”

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

The University of Kentucky welcomed the inaugural class of its Equine Science and Management undergraduate degree program in the fall of 2007, and the first graduate of the program came in 2009. The degree came about as part of the university's Ag Equine Programs, which until 2012 was known as the Equine Initiative.

“The Equine Initiative was launched in 2005 when the College of Agriculture set out to radically change how it served Kentucky's signature equine industry and provide a suite of services appropriate for a land-grant university,” said Holly Wiemers, the Ag Equine Programs' communications director. “This program has become one of the largest majors in the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and became very popular very quickly.

“When we first implemented this program, our enrollment jumped so quickly and we worked really hard to add staffing and resources to support the number of students that were coming in.”

Currently the major is set up so that students tailor a third of their degree coursework toward helping them reach their specific career goals through emphasis area classes. The three emphasis options are equine science, equine business, and communications/leadership.

“We put a lot of time and thought into student success here and help support students from when they enter as freshmen through when they graduate,” said Wiemers. “We then work closely with our alums, and even have an equine specific alumni chapter within the college.

“Our equine industry has been incredibly supportive of our program over the years. They have hosted interns, hired alums, served as guest speakers in classes, and have provided feedback and advice about the program

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as it formed and grew.”

Starting this year, study abroad opportunities count toward the academic enrichment component, which traditionally has equated to internships. The first students to take advantage of this were able to tour and learn from the equine industry in England. Next year opportunities will be made available in Ireland and Germany.

Additionally, incoming students this fall will be required to take Intro to Equine Careers so that they can begin to match their strengths to potential careers in the industry.

Since its inception, 425 people have graduated from the program, and this fall, UK is expecting an all-time record of 97 incoming freshmen. About 73% of the students come from out-of-state, representing more than 40 states and countries. In all, about 89% of the students are




UK COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

The University of Kentucky's Maine Chance research center

women, while 17% are first-generation students.

“The Equine Science and Management degree at the University of Kentucky fills a unique niche in support of the equine industry,” said Dr. Mick Peterson, the director of UK Ag Equine Programs. “Basic knowledge of the horse is combined with

specialized knowledge in communications, management, economics, or animal science. We anticipate an increase in demand to help fill the workforce gaps in the industry.” 

Amanda Duckworth is a freelance writer based in Lexington.

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