

Policy on Service Animals and Assistance Animals for Students with Disabilities

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide the University of Chicago community with guidelines for student use of Service Animals and Assistance Animals on campus. The University is committed to reasonably accommodating persons with disabilities who require the assistance of animals. This policy will clarify the different categories of animals and provide a framework for managing animals within the University community.

If you have questions about this policy, or wish to register a Service Animal or request approval for an Assistance Animal, please contact Student Disability Services (SDS) at disabilities@uchicago.edu or 773-702-6000.

SERVICE ANIMALS

I. Service Animal Defined

A Service Animal is an animal, ordinarily a dog, that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. These tasks may include but are not limited to: guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals who are hearing impaired to intruders or sound, pulling a wheelchair, carrying and/or retrieving dropped items, etc.

A Service Animal may accompany its owner on University property at all times, except under rare circumstances where health or safety may be compromised as described in Section III of this Policy.

II. Service Animal Identification

Any student who currently has a Service Animal or plans to bring a Service Animal on campus is encouraged to register the Service Animal with SDS. Although registration is optional, a student with a Service Animal may occasionally be asked to provide proof that the Service Animal has met all state or local vaccination requirements. Other than providing documentation of vaccinations, the University does not ask for other documentation for Service Animals, nor does the University require Service Animals to wear a vest, ID tag or specific harness. In situations where it is not obvious that a dog is a Service Animal, University officials may ask the following two qualifying questions:

- (1) Is the dog a Service Animal required because of a disability?
- (2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

III. Service Animals on Campus

In most cases, a student with a Service Animal may bring their Service Animal into all areas of the University that are open to the public or to students. However, for safety reasons, certain areas are generally off-limits to Service Animals and all other animals, including the following:

- i. **Research Laboratories**
Chemicals found in many labs can be harmful to animals. Organisms naturally found on most dogs or other animals could negatively impact the outcome of research.
- ii. **Mechanical Rooms/Custodial Closets**
Such locations can have chemicals or machinery that could potentially harm animals, and animals may cause disruption to services provided in the location.
- iii. **Other Potentially Dangerous Areas**
Any room, studio, or classroom with sharp metal cuttings or glass shards on the floor; hot material such as molten metal; excessive dust; or moving machinery may pose a danger to animals. When students with Service Animals must be in one of these restricted areas for a course requirement, students should contact their Dean of Students and SDS to discuss potential alternative arrangements.

ASSISTANCE ANIMALS

I. Assistance Animal Defined

An Assistance Animal is an animal that provides emotional support, well-being, or companionship that alleviates or mitigates symptoms of a disability. Unlike Service Animals, Assistance Animals are: (1) not individually trained to perform work or tasks; (2) not limited to dogs and can be other species of animal; (3) only permitted on campus with prior approval from SDS; and (4) generally only permitted in University housing (not classrooms, labs, dining facilities, etc.).

II. Requesting Approval for an Assistance Animal

In order to live with an Assistance Animal in University housing, a student must obtain prior authorization from SDS. The process for obtaining authorization is as follows:

- i. The student should submit their request to SDS for review as far in advance as is feasible, at least 60 days prior to the animal's anticipated arrival. The

request should include the following supporting documentation: a letter of recommendation from a therapist, physician or other reliable third party (*e.g.* licensed social worker) for the Assistance Animal, a SDS Accommodation Request Form, and any other information explaining the need for the Assistance Animal. The recommendation letter should be signed on professional letterhead, from the person's long-term physical or mental healthcare licensed provider, therapist or other reliable third party, and is not a member of the student's family.

- ii. Student Disability Services will review the request and supporting documentation, consult with the University's medical consultants when appropriate, and make a determination whether (1) the student has a disability and (2) the Assistance Animal is necessary to afford the student an equal opportunity to use and enjoy University housing. SDS may approve the request, deny the request, or request more information from the student. A SDS staff member will inform the student of the decision and discuss the next steps.

A request for an Assistance Animal may be denied if the animal would create an undue burden or a fundamental alteration of a University program or service, or if the animal poses a direct threat to the health and safety of any person.

- iii. SDS will write an accommodation letter for the student stating that their accommodation request for an Assistance Animal has been approved. The student should provide a copy of the SDS determination letter to Housing & Residence Life and retain a copy.
- iv. If the Assistance Animal request is approved, this policy will be reviewed with the student and they will be asked to sign an Assistance Animal Agreement. At that meeting (or at some time prior to the animal coming to campus), a member of the Housing & Residence Life Staff will also be present to review the guidelines that must be followed & possible consequences for failure to abide by this Policy.
- v. If a student's Assistance Animal request is denied, the student may continue to work with SDS, in consultation with Housing & Residence Life, to determine whether there are alternative accommodations that could be put into place. A student whose request is denied may request review as provided under the following policy:
<https://voices.uchicago.edu/disabilities/students/resolving-concerns-and-complaints/>.

- vi. Students must submit an updated accommodation letter and sign a new Assistance Animal agreement form each new academic year. The student must notify SDS if the animal is no longer needed, or is no longer residing on University property. Approval is limited to the specific animal identified in the request. If the student wishes to live with a different Assistance Animal, the student must submit a new request.

III. Accommodation Conflicts

Students who are negatively affected by the presence of an Assistance Animal should contact Housing & Residence Life or SDS. Housing & Residence Life and SDS will follow up with the students involved in order to make a determination as to whether there is a need for further accommodations or other changes. The University is committed to ensuring that the needs of all students are met and will determine how to resolve any conflicts or problems as expeditiously as possible. In the event that a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached, a student may request review as provided under the following policy: <https://voices.uchicago.edu/disabilities/students/resolving-concerns-and-complaints/>.

IV. Requirements for All Animals in University Housing

All Service Animals and Assistance Animals in University housing are subject to specific requirements. The policies governing animals in undergraduate residence halls are available from the Housing & Residence Life office. Housing & Residence Life reserves the right to make assignments of space or to require the student to move from one room or hall to another, as determined by Housing & Residence Life, in its discretion to be in the best interest of the student, other students, and/or Housing & Residence Life.

A. Legal Requirements and Documentation

Animals must be licensed in accordance with applicable City of Chicago requirements, and must have current vaccination records, if appropriate. The student may be asked to provide proof that the animal is in compliance with applicable legal requirements regarding licensure, vaccination, etc.

B. Responsibilities for Animal Care and Supervision

Care and supervision of the animal is the sole responsibility of the student who owns the animal. The student is solely responsible for the actions of their animal (e.g. bites, scratches, property damage, etc.). Students living with animals in University

housing are encouraged to maintain renter's insurance, including liability coverage for their animals, and are required to comply with the following guidelines:

- i. For health and safety reasons, the student must ensure the animal receives routine appropriate care (e.g., vaccinations, pest prevention, annual examinations). The University may request documentation relevant to health and safety concerns about the animal.
- ii. The University will investigate reports of abuse or neglect and involve local authorities as appropriate. A student who is found to be abusing or neglecting their animal will be subject to discipline and may be removed from University housing.
- iii. The student will designate an emergency handler to support the animal's care in emergency situations. The student must ensure that the secondary handler is aware of University policies and expectations regarding animal care and supervision.
- iv. The animal must be under the handler's control while outdoors on university property, adjoining sidewalks, and parkways. The animal must be properly restrained (e.g., on a leash or in a carrier) at all times.
- v. The animal must remain in close proximity to the handler whenever the animal is outside of the student's room. To the extent possible, the animal should be unobtrusive to other residents.
- vi. The animal must not pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others. The student must take reasonable precautions to protect others from physical threat of harm by the animal. Examples: Removing an agitated or barking animal immediately, and physical restraint.
- vii. Animals must be housebroken. The student is responsible for cleaning, and immediately and appropriately disposing of, all animal waste, indoors or outdoors. Feces must be secured in a plastic bag and disposed in an outdoor trash receptacle.
- viii. The student must take reasonable precautions to protect University property and the property of other residents. Examples: Preventing the animal from being on University furniture and/or eliminating on floors and carpets. Students with animals are solely responsible for any damage to persons or property caused by their animals in addition to any supplemental cleaning that is required due to the animal's presence.
- ix. To the extent possible, the animal should not: make contact with others or their personal belongings; display any behaviors or noises that are disruptive to others; and/or block an aisle or passageway for fire and/or emergency egress.
- x. The handler may request that others avoid: petting or addressing the animal; feeding the animal; deliberately startling the animal; and separating or attempting to separate the handler from their animal.

- xi. The student must include in any service request, a notification that there is an animal in their room. The student should, if possible, arrange to be present during the repair. During the time that University personnel are in the room, the student must either contain the animal in cage or crate, or remove the animal from the room. Under emergency circumstances, the University will enter the student's room at its discretion.
- xii. An animal cannot stay in University housing overnight without its owner. The animal must leave if the student leaves overnight, and during all University breaks during which the student leaves University housing.

C. Emergency Care

In the event of an emergency, University personnel will take appropriate action, which may include removal of the animal. As noted in Section IV(B), the student must provide contact information for an emergency handler, who will take responsibility of the animal and remove it from campus if the student is unable to care for it for any reason. The emergency handler must reside off-campus and must be available to remove the animal in a timely manner, and to provide needed care. The student also must provide contact information for an additional back-up handler in the event the emergency handler is not available.

V. Removal of an Animal from University Housing

A student may be required to remove their animal from University housing if the animal poses a direct threat to health and safety, creates an undue burden to the University, or when its presence unreasonably disrupts the housing environment or otherwise fundamentally alters the University's housing services. For example, an animal may be required to be removed from University housing if it: displays biting/scratching, or uncontrolled barking; if it has a health condition that creates an unsafe or unsanitary environment; if it is not housebroken; or if it destroys University property or the property of others.

Removal determinations will be made by Housing & Residence Life in consultation with SDS. The University will base each removal determination on an individualized assessment about the animal's behavior/condition and its impact on the living and learning environment. A student may request review of a removal determination under the following policy: <https://voices.uchicago.edu/disabilities/students/resolving-concerns-and-complaints/>.

VI. A note regarding pets

A pet is an animal kept for ordinary use and/or companionship, and is not considered a Service Animal or an Assistance Animal. Students are not permitted to have pets (except for fish in a small aquarium of less than 10 gallons) in University housing.