

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

**“For the Love of the Horse:
A History of the Alfred University Equestrian Program”**

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If it wasn't already obvious, the equestrian program made up a huge part of my college experience. In many ways, I've learned as much at the barn over these past four years as I have in my classes. And many of the greatest lessons I've learned here have less to do with riding than with life in general - how to take responsibility, the value of hard work, the importance of trying new things, and that everyone has something valuable to contribute, just to name a few. And because I've gotten so much out of the program, I've always felt it was important for me to be able to give back to it in a more tangible way than simply spending all my time there, which, to be honest, I'd be doing either way.

When I started thinking about topics for my honors thesis this fall, an equestrian-themed project wasn't initially on my radar. But after weeks of brainstorming, I had yet to come up with a topic that I was invested enough in to write a 30 or 40 page research paper on and not hate it by the end of March. So I started filtering through old files on my computer for ideas, and I came across a paper I wrote a few semesters ago on the organizational structure of the equestrian team for Dr. Schultz's organizational communication class. In doing the preliminary research for that, I remember realizing that very few people, myself included, knew much about the history of our equestrian program. I think it has a lot to do with the transitional nature of a college program. Members are involved in it for four years at the most before moving on, and those who make their roots across the country or the world might never have the opportunity to so much as stop by for a visit. It's easy to lose a lot of history that way, without having anyone to pass down the stories of previous generations of the program. So I decided to use my honors thesis as an opportunity to uncover that history.

In my initial planning of this project, I intended it to be a more traditional thesis paper. However, as I started to outline it, I realized that a paper wouldn't really capture the essence of the program in the same way that a book would. A thesis paper is something that gets listed on a CV and then sits in a filing cabinet or online database to hopefully be pulled out and

referenced in college students' essays. A book is an inherently friendlier format. It can be a topic of conversation sitting out on a desk or coffee table, a point of pride on a bookshelf, or skimmed through to let colorful photos and captions tell the story themselves. That was my goal for this project: not necessarily to contribute to a greater body of research so much as to create something that would be read and enjoyed by future generations of Alfred University equestrians. In my two years as a social media intern for the equestrian center, we've strived to emphasize the close-knit family atmosphere of the program as our "brand image." Along that vein, I decided that writing my thesis in book format rather than as a formal paper lent itself better to that image, as a book can be enjoyed as a group far more easily than a research paper can be.

This book covers every aspect of the AU equestrian program, from its roots to the various competitive and educational opportunities it offers today. I could easily have focused on just the classes, the teams, or even the horses themselves and created a more in-depth examination of just one of these aspects of the program, but I chose to create more of an overview of all of them so that readers could get an idea of the massive scope of our current program. Most universities, especially those as small as AU, would not attempt to offer multiple disciplines of riding, two equestrian minors, and two varsity equestrian teams under the umbrella of one program. While we may not be one of the most intensive equestrian education programs in the country or have multi-national championship-winning equestrian teams, the AU equestrian program offers something for just about everyone, a feature that not only sets it apart from most other equestrian colleges but also falls in line with Alfred University's emphasis on diversity and variety in its educational and extracurricular offerings.

The majority of my research process consisted of piecing together material from the Alfred University Archives. I had originally expected that I would need to do more outside research on the earlier history of the program, but I was surprised at the amount of

information I was able to find in the archives. The process of filtering through the old news articles, brochures, and university press releases on everything remotely equestrian-related to find pertinent information and organizing it into a chronological order took some time, but once I had everything together, most of the history of the equestrian program from the founding of the riding club through the construction of the Bromley-Daggett Equestrian Center was essentially outlined in front of me. The only topic that wasn't covered in the archive material was the relatively recent creation of the western team and riding program, so I turned to the team's head coach Harry Hurd, who has been with the western team since its founding in 2006. He was able to fill in most of the gaps in my knowledge of both the western and hunt seat teams.

Putting everything together into book format ended up being the most difficult step in the process of creating this book, which I hadn't anticipated. Blurb, the company I chose to print the book, has its own simple layout and design software program, which simplifies the process of uploading and printing the finished product. It works similarly to the program we use to design the layout for the Kanakadea Yearbook, so I assumed that my experience as the yearbook editor would make the layout process fairly straightforward. However, I chose not to use pre-set templates for the book because each section had different amounts of text versus photo content, which would make using a structured template more difficult. So I designed layouts for each page from scratch, using the same basic format for each page with modifications for additional text or photo boxes depending on the content of the section.

Putting the book together gave me quite a bit of practice in basic graphic design and fueled my interest in pursuing a career in editing for an equestrian publication at some point in the future. It was also an excellent opportunity for me to employ my marketing and communications skills in a productive way. I spent a considerable amount of time editing the text content of each section so that it conveyed the value of each aspect of the equestrian

program without reading like an advertisement. While the book itself could easily be used as a marketing tool for the program, I made an effort to write it in an unbiased way, presenting the history and evolution of the equestrian classes and teams factually rather than as traditional promotional content. I chose to use the introduction and conclusion to add a more personal level to the book, explaining my interest and investment in the AU equestrian program and how that inspired me to create this book.

This project has truly been a labor of love, and I am proud to have been able to make a tangible contribution to the life of Alfred University and the equestrian program. I believe it will be useful to the university in a number of ways, whether as a marketing tool for recruiting prospective equestrian students, as a reference for anyone interested in learning more about the history of our equestrian program, or simply as a reminder of just how lucky we are to have been able to take advantage of the unique opportunities offered through the AU equestrian program. However it is used in the future, I hope that this book will serve as a valuable resource for my fellow Alfred University equestrians for years to come.