

Service and Emotional Support Animal Policy

As established and defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service animals shall not be excluded from Converse University facilities or activities. To facilitate appropriate acceptance of service animals in classes and other campus areas, students with service animals must affiliate with the disability services office as described below prior to bringing service animals into classes.

As stated by the ADA, service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered while in public, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. For the benefit of students and the community, it is recommended that all service animals wear a vest indicating them as a service animal. Service animals in training must wear a vest identifying them as a "Service Animal in Training" when in public. Service animals may travel with their handler on the campus, excluding those areas that may pose a safety risk (listed in the policy). Service animals may live in University housing with prior approval through the request for accommodations and by completing the Service/Emotional Support Animal Agreement.

Separate from Service Animals, Emotional Support animals may be considered for access to University housing. Emotional Support animals may not reside in University Housing without approval for an accommodation and prior approval from the residential life office. All Emotional Support animals residing in University housing must comply with the requirements outlined in the Service/Emotional Support Animal Agreement. Permission to have an Emotional Support animal in University Housing does not extend access to other campus facilities or to common areas of the residence halls.

Handlers must take responsibility for obtaining a dog license from the City of Spartanburg within 30 days of bringing a Service or Emotional Support animal to campus, and for abiding by all other City of Spartanburg animal control ordinances. Handlers are also responsible for ensuring that animals are under their control and adhering to any University and City clean-up rules.

As with all accommodations that have an academic component, students are required to notify their professors each semester of the accommodations. Students should email the professor prior to the first class meeting to schedule a meeting within the first week of class to discuss the presence of the service animal in their classroom.

Residential Life may exclude a service animal or assistance animal from housing if it 1) poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others; 2) would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others; 3) would pose an undue financial and administrative burden, and/or 4) results in a fundamental alteration of the University's program(s).

Definitions

Emotional Support Animal: An Emotional Support animal is not a pet. An Emotional Support animal is a companion animal that provides therapeutic benefit to an individual with a mental or psychiatric disability. The person seeking the Emotional Support animal must have a verifiable disability (the reason cannot just be a need for companionship). The animal is viewed as a "reasonable accommodation" under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (the FHA) to those housing communities that have a "no pets" rule. In other words, just as a wheelchair provides a person with a physical limitation the equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, an emotional support animal provides a person with a mental or psychiatric disability the same opportunity to live independently. Most times, an emotional support animal will be seen as a reasonable accommodation for a person with such a disability.

To qualify, a person must meet the federal definition of disability and must have documentation from a physician or other medical professional stating that a person has a disability and that the reasonable accommodation (here, the emotional support animal) provides benefit for the individual with the disability. The emotional support animal alleviates or mitigates some of the symptoms of the disability.

Service Animal: Any dog or miniature pony that is individually trained or in the process of being trained to do work or perform specific tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. Examples of work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting an individual who is blind or has low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing non-violent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting an individual to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to an individual with mobility disabilities, and helping an individual with psychiatric and/or neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

Service Animals in Training: Individuals training a service animal are afforded the same rights as those individuals who require the assistance of a service animal. If you are training a service animal to aid and guide persons with disabilities, you must contact the disability services office and comply with the requirements set forth in this Policy.

Handler: The individual with a disability who utilizes a service or assistance animal as an accommodation.

Accommodation: Any modification or adjustment in policies, practices, procedures, or work/school/housing environment to enable a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy equal opportunities and access to University rights, privileges, benefits and services.

Procedures for Documenting Emotional Support Animals:

Documentation is required for review of requests for accommodations related to Emotional Support Animals and must be completed and submitted to the disability services office. The following steps comprise the process for approval under this policy. Student must:

- complete registration with the disability services office by submitting a request for accommodation through disability services.
- submit official documentation (outlined below).
- meet with the disability services office to review any pertinent campus-wide policies that may relate to the animal.
- review and sign Converse University Emotional Support Animal Agreement.
- provide evidence that the animal is in good health, and has been vaccinated against diseases common to that breed of animal as recommended by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Veterinary records attesting to that fact must be submitted in writing prior to the animal taking residence.
- (for an animal in residence) meet with a Residential Life liaison prior to the animal taking occupancy in University housing in order to review the agreement and expectations.

Documentation Guidelines for Emotional Support Animal Requests

- A. A written request from the prospective handler explaining
 1. the need for the animal
 2. the type of animal
 3. the date when the animal was put into service
 4. description of the animal (e.g. weight, breed, etc.), whether the animal is housebroken, and the animal's name.

- B. Documentation of medical and/or psychological conditions requires the completion of forms available on my.converse by a licensed healthcare professional. In order to ensure an objective assessment, the professional completing the evaluation must be an impartial individual who is not related to the student. The forms should include information specifically addressing:
1. the nature of the proposed handler's disability,
 2. the date[s] of the medical diagnosis and prescription for such an animal,
 3. how the animal is necessary to provide the proposed handler access to Converse University housing program, and
 4. the relationship between the disability and the Emotional Support animal.

Please note that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has been asked to investigate websites that purport to provide documentation from a health care provider in support of requests for an ESA. The websites in question offer for sale documentation that is not reliable for purposes of determining whether an individual has a disability or disability-related need for an ESA because the website operators and health care professionals who consult with them lack the personal knowledge that is necessary to make such determinations. Letters purchased from the internet for a set price rarely provide the information necessary to support an ESA request.

Confidentiality and Authority:

Information regarding disability is considered highly confidential, is maintained in separate, secure files with limited access, and is only shared on a need-to-know basis. Authorizations for animals used for disability-related accommodations are made based on medical and/or mental health documentation and the situation at hand.

Policy Revisions and Review:

This policy is subject to revision and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Please keep a copy of your documentation. The Student Accessibility Services office holds documentation for a limited time period after a student leaves the University; all documentation will be destroyed at the end of this time period or upon the request of the student.

Documentation may be brought in, emailed, or mailed to:

Converse University
Case Manager for Student Accessibility Services
580 East Main Street
Spartanburg, SC 29302