

# Competitive Edge

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In the horse racing industry, where one-fifth of a second counts in ultimate earnings, horsemen need to look to all avenues to gain a competitive edge. Sometimes the smallest adjustments can result in the greatest gains – in the winner's circle.

Training a horse is based on knowledge and understanding of the equine athlete. Are your horses trained on a foundation of scientific fact, or is the training based on myths and traditional routines?

## You Can Lead a Horse to Water

For example, you can lead a horse to water and you *can* make him drink – if you know what triggers a horse's desire to drink.

What makes a horse thirsty? Should you offer a horse cold or warm water? How does one determine if a horse is properly hydrated?

You can learn the answers to these questions and gain other useful knowledge and skills about horses from courses in the Equine Science Certificate program at Equine Guelph. Six courses cover the following areas: anatomy, exercise physiology, nutrition, health and disease prevention, growth and development, and management of equine facilities.

Information presented in the courses is based on recent scientific findings. At the University of Guelph, Equine Guelph is directed by the horse industry and committed to equine-related research, communication, and education.

The Equine Science Certificate program is aimed at adults wishing to gain the latest knowledge about horses. Reasons for enrolling are widespread. Persons may enroll because they care for their own horses, they want to advance their career, or because they are seeking a competitive edge in the horse industry.

The courses are offered at least once a year, beginning in January, May, or September. Each course runs for a 12-week period. Students are expected to study seven to 12 hours per week, per course. Students usually take two years to complete all six courses.

## Online Courses

All the courses are offered online. Using the internet, students can take the courses from anywhere in the world at their own computers at home. Students participate from across Canada, the United States, and many other countries including, Australia, Egypt, Portugal, France, Israel, Korea, and the United Arab Emirates.

Working online at their own computers, students can study in the wee hours of the morning, if that is what suits their schedule. Online courses offer students convenience and flexibility – students study at home during hours that fit their personal schedule.

Universities across Canada are developing more online courses each year. Made possible by the technological advances of the internet, online courses reduce costs and eliminate timetable scheduling conflicts. Online courses eliminate the expensive requirements of physical space for classrooms, laboratories, cafeterias, and parking. Timetable conflicts are lessened because online courses are not scheduled for a certain time of day.

The development of online courses is focused mainly on required courses at the undergraduate level. These courses have high levels of enrollment and thus offer the greatest savings in money and time if the courses go online. For example, one class in a first year psychology course last fall at the University of Western Ontario numbered 800 students! Few universities have many lecture halls large enough to accommodate such enormous class sizes.

Online courses at the university level appear to be the way of the future. It is interesting to note that the hands-on horse industry can take advantage of internet technology at Equine Guelph. The Equine Science Certificate program began in 2002 and is currently running at full capacity.

## A Step Further

The Equine Science Certificate program goes a step further than the typical online courses offered at universities. Limiting enrollment to 60 students permits a high degree of interaction between the keen adult learners and the instructor. Instructors may be online up to three times a day, for a total of three to five hours, answering questions and offering advice to students.

Gayle Ecker, Senior Manager of Equine Guelph, states the courses were developed with the learning philosophy of "see it, hear it, do it, read about it, and talk about it".

Students experience far more than just reading from a text book. For example, they may see and hear about a topic on a video tape or from a CD-ROM. They may also be encouraged to try techniques and skills on their own horses. Students then discuss the topic online with their instructor and other students. Finally, they must write about the topic on assignments and the final exam.

In addition to a high level of dialogue between the students and the instructor, the courses offer various learning aids to assist students. Along with textbooks, students may receive video tapes, audio tapes, audio CDs, computer diskettes, and CD-ROMs. Additional information is available online.

Guest speakers are another innovative form of teaching real-life skills. Equine specialists, many from around the world, host chats with students. For example, Liz Bulbrook, an International Forage Specialist from England, interacts with students in the *Nutrition* course. Ron Waples, 1986 inductee into the Canadian Horse Racing Hall Of Fame, was a popular recent guest in the *Exercise Physiology* course.

When designing the program, Equine Guelph listened to counsel from representatives from the horse industry. They did not want a degree program. They wanted the focus to be on learning skills for use in the equine industry. They also wanted students to have the convenience to learn while working. Interactive, online courses made sense, and were cost effective.

## Bargain

A bargain at the university level, one course costs \$495. Successful completion of six courses earns you a University Certificate (a step below a diploma) from the University of Guelph.

As an added incentive, each year Equine Guelph awards a scholarship to a student enrolled in Equine Science. The scholarship is awarded based on academic achievement, an essay, and evaluation by a committee. The scholarship is equal in value to the tuition for one Equine Science course.

Equine Guelph makes learning convenient, accessible, and affordable. The courses are available to anyone with a computer from anywhere in the world. The admissions office is currently taking registrations for courses starting in September.

Is there nothing more you can learn about horses? You may owe it to yourself, your horses, and the bottom line of your stable, to learn more about the latest and greatest findings in equine research and knowledge.

For more information about the Equine Science Certificate program, visit the Equine Guelph website at [www.equineguelph.ca](http://www.equineguelph.ca).

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