

Student Voices: Research is Fun – the People and the Horses Are Great!

By Diane Sickles, Class of 2005

My four years at Cook College will stay with me for years to come. I have met remarkable people and have had the opportunity to partake in a variety of classes, clubs, and extracurricular activities. The highlight of it all has been my involvement at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station farm on the Cook College campus doing research with horses.

Ever since I was young, I have had a strong interest in horses. It has been a dream of mine to study and work with horses and maybe one day have a barn of my own. But I hadn't had much exposure to horses. When I was younger, I used to ride, but that was long ago.

My equine experience began my sophomore year, when I had the opportunity to work with a filly for Ag-Field Day. I learned the basics of handling, restraining, grooming, and other horse management practices. In the spring of my junior year, I enrolled in equine research with Dr. Kenneth McKeever, where I was destined to help with master's and Ph.D. research projects.

As the time approached to start this research course, I started to worry that I wasn't experienced enough or would be thought of as the total rookie in the class. When I got there, though, I found that I wasn't the only one who was a beginner and that there were plenty of other students who were new, too. The faculty and the graduate students were more than willing to take time to teach us and include us in everything, because that was what we were there for — to learn! Now, after being an equine researcher for more than a year, I am very comfortable working with the horses and students, and I am also helping to teach the newer students all the things that I learned.

This experience has been truly amazing for me. Every day that I went to the farm I learned something new. This included basic equine first aid and veterinary care, catheterization, ultrasound assistance, proper handling and restraining, as well as a variety of laboratory sampling procedures and data analysis, among other things. Since my junior year, I have enrolled in two more semesters of research in addition to working over the summer as the equine Teaching/Research Assistant, and I am currently working with Dr. Carey Williams and her nutrition and exercise physiology studies.

Another great bonus was winning the Doris C. Murphy Scholarship for my senior year. The award is given to Rutgers women pursuing equine studies. Since I held jobs all the time I was in school, the

scholarship dollars were a very welcome and much appreciated boost and a nice reward for working hard.

I know that if I went to any other school, I would not have gotten this unique opportunity... or the incomparable chance to work with horses. For any student who needs experience-based credits, I definitely recommend research. You learn so much, and the best part about it is that you get to do a lot of hands-on work. Research is fun, the people are great, the horses are great, and it's rewarding to know you helped with a graduate/Ph.D.-level study!

Now that I am graduating in May, I am investigating internships and jobs in the equine field. My plan is to take the knowledge I acquired down at the farm and use it in the real world, hopefully landing a job working with horses. I will miss Cook College very much, but mostly, I will miss my research professors (Dr. McKeever and Dr. Williams) and all of the great horses that I was able to work with. Thank you all for this wonderful experience!



Diane Sickles is an Animal Sciences major with a minor in Equine Science. Here she poses with one of her "lab assistants," Cascade.