The Illinois State Equestrian club is a multifaceted Registered Student Organization that prides itself on not only competing in horseback riding competitions, but also volunteering in the community and gathering for other social activities.

As a part of the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) Zone 7, Region 5, the team is placed against other schools in the area for competitions. The host school provides the horses and the material needed to compete.

“[Riding a different horse at every competition] is challenging,” Vice President Christine Schieve said. “At home, we know the horses’ quirks and what sets them off, but with different horses, you don’t know what to expect until you are being judged.”

Competitions range from walking and trotting — a pace between a walk and a run — to jumping over fences as tall as three-and-a-half feet. All experience levels are welcome in the club, and participants are placed into divisions based on skill level and experience.

The ISU Equestrian club also includes members who do not participate in competitions. The club makes sure to include events that are non-competitive to include all of its members.

“Noncompetitive members can take lessons and participate in our other group activities,” Schieve said.

The team holds a movie night before finals each year as well as visits to a ceramic-painting store to paint horse figurines.

Outside of competitions, the team enjoys spending time together participating in things such as ice cream socials, mounted game nights and cookouts.

In addition to tournaments and non-competitive riding activities, it is important to the ISU Equestrian club to be involved in charity work and give back to the community.

The ISU Equestrians are involved in many volunteer events including the Central Illinois Riding Therapy, the Special Olympics, Girl Scouts of America and Relay for Life.

“If we are able to give back, we should,” club member Lindsay Fairbanks said. “Being an equestrian is costly and time consuming.”

Like many of the members, Fairbanks and Schieve began riding when they were young girls and have been members of the ISU Equestrian club for three years.

“Horses were always my favorite animal, and as soon as I was old enough, I asked my parents if I could start taking lessons,” Schieve said.

The average team member is required to take a lesson every other week and during off weeks is required to spend a few hours on the saddle. Noncompeting club members can be as involved as they wish.

“The nice thing about the team is that it offers an opportunity for those without a lot of money and those who do not own a horse to compete,” Schieve said.

As vice president, it is one of Schieve's responsibilities to organize fundraisers for the team. Bake sales and Noodle Night, a fundraiser held at Noodles and Co., help bring down the cost of traveling to competitions.

"Very few of our members own horses," Fairbanks said. "It is a misconception that ownership of a horse is a prerequisite for joining the club. These equestrians accept all experience levels into the club. The most important thing to them is raising awareness for their club and bringing together students with a love of horses."