

KER Employee Profile: Interns Get Hands-On Research Experience

Spending almost every waking hour in a horse barn might not seem like an appealing goal for many college graduates, but for two young women from the other side of the Atlantic, that's just what they wanted to do. In the months they have been at the Kentucky Equine Research (KER) farm on research fellowships, Pamela Galvin and Carrie Neads feel they have learned valuable skills while acquiring a true understanding of the hard work and attention to detail that are essential elements of any scientific study.

Yearlong internships are open to university students or recent graduates of equine studies programs. Interns participate in all phases of nutrition and exercise physiology research while working under the direction and guidance of research farm director Delia Nash and assistant director Whitney Jones. As applicants, Carrie and Pamela had to put together a letter of application and a resume, gather three letters of reference, and write a short essay. That amount of preparation might have dissuaded someone with a less intense interest, but for Carrie, it was well worth the effort. "I've wanted this position for four years," she admitted.

Growing up in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, England, Carrie started riding and working with horses ten years ago. She completed a National Diploma in equine studies at Oaklands College and followed that with a B.Sc. Honors degree from Writtle College in the same field. As part of her requirements at Writtle, she did a dissertation focusing on the marketing of antioxidants in the equine industry, both from the standpoint of feed company strategies and consumer buying behavior.

Although Carrie had done a six-month work placement at a riding and showing stable during her Oaklands studies, she said her understanding of everyday horse care has expanded since she's been at KER. "We get to the barn about 7:00 every morning," she explained. "We check hay, measure and feed grain, groom, and get the horses ready to work on the treadmill. After they have all been exercised, we muck out stalls, clean the barn, scrub and refill water buckets, and check that we have all the supplies we will need for the next few days. We hold horses when the farrier and veterinarian make visits, and there are always horses to bring in or turn out at various times of the day." Chores are usually finished by late in the afternoon, but someone has to return to the barn for an evening feeding and to make a final check of all the horses.

For Pamela, interning at KER has been harder work than she expected, but she would still recommend the program to anyone who wants to increase their equine experience. "I've really learned a lot here, not just about caring for the horses, but in lots of other areas," she said. "For instance, at home in

Ireland, if you needed a blood sample, a veterinarian would have to be called. Here, I've learned how to draw blood, centrifuge the sample, and analyze for glucose and lactate. Everything that needs to be done—driving the tractor, fixing fences—it's up to us, so we just do it!"

Although she had worked in the virology lab at the Irish Equine Center after earning a degree in equine science at the University of Limerick, Pamela said the intern position at KER gave her a new understanding of the importance of forethought, precision, and attention to detail. "A lot of this job is being alert all the time and keeping up with the little things," she said. "Every day is different. Maybe a horse's feed has to be changed, or he goes on a new turnout schedule. It's a lot to keep up with, and we have to sure everyone is communicating so that things are done the right way."

The young women agree that, while leaving their homes for a year was difficult, their experience in America has been valuable. Attending the KER nutrition conference was something that both enjoyed, and hearing the presentations by prominent scientists helped convince them that they want to look for jobs in some phase of equine research when their internship is finished. With a firm understanding of what's involved, these future scientists are poised to look for answers that will benefit the horses of tomorrow. ☺



Carrie Neads (left) and Pamela Galvin (above) share horse care and research responsibilities.