

Service and Assistance Animal Policy

Columbia University (Columbia) recognizes the importance of Service and Assistance Animals to individuals with disabilities and has established the following policy regarding Service Animals (and Service Animals in training) and Assistance Animals, to assist people with disabilities. This policy ensures that people with disabilities, who require the use of Service or Assistance Animals as a reasonable accommodation, receive the benefit of the work or tasks performed by such animals or the therapeutic support they provide. Columbia is committed to allowing people with disabilities the use of a Service Animal on campus to facilitate their full-participation and equal access to the University's programs and activities. Set forth below are specific requirements and guidelines concerning the appropriate use of and protocols associated with Service Animals and Assistance Animals. Columbia reserves the right to amend this policy as circumstances require.

Section I. Definitions

A. Service Animal¹

A "Service Animal" is a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. In some cases, a miniature horse may be permitted as a Service Animal. Other animals, whether wild or domestic, do not qualify as Service Animals. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service Animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a Service Animal has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as Service Animals. (Sections II, III, IV, and V of this document apply to Service Animals).

B. Assistance Animal

"Assistance Animals" are (1) animals that work, provide assistance, or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or (2) animals that provide emotional support which alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. Some, but not all, animals that assist persons with disabilities are professionally trained. Other Assistance Animals are trained by the owners. In some cases, no special training is required. The question is whether or not the animal performs the assistance or provides the benefit needed as a reasonable accommodation by the person with the disability. Unlike a Service Animal, an Assistance Animal does not assist a person with a disability with activities of daily living, nor does it accompany a person with a disability at all times. Assistance Animals may be considered for access to university housing, however, they are not permitted in other areas of the university (e.g. libraries, academic buildings, classrooms, labs, student center, etc.). (Sections I, III, IV, and V of this document apply to Assistance Animals).

¹ **Service Animals in training:** Individuals qualified to train animals to aid and guide persons with disabilities are afforded the same rights to those individuals who require the assistance of a Service Animal. If you are training an animal to aid and guide persons with disabilities, you must contact DS and comply with the requirements set forth in this policy.

C. Pet

A “Pet” is an animal kept for ordinary use and companionship. A pet is not considered a Service Animal or an Assistance Animal. It is not covered by this policy. Residents are not permitted to keep pets, other than fish, on university property or in university housing.

D. Approved Animal

An “Approved Animal” is a Service Animal or Assistance Animal that has been granted as a reasonable accommodation under this policy.

E. Owner

The “Owner” is the student or other covered person who has requested the accommodation and has received approval to bring the “approved animal” on campus.

Section II. Procedures for requesting to have Assistance Animals in University housing as a reasonable accommodation

Assistance Animals may not be brought into University housing without expressed approval of University officials.

The procedures for requesting Assistance Animals in University housing are outlined below:

1. A person requesting permission to keep an Assistance Animal in University housing must make a formal request to the university’s Disability Housing Committee. To do so, the person should submit the appropriate “Request Form for Disability Housing Accommodations”, as well as documentation of their disability to be reviewed by the Committee. The form is available online at www.health.columbia.edu/

The Committee meets once per month, on the first Tuesday of the month, to review requests for housing accommodations. The following deadlines for requesting housing accommodations apply:

Columbia College and SEAS incoming first-year students:

May 1 for the fall semester
November 1 for the spring semester

All other Columbia College and SEAS:

February 1 for the fall semester
November 1 for the spring semester

General Studies undergraduate students and Graduate & Professional (Morningside) students:

June 1 for the fall semester
November 1 for the spring semester

SEAS Combined-plan transfer:

June 30 for the fall semester

November 1 for the spring semester

CUMC students:

Entering first-year P&S medical students: April 1

Entering ETP nursing students: March 1

Other entering, first-year students: May 1

Couples Housing: May 1

While applications submitted after these dates will be accepted and considered, Columbia cannot guarantee that it will be able to meet late applicants' accommodation needs, including any needs that develop during the semester.

2. Documentation of the need for an Assistance Animal should follow Disability Services guidelines for documentation of disability, and should generally include the following information:
 - a. Verification of the individual's disability from a physician, psychiatrist, social worker, or other mental health professional,
 - b. Statement on how the animal serves as an accommodation for the verified disability, and
 - c. Statement on how the need for the animal relates to the ability of the resident/student or live-in family member to use and enjoy the living arrangements provided by the University.
 - d. Current documentation of items requested in a., b., and c. (dated within the last 6 months).
3. The University Disability Housing Committee will review documentation and, if the Committee approves the request, it shall arrange a meeting with the person requesting that a Service or Assistance Animal be housed in University housing. This policy will be carefully reviewed with the person at that time.
4. Students whose request for an Assistance Animal through this process is not granted, will have the opportunity to appeal such decisions. All appeals are reviewed by the Assistant Vice President of Columbia Health. Students will receive information about the appeals process upon notification of decision of request for disability housing accommodations.
5. Upon approval of an Assistance Animal, residential building staff will be notified as appropriate.
6. Upon approval of an Assistance Animal, the student's roommate(s) or suitemate(s) will be notified (if applicable) to solicit their acknowledgement of the approval, and notify them that the approved animal will be residing in shared assigned living space.

Section III. Procedures to have Service Animals in University Housing

Students planning to bring their Service Animals to reside in University housing are required to follow the steps outlined below:

1. A person seeking to keep a Service Animal in University housing must make a formal request to the university's Disability Housing Committee. To do so, the person should submit the appropriate "Request Form for Disability Housing Accommodations" so that the student can be assigned to the most appropriate housing location with their service animal, considering the student's needs and preferences.

The Committee meets once per month, on the first Tuesday of the month to review requests for housing accommodations. The following deadlines for requesting housing accommodations apply:

Columbia College and SEAS incoming first-year students:

May 1 for the fall semester

November 1 for the spring semester

All other Columbia College and SEAS:

February 1 for the fall semester

November 1 for the spring semester

General Studies undergraduate students and Graduate & Professional (Morningside) students:

June 1 for the fall semester

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Entering ETP nursing students: March 1

Other entering, first-year students: May 1

Couples Housing: May 1

While applications submitted after these dates will be accepted and considered, Columbia cannot guarantee that it will be able to meet late applicants' accommodation needs, including any needs that develop during the semester.

2. Requests for Service Animals in housing do NOT require documentation of disability. Rather, students should answer relevant question on the Request Form regarding requests for Service Animals.
3. The University Disability Housing Committee will review the request and, once the Committee approves the request, it shall arrange a meeting with the person requesting that a Service Animal be housed in University housing. This policy will be carefully reviewed with the person at that time.

4. Upon approval of a Service Animal, residential building staff will be notified as appropriate.
5. Upon approval of a Service Animal, the student's roommate(s) or suitemate(s) will be notified (if applicable) to solicit their acknowledgement of the approval, and notify them that the approved animal will be residing in shared assigned living space.

Section IV. Conflicting Health Conditions

Housing personnel will make a reasonable effort to notify tenants in the residence building where the Approved Animal will be located.

Students with medical condition(s) that are affected by animals (e.g., respiratory diseases, asthma, severe allergies) are asked to contact Disability Services if they have a health or safety related concern about exposure to a Service or Assistance Animal. The University is prepared to also reasonably accommodate individuals with such medical conditions that require accommodation when living in proximity to Service or Assistance Animals.

Disability Services will resolve any conflict in a timely manner. Staff members will consider the conflicting needs and/or accommodations of all persons involved. Disability Services staff may use Columbia Health as a resource for information on health issues. In the event that an agreement cannot be reached, Disability Services' decision is final and not subject to appeal.

Section V. Owner's Responsibilities in University Housing

1. The Owner is responsible for assuring that the Approved Animal does not unduly interfere with the routine activities of the residence or cause difficulties for students who reside there.
2. The Owner is financially responsible for the actions of the Approved Animal including bodily injury or property damage. The owner's responsibility covers but is not limited to replacement of furniture, carpet, window, wall covering, and the like. The owner is expected to cover these costs at the time of repair and/or move-out.
3. The Owner is responsible for any expenses incurred for cleaning above and beyond a standard cleaning or for repairs to University premises that are assessed after the student and animal vacate the residence. The University shall have the right to bill the Student account of the owner for unmet obligations.
4. The Owner must notify Disability Services in writing if the Approved Animal is no longer needed as an Approved Animal or is no longer in residence. To replace an Approved Animal the owner must file a new Request for Reasonable Accommodation.
5. The Owner's residence may be inspected for fleas, ticks or other pests once a semester or as needed. The applicable housing office for the residence hall will schedule the inspection. If fleas, ticks or other pests are detected through inspection, the residence will be treated using approved fumigation methods by a university-approved pest control service. The owner will be billed for the expense of any pest treatment above and beyond standard pest management in the residence halls.

6. (For students in the Residence Halls and/or Apartment shares) All roommates or suitemates of the owner must sign an agreement allowing the Approved Animal to be in residence with them. In the event that one or more roommates or suitemates do not approve, either the owner and animal or the non-approving roommates or suitemates, as determined by the appropriate Housing office for the residence location, may be moved to a different location.
7. Service Animals may travel freely with their owner throughout University Housing (and other areas of the University, see Section VI part G of this document). Assistance Animals must be contained within the privately assigned residential area (room, suite, apartment) at all times, except when transported outside the private residential area in an animal carrier or controlled by leash or harness. When outside the residence, the owner of an Assistance Animal shall carry proof that the animal is an Approved Animal.
8. Approved Animals may not be left overnight in University Housing to be cared for by another student. Animals must be taken with the student if they leave campus for a prolonged period.
9. Housing has the ability to relocate owner and Approved Animal as necessary according to current contractual agreements.
10. The Owner agrees to continue to abide by all other residential policies. Reasonable accommodation which may constitute an exception to a policy that otherwise would prohibit having an animal does not constitute an exception to any other policy.
11. Any violation of the above rules may result in immediate removal of the animal from the University and may be reviewed through the Residential Judicial Process and the Owner will be afforded all rights of due process and appeal as outlined in that process.
12. Should the Approved Animal be removed from the premises for any reason, the owner is expected to fulfill his/her housing obligations for the remainder of the housing contract.
13. The Owner undertakes to comply with animal health and wellbeing requirements as set forth in Section VI, item C.

Section VI. Guidelines for Maintaining an Approved Animal at Columbia University

A. Introduction

The following guidelines apply to all Approved Animals and their owners, unless the nature of the documented disability of the owner precludes adherence to these guidelines, and permission for a variance from the guidelines has been granted.

B. Care and Supervision:

Care and supervision of the animal are the responsibility of the individual who benefits from the Approved Animal's use. The person is required to maintain control of the animal at all times.

The person is also responsible for ensuring the cleanup of the animal's waste and, when appropriate, must toilet the animal in areas designated by the University consistent with the reasonable capacity of the owner. Indoor animal waste, such as cat litter, must be placed in a sturdy plastic bag and securely tied up before being disposed of in outside trash dumpsters. Litter boxes should be placed on mats so that waste is not tracked onto carpeted surfaces.

C. Animal Health and Well-being

1. **Vaccination:** In accordance with local ordinances and regulations the animal must be immunized against diseases common to that type of animal. Dogs must have current vaccination against rabies and wear a rabies vaccination tag. Although not mandated, cats should have the normal shots required for a healthy animal. Local licensing requirements are followed.
2. **Health:** Animals, other than cats and dogs, to be housed in university housing must have an annual clean bill of health from a licensed veterinarian. Documentation can be a vaccination certificate for the animal or a veterinarian's statement regarding the animal's health. The university has authority to direct that the animal receive veterinary attention. (Local licensing law is followed.)
3. **Licensing:** The university reserves the right to request documentation showing that the animal has been licensed (e.g., New York law requires that every dog be licensed and provides that service dogs are exempt from the license fee).
4. **Training:** Service Animals must be properly trained.
5. **Leash:** If appropriate the animal must be on a leash, unless the leash would inhibit the animal's ability to be of service.
6. **Other Conditions:** Disability Services may place other reasonable conditions or restrictions on the animals depending on the nature and characteristics of the animal.

D. Requirements for Faculty, Staff, Students, and Other Members of the University Community

Members of the University community are required to abide by the following practices:

1. They are to allow a Service Animal to accompany its owner at all times and in all places on campus, except where animals are specifically prohibited.
2. They are not to touch or pet a Service or Assistance Animal unless invited to do so.
3. They are not to feed a Service or Assistance Animal.
4. They are not to startle a Service or Assistance Animal, deliberately.
5. They are not to separate or to attempt to separate an owner from his or her Service or Assistance Animal.
6. They are not to inquire for details about the owner's disabilities. The nature of a person's disability is a private matter.

E. Removal of Approved Animal

The University may exclude/remove an Approved Animal when 1) the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, or 2) the animal's presence results in a fundamental alteration of the University's program, or 3) the owner does not comply with Owner's Responsibilities in University Housing, or 4) the animal or its presence creates an unmanageable disturbance or interference with the Columbia community.

F. Damage

Owners of Approved Animals are solely responsible for any damage to persons or University property caused by their animals.

G. Areas Off Limits to Service Animals

The University may prohibit the use of Service Animals in certain locations because of health and safety restrictions (e.g. where the animals may be in danger, or where their use may compromise the integrity of research).

Restricted areas may include, but are not limited to, the following areas: custodial closets, boiler rooms, facility equipment rooms, research laboratories, classrooms with research/demonstration animals, areas where protective clothing is necessary, wood and metal shops, motor pools, rooms with heavy machinery, and areas outlined in state law as being inaccessible to animals.

Exceptions to restricted areas may be granted on a case-by-case basis by contacting Disability Services and the appropriate department representative; the person directing the restricted area has the final decision.

H. Areas Off Limits to Assistance Animals

All areas except for privately assigned living space in housing are off limits to approved Assistance Animals without prior authorization from Disability Services.

By my signature below, I verify that I have read, understand and will abide by the Guidelines outlined here and I agree to provide the additional information required to complete my Request for a Reasonable Accommodation under the University's Service and Assistance Animal Policy.

Resident Owner Signature

Date

Disability Services Representative

Date

Housing Representative

Date

Section VII. Roommate/Suitemate Acknowledgement

(Only Applicable to Residences in Residence Halls and/or Apartment Shares)

By my signature below, I understand that I will share the common areas of my assigned residential space with the animal approved by this agreement. Should I have any concerns regarding the care and control of the approved animal, I will discuss my concerns with the approved animal’s owner and then with Disability Services at (212) 854-2388 or disability@columbia.edu if the approved animal owner and I cannot come to an agreement.

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Section VIII. Approved Animal Registration Form

Owner's Name: _____

Owner's UNI: _____

Owner's Address: _____

Owner's Phone: _____ **Work:** _____

Animal's Name: _____

Type of Animal: _____

Physical Description of Animal: _____

Alternate Caregiver for Animal If Owner is Unavailable:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Please attach the Veterinarian's verification that the animal has all Veterinary-recommended vaccinations to maintain the animal's health and prevent contagious disease. Also include a copy of New York's required animal license (for dogs only).