

KER Internship Combines Work and Learning

To travel...to learn...to meet new people. Their motivations are as varied as their backgrounds, but all participants in KER's intern program seem to agree on at least one thing: there's a fair amount of physical work involved in the job. Each day, all the horses must be brought in, groomed, exercised, and fed; stalls must be cleaned; hay and shavings must be brought up from the storage barn. And that's the easy part! Tasks like operating the high-speed equine treadmill, drawing blood for studies, and manually collecting manure samples are no less demanding, because all aspects of research must be done to exacting standards.

Internships at Kentucky Equine Research are open to university students or recent graduates who want to gain experience in equine nutritional research. Summer interns stay for three months; those with more time can spend 12 to 18 months at the research facility in central Kentucky.

This year's summer intern, Florida native Kaitlyn Sirico, comes from a family of horse enthusiasts. After years of hunt seat and dressage competitions, she had plenty of experience in handling horses, but still found a challenge in her first day at the research barn. "My immediate worry was learning to tell these horses apart," she laughed, referring to the fact that, among the 18 geldings at the research farm, 15 are bay Thoroughbreds of similar size.

As a biology student, Kaitlyn was familiar with laboratory experiments where most parameters are controlled and there is only one variable. "It's different when you work with animals," she said. "Many more things need to be considered. I'm learning how an equine study is planned and carried out, and then how the findings are used to design products or to impact training and performance."

University graduates Cassy Streeter, Nicola Crowley, and Rachel Moxon are spending a year at KER before going on to various professional careers. Worked with racing Standardbreds during her college years in New York, Cassy saw the musculoskeletal problems that can develop even in the most carefully trained horses. She wanted to find out more about the influence of feeds and nutritional management on performance and soundness, and felt a year at KER could be instructive. Weighing options for the future, she is considering becoming a chiropractor or possibly assisting in

research on tying-up. "I'm looking forward to the KER conference and meeting experts who are working on these questions," she said.

Coming to Kentucky from Liverpool, England, Nicola can't remember a time when she wasn't interested in horses. As a child, she told her mother, "I don't believe in Santa Claus any more, because every year I ask him for riding lessons and I never get them!" Mom remedied the situation, and lessons were followed by a pony, years of horse shows, and finally an Arabian mare.

"This mare has been a problem to feed; she won't eat, and she ties up," Nicola reported. "I want to learn more about feeding individual horses so I can help to educate other owners." After her year at KER, Nicola would like to work for a feed company in this capacity, visiting farms to evaluate the condition of their horses and advising trainers on feed management changes.

When Rachel found that the KER stable held fewer than 20 horses, her reaction was, "What will I do to stay busy all day?" At home in Nottingham, England, she had worked at a bustling 120-horse facility that handled riding lessons, a livery service, a breeding operation, and a steady stream of horses being broken, trained, bought, and sold. At KER, she has gotten a reprieve from this whirlwind scenario, as her initial duties have involved reading x-rays of young horses, entering data, and working on literature searches. She's also assisted research fellow Clarissa Brown-Douglas, who is investigating the relationship between foal growth curves and mature racing performance. "I love learning," she said. "I enjoy having access to the KER library and all the articles on the Web site."

Gaining a better understanding of equine nutrition and exercise physiology research should help launch these young women into satisfying careers in their chosen fields. ☺☺

Interns Cassy Streeter, Kaitlyn Sirico, Nicola Crowley, and Rachel Moxon show off their favorite horses from the KER research herd.





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