

This semester, I participated as a member of the University of Rhode Island Intercollegiate Dressage Team. I would not have been able to join the team had it not been for the generosity of Dressage4Kids and the Lendon Gray Scholarship, which covered my dues for the semester.

Riding on an Intercollegiate Dressage Association (IDA) team was unlike any riding experience I have had. IDA could be considered the speed dating of horse showing. You are given ten minutes to warm up on a horse before going into the ring to ride a test. Most people have their horses for months before they enter their first show, but, in IDA, riders have only ten minutes to get acquainted with a horse they have never met! I learned that the warmup has to be targeted and efficient. In order to be successful in the ring, you need to have a plan in the warmup. Riders need to be flexible but focused in order to get the best performance out of their horses.

Another way I learned from IDA is by riding an enormous variety of horses. This semester, I have ridden tests on 14 hand Connemaras to 17 hand Warmbloods and everything in between. By riding such a multitude of horses, I learned techniques for finding relaxation and connection in many situations. One thing that stayed the same among all of these horses was keeping my legs on! As many have speculated, more leg is almost always the answer!

The pressure in IDA is high, as you are riding for your team, not just for yourself. In a typical show, a mistake might cost you a ribbon, but you would be the only one affected by it. In IDA, the team is relying on you to get a good score. This was a great experience for me because it helped me learn to stay calm in the ring. Even with all the pressure of helping the team, I had to keep the stress from affecting my riding. This will be very useful to me in my United States Pony Club upper level certifications, as well as at any shows in which I plan to ride.

I am immensely grateful to Dressage4Kids and the Lendon Gray Scholarship for allowing me the opportunity to ride on the University of Rhode Island IDA team. It has improved my riding and prepared me to ride in high-pressure situations and on a variety of horses. Without Dressage4Kids, I would not have been able to join the team. Thank you, D4K!