

KARA WALCHER

PROUD TO BE AN OILER



Whenever I am asked what it's like to be a student at the University of Findlay I usually give the text book answer of; we ride five days a week, have great instructors, get to learn different disciplines within the western industry, the opportunity to participate on the IHSA or Ranch Horse teams, the equestrian courses we take, what students learn each grade level, etc., etc. While all of that is important information, I never get to share how my experience here has created so many opportunities for me and has allowed me to grow personally, and professionally.

So when I think of the University of Findlay, the Western Equestrian program specifically, it's the 6 AM team practices and workouts to make me a better rider; the falls, tears, and sweat that turn into smiles, happiness, and success; the late nights studying to get that A on your exam; or the late nights preparing your horse for your test the next day. It's the adventures you experience with your new best friends; the staying in Henderson until it closes because you and your friends are having too much fun; or the being told to be quiet at night in your dorm lobby because you and your friends are laughing too loud. The unbroke colt that has never been saddled that turns into a green broke at the end of the semester; the walks across campus when the flowers are blooming or the leaves are changing to go from class to class; the going to George House to get some coffee to help you study or to stay awake in class. It's winning a saddle pad or a hat or a cup at finals with your two year old; or the Friday night shows where you practice for finals with your classmates; the having barn finals before campus finals; or the getting to know the owner of the horse and connecting with them; the advice you receive from the instructors and your peers; the mentoring of the incoming freshman and helping them through their first year of college. It's the joy on your family's faces when you surprise them by coming home unexpectedly one weekend; or the joy you feel once your horse finally clicks with you and you understand what each other is asking; the excitement of winning your first class at finals or an IHSA show; or the disappointment of not winning, but striving to learn and become better for the next time.

It's the knowledge you learn from your instructors and other classes; or the scary but exciting summer jobs that help you learn and grow as a better horseman; or the going to Congress to work for a week and getting the Congress crud right after; or getting to go to Congress to shop with your friends; the getting to work for and learn from an instructor and their business; the hosting and showing at an all-day home IHSA show and eating walking tacos. It's the asking your friends, instructors or advisors for advice with your horse or jobs; or being that shoulder for someone, who may not be a friend yet, to cry on. It's Clark Bradley saying "boogey boogey" in the ranch group or Linda Werst saying "what the crazy" whenever something weird happens; or the knowledge you get from caring for your sick or lame horse. It's the looking up to the seniors and hoping to be a mentor like they were to you one day; the meeting new people and gaining new friendships; the late night trips to Walmart to get food or candles; or the free t-shirts handed out by different clubs.

It's the talking with prospective students and hearing the excitement in their voice when they say they're coming to UF; the experiencing the ups and downs in a relationship and still caring for them in the end; the living on your own and becoming your own independent person; the finding of your passion and future career; the trials and tribulations you go through and the wisdom you gain out of it. It's being equipped for meaningful lives and productive careers. That's what it's like to be an Oiler, and I will always be proud to be one. ★★

