

# Graduates at the gallop

Students with horse-riding-related majors are in demand as number of equestrian clubs surges

By **HOU LIQIANG**  
and **ZHOU LIHUA**

**T**his year, 7.95 million university students are expected to graduate in China, according to the Ministry of Education. While some struggle to find work, those with horse-riding-related majors from Wuhan Business University are at ease.

All of the 150 graduates from the institution in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei province, secured jobs up to six months before they graduated in June.

Instead of graduates approaching employers, companies came to the university to compete for talented individuals.

"About 200 clubs turned to us hoping to join a jobs fair on our campus for graduates of horse-riding-related majors. We only gave 16 of them passes," said Xia Yunjian, dean of the university's School of Physical Education and Equine Industry.

Many clubs donated horses to the university for teaching purposes in the hope it will help them find the graduates they need. All 12 horses the university now has are donated ones, Xia added.

The local government is trying to build the country's horse-racing capital in Wuhan.

The university established its horse-racing industry management

major in 2008, and is said to be the first in the country to do so. The university also has an equestrian sports management major.

Although about 1,000 students with horse-riding-related majors have graduated from the university and more than 10 universities around the country have set up similar majors, there are still far from enough qualified graduates in the equine industry.

"The demand for horse-riding-related talent vastly outstrips the supply," said Xia, adding that many clubs turned to the university, looking for interns to help their businesses, but the university had to decline many of the requests.

A sharp increase in the number of clubs may well explain the rising demand.

The number of equestrian clubs in China shot up from 100 in 2008 to 907 at the end of last year and is still rising by about 100 a year, said Kuang Zuosheng, director of the Shanghai Equestrian Sports Management Center, at a horse industry seminar in Shanghai in April.

Xia said Wuhan Business University plans to invest almost 110 million yuan (\$16.6 million) to build facilities that will cover about 14 hectares on the campus. The facilities, including three training grounds and an 800-meter horse-racing track, will be used to host the Military World



Jockeys compete in a race this year in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei province, where the local government is trying to build the country's horse-racing capital. XIONG QI / XINHUA



Children and their parents attend a promotion event at a racing club in Beijing. LI XIN / XINHUA

Games in Wuhan in 2019.

The university will also build a China-French equestrian school to cover about 67 hectares outside the current campus, hoping to tap into French experience in cultivating horse-related talent.

In February, the university signed an agreement in Beijing with the

Wuhan Equestrian Association and the French Equestrian Federation to jointly build the school.

It is expected that by 2020, the value of the sports industry will be more than 3 trillion yuan and the proportion of its added value to GDP will rise from 0.63 percent in 2013 to 1 percent.

Hu Jun, executive general manager of the Wuhan Jockey Club, echoed Xia's sentiments that there are too few talented people to support the growing equine industry.

"It will be much better if education can be combined with experience in clubs, and it's important for universities to enroll those eligible for horse-riding-related majors," Hu said.

The most qualified individuals for horse racing, for example, are less than 170 centimeters tall and weigh about 55 kilograms, he said.

Hu said there is no industry specific qualification evaluation system in China, and the lack of a transfer system also results in a high turnover of personnel.

He added that the industry lacks appropriate pay scales. Jockeys still depend on salaries from their bosses to make a living instead of prizes, as in Western countries.

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## Getting on the right track

Random decision to major in equestrianism put a rural student on the path to a rewarding career

By **HOU LIQIANG**  
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Zhang Jiaojiao had never seen a horse in real life before she started a major in equestrianism.

In fact, she chose the major at Wuhan Business University in Central China's Hubei province completely at random after scoring poorly in the national college entrance exam in 2014.

"My hometown is in a rural area in Danjiangkou, Hubei province. People there know nothing about the subject, and think it's about protecting horses from illness, which is

embarrassing," said Zhang, 21.

She recalled that when her family held a banquet to celebrate her admission to university, her parents asked her to say she was majoring in sports to avoid being laughed at.

Though teachers described the major as not only high-end but also promising, she failed to take an interest until she got a chance to ride a horse.

"Previously, I had only seen them on TV. It was amazing when I sat on a horse for the first time. It's not like a dog or a cat. You need to communicate with a horse with your heart to make it understand you," she said.

For freshmen, there are no practical courses with horses, but Zhang found a way to interact with the animals by becoming the only female volunteer to clean the stable.

"Every day, after finishing my classes, I went to clean the stable. Afterward, I sat quietly watching students in higher grades riding, hoping they would let me ride for a short while," she said.

After cleaning the stable every day for six months, her perseverance finally paid off when some senior students decided to share their riding time with her. But in return she had to wash and brush the horse and

take it back to its stall. It was worth the trouble, she said.

Zhang started a WeChat account with students from two other universities studying the same major to share articles about horses. The first article they published has been viewed about 100,000 times, she said.

"Not many people take such majors. All the people who do are like family members and will discuss any topic about horses for a long time," she said.

Zhang is now proud of her major as equestrianism graduates are sought after and all her classmates got job offers long before graduation.

She accepted a job offer from an online platform that involves e-commerce and horse industry information in December.

"Instead of doing something that enabled direct contact with horses, I chose to do something behind the scenes," she said.

"You have to do a lot of preparation before you ride a horse and you need promotion to increase awareness. This is important for the industry's development. And this is what I am doing."

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