

Here is my scholarship report for both the Instructor's Certification workshops and exams:

All I can say is WOW! The USDF Instructor's Certification workshops and exam is totally underrated. I have learned so much and I wish people would look more for this in their riding instructor's across the nation. I feel so lucky to have been able to participate thanks to D4K. I would not have been able to afford it otherwise, and again learned so much more than I thought I would.

The first workshop was the riding workshop. The workshops are two full days of learning. We all get to ride one horse each day and then audit in on everyone else's rides. Bill McMullin did this workshop and was so helpful. The key with the instructor's certification is the way you explain things and the words you use. They stressed a lot on the training pyramid through all workshops. The riding workshop mainly focused on rhythm, relaxation, and connection since the workshops were for Training through First Level. To break it down, Bill had us, similarly to the exam, first and foremost check the tack of the horse, and then warm- up the horse on our own, making sure we changed direction, and felt the walk, trot, and canter each direction as well as a stretchy trot. We then had to come over and explain to what we were feeling, for example were they hollow or stiff on one side over the other. Then we would state how we would like to improve the horse and our plan for the horse. Basically, serpentine loops, turn on the forehand, leg-yielding, all basic training to first level movements to improve the horse. We would go off and do it while Bill watched and possibly helped us along the way. We would then come back over explain if things were working or not and continue or change the plan. At the end, we would then state how we were successful and what our future plans for the horse would be. Again, all of this with the focus on how we use our words and intertwining them with the Training Pyramid.

The second workshop was the teaching workshop. We were so lucky because we got Lilo Fore who came and hosted the workshop. She is awesome! It is again setup similarly to the riding workshop. With focus on the training pyramid and how we approach teaching using the correct words. All of the participants got a horse and rider combination that we got to teach. Again, starting with tack check and checking in with the rider, we would watch them warm up their horses both directions. After, the warm up we would turn and talk with Lilo on what we saw and what we wish to improve and making sure to pay attention to rider position and seat as well. Then we would go on and teach the rider with Lilo helping us if we needed it or giving us pointers as we go. Setup similarly to the riding workshop, we would then go back and assess how it is going so far and if we would change anything or continue with how we would teach. Then ending the session with what we would do in the future with that rider.

The third workshop was the lunging workshop. Boy, is lunging hard! It is not something that I do often in my routine, except with young and/or naughty horses. In the lunging workshop we had Sarah Martin help us. It was pretty difficult for me and I had a pretty rough first day with a naughty horse who liked to bolt as soon as I sent him out. Luckily, everyone was helpful in helping me through it with such a difficult horse. This

part of the workshop and exam is probably the hardest! There is so much care in making sure the tack is fitted properly - so much adjusting and making sure the whip, and lunge line do not touch the ground. As well as keeping your foot planted to keep a proper circle for your horse. The biggest thing that I probably learned was the "triangle" of aids that is apart of the lunging. From the horses mouth, to you, to the whip and butt of the horse. Keeping this, your whip is used like your leg in riding and that is how you exercise your horse on the lunge. I had always been taught that whip is just used to make the horse go between gaits from walk to trot and from trot to canter. But this is not the case! It is really used like your leg to help regulate within the gait! I also learned that you cannot practice lunging enough!

The final part of my scholarship I received was to partake in the Instructor's Certification exam for Training through First Level. It was probably one of the most stressful things I have ever done! We had to take a written, an oral, and a practical part of the exam all in about 3 days! Studying the training manuals was definitely helpful in this aspect. We all had to ride two horses, at least one unfamiliar, teach two riders, and lunge one horse, and lunge one rider. This was all done in the three days and it was busy! I had three exams in one day! It was very nerve-racking to say the least. The examiners were tough in asking questions and always trying to a little bit throw you off. However, if you weren't answering the questions exactly how they would like, they would keep re-asking the question in maybe a little bit different way to help you find the answer. Still-sometimes I had a complete brain fart and could not get the words out even though I knew what they were! Thankfully, I passed all portions and am now a USDF Certified Instructor at Training through First Level!

It has been an incredible opportunity that D4K provided me and I am so thankful that I got the chance to participate! I also would like to thank Kim Van Kampen and Hampton Green Farms for hosting two of the workshops and part of the exams. As well as Reese Koffler-Stanfield for helping set up the lunging workshop. And a big shout out to Laura Ashley for allowing us to use her farm and horses for part of the exam and workshops. We could not have these wonderful opportunities without people volunteering their time and horses for us. I would definitely recommend these workshops and exams to anyone who has their eyes on being a well educated riding instructor!

Let me know if there is anything else I could add! I, unfortunately, did not get any photos as I was too busy paying attention hoping I would pass!

Thank you,  
Alexandra Gainer