

An Evaluation of U.S. Horseback Riding Instruction Certifications: Availability, Acquisition, Barriers, and Industry Need

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Presentation Outline

Introduction

Literature Review

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Figure 1

A Western-style riding instructor and student.



Note. Sourced from "Maximize Your Lessons" by Nancy Cahill, 2015, Horse&Rider. Retrieved from <https://horseandrider.com/western-horse-training-tips/maximize-lessons-28569/>.

Introduction



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Background

- The recreational sector of the equine industry promotes 162,000 direct jobs and adds \$7.5 billion in direct value to the national economy (AHCF, 2017).
- Many other instructional trades that are related to inherent risk are mandated by certification or licensure, but not horseback riding instructors.

Given the intrinsic hazard that horseback riding presents, why aren't riding instructors required to have some type of license or certification? Would a certification improve an instructor's ability to deliver safe lessons?

Figure 2
A SCUBA instructor teaches students hand signals for SCUBA safety.



Note. Sourced from "Thinking Of Trying Scuba Diving This Vacation?" by Charles Davis, 2019, Deeper Blue. Retrieved from <https://www.deeperblue.com/thinking-of-trying-scuba-diving-this-vacation/>.

Statement of the Problem

What IS horseback riding? A sport, or a trade?

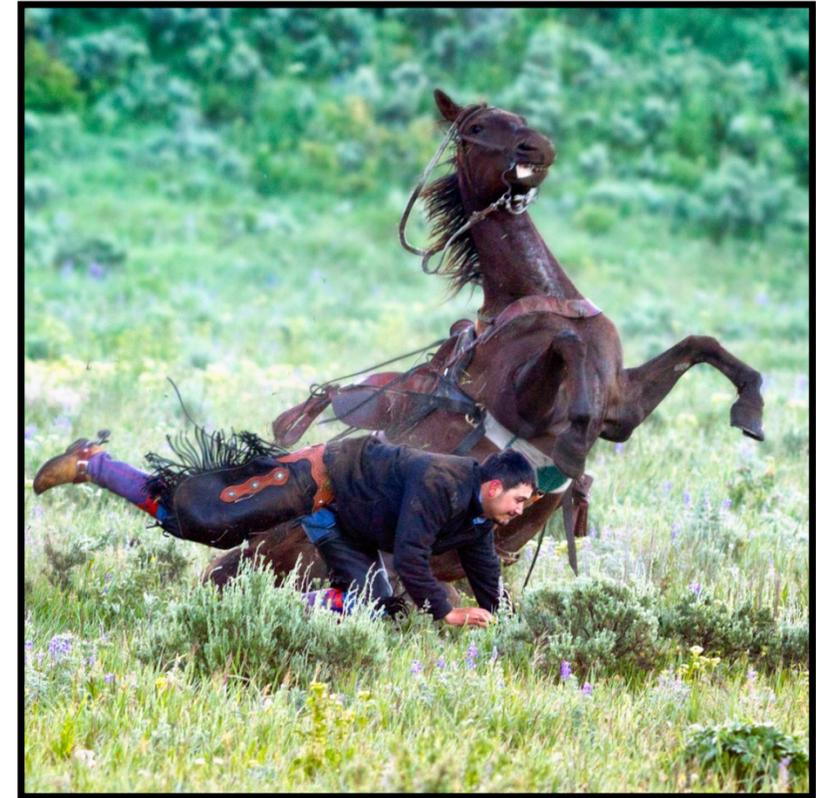
Examples of extreme sports that require certification to be a paid instructor:

- Base jumping
- Kayaking
- Scuba diving
- Skydiving
- White water rafting

Examples of trades that require licensure in order to receive payment:

- Massage therapist
- Educator
- Plumber
- Veterinary technician

Figure 3
A rider falls to the ground after a horse rears.



Note. Sourced from "What to Do After a Horseback Riding Accident" by Moss Berg Injury Lawyers, 2015. Retrieved from <https://mossberginjurylaw.com/steps-to-take-if-youve-been-injured-while-horseback-riding/>.

Figure 4
A rider falls to the ground after a horse falls over a jumping standard.



Note. Sourced from "When Horses and Riders Hurt Themselves" by Alexa Linton, 2021, Horse Journals. Retrieved from <https://www.horsejournals.com/horse-care/alternative-therapies/when-horses-and-riders-hurt-themselves>.

Objectives of the Study

1

Identify the competencies and the process for obtaining skill-based horseback riding instructor certifications of the five most popular third-party certifying organizations that are currently available in the United States.

2

Describe the attitudes towards certification in the US.

3

Describe the self-perception of currently certified and non-certified riding instructors' self-efficacy when related to riding instruction competency.

4

Identify and describe potential barriers to professional riding instruction certification in the United States.

5

Collect information on the average riding lesson demographic in the US.

6

Describe the consumer's preference for the selection of horseback riding instructors in the US.

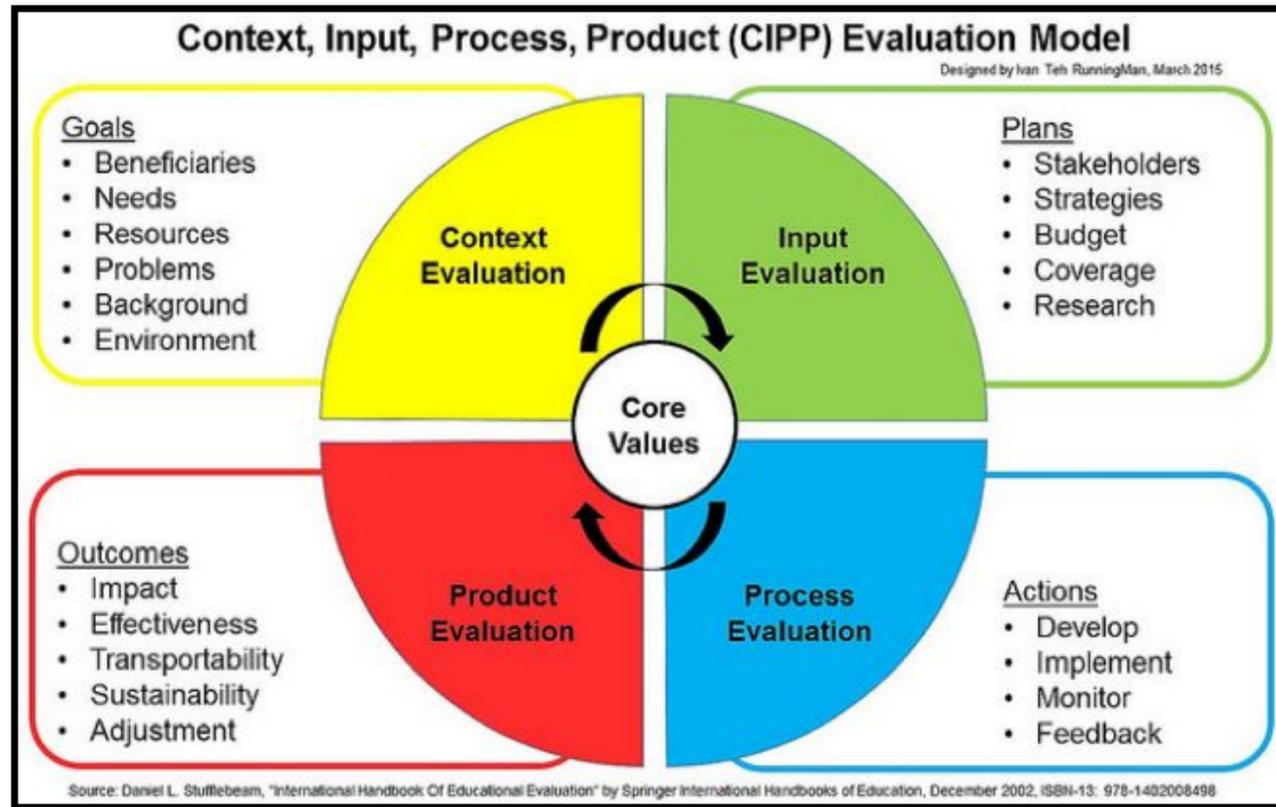
Literature Review



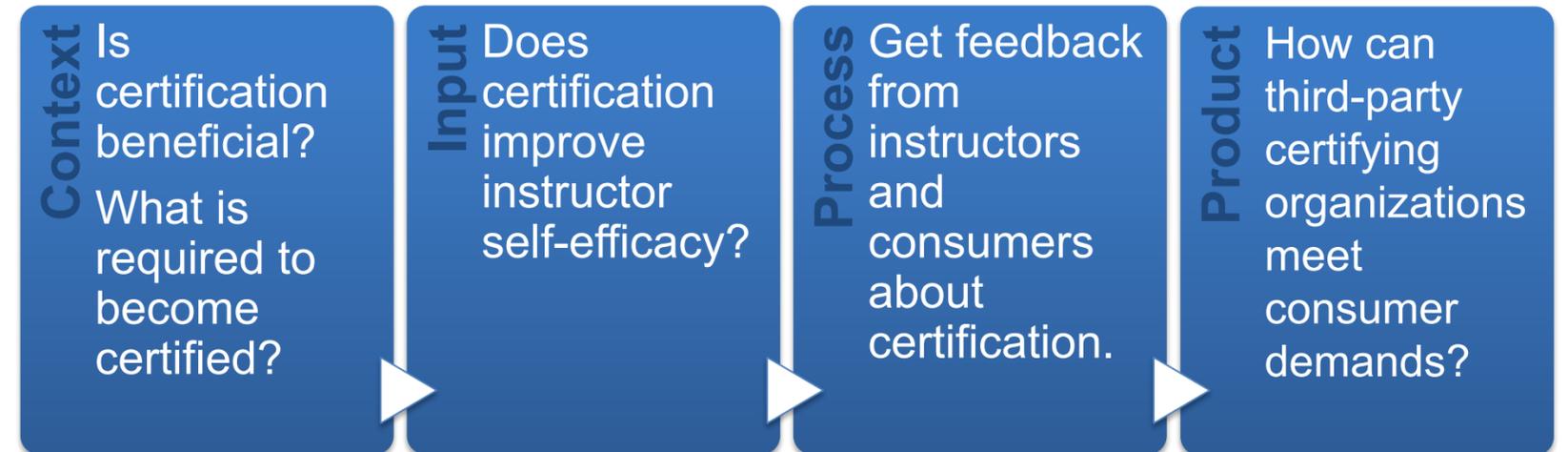
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Theoretical Framework

Figure 5
The CIPP evaluation model.



Note. Sourced from "CIPP Model," 2022, Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/CIPP>.



Historical Premise

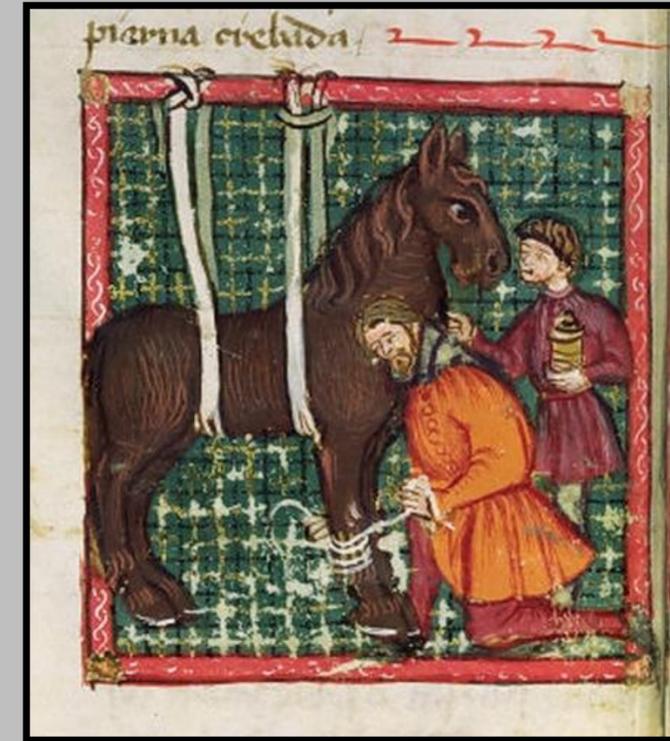
Professional certification is a designation earned by a person to assure that they have performed a task according to a standard.

Guilds that rule crafting and trades have existed since the Middle Ages and are often viewed as institutions that guaranteed quality.

Industries in the United States that currently require professional certification or licensure also include:

- Aviation
- Computer technology
- Hospitality
- Marketing
- Ministering
- Real estate
- Security

Figure 6
Medieval veterinarians working on a horse.



Note. Sourced from "The art of marshalcy and its practitioners in the late Middle Ages," Carmel Ferragud, 2017, *Siencia.cat*. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencia.cat/temes/art-marshalcy-and-its-practitioners-late-middle-ages>.



Literature Review



1946 (Spence) article states there is little information on qualifications of riding instructors.



Three articles described the relationship between collaboration in horseback riding instruction and the novel approach of horseback riding lessons in the education and trades industry.



In 2020 (Tienharra), it was found that the important attribute for Latvian, Swedish and Finnish riders in selecting riding lessons was a qualified teacher.



A myriad of studies was found that addressed the inherent risk of riding lessons, how instructors may affect safety outcomes in riding lessons, and the risk analysis of participating in riding lessons.



No literature can be found looking into riding instructor certification, the relationship certification may have to instructor self-efficacy or barriers to certification for horseback riding instructors.

Literature Review



PATH Intl.'s Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor is accredited with an outside organization, so it is required to offer certification to nonmembers. PATH Intl. also has the strictest requirements for CEU completion.



The USDF had the strictest requirements for instructor candidates. All CEUs and certification preparations require membership or affiliation with the organization, so therefore certification is inaccessible to nonmembers.



ARIA doesn't require teaching experience for its entry-level certification. Candidates are required to submit essays on teaching philosophy, which is unique to ARIA. Also unique to ARIA is the lack of requiring CEUs for recertification.



CHA allows instructors to certify as young as 16 (for an assistant instructor certification), making it the most accessible organization to younger population. CHA requires the largest amount of CEUs of any organization.



USEA has rigorous safety standards for instructors, and unique to USEA is obtaining three letters of recommendations from students, other organizations require recommendation from mentors but not students.

Methodology



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Survey Design

2 surveys

Instructor Survey:
23 questions

Consumer
Survey:
17 questions

Figure 7
Graphic of an online survey.



Note. Sourced from "How Online Surveys Work and Why Taking Them Is Worth Your Time," Nerdynaut Staff, 2021, NerdyNaut.com. Retrieved from <https://www.nerdynaut.com/how-online-surveys-work-and-why-taking-them-is-worth-your-time>.

Survey Design

Table 7

Summary of Measures used to Develop the Instructor Survey Instrument

Construct	Scale	Number of Statements	Source
Personal and professional characteristics	Binary, multiple-choice, 5-point Likert	12	Developed by researcher
Perception of self efficacy	5-point Likert, qualitative open-ended answer	4	Developed by researcher
Certification status	Binary, selection	2	Developed by researcher
Attitude towards certification	5-point Likert, open-ended answer, binary	4	Developed by researcher
Barriers to certification	5-point Likert	1	Developed by researcher

Table 8

Summary of Measures used to Develop the Consumer Survey Instrument

Construct	Scale	Number of Statements	Source
Personal characteristics	Binary, multiple-choice, 5-point Likert	8	Developed by researcher
Riding lesson description	Multiple choice, open-ended answer, binary	5	Developed by researcher
Instructor characteristics	Binary, levels of importance, multiple choice	4	Developed by researcher

Sampling Method

1. All of the associations being surveyed (PATH Intl., CHA, USDF, USEA, and ARIA) were contacted and asked to disseminate the instructor survey,
2. A follow-up email was sent to all of the associations being surveyed inquiring about the dissemination of the instructor survey, and only CHA communicated and disseminated the survey in their monthly email web-blast to members,
3. To gather non-certified instructor responses, social media was used to advertise the survey,
4. To gather consumer responses, social media and association email web blasts were utilized,
5. Nonresponse bias was assessed,
6. Data were analyzed, and
7. Results were then explained, and inferences made.



Findings



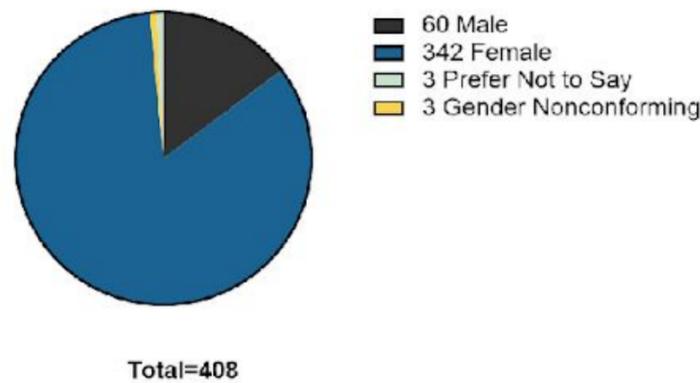
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Findings

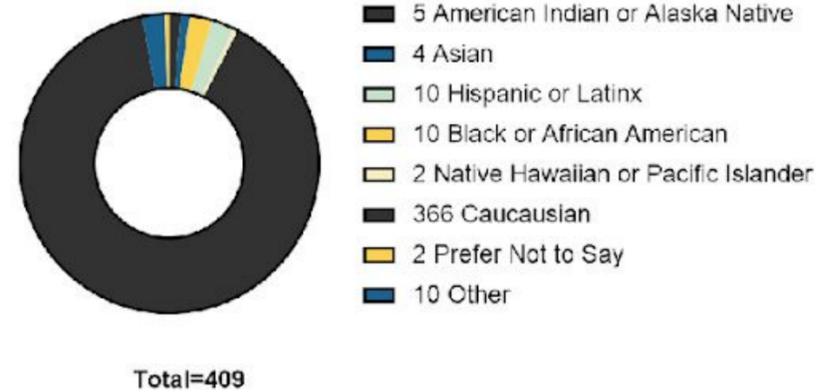
Response Rates

- 408 respondents for the instructor survey
- The total response rate for the instructor survey was 99.77% (n =428). Only one response was excluded as the respondent did not meet the inclusion criteria of the study.

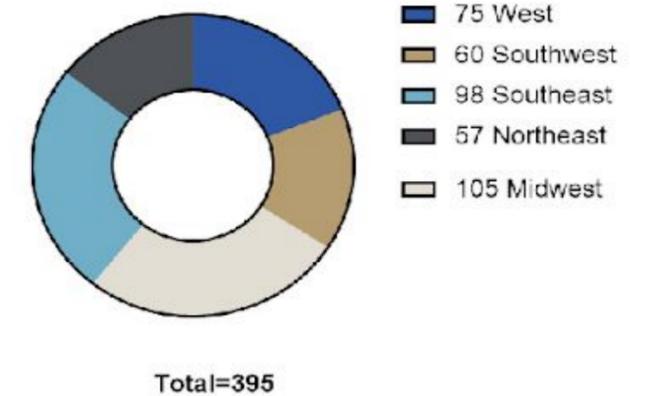
Gender Demographics (Instructor Survey)



Ethnicity Demographics (Instructor Survey)



Geographic Region Demographics (Instructor Survey)



Findings: Objective 1

The biggest differences between organizations is what disciplines are offered for certifying instructors to specialize in, certification fee structure, and whether or not workshops are required for certification acquisition.

ARIA, CHA, and USEA all require workshops for certification.

ARIA and CHA do not require lesson teaching records to gain the entry-level certification.

USDF and USEA were the only organizations that required a show record in their respective disciplines to certify.

PATH Intl. is the only organization that requires a qualified mentor and doesn't require proof of a candidate's riding ability.

ARIA is the only organization that doesn't require Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) for maintaining certification.



Findings: Objectives 2 & 3

Objective 2

- 99.52% of certified instructors were at least “slightly satisfied” with their choice to be certified, with the majority of respondents being “extremely satisfied” with their choice to be certified.
- One respondent was “not at all satisfied” with their choice to be certified.

Objective 3

- 95.63 of respondents believed that gaining a professional certification improved their self-efficacy in some way, with most respondents believing that their self-efficacy improved “very much.”
- Nine respondents believed that certification didn’t improve their self-efficacy at all.



Findings: Objective 4

1. Expense
2. Geographic inaccessibility
3. Time required to attend workshops/take exams

Regarding legislative requirements for certification, just under half of respondents (44.51%) agreed that a lack of regulations was a perceived barrier to acquiring certification.

Barriers such as lack of knowledge base, a lack of riding skills, and access to a mentor were viewed as not significant by the majority of respondents.

Table 12

Perceived Barriers to Instructor Certification Results

Perceived Barrier	Mean (μ)	Standard Deviation (σ)	Variance (σ^2)	Count
Time required to attend workshops/take exams	3.70	0.99	0.98	375
Expense	4.02	0.94	0.88	368
Geographic location	3.92	0.98	0.96	373
Lack of legislature requiring certification	3.34	1.21	1.46	373
I believe that certification will not improve my ability to instruct	2.88	1.30	1.68	374
I believe I don't have the knowledge base to successfully achieve certification	1.97	1.11	1.23	374
I believe I don't have the riding skills to successfully achieve certification	2.06	1.16	1.34	374
I do not have geographic access to a mentor	2.95	1.21	1.45	372
I do not know how to find a mentor	2.82	1.22	1.49	374

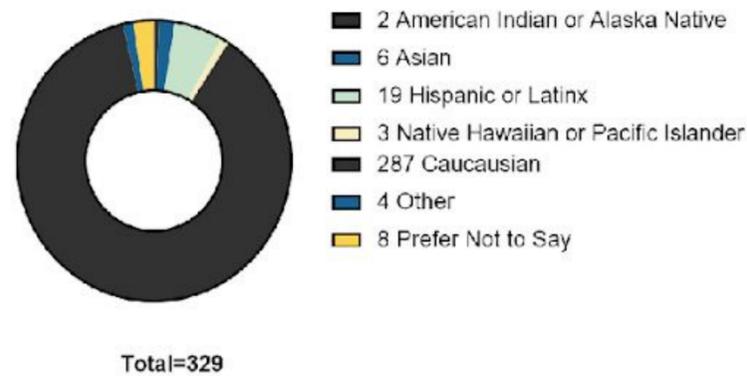
Findings: Objective 5

Response Rates

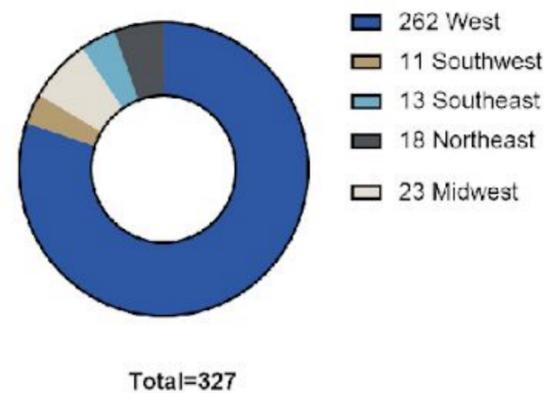
- 347 respondents for the consumer survey
- The total response rate for the consumer survey was 99.71% (n = 347). Only one response was excluded as the respondent did not meet the inclusion criteria of the study.

The average consumer respondent was a 37.5-year-old Caucasian female in the West that has been taking lessons for 12.4 years and pays \$56.93 for a 60-minute lesson.

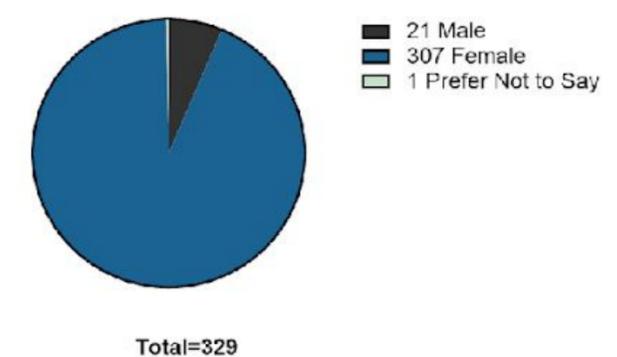
Ethnicity Demographics (Consumer Survey)



Geographic Region Demographics (Consumer Survey)



Gender Demographics (Consumer Survey)



Findings: Objective 6

A majority of respondents (80.93%) agreed that the qualifications of the instructor will affect the rate at which the consumer pays for a riding lesson, while 19.61% disagreed.

Interestingly, 58.23% ($n = 145$) of respondents stated that they would pay more for riding lessons from a certified instructor.

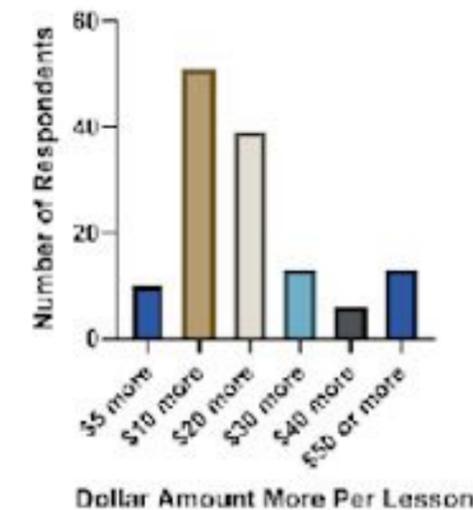
The following is the order of importance as determined by respondents when looking at the characteristics for a potential riding instructor:

1. Horsemanship skills
2. Good soft skills
3. Show record in a specific discipline
4. Liability insurance
5. Certification
6. Degree from a university in equine studies
7. Other

Figure 9

Instructor Certification Value to Consumers (a dollar amount)

Instructor Certification Value to Consumers



Discussion and Conclusion



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Discussion: Objective 1

Identify the competencies and the process for obtaining skill-based horseback riding instructor certifications of the five most popular third-party certifying organizations that are currently available in the United States.

Because the five most popular organizations could not, or would not, share grading criteria for certification, a compilation of competencies could not be built.

This lack of unity, transparency, and communication is prevalent among large organizations in the equine industry (Pickering, 2019), and leads to a lack of consumer trust (Kang, 2013). For organizations seeking to meet the consumer's desires, more transparency in grading criteria and access to study guides, modules, or other materials to help instructors succeed is recommended.

Discussion: Objective 2

Describe the attitudes towards certification in the United States.

Instructor survey results showed a positive attitude towards certification, being certified, and achieving certification.

- Satisfaction with certification on this scale had a mean score of 4.17 ($SD = 0.94$) on a 5-point scale, meaning that the average certified instructor was extremely satisfied with their decision to pursue certification and achieve certification.

Those who were uninterested in gaining certification stated expense, schedule availability, and no legislative requirement for certification as their top reasons for their uninterest. Responses included:

- “[certification] did not provide any new skills,”
- “current certifying organizations have poor reviews and seem like pyramid schemes.”



Discussion: Objective 3

Describe the self-perception of currently certified and non-certified riding instructors' self-efficacy when related to riding instruction competency.

Perception of improvement of self-efficacy on this scale had a mean score of 3.65 ($SD = 01.07$) on a 5-point scale

- The average certified instructor believed strongly that the process of receiving a certification improved their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to be successful in teaching horseback riding lessons.
- Just over one-third of respondents of respondents believed that their self-efficacy improved “very much.”

When instructors were asked which skills saw improvement due to certification, every single skill listed in the instrument saw majority (over 80%) response of improvement.

- Stop, start, and steering and walking, trotting, and cantering independently.
- Ability to teach safety information.
- Preventative measures for both horse and rider.
- Instructing in equine welfare.

There was a large amount of improvement instructors saw in soft skills such as communication and technical skills such as coaching technique and teaching to different groups of riders after completing certification processes.



Discussion: Objective 4

Identify and describe potential barriers to professional riding instruction certification in the United States.

Certifying organizations must have a way to pay for clinicians and facility rental. However, most certifying organizations offer scholarships that will cover part of the certification fees or all of the certification fees.

Instructors often teach for supplementary income and taking time off from teaching lessons can cost a significant amount of money and halt progress made with students. Further, most instructors host their own herd of lesson horses and time off means organizing care for these horses while gone.

More instructors agreed (42.78%) that certification would likely improve their ability to instruct, rather than instructors who disagreed (34.53%).



Discussion: Objective 5



Collect information on the average riding lesson demographic in the United States.



Demographics data on horseback riding consumers on a national basis is severely limited.

37-year-old Caucasian female

Completed at least some college

Riding lesson is 56 minutes in length

Average price paid for an hour-long lesson is \$57

Takes lessons for recreational and competitive purposes

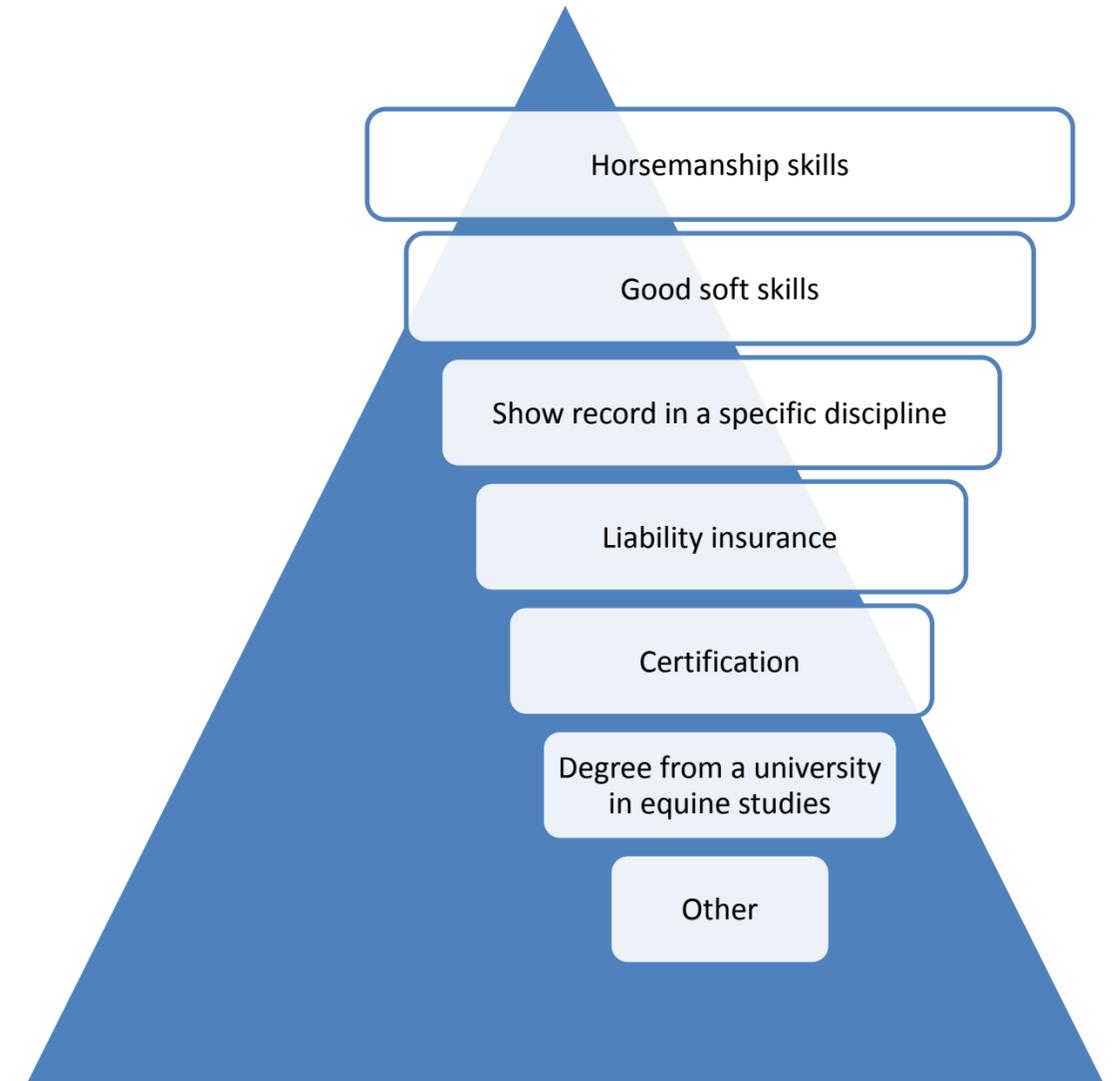
Discussion: Objective 6

Describe the consumer's preference for the selection of horseback riding instructors in the US.

Proof of competitive success in a discipline, (e.g., western pleasure or saddleseat), shows the potential client that an instructor can perform certain skills and be judged to a set standard and relates to the social modeling aspect of self-efficacy (Lee et. al., 2021).

Certification was ranked fifth most important to consumers, above only “a degree from a university in equine studies.”

- This shows that consumers do not seek out certified instructors, but rather skills and abilities.
- These are skills and abilities that certifications may be able to provide, but can also be gained from experience, internships, competitive experience, and much more.



Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations

- Small response rate.
- Ability to communicate with diverse populations.
- Difficult to disseminate surveys.
- Western U.S. representation (consumers)
- Cultural differences.

Recommendations

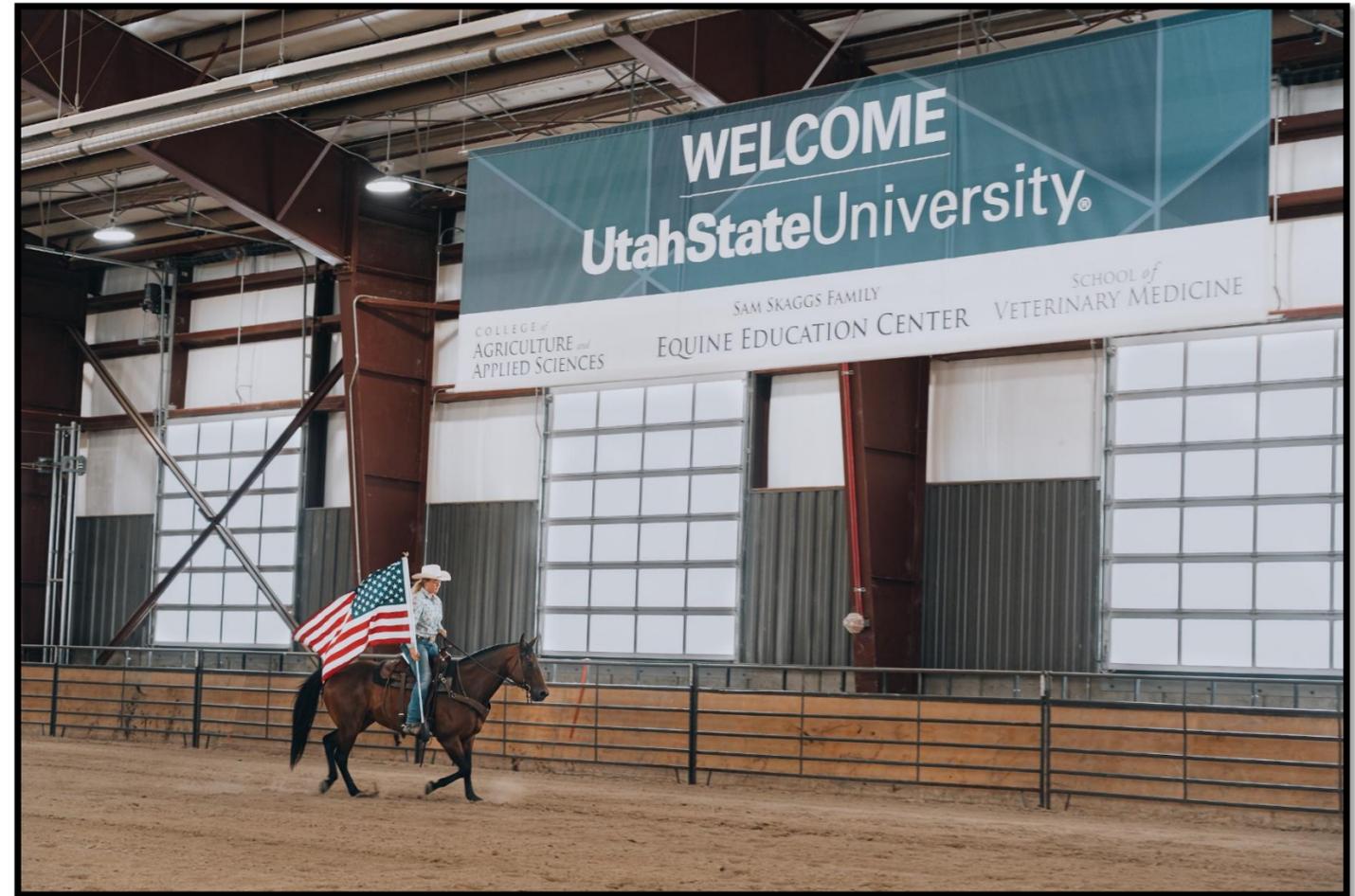
- More research is needed.
- Find an appropriate method of contacting horseback riding instructors and students.



Conclusion

Consumers have a positive attitude towards hiring certified instructors, but seek other qualifications above certification. Third-party organizations should look into developing horsemanship skills, soft skills, and fostering competitive experience in their certification candidates to meet needs of the United States' horseback riding lesson consumer.

Horseback riding industry in the United States needs a clearly defined, reliable, and valid standard.



Thank You



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