Equine Assisted Clinical Training in a University Setting
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Workshop Learning Objectives:
• Participants will understand the basic theoretical and clinical assumptions of the strength-based, experiential training approach.
• Participants will become familiar with the educational and supervisory advantages of incorporating horses into clinical training.
• Participants will gain an awareness of the steps needed to develop an equine-assisted model for collaborative, self-reflective, experiential clinical training.

Equine Assisted Clinical Training—developed at NSU:
• Equine assisted clinical training offers a relational, collaborative approach to therapy in which horses are used to facilitate and guide the clinical session.
• Informed by strength-based, brief therapy traditions, the model developed at NSU has been adapted for both clinical work and for training and supervision of master’s and doctoral students as well as community professionals.
• Attention to context and relationship are primary.
• NSU’s equine assisted training is experiential, and is informed by respect for trainees’ wisdom, resources, and abilities.
• Through interactions with horses, trainees are invited to experience challenges, face uncertainty, and attempt new solutions in the moment.
• Supervisors and trainers observe equine/human interactions and utilize the process to develop with the trainee new understandings of typical ways of relating to self and clients.

Equine Assisted Clinical Training and Supervision goals at NSU:
• To integrate brief, relational clinical ideas as foundational assumptions of the training model.
• To offer students the experiential opportunity to learn about equine assisted work from the perspective of both client and clinician.
• To utilize an equine assisted model as a training and supervision method, allowing students to examine and challenge their own clinical assumptions and therapeutic orientation.
**Structure and Process of Training Sessions:**

- Students participate in basic equine-based activities (herd observations, approaching and grooming, catch/halter, creating and navigating obstacle courses).
- Students note and document their personal reactions, ways of responding to fear, anxiety, ambiguity, confusion, pleasure, connection, change, etc.
- They then begin relating these experiences to their training as therapists and their typical ways of behaving in therapy room.
- This multi-layered, equine-assisted supervision process is intended to encourage self-reflexivity, and to thus allow students to increase their own self-awareness in terms of how they position themselves with clients.
- Considerations of the trainees’ approach to change, relationship, and context are primary throughout the work.
- As they participate in experiential activities designed to allow them to approach the animals, develop trust, and experiment with comfort levels regarding personal space, change, and intentionality, they reconsider the ways they typically manage similar issues with their clients.

**Student Responses to Training:**

- This course changed the way I act as a therapist; it helped me to become more conscientious and less agenda-driven.
- This course helped me work on myself and my professional identity; it should be required for all MFT students!
- This was awesome! A life-changing experience!
- This class is essential to our professional development as family therapists.
- This was a very enriching experience; I couldn’t help but grow personally as well as a therapist, and I wasn’t expecting the personal part.
- Beautiful experience; it was great having class outdoors and connecting with nature. Every therapist should be encouraged to explore equine assisted therapy.
- My role as a therapist improved drastically. I learned a lot about equine therapy and how it is essential in our field. I also learned about taking care of my professional and personal self.
- This was the most amazing class! I learned so much about who I am as a therapist; it should be used as an alternative form of supervision.

**Recommendations for Developing University Based Programs:**

- Educate your department administrators about the unique value of training in an equine assisted model (better trained, more self-reflective trainees, with greater awareness of innovative therapeutic approaches).
- Collaborate with community-based partners who share your values, goals, and understanding of equine assisted work.
- Involve motivated and talented graduate students who can help promote the training and encourage other students to enroll.
- Pilot your training approach with both students and community professionals to help solidify your work and increase visibility and understanding.
Recommended Readings and Resources:


Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. [www.eagala.org](http://www.eagala.org)


Jarrell, N., () Equine therapy: Marking the connection. *Counselor Magazine*.


