

Student Voices – The Road to Graduate School: Pursuing a Ph.D. in Equine Nutrition and Exercise Physiology

By Emily D. Lamprecht, Third-Year Graduate Student in Equine Science



Photo by Jamie Lamprecht

Emily Lamprecht and Snowdrift.

When asked what I am going to do with a Ph.D. in equine science, my answer is something like, "...Continue to find ways to improve equine welfare and performance, to educate horse owners and enthusiasts about relevant equine-related topics, and to promote and ensure the vitality of the equine industry both locally and nationally." After contemplating this response, most people ask if I am going to be a veterinarian; of course my answer is "No." Upon completion of my doctoral studies, I will most likely work in academia, in industry for a feed company, or for a pharmaceutical company. I particularly enjoy equine outreach and extension. About half of the people I have this conversation with are satisfied with this answer, the other half are curious as to how I started down this career path.

Like many young animal enthusiasts I aspired to be a veterinarian. I was accepted into the animal science program at the University of Missouri, Columbia and it wasn't until my sophomore year that I changed my career goals. After coming to terms with the reality of vet-school incurred debt, a typical starting salary for a veterinarian, and the general lifestyle of a practicing vet, I decided it wasn't for me. It was then that I got involved with equine and dairy research at the University's Department of Animal Science and saw the possibility of graduate school. Realizing that I would not be able to achieve my career goals without a higher degree, I was motivated to apply. I applied to several graduate programs including Rutgers

University, University of Kentucky, Colorado State University, and University of California, Davis.

Rutgers' equine science program was my top pick for many reasons. The animal science faculty is outstanding. Among them are several distinguished and respected equine faculty, including Dr. Ken McKeever, Dr. Sarah Ralston, Dr. Carol Bagnell, and Dr. Carey Williams. Dr. Karyn Malinowski (a former animal science faculty member and now Dean of Extension and Director of the Equine Science Center) realized a dream with the creation of the Equine Science Center. It is a tremendous asset to the Department of Animal Sciences, the University, and the state of New Jersey. The center provides networking and outreach opportunities for students and faculty, resources for the industry, and is a source of funding for equine research.

Another significant factor influencing my decision to attend Rutgers was funding. Rutgers' Department of Animal Sciences was the only program that provided continual graduate support through teaching and research assistantships which will allow me to come out of graduate school without debt. Additionally, our equine research facility, commonly known as "The Red Barn", is a state-of-the-art equine exercise physiology laboratory complete with an equine treadmill, free-stall exerciser, scale, and a "wet" laboratory. Rutgers offered a complete package, and although it was difficult to leave my family and the Midwest behind, it was the obvious choice for graduate school. I was pleasantly surprised by the strong presence and diversity of the equine industry in New Jersey. From thoroughbred and standardbred racing, to eventing, dressage and gymkhana, this state has it all.

Now entering into my third year of graduate study, I am still 100 percent sure I made the right decision to attend Rutgers. The faculty has proven themselves as caring and effective advisors. My dissertation research in equine joint inflammation and nutraceuticals is a constant challenge that I look forward to everyday. I truly enjoy working with the horses and undergraduate research students to address issues facing the equine industry. Opportunities for personal and professional development are numerous in this program. I have had and will continue to have opportunities to attend and present research at local, national, and international conferences where networking opportunities and exposure to current equine research can be attained. Graduate school is an excellent alternative to veterinary school, one that has allowed me to turn my passion for horses into a career.