



Fall 10-11-2007

An Uncommon College Lifestyle

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Recommended Citation

Stabosz, Kimberly, "An Uncommon College Lifestyle" (2007). *News and Events*. 3074.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3074>

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October 11, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – For many college students the four years they are in school revolves around classes, friends and jobs. Hayley Jones of Sheboygan Wisconsin, a political science and economics double major, desired more than that typical college lifestyle. At the end of her first year at IWU, Jones realized what she needed was a horse, and to continue her passion for riding that she had abandoned.

Jones said, "It was my life through middle school and through high school." She quit riding after she had to put her horse down. However, the summer between her freshman and sophomore year at the University Jones bought a new horse, and said her passion in life was restored. "When I came back to Illinois Wesleyan my sophomore year, life was so different because now I had to manage time. I was happy, I was more willing to actually apply myself to my studies. I had a reason to get up in the mornings, and then because I was taking better care of myself, I was able to focus better on school as well."

For students like Jones, the IWU Equestrian Club is more than a get together. Members of this club meet once a week, take lessons at Hunter Oaks Stables, or another nearby stable, Timber Creeks, and compete within the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA). Currently the club has 16 members and is hoping to grow more in the upcoming years. IHSA is working with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to make the competitions a recognized sport on college campuses, which will transform the already competing Equestrian Club into an official collegiate team.

Jones' horse, Hoover, resides at the Hunter Oaks Stables, which is a 20 minute drive from IWU's campus. "It's great that it is only 20 minutes away, because I go to the stables six days a week."

Jones also competes individually with her horse. This weekend, October 13 and 14, Jones will compete in the 7th Annual Hunter Oaks Horse Trials, which includes more than 100 equestrians from a five-state area. The three-part competition, also known as three-day eventing, is typical for Jones.

The competition begins on Saturday at the Bloomington Interstate Center (2301 W. Market St., Bloomington, Ill.) with the dressage phase, which will test the horse and rider's ability to perform a series of prescribed classical movements in an enclosed area. The horse and rider are judged on elegance, appearance, precision, and the discipline of the horse's movement. The next phase, show jumping, will also take place on Saturday. In show jumping, the horse and rider make their way over a course of colorfully-painted fences that they must scale within an allotted time. The final phase, which Jones calls the most exciting, is the Cross-Country phase that will take place at the Hunter Oaks Equestrian Center. During this phase the horse and rider gallop over a natural terrain, up and down hills, across ditches, and into water, leaping over a variety of obstacles along the way.

"There's always tons of preparation going into every competition. You have to have your horse ready, prepared, and you have to get him pretty," she said, "Its just a lot of preparation." On top of this preparation, and the normal college course load, Jones works two jobs in order to pay the expenses of owning her own horse.

Jones' hard work has paid off. She recently qualified and competed in the American Eventing Championship, the national championship for three-day eventing. Competing with Olympic riders and the current holder of the Pan American Gold for riding, was an experience she will not soon forget. "Just being at that competition with them was amazing."

Reflecting on her past four years Jones says, "Sometimes I wonder if I'm missing out on the 'normal' college experience, but this is my college experience, and I realized that this is what makes me happy." She even plans to take her horse with her as she pursues a double degree in law and human resources in graduate school.

When asked if she could imagine living her life any other way, Jones replied, "No, I would be miserable. I would not trade this for the world."

For more information about the IWU Equestrian Club please contact The Office of Student activities at (309) 556- 3850, and for more information about the Hunter Oaks Horse Trials please contact Lisa Slater at (309) 310-9321.



Hayley Jones