

Student Voices: Young Horse Teaching and Research Program Offers Rare Opportunities and Creates Lasting Memories

By Sarah Grossman, Class of 2006

Although my interest in horses began before I can remember, I know the exact moment when I fell in love with them. I was six, and my aunt was putting me on the first pony I ever rode. As she led the pony down the lane, I knew I had officially become horse crazy. Soon I was taking riding lessons, leasing horses, and eventually breaking and training my own youngsters. From the moment I sat on that pony, I knew that horses were in my future.

When it was time to go to college, it was only natural for me to pick a university where I could pursue my passion for horses. Cook College's academic reputation, the campus' beauty, and the farm facilities were the deciding factors which made it my choice. I was introduced to the NAERIC Young Horse Teaching and Research Program the fall of my sophomore year. By the spring semester I was enrolled as a research student with Dr. Sarah Ralston, who then allowed me to be one of eight students to travel to North Dakota to help hand pick foals for the following year. Since then, my involvement with the program has grown tremendously: I have developed a website featuring the weanlings (accessible through www.esc.rutgers.edu and http://homepage.mac.com/ru_horses/); filmed, produced, and edited videos of the foals; and have been a part of as many aspects of the program as possible, including collecting research data and coordinating the Ag-Field Day activities.

The program has not only allowed me to work with the animals I love but has also enabled me to increase my knowledge of horse nutrition, growth, and behavior. The program has also allowed me to travel

to North Dakota twice to work with young, untamed foals. This experience has been particularly rewarding. The foals, which prior to our attention have had little human contact, overcome their fear of people to gain complete trust in us, often choosing to be with people rather than their dams by the end of the week. The experience of working with and training an untouched horse is a unique aspect of the program. Working from a "blank slate" and watching the horse develop is a very special opportunity which I have had the privilege of experiencing twice, first with last year's RU Sandra Dee and now with RU Oh Gilbert!, one of this year's colts. In addition, I have found the NAERIC auction a thrilling and emotional end to the year. Although sad to see my beloved horses sold, the admiration the yearlings receive from the public fills me with pride. Through the hard work of myself and the other students, we are able to turn twelve timid weanlings into beautiful, gentle, and well trained yearlings who go on to bring pleasure to their new owners' lives. The happiness their future owners take in their new horses is one the greatest rewards of the program.

This year will be my last with the NAERIC Young Horse Teaching and Research Program and my last at Cook. I will be graduating in May and hope to be accepted to a British veterinary school where I can pursue my lifelong goal of becoming an equine vet. I consider my hours spent with the NAERIC program among the best of my college career due to the unique opportunities it afforded me. Working with Dr. Ralston, traveling to North Dakota, and training my weanlings are memories of this program which I will remember long after my days at Cook are over.



Sarah Grossman with RU Cluedo.