

MEDIA Coverage



THE PLAID HORSE

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First in New Jersey, New Team Will Offer Highest Level of Competition for Women Riders Through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

Centenary University will introduce a National Collegiate Equestrian Association (NCEA) Division III equestrian team beginning in the 2024-25 academic year. The University will be the first in New Jersey to field an NCEA team, the highest level of competition offered for women riders through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The new team will complement the University's existing co-ed Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA) team.



Centenary University's Morgan Munz : Giana Terranova Photography

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“This is exciting news for Centenary University’s equestrian program,” said Dale Caldwell, Ed.D., president of the University. “The success of the equestrian program is one of our highest priorities. We want students to excel, both in the classroom and in competition.”

NCEA competition is growing at the DIII level, making it an attractive option for smaller schools like Centenary, explained Michael Dowling, assistant professor of equine studies, who will coach Centenary’s new team with Heather Clark, assistant professor of equine studies. “This positions Centenary to recruit a higher level of rider and enhance our existing program,” explained Dowling, who together with Clark also coaches Centenary’s IHSA team. “Parents understand NCAA sports and want that for their children. The top riders are all going to NCEA schools, yet we have academic opportunities not offered at larger DI and DII schools. In fact, Centenary will be the only NCEA school offering a degree program in equine studies.”

One of the top college equine programs in the country, Centenary has produced countless leaders in the sport, as well as numerous nationally ranked riders. The University offers a Bachelor of Science in Equine Science, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Equine Studies with concentrations in equestrian media and public relations, equine assisted services, equine business management, and equine training and instruction. Centenary students may also choose the Bachelor of Science in Animal Health (Pre-Veterinary Track), whose graduates have achieved an impressive track record for gaining acceptance to selective veterinary schools.

Kelly Munz, who chairs the Equine Department, explained, “Larger DI and DII schools offer a host of academic programs, but few if any offer an equestrian education like ours. At Centenary, we also offer many academic programs—which include a strong equine and animal health academic curriculum—but because we are small, we can provide a strong hands-on approach. Students who want a small school with lots of experiential learning opportunities, but also want to compete competitively on a collegiate riding team, should consider Centenary.”

A key to Centenary’s decision was the NCEA’s announcement several years ago that it would offer a single discipline championship, which supports teams with only a jumping seat emphasis. Centenary plans to compete in single discipline jumping seat and will spend the current academic year recruiting student-athletes for the 2024-25 season. While Dowling and Clark don’t plan on the team competing this year, Centenary has already been invited to participate in several scrimmages next spring. Dowling said, “Centenary is very well respected in the IHSA world, so we want to build on that reputation. This year will be our planning year, familiarizing ourselves with all the intricacies of the NCEA and recruiting our team. Our plan is to start out strong and be a contender in our first season.”

Munz agreed: “We are at the top of our game with our IHSA team—Centenary is one of the strongest teams in the country. With the addition of this NCEA team, we will be looking to recruit top riders, while maintaining our strong IHSA team, which provides a place for all levels of riders, from beginners to advanced. The addition of an NCEA team will enhance Centenary’s reputation nationally.”

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