



ANIMAL POLICY AND PROCEDURE HANDBOOK

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO) community with clear guidelines regarding pets, service animals, and emotional support animals (ESAs) on campus. This policy will define these different categories of animals and establish a framework for managing them within the university setting. If you have questions about this policy, wish to register a service animal, or would like to request approval for an ESA, please contact the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) at accessibilityservices@usao.edu.

The university is committed to reasonably accommodating individuals with disabilities who require the assistance of animals. As a federally funded institution, USAO is subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination based on disability. While pets are not covered under federal or state disability laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), requires USAO to permit service animals in university facilities and programs. Additionally, under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) and related guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), USAO must consider reasonable accommodations in campus housing for individuals with disabilities who require an animal's presence for disability-related support (e.g., ESAs). Rules, guidelines, and requirements for animals on university property are further detailed in the sections that follow.

I. PETS ON CAMPUS

A pet is any animal kept for ordinary use or companionship. Unlike service animals, pets are not protected under disability laws and may or may not qualify for emotional support animal (ESA) registration. Following the no-pet policy outlined in USAO's Housing Guide, students are not permitted to have pets in university housing except for fish in a small aquarium of less than 10 gallons. **Any student found with a pet in university housing will incur a fine of \$100 per day until the animal is removed.** This fine will be charged to the student's bursar account, and a university hold will remain in place until the balance is paid in full. Students interested in seeking ESA approval for an existing pet should consult the Emotional Support Animal (ESA) section of this document.

II. SERVICE ANIMALS

A. SERVICE ANIMALS DEFINED

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is defined as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disabilities. The ADA also includes a separate provision recognizing individually trained miniature horses as potential service animals, but no other species, whether wild or domestic, qualify under this definition.

The tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. Examples include:

- Guiding individuals who are blind;
- Alerting individuals who are deaf to sounds;
- Pulling a wheelchair;
- Assisting during a seizure by alerting others or ensuring safety;
- Reminding individuals to take medications;
- Calming individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during anxiety episodes through trained behaviors.

Under the ADA, service animals are considered working animals, **not pets**. Animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under federal law. Additionally, Oklahoma law does not grant public access rights to service animals in training unless the trainer is certified by or affiliated with a recognized training program. Therefore, partially trained service animals are not entitled to the same campus access rights as fully trained service animals.

B. SERVICE ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION

Any student who has a service animal or plans to bring one to campus is encouraged to register with the Office for Accessible Education (OAE). **While registration is optional**, students may occasionally be asked to provide proof that the animal meets all applicable state and local vaccination requirements. Beyond vaccination records, the university does

not request additional documentation for service animals. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) guidelines, service animals are also not required to wear vests, identification tags, or specific harnesses, as these items do not independently verify an animal's status and are not required for certification or recognition under federal or state law.

If an animal's role is not obvious, university personnel are welcome to use the following procedure to determine service animal legitimacy:

1. Type of Animal

Is the animal a dog or a miniature horse?

- a. **If yes**, proceed to the next question.
- b. **If no**, the animal is not a service animal and is not permitted to enter public buildings or areas on campus.

2. Performance of Work or Tasks

Is it readily apparent that the dog is trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability? (Note: "performing work or tasks" means taking specific action when needed to assist the person with a disability.)

- a. **If yes**, the dog is a service animal, and further inquiry is unnecessary.
- b. **If no**, proceed to the next question.

3. Permissible Inquiries

If the service animal's purpose is not readily apparent, the ADA permits only the following two clarifying questions:

- Is the dog required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

4. Service Animal Qualification Criteria

- a. If the student answers "YES" to the first question and identifies specific work or at least one task the dog is trained to perform, then the dog qualifies as a service animal. **Further inquiries, such as questions about the individual's disability or paperwork, are not allowed by the DOJ.**
- b. If the answer to either question is "NO" or "NONE," the dog does not qualify as a service animal under federal law.

C. SERVICE ANIMALS ON CAMPUS

Service animals are the only animals permitted to accompany individuals with disabilities throughout campus, including in university buildings and other areas where students and the general public are allowed. This means that, in most cases, a student with a service animal may bring their animal to classes, meetings, events, and other public university areas. University personnel questioning whether an animal on campus qualifies as a service animal should either refer to the Service Animal Identification section of this document or contact the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) for guidance.

1. Service Animal Exclusion

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require institutions to modify policies, practices, or procedures if doing so would:

- Fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, services, programs, or activities provided by the institution;
- Present a direct threat to the health or safety of others; or
- Override legitimate safety requirements.

Additionally, under the U.S. Department of Justice's *ADA Requirements: Service Animals* (ADA.gov), a service animal may be removed from campus premises if:

- It is out of control and the handler does not take action to regain control, or
- It is not housebroken.

In most situations, the presence of a service animal does not result in a fundamental alteration. Exclusion cannot be based on assumptions, general fears, or past negative experiences with other animals. **If a service animal is removed for a valid reason**, USAO personnel must ensure that the individual with a disability is still provided with equal access to participate in programs or services without the animal's presence. For safety reasons, the following areas are generally off-limits to service animals:

- **Research Laboratories:** Chemicals found in many labs can be harmful to animals, and organisms naturally found on most dogs or other animals could negatively impact the outcome of research.
- **Mechanical Rooms/Custodial Closets:** These spaces can have chemicals or machinery that could potentially harm animals.

- **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, the student should contact the Dean of Students and the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) to discuss potential alternatives.

III. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS (ESAS)

A. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS DEFINED

Emotional support animals (ESAs) are defined as animals that provide emotional support or comfort to alleviate one or more identified symptoms or effect of a person's disability. Unlike service animals, ESAs are not required to have specialized training, as they do not perform specific tasks related to daily living. Their primary role is to offer emotional support, improve psychological well-being, and reduce symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, or other mental health conditions

While ESAs may be permitted to reside in university housing, they are not allowed in public university areas such as classrooms, dining facilities, or university events. ESA access is only granted after institutional approval, as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) require housing-related animal requests be evaluated through an individualized and interactive process.

B. REQUESTING APPROVAL FOR AN EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL (ESA)

Emotional support animals (ESAs) may be approved as a housing accommodation for students who provide appropriate documentation demonstrating that the animal is necessary for their ability to use and enjoy university housing. **Students should submit their ESA accommodation request to the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) as far in advance as possible, at least 60 days prior to the animal's anticipated arrival.** While requests submitted after this window will still be reviewed, final approval, if granted, may not be completed until after the semester begins.

1. Emotional Support Animal (ESA) Application Process

Students wishing to register with the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) must complete all required steps as outlined below. Submission of incomplete or insufficient documentation will result in immediate denial of the application.

a. Complete and Submit an ESA Accommodation Request

Emotional Support Animal (ESA) Accommodation Request paperwork is available on the university website. This paperwork provides an overview of the materials required for ESA consideration, including:

- **Owner's Rules & Responsibilities for an Emotional Support Animal**

The student must read, sign, and date this form to verify they understand what is expected of them should their ESA accommodation request be approved.

- **Letter to the Licensed Healthcare Provider**

These forms explain the requirements for the Letter of Recommendation that must be written by the student's licensed healthcare provider. This letter must be completed on a professional letterhead by a licensed counselor, psychologist, physician, or other reliable third party (e.g. licensed social worker) who has personal knowledge of the student in line with their professional responsibilities and cannot be a family member.

- **Animal Identification & Registration Form**

This page must be completed by the student and outlines additional materials required for submission, including a current local pet license, photos of the animal, and photos of all supplies the student plans to keep for the animal.

- **Emergency Handler Information for USAO Housing**

The student must provide information for a primary and backup emergency handler in the event the student is unable to reliably care for the animal.

b. Complete an Interactive In-depth Intake Interview (I4)

After receiving the completed ESA Accommodation Request paperwork, the OAE will contact the student through their university email to schedule an interactive in-depth intake interview. This interview will be conducted with the Accessibility Specialist and can take place in person or virtually.

2. Application Review and Possible Outcomes

After the interview is completed, the Accessibility Specialist will review the information gathered during the interview along with all submitted documentation. The student will receive a timely response via email with one of the following application statuses:

a. **Application Approval**

If the application is approved, the student will receive confirmation through their university email. This email will specify when the ESA is permitted on campus, the duration of the approval, and the timeframe for when the student must re-register their animal. Housing staff will be copied on this email, and the student's roommate(s) will be notified separately regarding the animals' presence in their living environment.

b. **More Information Needed**

If the application lacks sufficient information or documentation to substantiate the need for an ESA accommodation, the student will be notified through their university email. A follow-up meeting with the Accessibility Specialist may be required to discuss the outstanding materials, and the student will receive further instructions on how to proceed.

c. **Application Not Approved**

If the ESA accommodation request is not approved, the student will be notified through their university email. This email will detail the reason(s) for the denial and outline the next steps they can take. Students may appeal the decision by following the **Student Grievance Procedure (Appeals Process)** at the end of this document.

In the event of approval, the animal may not reside in university housing until the official ESA approval email has been issued by the Accessibility Specialist to both the student and USAO Housing. Animals without official approval will be considered pets, regardless of the student's status in the ESA application process. **Any student found with a pet in university housing will incur a fine of \$100 per day until the animal is removed.** This fine will be charged to the student's bursar account, and a university hold will remain in place until the balance is paid in full.

3. Consideration for Household vs. Unique Animals

Animals commonly kept in households are more likely to receive emotional support animal (ESA) approval due to their domesticated nature, ease of care, and historical role as companion animals. Common household animals typically include:

- Dogs
- Cats
- Small birds
- Rabbits
- Hamsters, gerbils, or other rodents.
- Most small, domesticated animals traditionally kept for companionship rather than for commercial purposes.

For this document and university policy, reptiles, barnyard animals, monkeys, and other non-domesticated animals are not considered common household animals. **Most reptiles or animals known to carry and transmit zoonotic diseases are generally not eligible for ESA approval** due to the health risks they may pose to the university community.

Requests for unique animals are assessed by the Accessibility Specialist on a case-by-case basis. In these situations, **the burden falls on the student to provide substantial evidence demonstrating a disability-related therapeutic need for that specific type of animal.** The student's licensed healthcare provider must submit verification on professional letterhead confirming the necessity of the unique animal as opposed to a common household animal that could provide similar emotional benefits. A lack of appropriate documentation may constitute reasonable grounds for denying the ESA request.

A unique animal may be granted as reasonable accommodation when:

- a. **The animal performs tasks that a dog or miniature horse cannot.** Although the animal may not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) definition of a service animal due to its species, it may still qualify as an ESA or assistance animal under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) if it performs tasks directly related to the individual's disability in addition to providing emotional support. For instance, a capuchin monkey trained to assist a person with paralysis might retrieve a water bottle, unscrew the cap, insert a straw, and place the bottle in a holder; operate light switches; or retrieve

objects that are out of the person's reach. In this example, the monkey's unique ability to perform specific tasks with its hands qualifies it as a necessary accommodation, as a dog would not be capable of completing those same functions.

- b. **A healthcare professional determines that a common household animal is not viable** due to chronic health conditions, severe allergies, phobias, or because the unique animal provides therapeutic benefits that a household animal cannot.
- c. **The absence of the animal would significantly worsen the individual's disability-related symptoms**, especially those alleviated by emotional support.

C. ACCOMMODATION CONFLICTS

Students who are negatively affected by the presence of an emotional support animal (ESA) should contact USAO Housing and the Office for Accessible Education (OAE). Housing and/or the OAE will follow up with the students involved to determine whether there is a need for further accommodations or other reasonable 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. If a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached, the student may contact the Dean of Students for further review.

When an ESA negatively affects the health or well-being of a roommate or suitemate, such as in cases of chronic health conditions, animal dander allergies, or severe phobias, the Accessibility Specialist will meet with the individual to determine whether the impact rises to the level of a disability. If the impact does rise to that level, the ESA may need to be temporarily removed from campus until a reasonable solution can be reached. If the impact does not rise to the level of a disability, the ESA cannot be removed on that basis alone. However, USAO Housing will work with all parties involved to explore alternative housing arrangements. Depending on availability, possible outcomes may include relocating either the student with the ESA or the affected roommate/suitemate, as appropriate.

When further accommodation or reasonable changes are insufficient in mitigating the animal's negative impact (e.g., including behavioral issues such as biting, scratching, and barking, or health issues such as maltreatment and neglect), USAO Housing will consult the Animal Removal Procedure listed in this document for guidance.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL ANIMALS IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING

All service animals and emotional support animals (ESAs) in university housing are subject to specific requirements. USAO Housing reserves the right to assign or reassign living spaces, including requiring students to move to different rooms or residence halls, at the discretion of housing staff. Such decisions will be made in the best interest of the student, other residents, and the Student Life and Housing department.

A. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND DOCUMENTATION

Animals must be licensed in accordance with applicable City of Chickasha regulations and must have current vaccination records when required for the animal's species. Students may be asked to provide proof of compliance with these legal requirements, including current local pet licensure and vaccination documentation.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ANIMAL CARE AND SUPERVISION

Care and supervision of the animal is the sole responsibility of the student who owns the animal. Students living with animals in university housing are required to comply with the following guidelines. All responsibilities listed below apply to both service animals and emotional support animals (ESAs) unless otherwise specified. Students with additional questions should contact the Office for Accessible Education (OAE).

1. Routine Care Requirements

For health and safety reasons, Students must ensure their animals receive daily care (toileting, feeding, watering, grooming) and long-term care (vaccinations, pest prevention, veterinary exams). The university may request documentation to verify these health and safety needs for service animals and ESAs.

2. Abuse and Neglect Policy

The university will investigate any reports of abuse or neglect and involve local authorities as appropriate. A student found to be mistreating their animal may face disciplinary action and removal of the animal from university housing.

3. Emergency Handler Designation

Students must designate a primary and backup emergency handler to care for their animal in case of an emergency. Both handlers must be familiar with the university's

animal care policies. If neither handler is available, the university may remove the animal and place it in a local animal facility at the owner's expense.

4. Control and Restraint in Outdoor Areas

Animals must always remain under the handler's control while on university property, including adjoining sidewalks and parkways. ESAs must be properly restrained using a leash, harness, or carrier. For service animals, voice commands or other effective signals are acceptable forms of control if the animal is trained to respond. This alternative is allowed when the handler cannot use physical restraints due to a disability or if restraints interfere with the animal's ability to perform work or tasks.

5. Proximity and Consideration for Others

Animals must remain close to their handler when outside university housing and should be as unobtrusive as possible to residents and USAO personnel. For service animals, any work or task performed to alert others during a disability-related emergency on behalf of their handler is not considered obtrusive.

6. Safety and Behavioral Expectations

Animals must not pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Handlers are responsible for taking reasonable precautions to prevent harm, including using physical restraint or removing the animal from university property if it becomes aggressive or disruptive. For service animals, USAO personnel may require the dog to be removed from a classroom or other university space if disruptive behavior is not immediately resolved. Ongoing behavioral issues may necessitate corrective measures by the owner before the animal is permitted to return to campus.

7. Waste Disposal and Housebreaking

The student is responsible for cleaning up after their animal and must immediately and appropriately dispose of all waste, both indoors and outdoors. Animal feces must be secured in a plastic bag and placed in an outdoor trash receptacle.

8. Property Protection and Liability

Students must take reasonable precautions to protect university property and the personal belongings of other residents. This includes preventing animals from damaging university furniture or urinating/defecating on floors and carpets. Students are solely responsible for any damage or additional cleaning costs resulting from

their service animals' or ESA's presence, including professional pest treatment or carpet replacement.

9. Respectful Behavior in Shared Spaces

To the extent possible, the animal should not disrupt students or university personnel, disturb others' personal belongings, exhibit disruptive behaviors, or block passageways required for fire or emergency egress.

10. Interaction Boundaries

The handler may request that others refrain from petting, addressing, feeding, or deliberately startling the animal. The animal must always remain with its handler whether it is a service animal or ESA.

11. Maintenance and Service Requests

Students must notify university housing staff of an animal's presence when submitting any service request and, if possible, be present during the repair. While university-approved personnel are in the room, ESAs must be crated or removed, and service animals must always remain effectively controlled. In emergencies, university-approved personnel may enter the room at their discretion.

12. Owner's Responsibility During Absences

Animals may not remain in university housing overnight without the owner present. If the student leaves overnight or during university breaks, the animal must accompany them.

C. EMERGENCY CARE

In the event of an emergency, university personnel will take appropriate action, which may include removal of the animal from university property. As noted previously, the student must provide contact information for a primary and backup emergency handler who will take immediate responsibility for and remove the animal should the student be unable to. It is the student's responsibility to ensure both emergency contacts are familiar with university animal care policies and are prepared to act when needed. If neither handler is available, **the university reserves the right to remove the animal and place it in the care of a local animal facility at the owner's expense.** The student will be responsible for all costs associated with the care, boarding, and retrieval of the animal.

V. REMOVAL OF AN ANIMAL FROM UNIVERSITY HOUSING

A student may be required to remove their animal from university housing under circumstances that compromise the health, safety, or well-being of the campus community. Removal may also be required if the animal's presence imposes an undue financial or administrative burden on the university or if it fundamentally alters the nature of university housing services. Situations that warrant removal may include:

- The animal exhibits **threatening or uncontrolled behavior**, such as lunging, snapping, biting, growling, scratching, or persistent and disruptive vocalizations (e.g., barking, howling) that interfere with the living environment.
- The animal is visibly ill, unkempt, infested with parasites (e.g., fleas, ticks), or otherwise **fails to meet basic hygiene and wellness standards**.
- The animal repeatedly eliminates waste indoors, is **not reliably housebroken**, or has a medical condition that creates persistent sanitation concerns or odors.
- The **student fails to properly care for, feed, groom, or exercise the animal**, resulting in neglect, malnourishment, or noticeable behavioral deterioration.
- The animal causes **significant damage to university property** or to the belongings of roommates, suitemates, or other residents.
- The animal **injures a student, university personnel, or another animal** approved to reside at the university.
- The **student does not comply with university animal policies**, including but not limited to failure to crate or control the animal during maintenance visits, leaving the animal alone in the residence overnight, or failing to provide updated vaccination or emergency handler information as required.

In cases where a service animal exhibits behavior or health concerns that warrant removal, the student may be required to take corrective action. This may include temporary removal of the dog from university property, behavior training, or veterinary intervention. If the issues persist or cannot be adequately resolved, permanent removal of the service animal may be necessary. **The student remains fully responsible for any damages, fines, or costs incurred because of the service animal's behavior or condition.**

A. ANIMAL REMOVAL PROCEDURE

Removal determinations will be made by USAO Housing in consultation with the Office for Accessible Education (OAE). An individualized assessment will be conducted to evaluate the animal's behavior, condition, and overall impact on the university's residential and academic environments. If all applicable parties determine that removal is necessary, the following procedure will be followed:

1. Issuance of a Formal Violation Report

The student will receive a Formal Violation Report via their university email from USAO's Housing Office. It is the student's responsibility to check their university email regularly as **no extensions will be granted**.

2. Student Response and Appeal Opportunity

Once the report is issued, the student has **24 hours** to contact the Housing Office with a formal plan to resolve the issue. If no response is received, USAO's Housing Accommodation Team will determine how to proceed and will notify the student via their university email. The student may appeal the decision by following the **Student Grievance Procedure (Appeals Process)** at the end of this document.

3. Animal Removal Process

Unless exigent circumstances require otherwise, the student will have **48-72 hours to remove the animal** from university housing. If the university is unable to contact the student, housing staff will reach out to the primary and backup emergency contacts. If neither emergency contact is available, USAO Housing and Security will remove the animal and place it in the care of a local animal facility at the owner's expense. If the animal is removed for any reason, the student remains responsible for **fulfilling their housing obligations** for the duration of the housing contract.

4. Consideration for an Alternative ESA

If an ESA must be permanently removed for any reason, the student may submit a request for an alternative ESA if their condition continues to warrant accommodation. Any new request will undergo the standard review process to ensure it complies with university policy and appropriately addresses concerns that led to the prior animal's removal. **Approval is not guaranteed** and will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

VI. STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE (APPEALS PROCESS)

Students who disagree with the decision made by USAO Housing in consultation with the Office for Accessible Education (OAE) to remove their animal from university property have the right to appeal through the process below. Students are encouraged to provide as much detailed information and evidence as possible throughout the entirety of this appeals process.

Step 1: Initial Appeal to the USAO Accommodations Team

1. Submission of the Appeal

Students must complete an Accessibility Grievance Form (available on the university website) detailing the basis of their appeal. The completed form, along with any supporting documentation, must be emailed to the OAE.

2. Review Process

The USAO Accommodations Team will review the grievance, which may include conducting an investigation, requesting additional documentation or information, and/or holding interviews with relevant parties.

3. Decision Notification

A formal response letter detailing the decision will be sent to the students' university email address.

Step 2: Secondary Appeal to the Dean of Students

1. Filing a Secondary Appeal

If the student is dissatisfied with the USAO Accommodations Team's decision, they may submit a new Accessibility Grievance Form to the **Dean of Students**. The appeal should include any updated or additional evidence relevant to the grievance.

2. Review by the Dean of Students

The Dean of Students may conduct a comprehensive review, which can involve:

- An independent investigation.
- Requesting further documentation or clarification.
- Interviewing individuals involved in the case.

3. **Final Decision Notification**

A formal response letter will be sent to the students' university email with the final determination. The decision made by the **Dean of Students** will represent the university's **final resolution of the grievance**.

Both the USAO Accommodations Team and the Dean of Students prioritize fairness, thorough review, and adherence to legal standards in their decision-making processes. The decisions made at each step will be documented and communicated to the student in writing. This process ensures that students have access to a fair and transparent mechanism for resolving disputes related to accommodation while maintaining the integrity and compliance of university policies.