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IWU's Equestrian Club Experiences Success in Competition

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University has more than 165 registered student organizations, including academic groups, sport teams, Greek organizations and club activities. With the University offering so many opportunities, it is just a matter of time before every student selects an organization to join to fit his or her exact interests. Senior biology major Kristin Tvdirk and sophomore business major Jane Papke discovered their niche with Illinois Wesleyan University's Equestrian Club.

This past year the club has experienced more success in competition than ever before, taking one member all the way to nationals. Both Papke and Tvdirk —the vice president and president of the club respectively— placed at an IHSA regional competition, with Papke placing first and Tvdirk placing second.

Following regionals, Papke and Tvdirk continued onto the next stage of the competition, to vie for a spot at nationals. The two competed with teams from 10 different states where Papke placed first and Tvdirk placed fourth. "We beat out other teams which included large state schools with more riders to select from for their roster," Tvdirk said. Papke then traveled to Los Angeles for nationals which took place May 8 through May 12. She placed eighth out of 18 in the "novice over fences" category, which according to Papke, is the best the University's Equestrian Club has ever performed.

"The experience at nationals was incredible. The horses were amazing, the atmosphere was exciting, and the riders were all so talented," said Papke.

The Illinois Wesleyan Equestrian Club, founded in 2001, is for students who share a love of riding horses. Members of the club meet once a week, take lessons at Hunter Oaks Stables in Carlock, Ill., 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, in hopes it will transform the already competing Equestrian Club into an official collegiate team.

This year's past success has motivated Papke and the others on the team to push themselves, so next year will be just as gratifying for all members. "I'm so grateful I've had the opportunity to participate in something so rewarding," Papke said.

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