

Policy Number	608.006
Policy Title	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING
Responsible Officers	Academic Success Center Director
Responsible Offices	Academic Success Center
Summary	Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) may reside with the individual on campus if the animal is necessary for the individual to have the full benefit, enjoyment, and use of the residential facility.
Definitions	- Emotional Support Animal (ESA): ESAs are those animals whose presence ameliorates the effects of a mental health disability. Unlike service animals, which are trained to perform specific tasks important to the independence or safety of their disabled handler, ESAs are generally not trained to perform disability-specific tasks. Their therapeutic support is a function of their presence and interaction with the person with a disability. ESAs are not pets. - Approved ESA: Approved ESAs are animals that have ASC approval to live within the owner's privately assigned individual living accommodations (e.g., room, apartment). - Owner: The owner is a resident individual who has an approved ESA in university housing under this policy. - University Housing: Any housing facility owned or operated by the university, whether leased or owned. - Disability: The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. (Source: https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada). Under the ADA, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person with a disability.
Approving Body	Academic Council, Administrative Council
Approval Date	08.04.2016 608.000 – Aca C & Admin C by E-vote (02.23.2018) 608.001 – Aca C (08.10.2018); Admin C (08.17.2018) 608.002 – Aca C (05.21.2021); Admin C (05.28.2021) 608.003 – Aca C (06.12.2023); Admin C (05.31.2023) 608.004 – Aca C (11.08.2024); Admin C (11.06.2024) 608.005 – Aca C (12.05.2025); Admin C (11.19.2025) 608.006 – Aca C (10.12.2026); Admin C (09.21.2026)
Last Revision	02.08.2018; 05.08.2018; 08.2018; 05.2021; 05.2023; 10.2024; 11.2025; 09.2026
Re-evaluation Date	Fall 2030
Departmental Impact	Residence Life, Security, Physical Plant, University Housing, Student Life

Failure to follow the following policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment.

General standards

Animals are not permitted at Columbia International University (CIU), except for:

- Service animals
- Approved Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) in university housing
- Turtles in residence hall rooms only (in tanks of 5 gallons or less)
- Fish in residence hall rooms and Pine View Properties (in tanks of 5 gallons or less)

This policy outlines the requirements for approved ESAs in university housing and does not apply to service animals, which are governed by the CIU Service Animal Policy.

While animals are generally prohibited in university housing, CIU will consider requests for ESAs as a reasonable accommodation for residents with documented mental health disabilities, in accordance with the Fair Housing Act (FHA).

No ESA may be brought into university housing until written approval has been granted. Any unapproved animal found in university housing must be removed immediately. Failure to comply with this requirement will be considered a violation of the Housing Policy and may result in fines of up to \$100 per day.

Requesting an ESA

Residents seeking an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) in university housing must submit a request to the Academic Success Center (ASC) at academicsuccess@ciu.edu and provide documentation from a qualified professional verifying a mental health disability and the need for the ESA. Online ESA certifications alone are not sufficient.

ESA approval is a two-step process: (1) determining whether the resident qualifies for the accommodation and (2) approving a specific animal. Dogs and cats are the most commonly approved ESAs, though other domesticated animals may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Requests are reviewed by the ASC Resource Team, which may require additional documentation. Residents should submit requests as early as possible, preferably at least 60 days before moving into university housing. Requests may be submitted at any time, but CIU cannot guarantee accommodations can be implemented during the current semester if submitted shortly before or after move-in. An animal may not be brought into university housing until approval is granted.

Approved ESAs are permitted only in assigned university housing unless separate authorization is obtained through the ASC. ESAs are not permitted in classrooms, academic buildings, dining facilities, libraries, athletic facilities, laboratories, or other campus locations.

The university may deny or restrict an ESA if it:

- Cannot be reasonably accommodated within the assigned housing space due to size of crate/cage
- Creates a health or safety risk, including zoonotic diseases
- Causes significant disruption, odors, or noise
- Is not housebroken
- Cannot be appropriately controlled and/or escapes from containment
- Has incomplete vaccinations
- Has a history of aggressive behavior
- Causes damage beyond normal wear and tear

- Creates a significant conflict for other residents, such as severe allergies/fears

If approved, relevant university departments, roommates, and affected residents may be notified as necessary. When conflicts arise, CIU will work with all parties to determine appropriate accommodations on a case-by-case basis. Residents whose requests are denied may appeal through the university's established process.

Owner Responsibilities

Residents who are approved to keep an ESA in university housing are solely responsible for the animal's care, behavior, and compliance with all applicable laws and university policies.

Owners must:

- Comply with all local, state, and licensing/vaccination requirements and provide documentation upon request.
- Ensure the ESA is properly cared for and not mistreated or neglected.
- Accept financial responsibility for damage, pest treatment, cleaning, or other costs caused by the animal beyond normal wear and tear.
- Cooperate with university personnel regarding animal care, sanitation, and designated relief areas.
- Ensure the ESA does not disrupt residents or interfere with the residential environment.
- Remove the ESA from campus whenever they are away overnight and keep the animal properly contained when unattended.
- Keep the ESA in a crate or cage when not present in the room. Animals and cages may not be cleaned in communal bathrooms.
- Notify the Academic Success Center (ASC) if the ESA is no longer needed and obtain approval before replacing an ESA with another animal.
- Understand that university personnel are not responsible for the care, feeding, evacuation, loss, or safety of the animal during emergencies.
- Provide consent for the ASC to share limited ESA-related information with relevant university personnel, roommates, or neighbors as needed.
- Keep the ESA within their assigned residence except when taking it outside for relief or transporting it off campus.
- Agree to abide by all other residential policies. Reasonable accommodation that may constitute an exception to a policy that otherwise would prohibit having an animal does not constitute an exception to any other policy period

Additional requirements include:

- Generally, only one ESA is permitted per resident and per housing unit.
- Dogs must generally be at least 12 months old, cats at least 6 months old, and both should be spayed or neutered before residing in university housing.
- If an ESA is removed, the resident remains responsible for all housing obligations under their housing contract.
- The animal must be under the owner's control at all times.

Other Guidelines

- CIU does not charge a fee or surcharge for an approved ESA.
- The owner must provide an off-campus emergency contact who can assume responsibility for the ESA and remove it from campus within 6 hours if necessary. If the contact is unavailable, the animal may be boarded at the owner's expense.

Removal of an ESA

CIU may require the removal of an ESA if it:

- Poses a health or safety risk or causes significant property damage

- Is not housebroken
- Fundamentally alters a university program
- Creates a significant disruption to the campus community
- Or the owner does not comply with their responsibilities set forth in this policy.

Removal decisions will be based on the behavior of the specific animal, not assumptions or stereotypes.

Violations and Conduct

Providing false information, failing to follow university directives, or violating this policy may result in referral for disciplinary action. Residents with unauthorized animals are subject to fines authorized under their housing agreement and/or housing policy. Violations will be reviewed by Residence Life or Pine View management and may result in escalating fines, ESA removal, or additional disciplinary measures. Serious threats may result in immediate removal.

Documentation and Appeals

Documentation purchased online (e.g., certificates, registrations, or letters obtained solely through a fee-based website) is generally insufficient by itself to establish eligibility for an ESA accommodation. Documentation of disability should come from a source with direct personal knowledge of the individual based on a thorough clinical evaluation. A clinical evaluation for a mental health problem is a comprehensive process involving interviews, observation, standardized tests, and history review to understand symptoms and their impact, leading to a personalized treatment plan by assessing behavior, mood, thinking, medical history, and social factors. Such an evaluation can establish the need for the ESA and the nexus between the disability and the presence of the animal in housing.

Residents may appeal accommodation decisions through the university's established process ([CIU Policy 601](#)).

Policy Changes

CIU reserves the right to amend this policy as needed.



By my signature below, I verify that I have read, understand, and agree to abide by CIU's policy on Emotional Support Animals in University Housing if my request for an ESA is approved.

I give permission to the ASC to disclose information regarding the request for and presence of the ESA to individuals who may be impacted by the animal's presence, including, but not limited to, Residence Life personnel and potential and/or actual roommates and neighbors.

I understand this is an annual accommodation approval, and an annual renewal will be required as long as I have this ESA in my residence.

This contract will expire on _____.

- ***ESA Owner:*** Date _____ Printed name _____ Signature _____

- ***Emergency Contact*** (should reside within 3 hours of CIU and must not be a CIU campus resident):
Date _____ Printed name _____ Signature _____ Cell # _____

- ***Academic Success Director:*** Date _____ Printed name _____ Signature _____

- ***CIU Housing representative:***
Date _____ Printed name & title _____ Signature _____