



UC Davis doubles West Coast representation in the National Collegiate Equestrian Association league.

Friday the 13th was a good day for collegiate equestrian sports. That's the April day when UC Davis announced it had chosen equestrian as one of two new women's varsity sports to maintain its commitment to Title IX compliance. Beach volleyball is the other.

The university began considering new women's sports last November. Input from current students, alumni and donors was taken into account, along with each prospective sport's characteristics. It was noted that equestrian rosters ranging from 25 to 65 riders afford flexibility that helps maintain gender equity compliance between all campus varsity sports for many years into the future. Cost was a factor, too, with equestrian being relatively low because competitions take place on horses provided by host schools, rather than having to transport horses.

The new Hunt Seat and Western teams' fit with existing equine facilities and programs was a compelling consideration. "The equestrian team will enjoy a special synergistic relationship with two of UC Davis' world-leading academic organizations," states an explanation of the selection process. "The School of Veterinary Medicine will be involved in the provision of medical care to the horses, and the equestrian team will significantly benefit from the planned state-of-the-art Equine Performance Center. The equestrian team will also partner with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and collaborate with faculty and students who are involved in the Animal Science program, which hosts comprehensive undergraduate and graduate majors."

“We are very excited about the addition of a varsity equestrian team. This program will add another interesting dimension to the equine education and research activities that take place in our world-renown animal science program,” said Dr. Helene Dillard, dean of the UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Dr. Michael Lairmore, dean of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, added the following: “We look forward to ensuring that the equine athletes receive superb medical care from our world-leading clinicians and students, and anticipate collaborating with the varsity equestrian team in multiple ways that strengthen the leadership of UC Davis in equine health.”

The equestrian team will also work closely with Campus Recreation, the university organization that manages the UC Davis Equestrian Center. “The equestrian center has been part of UC Davis since 1962, and the addition of a varsity equestrian team will further enhance what the program and facility are able to offer to our students,” said Deb Johnson, the director of Campus Recreation.

The search for a head coach is underway and the Aggies expect to start their new team in time for the 2018-2019 season, which starts in September. Recruiting will start when a coach and staff are in place, and try-outs will be held this fall with the team shooting for a 30 student-athlete roster for its first few years. Davis-area trainer Holly Fox is a pioneer in collegiate equestrian sports and has been involved with Davis’ club teams dating back many years. She is expected to be part of the NCEA program as well.

The NCEA varsity team addition builds on UC Davis’ long history with equestrian club teams, supervised by the Campus Recreation department and run by students. The hunter/jumper squad counts 46 members; western, 49; dressage, 21; and eventing, 22. “They will continue to operate as long as there is student interest,” relays a school spokesperson. As of the 2018-2019 season, the collegiate club league, the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association, states that IHSA riders can no longer ride for a school’s IHSA and NCEA team: they can only be on one team’s roster.

Joining a league defined as an “emerging sport” by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the UC Davis team will compete nationally under the governance of the National Collegiate Equestrian Association against other large public schools like Fresno State, Georgia, and Texas

A&M.

Until now, the Fresno State Bulldogs had been the only NCEA team on the West Coast. The Aggies bring the league's total to 22 schools, 16 of them Division 1 programs that can and do provide athletic scholarships, many of them partial scholarships, to team riders. League participation is heavily weighted toward the Southeast, Midwest and Texas, so significant travel for the West Coast's human athletes is involved, though a second team in the West may cut that down some.

For more information on UC Davis' new team, visit www.ucdavis.edu, and navigate under "Campus Life" tab to "Athletics." For more information on NCEA, visit www.collegiateequestrian.com