



Approving University Officials: Provost; Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; Vice President for Operations and Chief Operating Officer

Responsible Office: Human Resources; Student Affairs; Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

Effective Date: July 1, 2026

Next Review Date: July 1, 2027

Service, Assistance, and Other Animals at Northwestern Policy

Policy Statement

This policy addresses Northwestern's requirements and guidelines regarding the use of service, assistance, and other animals.

Purpose

Northwestern is committed to fostering an inclusive environment for all members of its community, including individuals with disabilities who require service or assistance animals. In order to better support individuals with disabilities and promote adherence to laws requiring accommodations for individuals with disabilities, including the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") and Illinois law, this policy provides guidance concerning the appropriate use of and protocols associated with service, assistance, and other animals on campus.

Audience

All members of the University community, including faculty, students, staff, and visitors.

Definitions

AccessibleNU ("ANU"): An office within the Division of Student Affairs that provides academic and Residential Services housing and dining accommodations to students with disabilities.

Accommodation: A modification or adjustment to a program, service, job, or application process that makes it possible for the following to enjoy equal opportunities: (1) individuals with disabilities; (2) individuals with pregnancy or related conditions; and (3) individuals observing sincerely held religious beliefs.

Assistance Animal: Animals that provide emotional support or comfort that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. Because assistance animals have not been trained to perform a specific job or task, they do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. Unlike a service animal, an assistance animal does not assist a person with a disability with activities of daily living, nor does it accompany a person with a disability at all times. Assistance animals are sometimes referred to as "comfort animals" or "emotional support animals." While dogs are the most common assistance animals, other animals may also serve as assistance animals.

Disability: A documented physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a record of such an impairment.

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance ("OCR"): An office that among other functions serves as a University-wide resource on disability- and accessibility-related information, procedures and services for the University community. This office oversees disability accommodations for employees, student employees, and third parties; pregnancy accommodations for employees, student employees and students; and religious accommodations for employees.

Owners: Faculty, staff, students, or visitors who (1) use a service animal to perform work or tasks; (2) use an approved assistance animal for emotional support or comfort; or (3) otherwise bring an animal on campus. (See Section VIII and Appendix A for Owner's Responsibilities.)

Pets: An animal that is kept for ordinary use and companionship. A pet is not considered a service or assistance animal.

Public Areas: All areas of Northwestern where students, members of the public, recipients of services, or participants in the University's programs or activities are generally allowed to go.

Service Animals: For purposes of this policy, service animals will be referred to as "service dogs" or "service animals." Service animals are dogs that are individually trained or being trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other disability. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service dogs are working dogs, not pets. The work or task a service dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Service dogs are not assistance animals. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service dogs.

In some cases under the ADA, a miniature horse that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities may be permitted as a service animal. (See Section II of this policy). Other animals, whether wild or domestic, do not qualify as service animals.

Trainer: An individual who is working with a service animal to develop the animal's ability to perform specific tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. The trainer may be either the individual with the disability or a different individual.

Policy Implementation

I. Service Animals in Public Areas of the University

- A. Except as set forth in Section I(E) below, service dogs must be permitted to accompany people with disabilities or their trainers in all public areas of the University. For an individual to qualify to have a service dog on campus (1) the individual must have a disability as defined by the ADA, or be the trainer of a service dog, and (2) the service dog must be trained, or in training, to do specific tasks for an individual that are related to the individual's disability.
 - a. The obligations listed in Sections VIII. X and Appendix A in this policy also apply to trainers.
- B. University employees cannot ask about the nature or extent of a person's disability to determine whether a person's dog qualifies as a service dog. When it is not obvious what service the dog provides, University employees may make only two inquiries to determine whether the dog qualifies as a service dog, which are:
 - a. Is the dog required because of a disability?
 - b. What work or task has the dog been trained, or is the dog in training, to perform?
- C. University employees cannot require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task. Service animals are not required to wear a vest, ID tag, or specific harness.
- D. A service dog must be housebroken and must be kept under control by a harness, leash, or other tether, unless these devices interfere with the service dog's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. In cases where a harness, leash, or other tether cannot be used, the owner or trainer must maintain control of the service dog at all times.
- E. Although service dogs are generally allowed in public areas of the University, it may be appropriate, in limited instances, to exclude a service dog from certain areas of the University where the dog's presence may cause a fundamental alteration to the nature of the service or program provided in the area. The University will decide, on a case-by-case basis, which areas of the University fall into this limited exception. Some examples of areas where service dogs may be excluded include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Sterile rooms (e.g., certain research laboratories);
 - b. Areas where food is prepared (although service dogs cannot generally be excluded from dining areas where food is present nor can they be excluded from communal food preparation areas, such as are commonly found in residence halls);
 - c. Areas where the use of a service dog may compromise the integrity of certain research;
 - d. Areas with research/demonstration animals.
- F. The determination of whether service dogs may be excluded from a public area of campus must be made in collaboration with ANU and OCR. Upon receiving such a request, the appropriate University representatives will analyze the circumstances surrounding the request and evidence pertaining to the request, and make an individualized determination regarding whether service dogs should be excluded in the area.
- G. Individuals with disabilities who require a service dog will not be denied access when another individual on the premises is allergic to dogs. In such instances, both parties should consult with the OCR or ANU to determine if both parties can be accommodated. (See Section VII of this policy.)
- H. A person with a disability or trainer may be asked to remove a service dog from the premises if (1) the dog is out of control or aggressive and the owner or trainer does not take effective action to control it; (2) the dog is not housebroken; (3) the dog is physically ill; (4) the dog attempts to enter a place on campus where the presence of an animal causes danger to the safety of the owner and/or members of the University community; (5) the dog attempts to enter any place on campus where the dog's safety is compromised; (6) the dog attempts to enter any place on campus where

service and assistance animals are prohibited. (See Section I(E) of this policy.) If a member of the University community requests that a person with a disability or trainer remove their service dog, the requestor must notify OCR or ANU immediately.

- I. Students who require the use of a service dog on campus are strongly encouraged to contact ANU to determine what assistance is available. Information provided to ANU will assist the student in navigating academic and residential hall communications about the presence of the service animal (if desired), and assisting with any related accommodation needs.
- J. Employees who require the use of a service dog on campus are strongly encouraged to contact OCR. OCR will assist the employee in navigating the workplace, communicating with colleagues about the presence of the service animal (if desired), and assisting with any related accommodation needs.
- K. In limited circumstances miniature horses may qualify as service animals under the law. The University will consider requests for the use of miniature horses by people with disabilities or trainers on a case-by-case basis. Requests by employees should be directed to OCR and requests by students should be directed to ANU. In each case, University officials will consider (1) whether the miniature horse is housebroken; (2) whether the miniature horse is under the owner or trainer's control; (3) whether the facility can accommodate the miniature horse's type, size, and weight; and (4) whether the miniature horse's presence will compromise legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operation of the facility.
- L. Individuals qualified to train dogs or miniature horses to aid and guide persons with disabilities are afforded the same rights as those individuals who require the assistance of a service animal. Any individual who is training a dog or miniature horse to aid and guide persons with disabilities is strongly encouraged to contact ANU or OCR and must comply with the requirements set forth in this policy.

II. Assistance Animals in Public Areas of the University

- A. Assistance animals are generally not permitted inside public areas of the University.
- B. If permitted as an accommodation by ANU or OCR, assistance animals and their owners are subject to the same requirements and restrictions described in this policy that are applicable to service and other animals, in particular, Sections I(E), VIII, X, and Appendix A. Guidelines regarding service and assistance animals in residence halls are provided below.

III. Service Dogs in Residence Halls

- A. Students planning to bring their service dog to reside in a Residential Services residence hall are encouraged to follow the steps below:
 - a. Notify ANU by completing the online application form through [ANU's website](#). For assistance with the online form or other questions, students should contact ANU at accessiblenu@northwestern.edu or 847-467-5530.
- B. Notification of service dogs in residential halls do not require documentation of disability. Rather students are asked to confirm that the service dog is required because of a disability and provide information regarding the work or task that the dog has been, or is being, trained to perform.
- C. Upon notification of a service dog in a residence hall, ANU will inform the Residential Services staff about the presence of the service dog. Roommates will be informed that a service animal will be living in the shared space and will be asked to sign a roommate acknowledgement and a student housing service animal agreement. If a roommate has concerns about sharing the space, a

room change may be considered—either for the service animal owner or the objecting roommate(s)—with the agreement of the service animal owner.

- D. Service dogs in residence halls may travel freely with their owner or trainer throughout University residence halls and public areas of the University. (See Section I of this policy regarding service dogs in public areas of the University.)
- E. Miniature horses: The University will consider requests for miniature horses by individuals with disabilities or trainers to live in residence halls on a case-by-case basis.

IV. Assistance Animals in Residence Halls

- A. Students with disabilities may request the use of an assistance animal in their residential hall as part of ANU's accommodation process. For more information regarding how to request an accommodation, please review the [ANU website](#).
- B. Upon approval of an assistance animal in a residence hall, ANU will notify Residential Services staff. Roommates will be informed that an assistance animal will be living in the shared space and will be asked to sign a roommate acknowledgement and a student housing assistance animal agreement. If a roommate has concerns about sharing the space, a room change may be considered—either for the assistance animal owner or the objecting roommate(s)—with the agreement of the assistance animal owner.
- C. Approval for an assistance animal in a student's residence hall room is limited to that specific living space. It does not extend to other areas of campus or public spaces within the residence hall. All other buildings and indoor areas of campus—including public areas of the residence hall—are not accessible to assistance animals unless prior authorization has been granted by the Room & Board Accommodation Committee. This includes any location beyond the student's assigned room and the necessary pathways for entering and exiting that space.

V. Service and Assistance Animals for Faculty and Staff

- A. Faculty and staff are strongly encouraged to notify OCR before bringing a service animal to work.
- B. Faculty or staff members with disabilities may request the use of an assistance animal as part of the University's reasonable accommodation process. For more information regarding how to request an accommodation, please review the [OCR accommodations website](#).

VI. Other Animals

- A. Because of their potential to disrupt research, and because others on campus may be allergic to or disrupted by them, pets are generally not permitted in any campus buildings, including offices, classrooms, public areas, and housing.
- B. When brought to outdoor areas on campus or otherwise, pets and their owners are subject to the same requirements and restrictions described in this policy that are applicable to service and assistance animals, in particular, Sections I(E), VIII, X, and Appendix A.

VII. Conflicting Health Conditions

- A. Students with medical condition(s) that are affected by animals (e.g., respiratory conditions, asthma, severe allergies, etc.) are asked to contact ANU if they have a health or safety-related concern about exposure to a service or assistance animal.
- B. Employees with medical condition(s) that are affected by animals are asked to contact OCR if they have a health or safety-related concern about exposure to a service or assistance animal.
- C. In such instances, the University will reasonably accommodate individuals with medical conditions that require accommodation when living and/or working in proximity to service or assistance animals.
- D. For more information on the reasonable accommodation process for students, please visit <http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/>. For more information regarding the reasonable accommodation process for employees, please visit the OCR accommodations website.

VIII. Owner's Responsibilities

- A. Northwestern is not responsible for the care, training, or supervision of service, assistance, or other animals. Owners or trainers are responsible for the cost, care, and supervision of service, assistance, or other animals, including compliance with any laws pertaining to:
 - a. animal licensing, vaccination, and owner identification;
 - b. keeping the animal under control and taking effective action if the animal is out of control; and
 - c. properly caring for the animal, and disposing of its waste.
- B. Specific responsibilities pertaining to owners or trainers of service, assistance, and other animals are detailed in Appendix A.

IX. Requirements for All Members of the University Community

- A. All members of the University community are expected to adhere to the following guidelines with regard to service and assistance animals:
 - a. Service animals must be allowed to accompany their owners or trainers at all times and in all public places on campus, except where service animals are specifically prohibited.
 - b. Individuals should not touch or pet a service or assistance animal without permission by the owner or trainer.
 - c. Individuals should not give treats or otherwise feed a service or assistance animal without permission by the owner or trainer.
 - d. Individuals must not attempt to separate the owner or trainer from the service or assistance animal.
 - e. Harassing or deliberately startling a service or assistance animal is strictly prohibited.
 - f. Individuals should avoid initiating conversations about the student or employee's disability. The nature of a person's disability is a private matter.

X. Removal of a Service, Assistance, or Other Animal

- A. The University may exclude or remove a service, assistance, or other animal when:
 - a. The animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others;
 - b. The animal is not housebroken;
 - c. The animal is physically ill;

- d. The animal attempts to enter a place on campus where the presence of a service, assistance, or other animal is prohibited;
- e. The animal attempts to enter any place on campus where the animal's safety is compromised;
- f. The owner or trainer does not comply with the responsibilities detailed in Section VIII and Appendix A of this policy.

Consequences of Violating this Policy

Failures to follow the terms set forth in this Policy will be referred to the appropriate office for corrective action.

Related Information

[City of Evanston Code of Ordinances, Title 9, Chapter 4](#)

[Municipal Code of Chicago, Title 7, Chapter 7-12](#)

Contacts

The following office can address questions regarding this Policy:

Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance

Phone: 847-467-6165

Email: accommodations@northwestern.edu

History

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Policy URL:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/civil-rights-office/policies-procedures/policies/service-assistance-and-other-animals-at-northwestern-policy.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A – Responsibilities of Service, Assistance, and Other Animal Owners and Trainers

- A. Northwestern is not responsible for the care or supervision of service or assistance animals. Owners and trainers of service, assistance and other animals are responsible for the cost, care, and supervision of service, assistance, or other animals, including compliance with any laws pertaining to:
- a. animal licensing, vaccination, and owner identification;
 - b. keeping the animal under control and taking effective action if the animal is out of control; and
 - c. properly caring for the animal, and disposing of its waste.
- B. Responsibilities pertaining to service or assistance animals on University property are detailed below.
- a. Control: Owner or trainer must be in full control of the animal at all times.
 - b. Waste: Owner or trainer is responsible for ensuring the cleanup of the animal's waste.
 - c. Vaccination: In accordance with local ordinances and regulations the animal must be immunized against diseases common to that type of animal. Dogs must have current vaccination against rabies and wear a rabies vaccination tag. Cats should have the normal shots required for a healthy animal.
 - d. Health: Animals must have an annual clean bill of health from a licensed veterinarian. Documentation can be a vaccination certificate for the animal or a veterinarian's statement regarding the animal's health. The University has authority to direct that the animal receive veterinary attention.
 - e. Licensing: For assistance animals, the University reserves the right to request documentation showing that the animal has been licensed by the City in which it resides.
 - f. Leash: If appropriate, the animal must be on a leash unless the leash would inhibit the animal's ability to be of service.
 - g. Residential Halls: Prior to the date that the approved animal is moved into the residence, the Owner must agree to the Student Housing, Service & Assistance Animal Agreement and review and acknowledge receipt of the Service, Assistance, and Other Animals at Northwestern Policy.
 - h. Other Conditions: For assistance animals, the University may place other reasonable conditions or restrictions on the animals depending on the nature and characteristics of the animal.