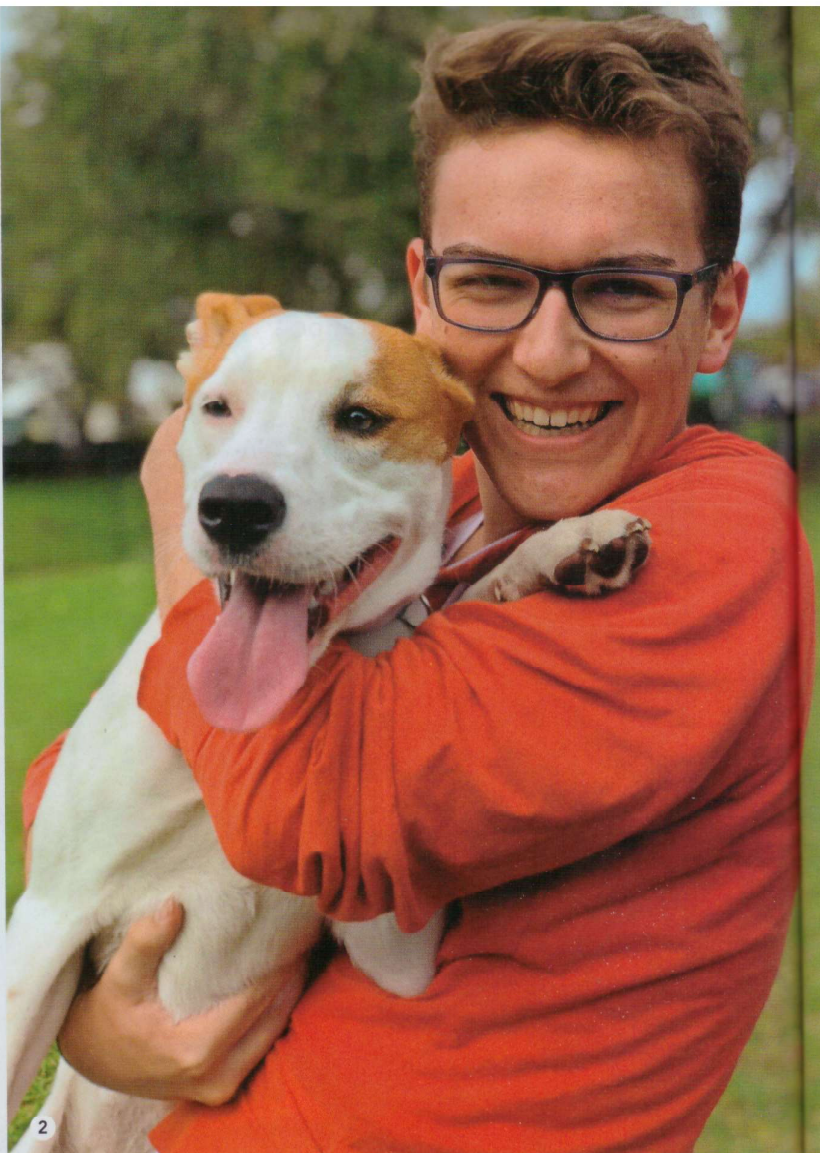


TRENDS

Animal House

More colleges are adopting pet-friendly policies

BY LISA A. BEACH



LISA PRESNAIL/PRESNAIL PHOTOGRAPHY; COLIN HILLIARD; JANINE EYERLY; JOSH GASSER



"I grew up as an only child in a very pet-friendly household. We've never not had a dog in the house," says 20-year-old Colin Hilliard, a junior at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Fla. "College was the first time that I'd been away from home ... so it was extremely challenging for me to adjust."

After his freshman year, while he was home in Gettysburg, Pa., Hilliard adopted a 2-month-old puppy named Luna. He took advantage of Eckerd's pet-friendly policy by bringing Luna to live with him on campus his sophomore year. "I'd always used my dog to ease my anxiety symptoms, so being without one was rough," he says. "Having my dog at college gives me the emotional stability I need to keep up with my busy schedule."

HEALTH BENEFITS

Recent studies show owning a pet can lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, decrease feelings of loneliness and increase fitness levels.

And a 2017 study, *Pets on Campus: Best Friend or Bad Decision?*, showed findings that mirror Hilliard's experience. The

study tracked 66 students — some with pets and others without — over the course of one semester. "There wasn't really a difference in the levels of stress and anxiety between pet-owning students and nonpet-owning students," explains the study's co-author, Miranda Goodman-Wilson, assistant professor of psychology at Eckerd. "But we found that, for students living with pets, even if reporting lots of stress, it wasn't translating into symptoms of anxiety." Goodman-Wilson says that pets help students better manage the physical symptoms of stress.

PAWS-ITIVE PERKS

Eckerd College was one of the first schools in the country to offer housing to students with pets. A private liberal arts college founded in 1958, Eckerd informally allowed fish and small pets for years. But in 1973, it officially sanctioned a pet policy to welcome larger animals such as cats and dogs, according to James Annarelli, Eckerd's vice president for student life and dean of students.

Since then, the pet-friendly culture has blossomed to include a spring >

1. Saki is 2018 Eckerd College graduate Kaitlyn Hamill's kitty

2. Eckerd College student Colin Hilliard with Luna

3. Lees-McRae College student Ellie Eyerly with her dog, Toby

4. Lees-McRae College assistant dean Josh Gaisser's dog, Jack, with students

5. Eckerd College graduate Paige Booth with her dog, Bodhi

6. Gaisser says students frequently visit his office to see Jack



PET PARTNERS

Here's a sampling of institutions that let you and your pets be roommates:

- ▶ Chapman University, Orange, Calif.
- ▶ Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- ▶ Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
- ▶ Reed College, Portland, Ore.
- ▶ Stephens College, Columbia, Md.
- ▶ Stetson University, DeLand, Fla.
- ▶ University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colo.
- ▶ Washington & Jefferson College, Washington, Pa.

graduation and a fall pet blessing. Annarelli estimates that 200 pets have "graduated" in a ceremony that coincides with their owners graduating from Eckerd. "It's heartwarming," notes Annarelli. "Some of the seniors buy diplomas for their (pet) graduates and make a cap and gown for them."

With a total student enrollment of 1,842 (as of spring 2018), Eckerd is home to 229 registered pets — more than half of them dogs and cats, says Robbyn Hopewell, a college spokesperson. Other campus critters include hamsters, lizards, hedgehogs, rabbits and ferrets.

Whether fur, feathers or scales, pets give students a connection to home.

"Before college, I wasn't all that social," admits 20-year-old Haley Sumner, a junior at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, N.C. "With that comes a fear of being alone in a place filled with people you've never met before." To fix that, Sumner brought along her 4-year-old cat, Princess. "It was important to me to have that piece of home come with me. My cat is more than just a pet. She's a friend that knows me without judgment. I couldn't imagine not coming home to her every day."

Speaking of friends, pets also provide a natural way to make new ones.

"Whenever I take Toby on a walk or to classes, people always stop to say 'hi,'" notes 19-year-old Ellie Eyerly, a freshman at Lees-McRae who lives on campus with her dog. "Because of this, I've been able to meet more people on campus."

Anne Wetmore, Eckerd's associate dean for student life, sees this firsthand every day.



Jack, Josh Gaisser's dog, is a hit with students.

"Having pets on campus is a great community builder and adds a dimension of warmth to an already-friendly campus," she says.

The pet-friendly perk extends beyond students at some colleges. Faculty and staff at Lees-McRae, for instance, can bring their own furry friends to campus.

"My own pet, Jack, is hanging out with me in the office right now," says Josh Gaisser, assistant dean of students for residence life. "I've found that students hang out in my office much more frequently when Jack is present. As a result, having pets on campus helps build greater connections not only between students, but between students and staff members as well."

A GROWING TREND

Eckerd College might have laid the foundation for what's now a small-but-growing trend. While a study of more than 1,000 schools and their pet policies found that just 4 percent allow pets, the number has been slowly inching upward. Anecdotal evidence shows just a handful of pet-friendly colleges existed a few decades ago. Now, there are more than three dozen.

Wetmore, who also sees a rise in emotional support animals on campus, says "other colleges are asking us how we do it."

They need only look to the colleges that already allow pets. Policies are fairly similar, designed with both safety and hygiene in mind to protect people, animals and property. Many colleges designate a specific floor or residence hall for students with pets, require them to register their pets with the housing office and perhaps pay a fee.

With so many positive outcomes — boosting mental and physical health, building community, helping students adjust — colleges considering pet-friendly policies might be barking up the right tree. ■

Doggone Helpful

In addition to allowing students to bring their dogs to school, colleges are finding ways to form a symbiotic relationship between people and animals. Here are two examples:

CAMPUS PUPPY RAISING PROGRAM

Susquehanna Service Dogs (SSD) in Grantville, Pa., raises, trains and places service dogs with children and adults with disabilities, helping them become more independent. The organization partners with nearby colleges such as Dickinson College and Penn State University in its Campus Puppy Raising Program.

Qualified students receive a puppy to raise for about 18 months, and are responsible for teaching good house manners, basic obedience skills and specific tasks identified by SSD trainers. Students help socialize the puppies and attend regular puppy classes. The program is a win-win relationship and helps students gain responsibility and boosts their time management and leadership skills.

To learn more, visit keystonehumanservices.org.



DOGS ON CAMPUS PET THERAPY PROGRAM

Back in 2004, Kathleen Adamle, professor emerita from Kent State University's College of Nursing, conducted a study on the relationship between dog and owner. The research took on a life of its own, morphing into the nonprofit **Dogs on Campus**, one of the country's first pet therapy programs that brings certified therapy dogs to stressed-out college students.

The dogs and their handlers go through rigorous training in order to be certified through the program's pet therapy team, explains Adamle. Then, the therapy dogs make regularly scheduled group visits to residence halls, as well as trips to the library, college departments, health centers and special events. The dogs are also on hand to help students with the stress of finals week.

"It's grown considerably

from helping students with stress before finals to helping with suicide awareness programs," notes Adamle. "We found that, because of the dogs' presence, the number of depression screenings tripled."

In the last 15 years, Adamle says the program's therapy dogs have visited more than 100,000 students, faculty and staff.

To learn more, visit dogsoncampus.org.