

# **Service and Assistance Animal Policy**

## **I. Introduction**

The University of South Alabama (USA) is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities, and recognizes that some members of the USA community with disabilities may require the use of service or assistance animals while at USA. Set forth below are guidelines concerning the appropriate use of and protocols associated with service animals and assistance animals. USA reserves the right to amend these guidelines as needed, with or without prior notice. Members of the USA community who are students and require the use of a service or assistance animal should contact the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) at (251) 460-7212. Members of the USA community who are faculty and staff and require the use of a service or assistance animal should contact USA Human Resources at 251-460-6133.

Animals that are regarded strictly as pets are not allowed to live on campus in the residence halls or the GROVE.

## **II. Definitions**

### **Service Animal**

A *service animal* is defined as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Miniature horses may be considered service animals in some cases. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals. The work or task that a service animal has been trained to provide must be directly related to the functional limitations of the person's disability.

An animal whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support does not qualify as a service animal.

A service animal is allowed on campus anywhere it is safe for them to be such as academic buildings, libraries, and on-campus dining establishments. There may be areas of the USA campus where it is considered unsafe for an animal to be present, such as medical facilities, laboratories, mechanical rooms or any other place where the safety of the animal or its handler may be threatened. Individuals such as laboratory directors, faculty, and the Director of Environmental Health and Safety may be consulted in making this determination. If an area is determined to be unsafe, reasonable accommodations should be provided to assure the student equal access to the activity taking place there.

## **Assistance Animal**

An *assistance animal* (therapy, comfort, or emotional support animal) is an animal that performs tasks and/or provides assistance, or emotional support which alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of an individual's disability. Some, but not all, assistance animals receive training. Assistance animals are prescribed to an individual with a disability by a mental health professional. An assistance animal must be regarded as an integral part of a person's treatment process to be considered for approval. Species other than dogs or domestic cats will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Assistance animals are not service animals and do not accompany an individual at all times. Assistance animals are only permitted in the individual's assigned living space, and designated outdoor spaces, if appropriate, under proper handling of the owner. These animals are not allowed in any other campus buildings. Students living off campus should note that assistance animals **ARE NOT** allowed in campus buildings.

## **Pet**

A *pet* is defined as an animal that is kept for ordinary use and companionship. A pet is not considered a service or assistance animal. Individuals are not permitted to keep or bring pets into campus residence assignments or The GROVE.

### **III. Service Animals on Campus (Non-Residential Students)**

Non-residential students bringing service animals to campus must register with the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS). To make this formal request, the student must submit a completed disability application which may be found on the SDS website ([www.southalabama.edu/dss](http://www.southalabama.edu/dss)).

#### **Documentation for a Service Animal**

*Students should submit documentation based on the following guidelines in this section:*

Provide a letter with the prospective resident's explanation of the tasks or function the animal has been trained to perform as a disability-related accommodation (provide certification information, if applicable) and the type/description of animal.

Individuals seeking permission to have a service animal on campus must provide information establishing the existence of an impairment and sufficient information concerning his or her functional limitations to show that the work or tasks performed by the animal is related to those limitations. Insufficient documentation that does not fulfill the outlined requirements may result in accommodation delays or denial.

See section *Owner Responsibilities* for additional applicable requirements.

#### **IV. Procedures for Approval of Service and Assistance Animals in Housing & Dining (Residential Students)**

A student who will be living in campus housing (residence hall or The GROVE) must make a formal request to SDS for an accommodation on the basis of a qualifying disability. To make this formal request, the student must submit a completed disability application which may be found on the SDS website ([www.southalabama.edu/dss](http://www.southalabama.edu/dss)). The request for an accommodation concerning a service/assistance animal should be made at least 30 days prior to the date the student would like to bring the animal into campus housing.

The request for a service/assistance animal may be denied if proper documentation is not presented or if such an accommodation is deemed unreasonable. Examples of an unreasonable accommodation include one which presents an undue financial or administrative burden on the University, or poses a substantial and direct threat to personal or public safety or to the property of others, or constitutes a fundamental alteration of the nature of the service or program. If a requesting student is denied a request for a service/assistance animal, the student may appeal the decision, in writing, to the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students (VPSA), within 5 business days. The decision of the VPSA is final.

##### **Documentation for a Service Animal**

*Students should submit documentation based on the following guidelines in this section:*

Provide a letter with the prospective resident's explanation of the tasks or function the animal has been trained to perform as a disability-related accommodation, (provide certification information, if applicable) and the type/description of animal.

Individuals seeking permission to have a service animal on campus must provide information establishing the existence of an impairment and sufficient information concerning his or her functional limitations to show that the work or tasks performed by the animal is related to those limitations. Insufficient documentation that does not fulfill the outlined requirements may result in accommodation delays or denial.

##### **Documentation for an Assistance Animal**

Requests for an assistance animal in campus housing require complete documentation to be submitted before review and rendering of a decision and/or recommendation. Documentation must be dated within the last 12 months. Detailed documentation requirements are available on USA's

SDS website at [www.southalabama.edu/dss](http://www.southalabama.edu/dss).

Documentation of the need for an assistance animal should follow the Office of Student Disability Services guidelines for documentation of a disability, and should include the following information:

The credentials and contact information of the evaluator(s);  
A diagnostic statement identifying the disability;  
A description of the diagnostic methodology used;  
A description of the current functional limitations;  
A description of the expected progression or stability of the disability;  
A description of current and past accommodations, services and/or medications;  
Statement on how the animal serves as an accommodation for the verified disability;  
Statement on how the need for the animal relates to the ability of the resident/student to use and enjoy the living arrangements provided by the University.

Any individual approved for a service/assistance animal accommodation must:

Follow all established University policies as outlined in the Lowdown;  
Register the animal with SDS prior to moving into campus housing each year (deadlines noted above);  
Provide documentation at the start of each academic year that the animal is licensed pursuant to applicable local (i.e. Mobile County) laws and in good health;  
Review and sign appropriate forms as requested at the start of each academic year.

## **V. Owner Responsibilities**

*The owner of the service/assistance animal is expected to accept the following responsibilities:*

Comply with applicable local, state, and federal Laws concerning the ownership of an animal.

The owner, not the University or another student/resident, is responsible for the care and conduct of the animal.

Animals must be kept clean, healthy and under the control of the owner at all times. This means that all animals are to be on a leash, harness, or within a carrier device at all times when outside of the designated living quarters.

All required immunizations must be up to date and a copy of the immunizations must be on file with the SDS office.

If an animal is required under applicable law or regulations to be licensed, then a copy of the current and up-to-date license must be on file with the SDS Office.

Dogs or cats must wear a collar with appropriate tags (i.e. vaccinations, contact information) at all times.

Animals must be fed on a regular and healthy feeding schedule.

Animals must possess friendly and sociable characteristics. Some specific animals can be restricted from the premises based on any confirmed or territorial behavior.

Animals and their accoutrements (i.e. Heat Lamp) must not pose a direct threat to the safety of others. All electrical accoutrement must be approved by the University Fire Marshall prior to use.

The owner is responsible for prompt clean up and disposal of the animal's waste.

Owners with cats must properly maintain litter boxes. In consideration of the health of the cat and the occupants of the apartment or residence hall room, cat litter box contents must be changed with new litter regularly in accordance with manufacturer recommendations.

The animal's waste must be taken to an appropriate residence hall or apartment dumpster. No waste is to be disposed of in any trash receptacle inside any building, or through any sewer system inside buildings (sinks and toilets).

Animals must sleep in the owner's room or apartment. USA shall inspect the residence on a regular basis to determine if there is infestation or other damage to the property.

Animals must not be disruptive to other students including excessive noise.

USA is not responsible for an animal during a fire alarm, fire drill, or natural disaster/building emergency.

An animal which is not contained in a cage/crate cannot be left alone for more than 12 hours; crated/caged animals should not be left alone for more than 24 hours.

Owner is responsible for finding appropriate accommodations for the animal when he/she will be leaving for a period of more than 24 hours.

An emergency contact number for an alternate caretaker should be on file with the SDS office and the Housing & Dining Office.

The owner is responsible for any bodily injury or property damage caused by the animal, and is also responsible for any related charges.

The owner must notify the SDS, in writing, when the animal is no longer present in the residence or no longer needed for the owner's disability.

If the owner is seeking to replace a service/assistance animal with another, the student must file a new registration form and file a new request with SDS.

Approvals are only good for the academic year in which the approval is made. A new request must be filed at the beginning of each subsequent academic year.

It is the owner's responsibility to ensure that the animal is free from fleas or other pests.

The owner will be responsible for the cost of eliminating any pest infestation as a result of the animal. In the event of infestation, the University or the Grove will contract an appropriate pest control company and bill the student directly for charges.

When a student and/or animal vacates the residential assignment at the end of a contract period, the University or Grove will inspect and clean the unit. The owner will be billed appropriate cleaning charges.

Failure to comply with any of the above policies may result in the removal of the animal and/ or the owner of the animal from the assignment.

## **VI. Housing & Dining Requirements**

If the request for service/assistance animal is approved, the requesting student will be required to complete and sign a *Service/Assistance Animal Registration and Agreement* with Housing & Dining. The Registration and Agreement form includes provisions related to the above policy to which the student must adhere in order to maintain the approval.

If a service/assistance request is granted, the Housing & Dining staff will make a reasonable effort to notify the other residents of the building where the service/assistance animal will be located. This notice will be limited only to information regarding the presence in the building as an accommodation to a student with a disability. There will be no disclosure of the student's disability. Students who are adversely affected by animals (i.e. respiratory diseases, asthma, severe allergies) are asked to contact SDS and/or Housing & Dining or The Grove if they are concerned about exposure to a service/assistance animal. Affected students may be eligible for an accommodation when living in proximity to a service/assistance animal. The Student Disability Services Director and the Housing Director or Grove General Manager will collaborate, as needed, to help resolve any conflicts related to a service/assistance animal. All staff members will consider the needs and/or the appropriate accommodations of all residents involved.

All roommates and/or suitemates of the accommodated student must sign an agreement acknowledging that the service/assistance animal will be living in the residence with them. If one or more roommate(s) or suitemate(s) does not approve of the service/assistance animal, then either the owner of the service/assistance animal, or the non-approving roommate(s) or suitemate(s), may be moved to another location, as determined by Housing & Dining or The Grove.

If a service/assistance animal owner is found to be in violation of the service/assistance animal agreement, then the service/assistance animal and/or the owner may be removed from University Housing or The Grove.

## **VII. Emergency Responders**

USA public safety officers will make every reasonable effort to keep the animal with its owner in the event of an emergency evacuation. However, the emergency responder's first effort will be toward the student and this may necessitate leaving an animal behind in certain emergency evacuation situations.

## **VIII. Visitors**

Visitors are limited to bringing service animals to campus. All visitors with service animals must adhere to the same service animal control, behavior and safety guidelines as students attending the University.