



Feather River College offers formal preparation for careers in the horse world.

by Kim F. Miller

The schools of hands-on experience and hard knocks are the pathways to careers in equestrian sports for many. But not for all. There are many benefits to having a formal education for those seeking a career involving horses, says Crystal Anderson, the Agriculture Equine program coordinator at Feather River College.

Equine science academic tracks exist at universities around the country, typically within agriculture and animal science programs. And, there are several associate's (two year) or certificate programs at schools in California.

Located in the Plumas County town of Quincy, between Chico and Reno, Feather River is unique as a community college that offers a four-year Equine Science bachelor program. This became a reality in 2016, after a small number of community colleges received permission to offer bachelor's degrees. FRC was the only community college to submit a proposal for an Agriculture-based program, including a degree program for equine and ranch management. Students choose between an equine or cattle management emphasis.



At presstime, Feather River was planning to start a hybrid schedule of online and in-person classes on August 24. While COVID-19 has caused many schools to go only or mostly online, Feather River's remote location and relatively low coronavirus cases in the region enabled it to open as planned. "Lectures are online and riding and training classes are still face to face," Crystal explains. "That is pretty hard to teach online." Following all safety protocols, of course.

Interest and enrollment in all levels of the equine science academic track have risen steadily and all classes involving horses are full this fall, she reports.

There are several benefits of getting a formal education before a career in the horse world, Crystal asserts. "You can prepare yourself for whatever may get thrown at you and it can make you a more well-rounded person." Along with courses and hands-on experience in riding, training, care and husbandry, the Feather River program includes business classes that equip graduates to apply their talents, knowledge and passion in a financially viable way.

Networking opportunities are another benefit, she says. "Your classmates become part of your network of professionals, giving you a broad base of contacts. Education is not just about taking a class and developing skills. It's also about developing a future career and professional relationships."

From a prospective employer's perspective, the bachelor's degree "shows me they've been able to complete the more advanced program: that they know how to jump through the hoops needed to earn their degree. It shows they are well-rounded people who can accomplish goals."

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