

Hello Hilltopper!

I hope this message finds you well. As you know, in general students are not allowed to have pets (with the exception of fish) on campus as this is a direct violation of the Housing Policy. The only time a student would be permitted to have an animal with them is if that animal is a Service Dog or if the animal is an Assistance/Emotional Support Animal approved as an accommodation through the Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC).

If approved through the SARC, the Assistance Animal would be permitted to live with the student in whichever residence hall they reside and *generally* could be any type of animal. The owner/handler would be responsible for the care of the animal and ensuring it meets any state laws for care in addition to applicable Housing & Residence Life policies. Any animal currently on campus, without an accommodation (with the exception of Service Dogs), should be removed immediately.

If you currently have a dog that you feel would meet the definition of a Service Dog, please let the SARC know as soon as possible so that our staff can provide you with the best guidance.

In order to request accommodations for psychological impairments – including those for an Assistance/Emotional Support Animal – students must fill out and submit the SARC Request Form and **submit medical documentation from a licensed mental health professional (e.g. licensed counselor, licensed therapist, psychologist, licensed clinical social worker, or psychiatrist - not a primary care doctor)**. This documentation should be typed on letterhead and contain your diagnosis/impairment and the specific impact/severity of symptoms you experience. This information can also be provided by submitting a SARC Verification Form that includes all the above information. The provider will also need to explain why, in their professional opinion, it is medically necessary for you to have an Assistance/Emotional Support Animal and why other treatment methods, that you and your mental health professional have tried, have not been sufficient. Generally, getting an Assistance/Emotional Support Animal is often seen as a “last resort” between a client and their therapist. Please know that there is no official certification for the assistance or emotional support animal, despite online organizations saying they will “certify” the animal when the owner pays a fee. These are not legitimate organizations. The documentation needed must be about the person making the request and their related condition, not about the animal itself.

To ensure you are receiving legitimate service, please make sure that you have actually met with your counselor (in-person, by phone, or virtually) and worked through the therapeutic process (usually over several sessions), not just filled out an online questionnaire and paid a fee.

Documentation can be uploaded with the SARC Verification Form or emailed to the SARC at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Once the SARC registration and documentation is submitted, you may request to meet with a SARC staff member to discuss your experience in a living and learning environment, barriers to access you feel you encounter, and any accommodations for which you may qualify.

More information about the SARC Registration Process can be found at www.wku.edu/sarc. **Please feel free to contact the SARC office with any questions at (270) 745-5004 or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu.** We look forward to working with you!