

Equestrian club introduced

By Megan Connor

Staff Writer

megan.cady.connor@student.mercer.edu

From this fall onward, students interested in the equestrian sport are in luck. Mercer University is home to the Equestrian Club, a new club sport.

The club came about when senior Lauren Hill spoke to Carole Burrowbridge, Mercer's Disability Support Services Coordinator, about her desire to learn to ride a horse. As Burrowbridge, who began riding at age nine, began helping Hill find instruction, the idea of the Equestrian Club was hatched. Through exposure to the club, students like Hill who are interested in riding won't have to search outside of Mercer. Instead, the Equestrian club offers guidance in selecting everything from equipment to instructors.

Because Mercer has no stables of its own, the club contracts with two local stables for access to horses: one in Lizella and another in Gray, both of which are about 30 minutes away. Students are

responsible for their transportation to lessons. New riders make a one-time equipment purchase of about \$100. A full semester of ten lessons costs \$225, and club dues are \$25 per semester.

Both western and hunt seat (English-style) lessons are available. When asked to describe the difference between western and hunt seat riding, Burrowbridge said that the hunt seat was the more difficult choice. The difference between hunt seat and western is like "the difference between trying to stay on a barstool and trying to stay in a La-Z-Boy." The Equestrian club appeals to students' individual interests, encouraging the "horsemanship and equitation (riding techniques)" that they find compelling, though Burrowbridge stresses the necessity of basics like "care, grooming, horsemanship safety, even catch it out of a field—all the things you would need to know to take care of your horse."

In addition to lessons, the Equestrian club offers chances to participate in regional intercollegiate competitions. Though most focus on jumping, there are some western

and dressage competitions. Though some members are interested, these events are neither necessary nor central to membership.

One aspect of riding stressed for all members, however, is safety. Burrowbridge cautions, "You have to remember that it is an extreme sport. It can be dangerous, but you control what risks you take, and some people take more risks than others." Before beginning lessons, riders must take an evaluation lesson to deduce individual skill level. Because of this, the Equestrian Club is no longer accepting riders for fall 2006. New riders would not have time to be evaluated and complete the 10-lesson contract necessary to "get over the beginner's hump" of riding. This semester, the club still welcomes non-riding members, who can take advantage of twice-monthly meetings and volunteer opportunities with 4-H, local horse clubs, and equestrian therapy for the disabled.

The next meeting is Sept. 26 from 5-6 PM on 3rd floor of Connell.

For more information, contact Carole Burrowbridge.

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