



UNIVERSITY of
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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institute for Human-Animal Connection



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Equine-Assisted Mental Health at University of Denver - New Program Starting in 2015

A new, innovative program for mental health practitioners incorporating horses into therapy services is starting Fall 2015 at University of Denver through the Institute for Human-Animal Connection. The Equine-Assisted Mental Health Practitioner Certificate is a practitioner-focused, post-masters program that provides education, training and supervision, and fulfills the educational requirements for independent board certification through the Certification Board for Equine Interaction Professionals (CBEIP) in the U.S.

The Institute for Human-Animal Connection, a center for the study of the interrelationship and health of people, animals and the environment housed within the Graduate School of Social Work has offered human-animal interaction courses and programs, in addition to research and events such as a practitioner conference, since 2006. The new Equine-Assisted Mental Health Practitioner Certificate program is the Institute's first equine-specific program and is offered under the leadership of the new Director of Equine Programs, Nina Ekholm Fry.

"We are thrilled to announce our new clinical offering, designed specifically for practitioners focused on acquiring advanced equine-specific clinical intervention skills", says the Institute's Executive Director Philip Tedeschi, who especially wants to highlight the program's dual focus on clinical skills and equine welfare. "This new clinical intervention program intentionally raises the focus on our relationship with horses and equine wellbeing, and integrates the most current understanding of equitation science into best practice for equine-assisted mental health services. We intentionally recruited Ms. Ekholm Fry, one of the most highly qualified equine practitioners and academic leaders in the field, to lead our equine programs and are excited to have her join our talented faculty." He continues, "This program is going to change the professional landscape for practitioners wanting to incorporate horses into their clinical and therapeutic activities."

Nina Ekholm Fry, who previously served as Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Counselor Education at Prescott College and led its equine-assisted programs, says she is excited to join the faculty at University of Denver.

"The Institute for Human-Animal Connection is perfectly positioned to offer practitioner-focused clinical programming with its emphasis on research, education, ethics, and global human-animal related topics such as One Health and conservation. Even when animal-assisted practitioners focus on specific therapeutic interventions with specific animals, we are, as a field, intricately connected to the larger issues in human-animal interactions and the environment".

The Equine-Assisted Mental Health Practitioner Certificate program takes place over the course of 10 months in a limited residency format - participants do not have to live in Colorado, or even in the U.S., to complete the certificate training. Participants meet for hands-on training three times during the program year and complete course work at a distance and in their communities, including supervised client hours.

Accessibility is important when it comes to professional training, according to Ekholm Fry. "At the same time, the program sets a high standard. Our [equine-assisted] field needs practitioners who are competent both in providing effective services, bringing theory and research to practice, and who have the knowledge of the field and profession to make them effective in moving the field forward."

Also important is programming tailored to professional needs and goals. "This program offers one-to-one advising and group calls to ensure that each participant is gaining the most out of the program," says Ekholm Fry. "The participants have an opportunity to focus in on their population and clinical theory of choice while gaining knowledge and skills in areas such as treatment planning, service optimization and assessment for equine-assisted clinical services."

The program emphasizes three key areas of practitioner competence, which affect everything from session design, program sustainability and risk management, to the wellbeing of all in the session and beyond. Theory, ethics, research, and knowledge of the field and profession is one area; clinical and facilitation skills, and business planning another; and equine competencies is the third key area. More information about each area can be found on the program webpage.

"We can't really talk about providing equine-assisted programming without talking about being competent as a horse professional" says Ekholm Fry. "I would go as far as to say that the quality of client services is directly related to this." She continues, "In an ideal world, professionals who work in human-equine therapeutic and educational interactions would be especially knowledgeable in matters such as equine welfare and behavior, needs and motivations, and how horses express emotions. We need to keep working toward this ideal in the field."

The Equine-Assisted Mental Health Practitioner Certificate program is open to mental health professionals and graduate students in mental health related programs who have previous horse experience.

Please see www.du.edu/humananimalconnection/programs-education/eamh.html for more information and to apply for the 2015 cohort.