



2021 SENIOR ESSAY AWARD RUNNER-UP

Sarah Zube, University of Virginia

There are so many ways I could write about my time as a collegiate equestrian and what it taught me. I could write about the way it made me a leader, or how it gave me unimaginable opportunities to further my riding. I could write about the ways it humbled me, and how it made me a more patient and compassionate rider. I could also write about how I met my best friends and roommates on the day of tryouts, or how the quiet of the barn became my sanctuary among the high-pressure environment of UVA. I could write about how it, in tandem with my public policy coursework, made me realize how privileged I am to ride at all. But the biggest thing I learned from showing with IHSA was what I learned when the competitions were canceled from COVID-19. Who does a captain become when the shows stop?

Last year, I was bracing for the inevitable cancellation of Regionals, Zones, and Nationals. I had qualified for Regionals and my team was Zones bound, and we had a really good shot at Nationals. When we finally got word of the cancellations, the wave of sadness I expected never came. Instead, I felt so glad to have shown all year, and that the season had been my most successful one yet. I thought about all the great lessons and lovely horses I got to ride in preparation for post season. But I especially thought about how it was almost a metaphor for one of the biggest lessons I learned as an IHSA rider: to let go of disappointment and ground yourself in the present.

Like many equestrians, I am a massive perfectionist. One of the biggest things my coach and I have worked on these past 4 years is not letting mistakes define my ride. If I missed a lead change? Skip it up and keep going. If I get deep into a line? Add leg and move on. Let it go and focus on right now. And I think all of this has helped me stay grounded in the disappointments COVID has brought.

Come my final year on the team, I was ready to make decisions that were best for our riders and the health of our community, even if it meant my time horse showing was over. So, what then does a captain become? She becomes the mane puller, the pep talker, the lesson videographer and cheerleader. She gives new members virtual tours of the barn. She organizes virtual horse shows. She takes winter break off from jumping and enjoys trail rides with one of her favorite team horses. She lets go of disappointment and throws herself into the present.

This certainly isn't to say there haven't been hiccups, and my coaches can attest to that. I miss horse showing with my best friends, and while it's a bummer to miss out on my final hurrah, my experience with IHSA has already given me everything I needed. As I graduate, enter the workforce, and begin planning for law school, I know I will take this way of being, thinking, and experiencing the world with me wherever I go.



2021 SENIOR ESSAY AWARD THIRD PLACE

Hannah Waroway, Midway University



Hannah with Buddy, owned by Midway University.
Photo by Tina Ibbotson

Throughout my freshman and sophomore year as an IHSA competitor, I rarely placed in my flat classes. With hopes of being an integral leader on my team early in my collegiate career, I felt as though I was failing my teammates as well as myself. However, I realized that those challenges provided me an opportunity to appreciate the value in learning from each experience. Although my collegiate career has been decorated with numerous achievements, awards, and scholarships, the lessons I have learned have had a greater impact on me.

As COVID-19 rampaged around the world in 2020 leaving grief, cancellations, and social-distancing in its wake, leadership skills became imperative to successfully keeping an optimistic mindset instilled in my teammates. After leading my team as a captain for three years, I have realized how an authentic, hard-working leader can be an indispensable asset to a team, university, region, and organization. Throughout my collegiate career, I have been able to motivate my team's desire to learn, drive for success, and together, we have celebrated the victories and learned from the setbacks.

On February 18, 2021 I had to put my pony down unexpectedly and it destroyed me. I put on a smile and tried to stay strong to lead my team, but as I grieved, they came to my aid without being asked. As a leader, I never realized how much influence I could have on the people I interacted with until I received a magnanimous amount of support. I never reveled in the power I had as a team leader, rather I just led by example. After putting my heart and soul into leading this team, one member from the hunt seat and western team came together to lead the rest by example in supporting me during one of the hardest times of my life.

Through being a leader of my IHSA team, I have learned vulnerability, self-love, confidence, how to encourage people in their hardships, and how to accept love through my own imperfections. Leadership is not about being perfect, the most talented, stoicism, or intelligence, rather it is about leading people to be the best versions of themselves and empowering them to accept who they are. As John Maxwell says, "Leaders become great not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others."



Midway University head coach Heath Gunnison, Hannah Waroway with parents Shanon and Mike-Waroway.

Photo by Lesley-DuPlessis

In May I'll graduate as a proud member of IHSA and will leave behind a legacy, but I will always have the support of my former teammates and coaches. There are many different avenues I could take in the equine industry, but I know whichever career path I choose whether that be photography, riding and teaching professionally, rehabilitation therapy, or all three, the impact my collegiate team had on me and the leadership skills I learned will never fade. I will conclude my undergraduate career having participated in one of the most life-changing organizations as IHSA has left an indelible mark on me as a person and as a horsewoman.