

Make Your College Dog-Friendly

Tips for petitioning school administrators to consider a dog-friendly campus.

By Jill Richardson

Longing to bring your Pomeranian or Poodle to college, but think that's about as likely as a full ride to Harvard? Think again. Though only a handful of colleges in the United States admit dogs with their students, school administrators sometimes can be open to the idea if dog-loving co-eds are willing to do a little legwork.

For instance, Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, currently prohibits pets in dorms, but Director of Residence Life Molly Burrows Schumacher explains, "If our students were passionate about such a change and could provide documentation that would support it, we would provide that information to our administration. We'd encourage students to write a proposal outlining why this type of change would be beneficial to students as well as the animals."

When asked what would motivate them to change, school officials most often cited student demand and proof pets would contribute to student health more than detract from it. Christina Bell of Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa., says, "When we review, we look at requests, what other schools are permitting, and incidents with pets on campus to determine policy."

If you want to tackle such a proposal at your school, be ready to answer the following questions: Why would this change help everyone? What would the benefits be to both student and school? Have studies to back you up. How could the school handle objections such as noise, damage, allergies, liability, and responsibility? Have examples of policies that work elsewhere. See California Institute of Technology; Eckerd College; Stephens College. Where is the need? A swell of student demand gets attention. Prove that enough people want the change.

To begin, contact the director of housing and ask, "What do I need to do to get you to consider this?" At the same time, work among the students to incite interest, discover their concerns, and gather supportive signatures. Consider starting among the pre-vet population, the people most responsible for the pet policy at SUNY-Canton. Gather your ammunition — research to back up the therapeutic value of pets.

Finally, be professional and patient. It can go a long way with busy college administrators who make the final decision on whether you'll be able to take Buster with you next semester.

Jill Richardson has written for numerous magazines and published three books.