

Equine assisted therapy connects students to Fort Collins community

Posted by Dixie Crowe on January 28, 2015 at 12:00 PM

<http://www.collegian.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/therapeutic-riding-program-at-CSU.mp3>

Horseback riding offers a unique experience to improve the lives of disabled members of our community.



CSU has several horses that are used for demonstrations in classes including therapeutic riding classes. Photo by Dixie Crowe.

Colorado State University's equine sciences department has a therapeutic riding

program, lead by [Dr. Sharon Butler](#), that not only introduces students to the benefits disabled riders can receive from riding horses, but also trains them to become certified instructors.

[Front Range Exceptional Equestrians](#), a local therapeutic riding program that serves disabled members of the local Fort Collins community, supplies riders for Dr. Butler's therapeutic instructor training lab. The riders use the Adams-Atkinson barn at the foothills campus during the CSU classes and when they ride with F.R.E.E. A major supporter of the equine program paid for special lift to be installed outside the west end of the arena that lifts wheelchair-bound riders onto the horses so they can enjoy the benefits of the program, too.

Students assist the riders as side walkers helping to stabilize them on the horse, lead walkers leading the horse around the arena at an appropriate pace for the rider, as well as designing and implementing lesson plans tailored to their age and abilities. If students want to pursue therapeutic riding as a career also have the opportunity to get teaching hours required for certification by volunteering for F.R.E.E.



A wheelchair lift, permanently installed in the Adams-Atkinson arena on the foothills campus, allows more people to experience the benefits of equine assisted therapy. Photo by Dixie Crowe.

Emily Geeslin, a senior majoring in equine science, took Dr. Butler's classes and did an internship with F.R.E.E. over the summer. She will have to take [written exams, write a special lesson plan, and pass a riding test](#) administered by the [Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International](#) in order to become a certified instructor.

Classes like Dr. Butler's therapeutic riding program help students serve the local community and increase the diversity of riders in the barns on the foothills campus. Watch a [video of riders taking part in the P.A.T.H. International program](#).

Dixie Crowe can be reached at blogs@collegian.com.