

GLS Alumni Tell How They Are “Living the Dream”

“Living the Dream” was the message from three GLS alumni who were featured at the GLS Open House and Alumni Panel held in early March. The event is an opportunity for current and prospective GLS students to explore career options and obtain advice on job skills, academic pursuits, and life lessons from students who have “been there, done that.”

Aaron Dinklage (2008) is now employed by the Reed Hamilton Ranch near Thedford, NE. He described his work routine, which includes daily feeding and management of the cow herd, rotation of cattle and management of forage resources, and facility maintenance. He also discussed how Mr. Hamilton and he are continuing to computerize their herd records. Aaron said his GLS internship on a southern Florida ranch helped make him unique and stand out when it came time to find a job. Stressing the importance of a great education, he commented that ranchers, like Mr. Hamilton, who have employed GLS students, very much value the new knowledge coming out of the University and seek input from young people who have attended UNL. Aaron appreciates that his input is sought and really listened to, and that he has the opportunity to start his own herd of cows.



Aaron Dinklage

Justin Linder (2004) is a Soil Conservationist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Pawnee City, NE. He designs grazing plans and works with private landowners and operators to improve conservation on their land. Not only does he enjoy his job, he loves the fact that he is near his hometown of Blue Springs, NE so he can help out on the family farm. Justin also talked about how his GLS internship with NRCS resulted in a full-time position. He said he is glad for the GLS major and what it has allowed him to do.



Justin Linder

Melissa Thompson (2007) is finishing her second year in the UNL/ISU Professional Program in Veterinary Medicine. Melissa indicated that the GLS major gave her a unique background and set of knowledge that come in quite handy in vet school. “You’d be surprised how often you have to figure AUM costs even in vet school, and just knowing what an AUM was turned out to be an advantage,” she said.



Melissa Thompson

(continued)



When asked about the most valuable courses to take at UNL to help for life beyond college, Dinklage, Linder and Thompson agreed that the capstone course, Livestock Management on Range and Pasture, is one of the best and most used. “And, take all the economics

you can,” they advised.

Whether working for a government agency, ranching, or pursuing a professional degree, the GLS major provides the needed preparation, and keeps these three alumni “living the dream.”

Student Profiles

Paraphrasing a popular question: What’s a city girl like you doing in a major like this? **Meredith Jordan** from Chelmsford, MA (near Boston) is used to that kind of question. Although her only connection with animal science was her love for horses at the early age of four, that is the major she started exploring for college. Her parents are originally from Nebraska and are UNL alumni. The nearest college under consideration was at least 800 miles from where she lived, so she figured as long as she was going quite a distance, it might as well be near extended family. She liked what she saw online about



Meredith Jordan

“It has been a bit harder for me to do some things like develop a ranch plan because of the lack of knowledge and experience that most of my classmates have.”

both the animal science and GLS majors, but began with just the former. Her initial focus was horses, and she figured her lack of hands-on experience (see first sentence above) would make it difficult to dual major with GLS, but with every agricultural production class she took she thought, “I love this!” She eventually began working with Dr. Brink on planning her courses, and in her junior year added GLS as a dual major.

“It has been a bit harder for me to do some things like develop a ranch plan because of the lack of knowledge and experience that most of my classmates have,

but all of the GLS faculty have been helpful in working with me on my unique situation of having no previous exposure to agriculture.”

Meredith decided to get the hands-on experience she lacked by renting 60 acres of land near Friend, NE where she pastured 10 head of cattle and now keeps her four horses. “That way I can immediately apply what I learn in the classroom and see what works, what doesn’t, and what I still need to learn,” she said. That’s pretty good motivation for paying attention in class! She also acquired additional experience and skills through internships.

After participating in a two-week study-abroad tour to Mexico in the fall of her sophomore year, Meredith, being the adventurous spirit that she is, decided to conduct her following semester at the University of Chapingo where she took courses in genetics, plant physiology, animal nutrition and microeconomics. No matter that the only word she knew in Spanish at the time of her arrival in Mexico was “hola!” Just like the city kid in ag classes, while it wasn’t easy, she immersed herself in the culture and language as best she could in the few weeks she had between the time the plane landed and classes started. Talk about being a quick study! While at Chapingo, she practiced with the rodeo and equestrian teams, and was able to travel all around the country with her classmates, with whom she still stays in touch.

Meredith will graduate this May and will again be heading south, although not as far south as Mexico this time. She has accepted a position in Texas with Cargill Cattle Feeders as a management trainee. She looks forward to the new experiences with Cargill and once again living and adapting to a new place. Her long-term goal, though, is to own and operate her own farm with cattle and horses in this area of the country. “I love it here!” the New Englander exclaimed.

While we have had many students who have transferred into the GLS program from other schools and majors, a former sports management major is a first! **Ryan Schnauffer** began his college career at Doane on a basketball scholarship. The Campo, CO native grew up on the family ranch, but at the time of high school graduation, he didn't think he wanted to return to the ranch after college. He was ready to be out on his own and have new experiences. A couple of years away gave him a different perspective. He could have returned to a school in his home state, but he had established friendships in this area, and he also had a Colorado neighbor who was attending UNL



Ryan Schnauffer

and recommended it. So Ryan checked out the offerings in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, explored the GLS web site, and thought this major might be a great fit for him. He set up a campus visit, during which he met Dr. Brink, and that sealed the deal. After completing some general education courses at Southeast Community College, Ryan entered UNL as a GLS major in January 2008.

Ryan said Dr. Brink has continued to be a big help with scheduling courses and planning his internship this summer. He will work for Lone Creek Cattle Company on its ranch in Mullen, NE. Then after one final semester of courses, he plans to graduate in December 2009 and return to the family ranch, which now sounds pretty darn good to him! As an only child, he likes the idea that he will get to be his own boss...some day. And the GLS major will have prepared him well for all those decisions he'll be making when he's running the ranch.

Students Use GLS Scholarships for Ranch Practicum

Last year two GLS students received scholarships to participate in the Nebraska Ranch Practicum. We asked them to share some comments on their experience.

By Luke Smith

The Ranch Practicum is held on eight days starting in June and ending in January, with sessions in Whitman at the Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory (GSL) and in North Platte. On each day they talk about all the things that you should be thinking about at that time of year. The Practicum is taught in a systems approach. There is a good mix of hands-on and in-class presentations from many speakers. It taught me to think about different aspects of management in ways I had not thought of before. I also learned about different research that the presenters had been working on that ranchers could apply if it fit their operation. I was able to attend the Practicum due to the GLS scholarship I received that paid for half of the registration fee, which was a great help. Overall I thought my experience was educational and will help me in the future.

By Travis Sterner

Each day of the Practicum was packed with different topics related to the beef industry including marketing, range management, calving system, cow body

conditioning, nutrient requirements, and many other valuable topics. At the first session we were given learning materials such as software, extension handouts, and a field notebook we used to keep track of the information we learned during the sessions. These materials will be very helpful resources in the future.

The eight sessions are designed to progress through the program, and each session builds on the one before. This allows us to see the seasonal changes in the grass and the cattle, which helps us understand the relationships between the two. The Practicum helped me take into consideration the importance of managing cattle frame size and milk production. The information about body conditioning score taught me how to judge a cattle herd's condition. In addition, I will be better able to monitor rangelands so that I am not overgrazing. The main thing that I gained was the grass nutrient cycle and what nutrients are in the grasses at certain times of the year.

The Practicum can also be taken for up to four college credits, which I am taking advantage of. I am very thankful for the GLS scholarship that made it possible for me to participate.

Upcoming Grazing Educational Opportunities

Educational opportunities abound outside the classroom. See related articles in this and the Fall 2008 issue of this newsletter for comments from GLS students who attended events last year. GLS students may apply for partial scholarships to the first two events.

Nebraska Grazing Conference, August 11-12, 2009, Kearney. Many presenters from multiple states will be on the program for this 9th annual event. One of the featured speakers is Allan Nation with *Stockman GrassFarmer*. Special rates apply to students, and both high school and GLS students may qualify for scholarships to the event. Past GLS students who have attended (and in some cases, presented) have found this event extremely valuable. Pre-registration deadline is August 1. Details at grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm.

Nebraska and High Plains Ranch Practicums, multiple dates and locations, June 2009-January 2010. Details at nebraskaranchpracticum.unl.edu and hpranchpracticum.com. GLS students may qualify for partial scholarships for this.

Nebraska Range Youth Camp, June 8-12, 2009, 4-H camp, Halsey. Know any young people (ages 14-18) interested in obtaining hands-on experience with rangeland resources while meeting new friends and having lots of fun? Tell them about this camp coordinated by the Nebraska Chapter of the Society for Range Management. Dr. Walter Schacht, a founder and leader of the GLS major, is an instructor at the camp. Several GLS students have been former Range Youth Camp participants. Details at www.ianr.unl.edu/srm/RangeCamp.htm.

For more information or to receive GLS materials, please contact:

Center for Grassland Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
306 Biochemistry Hall
P.O. Box 830736
Lincoln, NE 68583-0736
p: 402-472-4101
e: grassland@unl.edu

f: 402-472-4104
w: gls.unl.edu

