
A Tool to Evaluate Horse Judging Students Perceptions of Critical Thinking and Life Skills Development

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Abstract

A 20 question evaluation instrument was developed in order to determine whether enrollment and participation in a college level horse judging course could produce changes in students perceptions of their critical thinking and/or life skills abilities. Seven (N=7) students enrolled in a Horse Selection and Evaluation class at the University of Connecticut were asked to respond to the questions based on their current and prior experiences in five areas — judging ability, decision-making, public speaking, self-evaluation, and teamsmanship. The mean pre- to post- changes were significant on 15 of the questions at the $P < .005$ level, four of the questions were significant at the $P < .01$ level, and one question at the $P < .05$ level. It was concluded that the instrument was useful in determining the effectiveness of the horse judging experience in the development of critical life skills and that data generated by this instrument would be effective in both recruitment of students into judging classes, and in justifying the continuance and support of this type of learning experience at the university level.

Introduction

Horse judging team participation has been found to be a valuable and worthwhile experience for those students who choose to participate (McCann, 1991). Besides learning about conformation and performance criteria for evaluating horses in different classes, horse judging team members also hone their critical thinking and decision-making skills while learning to present themselves in a positive and assertive manner. As Potter (1993) has noted, students learn critical life skills as a result of their participation in horse judging events and that the skills learned are those that are sought out by employers.

Since many students first learn the basics of horse judging via classroom activities and course simulations, it was important to determine whether enrollment and participa-

tion in a college level horse judging course could produce changes in students perceptions of their critical thinking abilities and/or life skills abilities.

Procedures

A 20 question evaluation instrument was developed to measure students perceptions of behavioral changes in five areas — judging ability, decision-making, public speaking, self-evaluation, and teamsmanship. For each question, the students were asked to rate their personal experience on a five point scale where 1 indicated that it was “not at all” their experience and 5 indicated that it was “very much so” their experience. Mean pre- and post-test scores were calculated for each question. Mean changes and standard deviations were calculated for each question, and those data were analyzed by the Student's *t* test.

Results and Conclusions

Scores from each student showed positive increases pre- to post- for each question on the evaluation. Mean pre- and post-class scores are shown by category in Table 1. The largest numeric changes occurred in evaluation of conformation (Category 1), oral defense of decisions, speaking publicly with confidence, and visualization of horses during oral reasons (Category 3), utilization of acquired knowledge throughout life and in evaluating self-worth (Category 4), and recommendation of the horse judging programs to their peers (Category 5). However, the pre- to post-class changes were statistically significant for all items evaluated (Table 1).

In conclusion, the results from this study suggest that this evaluation can be useful in determining the effectiveness of the horse judging class experience in the development of critical thinking and life skills. Further, data generated by this instrument can be effective in recruitment of students into judging classes, as well as justifying the need for continuance and support of this program at the university level.

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References

McCann, J.S. (1991). Survey on the Value of the Collegiate Judging Team Experience to its Participants. *Proceedings Twelfth Equine Nutrition and Physiology Symposium*, p. 219.

Potter, J.T. (1993). *Development of Life Skills Through Horse Judging Team Participation*. University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, publication number 93-2.

Table 1 Comparison of Mean Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Five Categories of Skills Developed in Students Enrolled in Animal Science 281, Horse Selection and Evaluation

Item	Pre (n=7)	Post (n=7)	Change (± sd)	t, 6 df	P<
Category 1: Judging					
Evaluation of Conformation	2.0	4.14	2.14 ± .49	12.72	.005
Recognition of Breed Ideal	2.43	4.29	1.86 ± .76	6.41	.005
Elimination of Personal Bias	2.57	4.0	1.43 ± 1.62	2.34	.05
Evaluation of Performance Classes	2.43	4.14	1.71 ± .76	5.89	.005
Category 2: Decision-Making					
Making Objective Decision	3.0	4.43	1.43 ± .53	7.15	.005
Analytical/Sequential Thinking	3.0	4.43	1.43 ± .98	3.86	.005
Confidence in Decisions	2.43	4.29	1.86 ± .69	7.15	.005
Organization of Thoughts	3.29	4.57	1.28 ± .76	4.44	.005
Category 3: Public Speaking					
Oral Defense of Decisions	2.0	4.43	2.43 ± .53	12.15	.005
Speak Publicly with Confidence	2.0	4.0	2.0 ± .58	9.09	.005
Utilize Stress Positively	3.0	4.0	1.0 ± .82	3.23	.01
Visualization of Horses During Reasons	2.0	4.29	2.29 ± .76	7.89	.005
Category 4: Self-Evaluation					
Establishment of Goals and Objectives	3.14	4.29	1.15 ± .69	4.38	.005
Evaluation of Successes	3.14	4.14	1.0 ± .58	4.54	.005
Evaluation of Failures	3.0	4.0	1.0 ± .82	3.22	.01
Utilize Knowledge Throughout Life	2.29	4.71	2.42 ± 1.13	5.65	.005
Utilize Experience to Evaluate Self-Worth	2.57	4.57	2.0 ± 1.15	4.65	.005
Category 5: Teamsmanship					
Ability to Support Teammates	3.86	4.86	1.0 ± .82	3.22	.01
Ability to Feel Competitive	3.43	4.29	.86 ± .38	6.14	.005
Recommendation of Program to Peers	2.86	4.86	2.0 ± 1.63	3.22	.01

Scale: Score 1-5, with 1 indicating *not at all* and 5 indicating *very much so*.