Emotional Support Animal Policy

Walla Walla University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities, including an equal opportunity to use and enjoy university housing. Students with disabilities who seek to bring an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) to any of the WWU campuses must first contact Disability Support Services (DSS). This policy explains the specific requirements applicable to an individual’s use of an ESA in university housing on all Walla Walla University campuses and applies solely to Emotional Support Animals.

Background

Under the Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA), individuals with a mental health or psychiatric disability may be entitled to keep an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) in residence as a reasonable accommodation in university-owned housing facilities that otherwise impose restrictions or have prohibitions on non-service animals in residence. Walla Walla University will consider a request by an individual with a disability for reasonable accommodation to allow an ESA that is necessary because of a mental health disability.

Definition of Emotional Support Animal

An Emotional Support animal (ESA) is one that can be kept in residence as prescribed for a person with a mental health or psychiatric disability as a reasonable accommodation to provide the person an equal opportunity to use and enjoy university housing. Unlike a service animal, an emotional support animal does not need to perform a service or task for the person, but provides emotional support that alleviates or partially mitigates the impact of a person’s disability. This policy addresses only the presence of emotional support animals in University housing as an exception to the no-pets policy.

Guidelines and Requirements

In order for a student with a disability to qualify for such an accommodation, documentation of a mental health condition that rises to the level of a disability must be submitted from a licensed psychiatrist, psychologist, or mental health professional, who has been providing current face-to-face treatment to the student, and which establishes the need for the therapeutic nature of the animal that is connected to the individual’s disability. There must be a relationship, or nexus, between the individual’s disability and the assistance the animal provides. Further, documentation must establish that the emotional support animal is necessary to afford the individual with a disability an equal opportunity to enjoy and use campus housing. HUD/FHA regulations only apply to housing facilities, thus animals are only allowed in the resident’s room, apartment, or house and are not allowed in
any other area of campus housing or elsewhere on campus.

Generally, only one ESA is approved for an individual, and only one animal is allowed in a single residence unit.

Students are 100% responsible for the care and responsibilities of the animal. Roommates, friends, WWU staff or others are not responsible for the care of the animal. If an owner will be away from their residence overnight, the animal is not to be left in university housing, but must accompany the owner or be cared for by someone not living in university housing.

Students must provide the name and contact information for someone who does NOT reside in campus-owned housing, who could care for the animal in case of emergency. If, for some reason, the approved student is not able to care for the animal, the contact person would be asked to house and care for the animal in the student’s absence.

Students seeking to have an ESA in university housing must submit updated documentation of disability and a request for review each academic year. The animal must not be in residence prior to approval by the DSS Coordinator and before the Emotional Support Animal Agreement is signed and completed by housing and the DSS Coordinator.

Students who have an unapproved animal in their residence are subject to housing and conduct discipline and processes, and the animal must be immediately removed from campus pending the ESA review process.

Cats and dogs are the most common type of emotional support animals, although other animals may be allowed. Cats and dogs must be at least nine months of age and must be housebroken and spayed or neutered. Other animals may also be required to meet these criteria as appropriate. Pregnant animals are not allowed in campus housing. If your animal becomes pregnant while in residence, it must be removed from residence until the offspring are weaned. The approval of a request is animal-specific and cannot be transferred to another animal.

The university will allow only those ESAs, which are allowed by local and state laws and conform to standards, within this agreement. Dangerous, poisonous, and/or illegal animals are not permitted. Animals may also be excluded based on size, whether the type of animal is known to carry diseases which can be transmitted to humans, or appropriateness as an ESA.

The animal’s behavior may not create unreasonable disruptions to the residential community at any time, and the animal’s behavior must be congruent to reasonable standards of well-behaved animals relating to behavior, noise, odor, and waste. Excessive disruption, as determined by residential staff and/or the Housing Director, is grounds for immediate removal of the animal.
**Process for Requesting an Emotional Support Animal**

The procedure for requesting an ESA in housing follows the general procedure for requesting housing and dietary accommodations as outlined in the Guidelines for Housing Accommodations and the requirements of the Emotional Support Animal Policy.

While WWU will accept and consider requests for reasonable accommodation in University housing at any time, to guarantee adequate time to review and process housing requests, the deadline for an ESA application is sixty (60) days before the beginning of a term. Requests for continuation of an ESA for returning students should be submitted at the same time housing selection begins for university. An emotional support animal will only be allowed to move into university housing at the beginning of a quarter. This time frame provides the university sufficient time to best accommodate and provide a smooth transition for students as well as the animal.

**To seek approval for an Emotional Support Animal:**

1. Request an ESA by making an appointment with the DSS Coordinator (in person or by email.)
2. Review the Emotional Support Animal Policy.
3. Complete the Disability Accommodation Request Form.
4. The resident student will be provided with the Request for Information: Emotional Support Animal Form, to provide documentation of the student’s disabling emotional health condition. The student must submit documentation from an appropriate licensed physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, mental health counselor or social worker, which addresses:
   a. documentation of the student’s mental health diagnosis/condition, including severity of condition and impact on major life functions,
   b. statement on how the animal serves as an accommodation for the documented disability,
   c. statement on how the need for the ESA relates the ability of the student to use and gain benefit from university housing. This documentation should be a reflection of the student’s current level of functioning.

   The professional providing the documentation must by one who has:
   i. met personally and face-to-face with the student,
   ii. has established a therapeutic relationship with the student, and
   iii. residency in the student’s home state or the State of Washington or Oregon, depending on which WWU campus the student will be residing.

5. Receipt of the documentation. The DSS Coordinator will review the documentation and determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether to approve the student’s request for an ESA. In making this determination, the DSS Coordinator will consider the needs of the student, as well as the impact of the animal on the campus community. The DSS Coordinator will consult with other university offices, such as the Director of Housing or residential housing staff, to determine if there are any student conduct issues that may negatively impact the requesting student’s ability to effectively control and provide a safe environment for the ESA.
6. Absent exceptional circumstances, the DSS coordinator will review documentation, make determinations, and notify the student of the decision in writing within 10 business days.

7. Appointment with DSS. The student will meet with the DSS Coordinator to discuss the type of animal the student is planning to bring as an ESA to be certain it meets the campus criteria for approved animals in housing.

8. Approved Accommodation: The student must review and sign the Emotional Animal Agreement Form and other forms as appropriate. The student will provide documents required as appropriate to the type of animal approved.

9. Meet with Residential Life Staff. DSS will notify residential staff that the ESA is approved. The student will make an appointment to review the policy and specific details and requirements for having the animal in university-owned housing. The residential designee will sign the ESA Agreement Form at that time.

10. Roommate Agreement: Where applicable, the roommate(s) will meet with the residential life staff and sign the Roommate Agreement before the animal is moved into housing. Students should note that housing options may be limited as the University balances appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities with students who have allergies and/or animal fears.

11. Move-In Approval: Housing will give the owner a move-in date for the animal. Student must provide all supplies necessary for the animal at the time the animal is moved into housing.

12. Should changes in the housing assignment for the owner or roommates be required, the residential life staff and/or DSS will meet with the individuals and make arrangements for room assignment changes.

Documents Required if an ESA is Approved:

As appropriate to the type of animal, the following documents must be provided to the DSS Coordinator before an animal is approved to move into campus housing (typically during the meeting at which the ESA Agreement Form is signed):

- Current (within six months) well-animal check from a licensed veterinarian,
- Current vaccination records including rabies, and spay/neuter records.
- Copy of city license, if required for the type of animal,
- Photo of animal and owner together.

Denial of Accommodation/Appeal

1. If DSS and/or Director of Housing determine a request for an ESA be denied, DSS will contact the student and the Director of Housing in writing within ten (10) business days of its determination.

2. If the individual is unwilling to accept the denial, DSS will provide written notification to the individual and the Director of Housing of the denial, the reasons for the denial, the right to appeal the decision, and the procedures for an appeal. The written notification will be provided within ten (10) business days of the notification from the individual of his/her unwillingness to accept any of the alternative accommodations offered or the determination that there are no alternative accommodations available.

3. An individual may also use the grievance procedure provided under the general university grievance procedure.

WWU reserves the right to amend this policy at any time as circumstances require.

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