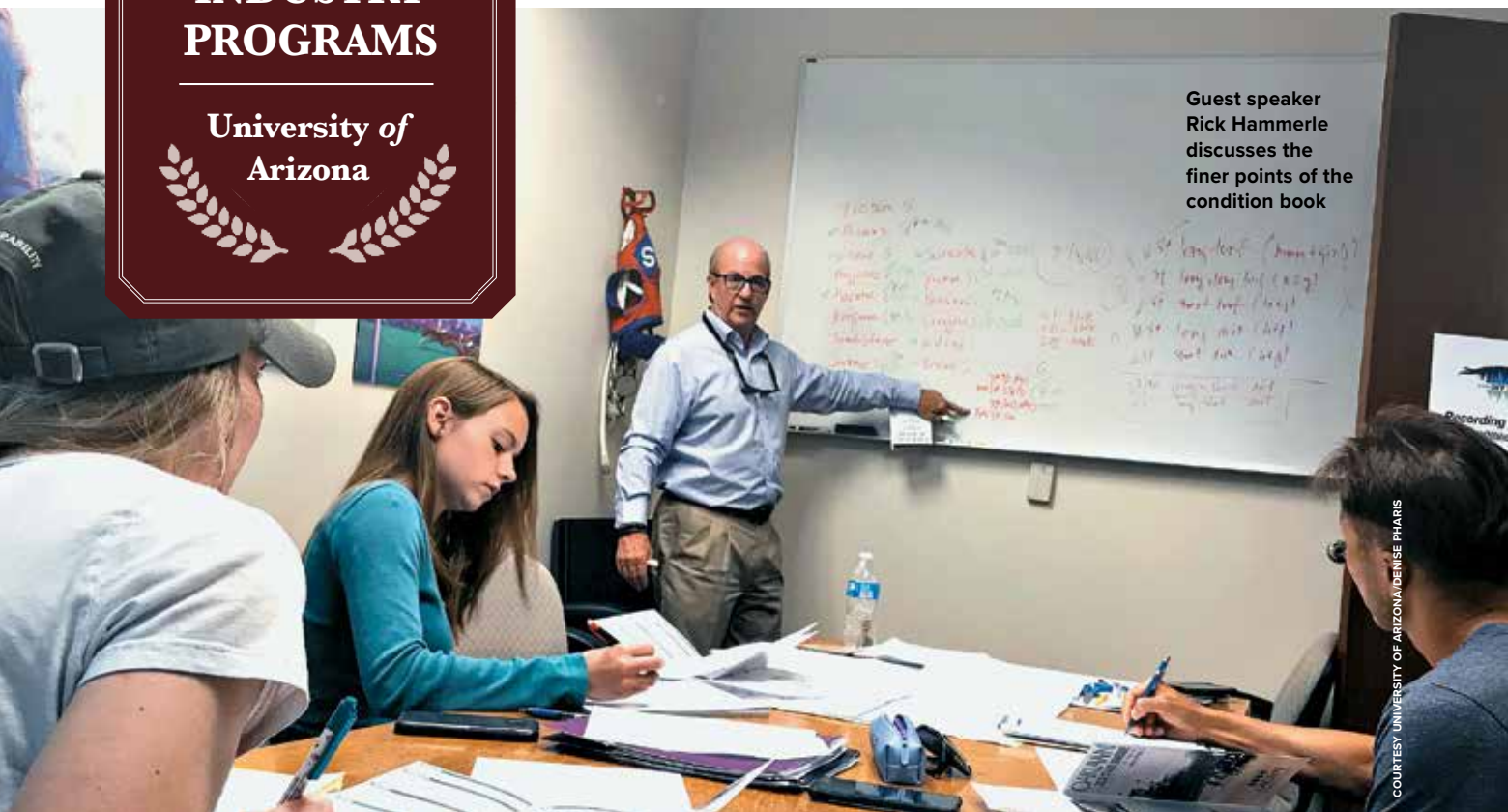


EQUINE INDUSTRY PROGRAMS

University of
Arizona

Guest speaker
Rick Hammerle
discusses the
finer points of the
condition book



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM FULFILLING ITS MISSION

The University of Arizona program began in 1973

BY RON MITCHELL

FOUNDERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA Race Track Industry Program realized in the early 1970s that the Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse, and greyhound racing industries needed an influx of younger, well-educated talent to survive a changing environment.

The group, spearheaded by Los Alamitos Race Course owner Frank Vessels, also included Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse breeder/owner Jack Goodman and Don Ussery, an icon within the American Quarter Horse Association.

These men felt it important that the program be based at a

SCHOOLING SESSION

In this series BloodHorse will examine a few of the prominent college and community college programs for students considering careers in the horse industry. BloodHorse has previously profiled the University of Louisville's Equine Industry Program, and the University of Kentucky's Ag Equine Program. In upcoming issues BloodHorse will profile Texas A&M Equine, and Bluegrass Community and Technical College's North American Racing Academy. It's not intended to be a comprehensive list, but we hope it provides awareness of the educational opportunities available for young—or older—people considering an industry career.

land-grant institution with year-round racing of both horses and greyhounds. After putting out feelers to various institutions fitting their criteria, the only genuine interest came from the College of Agriculture at the University of Arizona in Tucson, which agreed to try it on a trial period of five years.

"There is a mission statement with a lot of fancy words, but to break it down, the mission of the program is to provide well-qualified people to enter the racing industry and also to be a source of information and continuing education and support for the industry," said RTIP director Wendy Davis, a 1980 RTIP alum who has been with the program since 1989 when she signed on to manage the school's farm.

"Those were the two main things our founders were looking at, and I think we still do that. Our goal is to produce the very best graduates possible and to educate those already interested in racing as well as introduce new people to the industry and to consider it as a career."

More than four decades after its first class was offered in 1974, the RTIP has more than fulfilled those founders'

goals, having educated and sent into the industry a diverse, well-qualified group of industry professionals who have impacted all segments of racing, management, and technological fields, among many others.

The list of prominent alumni is extensive, but suffice to say the highest profile graduates are Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert and future Hall of Famer Todd Pletcher. RTIP alumni hold management positions at stallion farms throughout the world, racetracks, advance-deposit wagering companies, stables, training facilities, regulatory bodies, trade associations, breed registries, other governing bodies, and sale

companies, among others.

Initial funds to start the program came from the AQHA, but seed money also was received from a cross-section of the horse and dog racing industries, keys to the program's sustained existence, Davis said.

"Our founding fathers were so smart because they got money from the racing industry," said Davis, "They said 'the industry has gotten more complicated and more sophisticated, and we really need

and breeding animals.

Course titles include "Introduction to Animal Racing Industry," "Financial and Economic Strategy," "Race Track Marketing and Media Relations," "Racing Laws and Enforcement," "Race Track Organization, Structure, and Financial Management," "Racing Business Strategies & Global Perspective," and "Form and Function of the Equine Athlete."

Hands-on experience is gleaned from working with horses kept at RTIP's farm, which was recently relocated and expanded following the donation of a nearby former Arabian horse farm and some of its herd. Classes in this area include "Weanling Management," "Yearling Management," "Introduction to Horsemanship," as well as "Sales and Marketing Strategies of Performance/Race Prospects."

An important part of RTIP's educational function is its guest speaker program that brings professionals from all walks of the industry not only to talk to students but also to meet with them on an informal basis. Not only does that aspect of the program provide students a first-

hand look at the nuts and bolts of the industry not found in a classroom, but it also helps forge a relationship between the RTIP and the industry.

"We get a lot of offers because they want to come and guest lecture," Davis said. "They come to us and say 'I'd like to be a part because I want to help educate the next generation.'"

The University of Arizona's suspension of in-person classes midway through the spring semester as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the guest speaker program. While most classes could be held remotely, there was a void without having students interact with industry professionals.



COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA DIEGO CERVANTES

U of A student/intern working in the paddock at Los Alamitos

young people coming in who are college educated. We can't just hope that people are going to be there to take over these positions that are getting more complicated.'

"They put together a few endowments to ensure the program would be able to go forward," Davis continued. "And we still live on that. The industry is a tremendous support. Depending on the year, we're between 60%-70% self-funded."

Curriculum within the program offers two paths of study: one preparing students for racetrack management, regulation, or pari-mutuel racing organizations; the other preparing students for employment in areas dealing with racing



COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA/DENISE PHARRIS PHOTOS

Racing secretary Ben Huffman talks with students about the Kentucky Derby post draw

“We were prepared when we needed to go to the online format, and we told students that if you don’t have to, then don’t come back after spring break,” Davis said. “It really hurt us with our guest speaker program. We could do some with Zoom, but there is no substitute for when they’re here. They get to sit around the office one-on-one and not in a classroom setting, so the students are more comfortable and they go to lunch with students.”

As for possible impact of COVID-19 for the upcoming school year, Davis said it’s uncertain what the fall semester will look like at UA and that some consideration is being given to moving indoor classes outdoors.

“In the spring, because there was a full shutdown, even with classes that were outside and those working with horses had to stop,” she said. “They are actually looking at doing courses that are usually inside at outside venues because you can socially distance. We’re beautifully positioned for that.”

Outside academics, RTIP plays an important role within the industry by

presenting the Global Symposium on Racing, held each December since 1974. The symposium attracts international participants representing Thoroughbred, Standardbred, American Quarter Horse, greyhound, and racino interests from across the United States and internationally. Topics presented during the symposium include issues and trends of importance to the pari-mutuel in-

dustry, including simulcasting, account wagering, marketing, track surfaces, casino gaming, human and health issues, track operations, new technologies, and regulation.

In addition to bringing together a diverse group of industry professionals, the symposium is another opportunity for RTIP students to network, gaining valuable contacts that can lead to internships and future employment.

RTIP faculty are involved in an array of industry organizations. Davis coordinates and conducts the Racing Officials Accreditation Program designed to educate those making important decisions about how racing is regulated on a daily basis.

“As part of the stewards’ accreditation program, we bring in folks, many of whom have been in racing forever,” Davis said. “We teach them about the part of the legal system that allows stewards to do what they do.”

Davis said the annual symposium on racing, stewards’ accreditation, and other areas in which RTIP is involved are all part of how the program views itself outside its academic role.

“We feel really obligated to the industry because without them we wouldn’t be here,” she said. **BH**



Owner Barbara Banke (far left) meets with students on a field trip at her Stonestreet Stables