



OP 91.123: ANIMALS ON CAMPUS

PURPOSE

To establish standard practices and procedures for animals, including service animals, emotional support animals, therapy animals, and pets on university campuses and at all other university facilities and locations.

POLICY

The policy of Mississippi State University is to comply with applicable laws and regulations governing the presence of service animals, service animals in training, emotional support animals (ESA's), and therapy animals on campus and at university facilities. For pets and other personally owned animals, it is the policy of the university to maintain appropriate limitations to ensure a campus environment conducive to educational, research, academic, and administrative purposes.

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and other applicable laws and regulations, the university generally permits service animals, as defined below, in its buildings and most other facilities. The presence of service animals is subject to the limitations set forth below.

Service animals in training accompanied by a trainer are permitted in areas of the university open to the general public. Access to certain additional areas such as classrooms requires approval in advance of the service animal in training via the process outlined below.

The university generally permits emotional support animals within university housing subject to the accommodation review process and other limitations set forth below. ESA's are not permitted in other indoor or non-public areas of university campuses and facilities. The presence of therapy animals is subject to university discretion via the approval process outlined below.

DEFINITIONS

Handler: A person with a disability that a service animal assists, or a personal care attendant who handles the animal for a person with a disability.

Service Animal: Any dog (or under certain ADA-specified circumstances, miniature horse) 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, where the animal meets the definition of "service animal" under ADA regulations.

Emotional Support Animal (ESA): An animal that provides therapeutic emotional support to alleviate one or more symptoms or effects of a person's disability. ESAs do not perform work or

tasks that would qualify them as service animals under the ADA, and are permitted in university housing but not in other university buildings or facilities.

Owner: Any person other than a handler as defined herein who brings an animal to, or has legal responsibility for any animal present at, a university campus or facility, including any person approved to bring an emotional support animal into university housing.

Therapy Animal: An animal that, although not currently engaged as a service animal or ESA for a particular individual, has been approved under this policy to provide emotional support or other therapeutic assistance at specified, limited times within a particular university department or facility.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements apply generally to animals present on university campuses and at university facilities. Where more specific policies applicable to service animals, service animals in training, emotional support animals, therapy animals, or other animals differ from these general requirements, those more specific policies shall control.

In general, subject to the exceptions set forth below, animals are not permitted inside university buildings or facilities whether on or off-campus, on university transit vehicles, or in tailgating areas on gamedays. The university further reserves complete discretion to prohibit or restrict the presence of animals on any campus or at any university facility at any time, subject to applicable law and provisions of this policy.

The preceding restrictions on the location of animals do not apply to trained dogs or other animals utilized by the MSU Police Department for law enforcement purposes. These animals may accompany their handlers into any university building or facility while in the course of law enforcement related activities.

I. Owner Responsibilities

Animals on a university campus or at a university facility must be under the complete control of the owner at all times and present no hazard to people or property. In all cases, the owner of the animal is responsible for the animal's behavior. This means the animal must be secured by a leash, cord, chain, or similar direct physical control by the owner. An animal may not be tethered to a stationary fixture or tree or left unattended on campus.

Cleaning up after an animal is the sole responsibility of the owner. The owner is responsible for carrying equipment sufficient to clean up the animal's feces whenever the animal is on campus, and for properly disposing of waste and/or litter in appropriate containers.

II. Violations and Removal

The university may remove and/or bar any animal or owner from university premises where any of the above responsibilities are not met, or where it determines that the animal's presence poses a threat to safety, sanitation, or the proper functioning of the institution or any facility.

If an owner fails to comply with a request from an authorized university official to remove the animal or leave the premises, he or she may be subject to arrest for trespass and/or banned from university property. If the individual is a student or university employee, other disciplinary action may be taken pursuant to applicable policies and procedures, including payment of any costs associated with violations of this policy.

The university also reserves complete discretion to take steps to resolve situations where animals are placed in unsafe situations on its campuses or property. Owners assume full responsibility for any associated costs. For example, the university may undertake reasonable efforts to remove an animal confined in a vehicle or location when there appears to be imminent danger to the animal, and is not liable for any associated repair or damage cost to the vehicle.

SPECIFIC RULES AND PROCEDURES

I. Service Animals

A. Essential Requirements

A service animal is a dog (or under certain ADA-specified circumstances, miniature horse) individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. The tasks performed must be directly related to the individual's disability.

Examples include but are not limited to assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are 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 individuals to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or a telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

The potential crime-deterrent effects of an animal's presence or the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship in themselves do not constitute work or tasks for purposes of this definition.

B. Inquiries Regarding Service Animals

In general, Mississippi State University will not inquire about the nature or extent of a person's disability but may make two inquiries to determine whether an animal qualifies as a service animal. Employees may ask:

- (1) If the animal is required because of a disability, and
- (2) What work or task the animal has been trained to perform.

MSU employees may not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal. Generally, MSU employees should not make any inquiries about a service animal when it is readily apparent that an animal is trained to do

work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, such as where the animal is observed guiding an individual who is blind.

The above limitations apply to most university employees in most circumstances, but do not prohibit appropriate university administrators from making further inquiries in connection with (1) a request for accommodation or other inquiry authorized under this policy, or (2) an investigation of whether an animal meets the definition of a service animal, where said investigation has received prior approval by the ADA Coordinator.

Specific questions related to the use of service animals on the Mississippi State University campus by visitors can be directed to the Director of the Disability Resource Center (DRC), (662) 325-3335.

C. Responsibilities of Handlers

1. General Responsibilities

Handlers are responsible for any damage or injuries caused by their animals and must take appropriate precautions to prevent property damage or injury. The cost of care and arrangement for the well-being of a service animal are the sole responsibility of the handler at all times.

2. Students in University Housing

Students who plan to live in on-campus housing with a service animal are required to provide MSU Housing and Residence Life with current vaccination records showing that the animal is properly vaccinated. Additionally, while not required, providing advance notice of a service animal when applying for on-campus housing may allow more flexibility in meeting student's specific needs.

3. Employee Requests for Accommodation

University employees who plan to have a service animal accompany them while performing their job duties must follow the requirements found in MSU Operating Policy 60.123 for requesting and obtaining a reasonable accommodation for a disability. This requirement applies to any person engaged in work on behalf of the university, including graduate assistants and student employees.

Requests for accommodation are submitted to MSU Human Resources Management, which may require medical documentation of a covered disability and other appropriate information. An employee requesting such an accommodation also must provide documentation that the service animal has received all vaccinations required by applicable laws and/or regulations.

4. Student Service Animals

Students who wish to bring a service animal to campus, but do not plan for it to reside in on-campus housing or accompany them while engaged in university employment, are strongly encouraged but not required to contact the Disability Resource Center, especially if other accommodations are required.

The voluntary registration of a service animal with the DRC can assist in the communication with instructors or others of the need for the service animal. Voluntary registration of the service animal allows the student to obtain an MSU ID card for the animal.

5. Animal Control and Behavior

Service animals must be under the control of their handler and demonstrate appropriate behavior at all times. This includes but is not limited to the following requirements:

- The animal should be on a leash when this would not conflict with providing a needed service.
- The animal should respond to the handler's voice or hand commands at all times.
- To the extent possible, the animal should be unobtrusive to other individuals and the learning, living, and working environment. As a general rule, the animal should sit quietly when not performing tasks for the handler, should not bark or make noises except where necessary to perform a task for which it is trained, should not sniff individuals or their belongings, and should not block aisles or other passageways.
- It is recommended but not required that the animal wear some type of commonly recognized identification symbol, identifying the animal as a working animal but not disclosing disability.

6. Waste Cleanup

Cleaning up after the animal is the sole responsibility of the handler. If the handler is not able to clean up after the animal, they must hire or otherwise secure the services of someone to do so. The person cleaning up after the animal should abide by the following guidelines:

- Always carry equipment sufficient to clean up the animal's feces whenever the animal is on campus.
- Properly dispose of waste and/or litter in appropriate containers.
- Contact staff if arrangements are needed to assist with cleanup. Any cost incurred for doing so is the sole responsibility of the handler.

D. Removal of Service Animals

Service Animals may be ordered removed by the Mississippi State University for the following reasons:

1. *Out of Control Animal:* A handler may be directed to remove an animal where it does not comply with the control and behavior requirements of this policy and the handler cannot or will not promptly bring it under control. If the improper behavior happens repeatedly, the handler may be prohibited from bringing the animal into any university facility until the handler can demonstrate that he or she has taken significant steps to mitigate the behavior.

2. *Non-housebroken Animal*: A handler may be directed to remove an animal that is not housebroken.

3. *Threat to Health or Safety*: A handler may be directed to remove an animal that the university determines to be a direct threat to the life, health, safety, or welfare of the university community. This may occur as a result of an aggressive animal, a very ill animal, a substantial lack of cleanliness, or the presence of an animal in a hazard environment as described in this policy.

Where a service animal is removed pursuant to this section, the university will confer at the handler's request to identify reasonable alternatives to permit participation in the program or activity without the service animal present.

E. Conflict Resolution

In some instances, the presence of a service animal may create a conflict with the needs of employees, students, or other community members. For example, certain persons may experience animal allergies severe enough to constitute a disability.

In such instances, the university may be required to modify policies or accommodations to protect the rights and legitimate interests of all affected parties. Such steps may include but are not limited to modifying residence, work, or class locations or times.

Conflicts regarding an animal in a university workplace may be directed to the appropriate supervisor. In cases where no voluntary, mutually agreeable resolution can be reached, such matters should be referred to MSU Human Resources Management. Conflicts regarding animals in classrooms or residence halls, or otherwise involving MSU students, should be directed to the MSU Disability Resource Center.

Where no mutually agreeable resolution can be immediately identified, the university will conduct an interactive process to identify appropriate alternatives. Resolutions pursuant to this process must receive final approval by the university's ADA Coordinator.

F. Hazard Environments and Restricted Areas

Certain spaces and environments may present unique hazards or other conditions justifying the exclusion of service animals or restrictions on the conditions under which they may be included.

1. Hazard Environments

Examples of hazardous conditions that may justify exclusion of service animals from a given area may include but are not limited to:

- Chemical hazards that may cause harm during standard use or in the event of an accident or spill.
- Biological materials that may be directly hazardous to the service animal or present a risk of environmental spread by means of the service animal.
- Risk of exposure or contamination with radioactive materials.
- Laser radiation exposure or related hazards.

- Broken glass or dropped glassware.
- High noise environments that require the use of hearing protection.
- Moving equipment or pinch points that can injure the service animal.

2. Restricted Areas

In addition to hazard environments, service animals may also be excluded from locations where their presence would conflict with a core function of the facility. These may include but are not limited to:

- Animal containment laboratories or veterinary clinical settings where the service animal may adversely interact with research or client-owned animals.
- Limited-access areas that employ greater than general infection control measures and/or patient units, for human or animal patients, or where a patient is immunosuppressed or in isolation.
- Environments in which the results of research, including but not limited biological specimens research, might be compromised by the presence of the service animal.

3. Risk Assessments

Where any disagreement arises as to whether a facility or environment warrants a prohibition or limitation on service animals, the matter should be referred to the ADA Coordinator. Where appropriate, the Coordinator in conjunction with MSU Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) and the Disability Resource Center (DRC) may conduct a risk assessment of the facility and/or of the particular risks the animal may present.

After review, the Coordinator will make a final determination whether an animal may be permitted in the facility or environment, and if so, what restrictions or mitigation measures if any may apply. These may include but are not limited to requiring proof of vaccination, limiting access to certain portions of a facility, or requiring the handler to provide protective equipment for the animal.

In all cases, if an animal is permitted into such a facility, the handler, not the university, accepts full responsibility for the service animal's care and supervision. Additionally, all hazard mitigation efforts identified by the ADA Coordinator must be strictly adhered to. Notably, requirements that personnel to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) will normally also extend to the service animal.

G. Service Animals in Training

The university adheres to applicable state and federal laws concerning service animals in training. Service animal trainers, while accompanied by service animals in training, shall have the same rights of access to university facilities open to the general public as other persons who are not so accompanied.

For purposes of this policy, a "service animal trainer" refers to a professional trainer or a person serving as a volunteer with a professional trainer. A "service animal in training" (SAIT) refers to

an animal presently being trained to work as a service animal, as that term is defined under this policy. Training refers to training to perform a specific task related to a disability, not the basic control and behavior requirements outlined in this policy, which must be met at all times the animal is on campus.

The university requires that all service animals in training be registered with the Disability Resource Center before entering any university space not open to animals generally, including buildings, classrooms, and similar spaces. As part of this registration, the university may require, among other things, documentation of the trainer's professional status or affiliation with a professional trainer.

If a service animal in training is approved, the university will issue an MSU ID card for the animal, which the trainer must keep on hand whenever accompanied by the animal and may present in response to questions about the animal's presence.

Restrictions on access to hazardous environments and restricted areas under this policy apply to service animals in training. Unlike trained service animals, service animals in training are not permitted in MSU spaces not open to the general public. This means, among other things, that they may not accompany trainers into residence facilities and may not accompany university employees while performing their job duties, regardless of location. In extraordinary circumstances, case-specific exceptions to these limitations may be approved by the university's ADA Coordinator.

II. Emotional Support Animals in Housing and Residence Life

Emotional support animals (ESAs) will be permitted to access university residence halls and other housing facilities where certain conditions are met. Unlike support animals, an ESA's access is limited to the building in which its owner resides.

A. Procedure

Before an ESA will be permitted in university housing, a written request must be submitted to the university's Disability Resource Center (DRC). The requesting party must:

- Complete an Emotional Support Animal Request Form provided by DRC.
- Submit medical documentation from a licensed medical or psychotherapy professional supporting the need for the ESA.
- Complete the online housing application form and execute a housing contract with MSU Housing & Residence Life.

The university reserves the right to require information establishing that the medical or psychotherapy professional submitting documentation has personal knowledge of the requesting individual's condition sufficient to allow them to determine the need for an ESA. Medical documentation obtained solely via online consultation or questionnaires is not sufficient to establish the need for an ESA under this policy. General conclusions about a type of condition but not specific to the individual are likewise insufficient.

If the request for an ESA is made fewer than 60 days before the individual intends to move into

university housing, MSU cannot guarantee that it will be able to meet the individual's ESA accommodation needs during the first semester or term of occupancy.

If the need for the ESA accommodation arises when an individual already resides in university housing, he or she should submit the accommodation request as soon as possible. MSU cannot guarantee that it will be able to meet the ESA accommodation needs during the semester or term in which the request is received.

B. Criteria

The requested ESA must be necessary to afford the owner an equal opportunity to use the residence and there must be an identifiable relationship between the resident's disability and the assistance the animal provides.

Generally, ESAs are common household pets, meaning a domesticated animal, such as a dog, cat, bird, rabbit, rodent, fish or turtle, that is traditionally kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes. Common household pets do not include reptiles (except turtles). An animal prohibited by state or local laws will not be permitted as an ESA.

As a condition of approval, any emotional support animal in Mississippi State University Housing and Residence Life facilities must meet HUD requirements for animal health and behavior as well as the requirements of the owner's University Housing & Dining Contract. Animals requiring vaccinations must be fully vaccinated before being permitted in university housing.

A request for an ESA may be denied or revoked if it presents an undue financial or administrative burden on the university, poses a direct threat to the life, health, safety, or welfare of the university community or constitutes a fundamental alteration of the nature of the service or program. Factors that may result in temporary or permanent exclusion of an animal include but are not limited to:

- Space needed for the cage/crate in which the animal will be housed is too large for available assigned housing space.
- The animal is unruly, disruptive, out of control, or otherwise violates others' rights to peaceful and quiet enjoyment.
- The animal is not housebroken or unable to live with others in a sanitary manner.
- The animal poses health risks from zoonotic diseases or safety concerns regarding containment that cannot be sufficiently mitigated for inclusion in the communal living setting.
- The animal's vaccinations are not up to date.
- The animal poses or has posed a direct threat, such as through aggressive behavior or injuring others. If the animal is responsible for a single occurrence of a bite or similar injury to a person or animal, it will be removed from campus.
- The animal causes/has caused excessive damage beyond what would be considered normal wear and tear in university housing.
- The animal has been improperly cared for or treated by its owner to an extent that raises concerns for its welfare.

- The animal is too young to be successfully integrated into the communal housing setting that includes ongoing noise and distractions, and long periods of time being alone while caged/crated.
- The animal is in ill health or habitually unclean.

III. Therapy Animals on Campus

A therapy animal is an animal that, while not currently engaged as a service animal or ESA for a particular individual, has been approved under this policy to provide emotional support or other therapeutic assistance at specified, limited times within a particular university department or facility. For example, a department may seek to permit a therapy dog to be present in a particular area at a specified time for students to relieve stress related to academic or other activities.

While there is no right to bring a therapy animal into university facilities, the university may permit their presence for good cause upon written request. Requests to permit a therapy animal should be made in writing to the university's ADA Coordinator, and must include approval by the appropriate department head. Final approval by the ADA Coordinator must be obtained before bringing the animal into any university facility.

Factors considered in evaluating a request for a therapy animal may include but are not limited to:

- The training or other unique characteristics of the animal relating to its therapeutic value.
- The training or expertise of any handler or trainer of the animal.
- The location, time, and duration of the animal's presence.
- The compatibility of the animal with the space.
- Other factors such as safety, disruption, or health issues that might warrant exclusion.

Additionally, requests to bring a therapy animal into certain university facilities may require the approval of Event Services or other units with authority to schedule the use of said facilities. Requesting departments are strongly encouraged to submit all relevant requests for approval to the ADA Coordinator as far in advance as is practical to allow for timely review.

POLICY VIOLATIONS

Where a violation of this policy appears to be unintentional or based on a good faith misunderstanding, the university normally will attempt to resolve the matter without resort to formal disciplinary action. However, in circumstances where violations are repeated or intentional, or other circumstances warrant, the university reserves the right to take formal disciplinary action.

Where an alleged violation of this policy involves misconduct by a student, it will be resolved by the Dean of Students Office via the processes in the Code of Student Conduct (OP 91.100). Where it involves alleged misconduct by an employee, determinations concerning disciplinary and/or employment actions will be made by appropriate supervisory personnel pursuant to applicable university policies, after consultation with MSU Human Resources Management.

Where an accused party is neither a student nor an employee, the university may take appropriate steps to enforce these policies, including without limitation barring the accused party and/or any animal from its campuses or any specific portion thereof.

APPEALS AND GRIEVANCES

If a student or guest to the university is dissatisfied by a decision concerning a service animal or emotional support animal and wishes to file an appeal, the student or guest may submit a written appeal to the Director of the Disability Resource Center. If a staff or faculty member wishes to file an appeal, they should submit a written appeal to the Chief Human Resources Officer. In cases of discipline under the Code of Student Conduct, appeals will follow the normal procedures under that policy.

In any case except for student disciplinary matters, where a mutually acceptable outcome is not reached after the initial appeal, any party may submit an appeal in writing to the ADA Coordinator, who will review the matter and issue a final determination, which is not subject to further appeal.

If a student, staff, faculty, or guest to the university feels he or she has suffered discrimination or harassment based on his or her disability, he or she may contact the university's Director of Civil Rights Compliance at 662-325-5839 and/or file a grievance under the University's Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy (OP 03.03).

REVIEW

The Vice President for Student Affairs is responsible for the review of this operating policy every four years or as needed.

REVIEWED BY:

<u>/s/ Regina Hyatt</u>	<u>1/9/2026</u>
Vice President, Student Affairs	Date

<u>/s/ Tracey N. Baham</u>	<u>1/9/2026</u>
Associate Vice President, Institutional Strategy & Effectiveness	Date

<u>/s/ Joan Lucas</u>	<u>1/12/2026</u>
General Counsel	Date

APPROVED BY:

<u>/s/ Mark E. Keenum</u>	<u>1/30/2026</u>
President	Date