

Equine science students from universities across the county traveled to the University of Florida to participate in the 2012 American Collegiate Horsemen's Association (ACHA) Convention.

The ACHA convention brought students from 11 different universities to the Gainesville-Ocala area to explore a variety of equine operations and the opportunities at UF, said equine extension specialist and UF professor Sandra Ten Broeck.

UF's Animal Sciences departmental club, Block and Bridle, hosted the event last spring.

"Block and Bridle is an umbrella organization where subset species groups come together to promote the animal sciences as a whole," Ten Broeck said.

ACHA is the leadership organization of the equine sciences. The association provides equine students with the opportunity to come together and discuss issues and subjects related to the equine sciences, she said.

Students traveled from a variety of universities from across the country, including Texas A&M University, Louisiana State University and Colorado State University.

ACHA vice president and UF senior, Harrison Cribbs, worked with other UF students on the association's planning committee to put together farm visits, informational sessions and networking opportunities that would interest equine students from all areas, Cribbs said.

“The convention provided students with a unique opportunity to network with professionals in the equine industry as they traveled to their local facilities,” Ten Broeck said.

Participants learned about innovative technologies made and used by local companies and facilities, she said.

For example, Gold Mark Farm, LLC in Ocala, Fla. uses the biofuels system, created by Ocala-based Plant Green Solutions, to turn manure waste into energy. The manager of The Sanctuary, an equine sports therapy and rehabilitation center, discussed the purpose and safety of state-of-the-art conditioning and rehabilitation equipment, Ten Broeck said.

“My favorite was visiting Gold Mark Farms, because, while you were there, you were able to see the diversity first-hand,” Cribbs said. “From training to therapeutics to an eco-friendly way to dispose of waste, the opportunities to meet and connect with people were limitless.”

Students had the opportunity to interact with four representatives from different segments of the equine industry during farm tours and speaker sessions. Journalists, photographers, trainers and managers met with the students to discuss their operations and answer students’ questions, Cribbs said.

Participants also visited research facilities run by UF. A tour of the Equine Sciences Center in Ocala introduced students to research that aims to improve nutrition and reproductive efficiencies in the industry, Ten Broeck said.

“Students learned how both current and prospective students could get involved with our research,” Ten Broeck said.

The convention supported the association's mission of providing leadership and a basis for career development for equine students. Ten Broeck stressed the importance of networking, as well as career development, to make students more competitive in the job market after graduation.