

Rocky Mountain College Equestrian Program



Equestrian Studies Handbook *A Success Guide for Students*

Revised Fall 2021

Introduction

This handbook contains fundamental information for success in the equestrian studies program. It is a written resource to answer questions most often asked by students, a reminder of the important role you have in the success of the program, and a motivational tool to let you know what you can accomplish if you put your mind to it.

Presented in this handbook are numerous perspectives from past and present college students and instructors, giving you insights on how to excel in our program. Of course, it's your decision whether you take the time to gain these valuable insights. Keep in mind, however, you will be expected to have read and follow these guidelines.

If at any time you have questions that this handbook does not specifically answer, please ask. Different situations arise and they cannot all be addressed in a written format. Find an equestrian faculty member or the equestrian director and get an answer. Ignorance is not an excuse for either doing something wrong or not doing anything at all. If you do not know something, do not keep quiet. Some things just cannot be learned by observation alone and no one is born knowing everything about horses. This is why professionals discuss horse-related information with each other. Success in the horse industry is dependent on lifelong learning with a continuous thirst for knowledge and growth.

Your college years are a once in a lifetime experience. To make the most of them, get involved in the program. Volunteering, hanging around the barns, and watching others ride will give you experiences that increase your equestrian knowledge while potentially forming life-long friendships.

Three Tips for Success

TIP 1: Evaluate Your Goals

Your college career provides opportunities to try out different courses before committing yourself to a particular program. In the Equestrian Studies program, you will have the opportunity to “feel out” what your specific interests are involving horses. To make the most of this experimental time, talk to your advisor and look through the catalog to get ideas about what classes to take. Education is not just a process of checking the boxes on the required courses. It is your educational journey and you should explore the course offerings to tailor your college education into a customized learning experience that serves YOU best.

Your advisor's main job is to help you meet the academic requirements for a bachelor's degree from RMC. Your advisor is available during her/his office hours to answer questions, offer advice, or just listen. However, keep in mind that your advisor might not always be in the office during these hours. Things are constantly happening around the equine industry. If your advisor cannot be found, contact him/her via e-mail to set up an appointment.

Ultimately, you are in charge of making plans to accomplish your degree. It is your education. Faculty members cannot make decisions for you. You need to take an active role in deciding what you want from it. Start thinking now about what direction you want your education to take, and discuss your ideas with your advisor. And don't forget to always come prepared to your advising sessions with a list of the courses (including times and codes) that you might want to take.

TIP 2: Strive for Professionalism

PROFESSIONAL TRAITS. Characteristics of professionalism include proficiency, preparedness, presentation (proper image, language, and behavior), organization, frugality, friendliness, patience, flexibility, punctuality, honesty, integrity, discretion, self-discipline, respect (of people and horses), hard-work, confidence, and the all-important positive attitude. Now, in college, is the time to be developing professional behavior in order to create productive habits to serve you throughout your life.

PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION. Whether you like it or not, you are developing a “reputation” the moment you set foot on campus. Just as in the horse business, people are constantly forming opinions about us. To properly network and have positive words spread about you, strive to impress people, including peers, instructors, your director, the farrier, the vet, the owners of the horses you ride, and facility staff. You never know who might be able to help (or hinder) you in securing a great internship, scholarship, job, or serve as a reference on a job application. Quality relationships formed in college, often continue for a lifetime.

Whenever visitors show up at the barn or campus, make it a point to greet them with a smile and say “May I help you?” Not only is this a common courtesy, it will help develop your people skills for your future career.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION. The way you dress, the manner in which you care for your horse, the way you maintain your stall and barn aisle, are just a few things that reflect how you will be in your future career. Consumers are attracted to businesses that strive for excellence, especially in the details. Again, practice the art of presenting yourself and your environment in a crisply professional manner.

PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE. Incorrect equine terminology and crude, inappropriate words will likely offend someone and might limit your appeal to a diverse clientele in your future career. Develop the habit of using professional language that can be used to appeal to a larger population (which will probably include children).

PROFESSIONAL DISCRETION. Avoid criticizing or gossiping about other students, instructors, and equine professionals. Discretion and civility are often hard won traits that need to be developed with attention. Negative behavior is extremely non-productive. It is hurtful to others, and ultimately yourself. Wisely choose friends who will build up your positive outlook, professional growth, and your reputation.

PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT. Learn to be discreet and direct when dealing with conflicts. Go directly to the person with whom you are in conflict. Be careful about sharing problems with people who are not part of the solution. Though talking to your support people may make you feel better in the end it will only amplify the problem and help to bring other people down. Be courteous and civil in the face of conflict in order to most effectively resolve all conflict situations.

If you feel you are having conflict with your instructor, set up an appointment to talk to him/her. Be respectful and honest. Chances are that what you perceived was only a misunderstanding or miscommunication. Remember that both you and your instructor are human, and it is not possible to read minds. They cannot know what is going on with you if you do not talk to them. By working out

whatever differences you have with your instructor you ensure your potential for a successful and productive semester.

TIP 3: Deal with Mistakes

The best lessons learned are the ones you learn for yourself, in your own experience. This handbook is not going to make your journey through the program “bump-free.” You cannot be told everything that you should or should not do in order to achieve success without making mistakes. In the book Becoming a Master Student by David B. Ellis, there is an item entitled “Ten reasons to celebrate mistakes.” The basic idea is that you are a human and therefore will make mistakes. Mistakes happen to the best of people, in every facet of life. It may be as small as forgetting to tighten the girth before mounting your horse or as big as putting your horse away incorrectly, resulting in a sick horse. Whatever it is, you must acknowledge it and admit that you “goofed.” Identify it, correct it, and learn from it.

Making mistakes cannot be avoided because a perfect person does not exist. If you punish yourself every time you make one, you will never improve. You will anticipate making mistakes instead of watching for signs of improvement. Celebrate the fact that you can correct mistakes. They are one moment in time compared to the thousands of other moments in which you are doing things right. They will challenge you to avoid repeating the same wrong choices and push you to new heights of learning.

General Guidelines

ATTIRE. Whenever you are at an equestrian center, dress appropriately --- wear working attire when working around horses. Safety attire is required whenever you ride a horse on campus. This includes a helmet and footwear with a heel. Appropriate attire protects you from common injuries and helps your instructor clearly evaluate your riding position.

Consider your clothing as one aspect of professionalism. Notice how most trainers, riders, clinicians, judges, etc. dress “the part” when out in public. This helps give them an air of seriousness about their profession, enhancing their credibility. Equestrian business casual consists of properly fitted riding jeans, tops providing coverage for protection, and boots that provide stable footing (pun intended!) on all kinds of surfaces. Jackets and outerwear should be weather adaptable and fit close to the body in order for instructors to clearly see your body position when riding. Of course, most students are on a limited budget and they must be practical in the way they dress. Clothes must be functional and affordable. But, whether we like it or not, clothing is something that can add or detract from the reputation we are trying to achieve. Therefore, attempt to use discernment in your clothing choices. Remember that visitors and potential employers often stop by, and you are “marketing” yourself and representing the RMC equestrian studies program.

DOGS. Student owned dogs and pets are not allowed at equestrian facilities. New animals can disrupt the dynamic among the existing animals and often become a safety issue around the horses. We all love our pets but for safety reasons we need to love them at home.

EMERGENCIES: If a horse becomes ill or injured, the student should not call the vet without first reporting the problem to Amy Neuman. Amy will contact the veterinarian and arrange for immediate care. If Amy cannot be reached, contact another instructor or the director. Emergency phone numbers are posted in the barn, classroom, and in this handbook. Remember that equestrians are almost always on call so don't worry about calling at odd times in an emergency. Horse well-being is our priority.

If a person is hurt on the premises, immediately send someone for help (or dial 911 if necessary) and keep the person still, until help arrives. Riding instructors and the director are certified in First Aid and CPR. If you are considering an equestrian career we recommend that you maintain these safety certifications as well. Contact any faculty for help in locating appropriate certifications.

First aid kits can be located in all RMC tackrooms.

Be familiar with the locations of fire extinguishers, in case of emergency.

GATE. Be certain that the automated entrance gate to White Aspen is fully open before driving under it. Accidents in the past have damaged these types of gates and the vehicles.

HOURS. The equestrian facility closes at 8:30 P.M. For unusual circumstances (ill horses, vet calls, transporting, etc.), you need to inform the boarding facility manager of your presence after hours.

PARKING. Park only in designated areas. Do not block or hamper the work of others by parking in the way of the workflow.

PHONES. For safety awareness, no cell phones are to be in use when working around a horse, or while riding. In addition, our program cell phone policy suggests that you keep your cell phones available in your tack storage rather than on your person whilst riding.

SMOKING. Smoking is not allowed on any RMC campus grounds including our equestrian facilities. This is a commonsense rule for all equestrian facilities but should be stated here as a matter of record. Do not smoke around the highly flammable materials in horse barns.

VISITORS. Only RMC equestrian students and horse owners (with RMC and facility liability releases on file) are allowed to handle and ride the horses, or do chores. Friends, boyfriends, girl friends, family members, and visitors are not permitted to handle/ride the horses, or do barn duties and chores. The barn chores are part of the student grade, similar to homework. These chores are the responsibility of the student and they must be solely completed by the student enrolled in the class. If your visitor wants to help you finish your chores faster they can help you by bringing you coffee!

WASTAGE: Students will be guided by their instructors as to appropriate amounts of bedding and hay to be used for each individual horse. You do not want to underfeed or underbed. Your horse's well-being is first priority. But, on the other hand you should not be discarding good hay and good shavings. Wastage can result in higher fees of operation, which can ultimately affect equestrian fees. It is your responsibility to learn your horse's patterns and needs, and when in doubt consult with your instructor.

Barn Guidelines

Safety is the priority whenever handling or riding a horse.

CARE OF HORSE. Although your intentions are probably good, do not take the initiative to clip, medicate, pull manes, or switch horse equipment (bits, training aids, etc.) without the permission of your instructor.

You are given the privilege and responsibility of caring for the horse's body and mind. We need to make sure horses do not get returned to the owners with physical or mental issues. Overworking the horse or using non-program related riding techniques during "free riding time" can sour the horse and lead to unsoundness and illness. Many horse injuries and training problems can be prevented through the use of respect, patience, and common sense.

If the temperature is below 55 degrees or cool enough for you to wear a sweater, bring a cooler to the arena with you so that you can cover your horse after riding. To avoid spooking or entangling the horse, always take the time to properly fit and tie the cooler.

If the temperature is warm and/or if your horse is hot, walk him to cool him out before putting your tack away. If your horse is sweaty, you can give him a quick sponge-off or rinse (warm weather) or towel-dry (cool weather). In either case, make sure he is cool, dry, and breathing normally with his heartbeat at resting rate before you turn him loose in the stall.

FARRIER/VET. All shoeing and vet care decisions are the ultimate responsibility of the riding instructor; never the students. Consult with your instructor, if you feel there are additional needs for these services.

FRUGALITY. Here is a good definition of frugality: "Wisely using money and resources so you can afford what you truly need." In our industry frugality is an important consideration. The equestrian studies program must stay within budget, so we can afford what is most necessary for the horses and students.

Here are some frugal practices that students are expected to follow:

- When cleaning stalls, **remove all wet, soiled shavings**. Take the extra time to properly sift out all manure and hay. Avoid extravagance when adding clean shavings (consult your riding instructor regarding the necessary amounts of shavings). Shorting your horse on bedding can create health issues therefore developing the understanding of the "right" amount for each horse is an important consideration.
- If a horse is not eating all her hay, discuss with your riding instructor the possibility of changing the hay portion of her diet.
- Feed supplies must be kept tidy and well stored in order to maintain the quality of feed in addition to the safety of horses. Closing doors and correctly fitting lids on feed can keep nosy horses safe if they inadvertently leave their stalls unattended. When taking hay from the hay shed, do not open a new bale until all other opened bales are consumed. Always re-tie the bale so loose hay is not spread around and wasted. There should never be untied bales or loose hay in the shed.

- The use of supplements and medications need to be cleared through your instructor. Only use the exact amounts (carefully read all labels). Changes in feed/supplements are the ultimate responsibility of instructor; never the students. Consult with your instructor if you feel a change is needed.

HORSE BLANKETS AND TACK. Halters and blankets belonging to the horse owner need to be clearly labeled. Put these labeled items in your storage area, if not in use. It is the student's responsibility to make sure these items do not get misplaced or lost, since they are to be returned to the owner at the end of the school year. Keep account of these items, especially if you change horses.

Students shouldn't personally contact horse owners, unless instructed otherwise. If you meet the owner, please attempt to show the utmost of gratitude and never bad mouth the horse. This is your chance to exercise the use of professional language and discernment.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION. Unless it is an emergency situation, please do not use baling twine for buckets, blankets, or repairs. Duct/masking tape should not be used for repairs, signs, or labels. See *SIGNAGE* for the guidelines for signs and labels.

Keep the area around your stall swept and free of clutter (i.e., tack and supplies that can be stored elsewhere). This is good for presentation; as in your future horse business, you never know who might just "drop in". Elimination of clutter limits potential danger of horse entanglement.

REPAIRS. Report facility repair needs to your instructor or the EQS director. They will communicate it to the appropriate person.

SECURITY. The facilities employ reasonable security for our area to safeguard the horses and the equipment kept on the premises. It is wise, however, to use some common practices to protect yourself and your investments. Have your name visibly labeled on each piece of your tack and supplies. Brass or silver nameplates work well for identifying saddles and bridles. Distinctive tape, permanent markers, and color coding can be used for identifying your belongings. Additionally, storing your equipment properly and tidily is your best option for securing your belongings at any facility in your future.

Never borrow from someone else's trunk without first getting their permission.

Keep your tack trunk locked at all times. If you are missing something, immediately do a thorough search and then contact your riding instructor.

SIGNAGE. Stall cards should be uniform for a professional presentation. If you need a new stall card you can pick one up from your instructor or the program director. All stall cards and signage should be appropriately fastened to the stall front with clearly legible and professional language.

TYING. Tie your horse in its stall. Period. Do not tie to any other structure including stall doors, stall fronts, car mirrors, water hydrants, fences, turnouts, or yourself. This is highly dangerous for the horse and for the people who will need to rescue the horse if it gets in trouble when tied inappropriately. If you have the horse and need it to stay somewhere whilst you run a quick errand ask someone who is nearby to hold the horse briefly. If your mission will take a bit longer return the horse to its stall and tie it there.

Plan on tying your horse in the stall when grooming and tacking for class, unless instructed otherwise. Do not tack an untied horse in a stall. This can be dangerous, no matter how mellow the horse is. At least have a halter and lead rope on the horse to hold him while tacking.

Learn the safe, appropriate length of the lead rope when a horse is directly tied. Do not leave objects near the tied horse. This can lead to spooking or entanglement.

Learn safe knot tying. This is part of the curriculum in our program but you must take it into consideration that physical skills such as knot tying take practice to master.

WASH RACKS. Wash racks should only be used for bathing, sponging, rinsing, and cold-hosing for injuries. Avoid tacking or grooming in the wash rack. Please do not blow-dry, clip, pull manes or pick out feet in the wash rack. Electricity and water do not mix, and hair and dirt clog the drains, causing the wash racks to be closed for periods of time. Do not leave a horse unattended in the wash rack. When finished in the wash rack, manure should be deposited in the muck tub and the drain swept clear.

Riding Guidelines

ATTENDANCE. Because riding classes only meet three times a week, attendance is mandatory. A major portion of your grade is based on participation and improvement, and this cannot happen if you are absent.

At the beginning of the semester, you should inform your instructor about any medical problems or physical limitations you have. This will ensure that if anything occurs while you are riding, your instructor will have an idea about what is happening and know how to deal with it.

We are very fortunate to have all-weather facilities, not usually limited by rain or snow. Riding classes typically meet regardless of the weather. In case of bad weather you might or might not ride, but still come dressed to ride. Your instructor will direct your activities if weather is severe. Always assume that your class is meeting. Horses need care everyday... even when the weather makes it unpleasant to do so. If you are hospitalized or for some reason you cannot physically get to the center to care for your horse, call, text, and email in order to contact your instructor and let him/her know ahead of time that you cannot be there. Be prepared by having your plan for covering your responsibilities ahead of time with the name of the person who will cover for you.

ATTIRE. Whenever you are at the center, dress appropriately for the work and the weather--- riding attire needs to reflect the discipline as well as the safety requirements for our program. Your instructors will inform you about class specific attire requirements. In general, western classes require certified helmets, jeans in good repair, heeled boots (either paddock or pull on are suitable), tidy hair pulled back from the face, and tops that allow the instructor to visualize the alignment of your body in the saddle as well as appropriately conservative coverage for a professional setting. English classes require similar appropriate tops and helmets, but the English saddle is best ridden in field boots and breeches. If boots are not economically feasible, paddock boots with half chaps are a workmanlike solution.

CLASS PLACEMENT. The purpose behind these different levels is to put you in a class in which you can learn with other riders of similar knowledge and ability. There is no advantage to trying to ride in a class that is too advanced for your riding level. This is dangerous, and unfair to other students in the class as well as the horses. Remember that you are here to learn, not to prove yourself to anyone, and riding is only one part of the equine industry. Realize that you have your strong points and perhaps you excel above others in certain areas but the riding placement is determined by the riding instructors or the program director.

You may come from a background where you had professional instruction. In RMC classes, and throughout life, you must be willing to listen to other instructors/mentors and seek the value of their advice. Although it may be very different from what you have been taught previously, it does not mean that it is wrong. It may just be a different approach. Trying new methods, and venturing into areas in which you are not necessarily comfortable, will help you to be a better horseman. Focusing on the positive can make wonderful things happen!

DOORS. Prior to opening an arena gate ascertain the arena traffic and make certain they are aware of your pending entrance. This will give the riders a chance to maintain their mount's attention. Only lead horses through barn doors that are completely raised or completely open, and learn the technique for a safe entrance and exit. When a horse is led under a door that isn't properly opened or raised, the saddle can get snagged and the horse could panic. Students who are negligent and take risks that result in damage to the doors and horses, are financially responsible for the incurred damages.

ARENA ETIQUETTE. When riding in different directions, talk to each other. Calling "inside" or "rail" will alert other riders to your intentions. A good rule of thumb when two riders are riding in opposite directions: Pass left shoulder to left shoulder if you are at the same gait. If at different gaits, the faster horse passes on the inside of the arena (it is easier for the faster horse to readily move to the inside). It is still wise to call "inside" or "rail" in case the opposing rider does not know this rule. When riding in the same direction make certain to maintain safe distances between horses at all times. Don't get too close behind them or brush by too closely.

Not everyone has the same riding ability. We are all working from a different level. Unsolicited advice is not usually welcomed by any rider, and may actually be contradictory to what the instructor has advised. If a rider appears to be abusing or confusing a horse, discuss your concerns with the person's riding instructor or a faculty member on the grounds. We are all working together to ensure that horse welfare is always foremost in our minds. If something is happening that you do not understand and have concerns about, reach out to the student's riding instructor or program director and relay your concerns immediately. Be clear in relating your observations in order to provide the faculty with appropriate details to assess the situation.

FREE RIDING TIME. Free riding (riding outside of class time) is required as horsemanship homework to practice skills covered in classes. Students should not ride a horse that they have not ridden previously in riding class unless recommended by their instructor. Riding exercises and maneuvers must be consistent with class instruction. Don't attempt new things that have not been practiced in class (students who use their own horse should consult with their instructor about any exception to this policy). Changing to new bits and equipment must first be approved by the instructor. Helmets and appropriate attire must always be worn during free riding time.

Riding alone is not recommended. For safety, always have a travel buddy from the equestrian program who can back you up if needed.

JUMPING. Absolutely no jumping is allowed outside of class without the hunt seat instructor's express consent. Another student (also approved by the hunt seat instructor) must be present at all times in the arena to monitor the jumping practice. No fences or courses are to be jumped that have not been practiced in class. Heights should not exceed 2' 9". The horse's legs must be carefully protected from overwork and stress. It is common practice in the industry that most horses should not be jumped more than four days per week, or every other day. All fences and ground poles are to be put away when finished.

LUNGING. When selecting a location to lunge a horse, try to pick an arena where traffic is light. It is proper etiquette and safety conscious to seek permission of those in the arena, before you lunge. Only two horses should lunge in the indoor arenas at one time. Keep your lunging circle large enough to not put excess stress on your horse's legs but small enough to allow horses to pass safely on the rail.

Do not lunge directly in front of the gates where horses are entering and exiting the arena. This way horses can safely enter and exit the arena as well as be ridden in the remaining area.

Horse Transactions

Most horses at RMC are leased to the program by generous individuals, or they are student-owned. Occasionally, RMC will accept a horse as a donation to the college. This is with the understanding that the horse can be sold (privately or at auction) to generate revenue for program operation. Sometimes, RMC will maintain a donated horse in the riding program if it specifically meets program objectives and can be justified financially. RMC owned horses are available for summer lease to approved students and non-students. All horse transactions (leases, sales, purchases, donations, and retirements) are subject to the prior approval of the program director, before starting a transaction. For legal purposes, all transaction steps and paperwork need to be carefully followed.

Staying Informed

- **Google Classroom**-- Our program sets up a google classroom to communicate with all students of the program. Be sure to turn on your notifications in order to not miss any important notifications during the school semester.
- **Website** -- The equestrian program has a very extensive website.
- **Facebook**-- Check out the program's facebook page for meeting dates, job & internship opportunities, and other assorted news and information.
- **RMC Email** -- This is an efficient and effective way for the EQS Program to immediately contact you as an individual or as a group. Make it a daily practice to check your RMC email. You sure don't want to miss out on a job opportunity or a special meeting because you failed to check your email. Daily checks, please!

Your Voice

There may be times when you are not pleased with some aspect of the program. The faculty members genuinely care about your level of satisfaction and success. Please do not hesitate to approach an instructor or the director, if you have a concern or an idea for improving the program. We value your input!

Equestrian Facilities

Rocky Mountain College is extremely fortunate to have the support of our boarding facilities. They have specific guidelines and rules that students must follow when they are on the properties. These barn rules will be provided to the students in paper format and are also available at each property. General barn rules that apply to both properties are as follows:

Barn Rules

- ★ Barn closes at 8:30 p.m.
- ★ No smoking. Ever.
- ★ Students and visitors must not be impaired for any reason when on site. Do not come to the barn unless sober and in full possession of all faculties.
- ★ No dogs.
- ★ Children cannot be unattended – equestrian facilities are fascinating places filled with potentially dangerous items. Children must be monitored at all times.
- ★ Visitors may not handle horses.
- ★ Do not turn horses loose in any arena - either indoors or out - without instructor approval.
- ★ Stalls must be cleaned daily.
- ★ Drive slowly and attentively. There are frequently animals and children present who are not attentive to vehicles.
- ★ Pick up manure piles in open areas as your horse makes them.
- ★ Clean up spillage from trailer unloading.

Good Luck as You Begin Your Journey at the RMC!

We encourage you to get to know your equestrian faculty. We are here to help you succeed, and can assist you in connecting with people in all aspects of the industry. Also, open yourself up to forming quality relationships with your peers. You will find that the program has a family-like atmosphere because of our common passion for the horse. Enjoy this unique relationship. Spend extra time at the barn. Watch some classes other than your own. There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained at RMC, and opportunities abound. Get involved and enjoy the ride!

PHONE NUMBERS

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

Billings Fire Department

406-657-8423

406-657-8442

Emergencies (24 hrs)

9-1-1

Billings Police Department

406-657-8460

Billings Animal Control

406-657-8226

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

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Tony Yost - Farrier

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Chad Toavs - Farrier

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