Handling All in Stride

She might be “California dreaming” when the temperature is below zero, but equestrian head coach and instructor Brooke Leininger loves Minnesota and has since her arrival in 2007.

Born in Redding, Calif., Leininger earned her bachelor’s degree in equine science with an emphasis in management from Colorado State University in Fort Collins and a master of science in strategic leadership from the University of Mary. When she saw a job opening at the U of M Crookston, she thought the job description fit, but she had never been to Minnesota. A visit during the interview process proved she would love more than the work. Her visit left her in love with the campus, the equine program, and the potential for growth on the equestrian team.

“I saw myself as a fit for the position, and I loved how open and friendly everyone was,” she says. “I saw this move to Crookston as more than a job; it is a career.”

That was seven years ago, and Leininger continues to find deep gratification in her work with students as a coach and as an instructor. Her responsibilities include teaching many of the practical hands-on kinds of courses including riding, hunt seat, dressage, jumping, and the course about becoming a riding instructor. She serves as an advisor to students in equine science and pre-veterinary medicine.

Her work with then-student Angie Bartholomew ’12 was some of the first student-faculty research ever conducted in equine science and examined back pain and performance in horses. Through independent studies, Leininger oversees the instruction of advanced skills, and hopes to engage in more research projects as time goes on.

As a coach, she has a wealth of riding experience starting with her own riding lessons at age eight. She competes professionally and recently won the United States Dressage Federation’s Silver Riding Medal, a prestigious award recognizing a high level of achievement.

For Leininger, no matter what, it all comes down to students. She devotes countless hours to coaching, fundraising for team travel, compliance, and a host of other responsibilities. The equestrian team holds the highest GPA of any athletic team on campus. “We are not a club, we are an NCAA sport with athletes, and scholarships, and an astounding six-year record of success,” Leininger beams. She is proud, and she has a right to be. They are more than just successful as a team; her students have gone on to great success after graduation, and it is important to remember, Leininger is just reaching her stride. There is definitely more to come from this coach and her riders.

Since spring 2010, eleven students have graduated and gone on to attend veterinary school including the following alumni:

2013
Sara Scott
Jessica Charles – member of the
hunt seat team
Blake Setness
Samantha Zuck-Roscoe

2012
Kayla Klehr
Sara Wells – hunt seat team captain

2011
Heather Donati-Lewis
Laura Critchett - hunt seat team captain

2010
Nicole Veres – hunt seat team captain
Megan Hannon
Mindy Nieuwboer
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Brooke Leininger competing her mare Godiva at the FEI Prix St George level at the Sundance Dressage Festival in Lake Elmo, Minn., in June 2013.