

Documentation Guidelines for Emotional Support Animals

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the University of your disability. Accommodations are provided in accordance with the ADA. When you register for services, **please upload a current psychological evaluation and/or any testing that was done, a letter from your psychiatrist, an IEP/504 and a copy of any accommodations on the SAT/ACT to determine a diagnosis that supports the functional impact of the disorder.**

Please provide your psychiatrist with the following documentation guidelines.

A patient of yours is enrolled at Georgia College & State University and has requested an emotional support animal due to a disability. The Student Disability Resource Center establishes academic and/or housing accommodations for students with a documented disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

The University System of Georgia Board of Regents (USGBOR) requires current and comprehensive documentation for any diagnosis of a disability in order for disability services providers to determine appropriate accommodations and services. Please see Appendices D-H of the USGBOR Academic and Student Affairs Handbook: https://www.usg.edu/academic_affairs_handbook/section3/C793/.

Taken from the Human-Animal Interactions in Counseling Interest Network's Position Statement on Emotional Support Animals:

"It is the recommendation of the HAIC that professional counselors do not engage in the practice of writing letters for their clients, unless the counselor has specialized training and experience in working with the human-animal bond in counseling such as would be outlined in the ACA AAT-C Competencies, due to the potential risks involved for clients, the public, the counselor, and the animal. The ACA Code of Ethics C.2.a Boundaries of Competence states that counselors only work within their boundaries of competence based on education, training, supervision, experience and credentials." ... "In the event that a counselor has an otherwise existing therapeutic relationship with a client and is still considering writing a letter recommending an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) for a client, the counselor must have a thorough knowledge of the local, state, and federal laws and policies surrounding ESAs and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes with the subject of therapeutic human-animal interactions before writing such a letter. The ACA's Code of Ethics Consultations on Ethical Obligations includes "taking reasonable steps with other counselors, the ACA Ethics and Professional Standards Department, or related professionals when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations or professional practice.""

Please write your supporting letter on letterhead, date the letter, sign it and address all of the following:

- The evaluator's name, title and license number
- Description of the counselor's training and experience in working with human-animal bond in counseling such as would be outlined in the ACA AAT-C Competencies for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)
- Primary and secondary diagnosis (if applicable) and date of diagnosis(es)
- DSM/ICD Code for each diagnosis
- A clear diagnostic statement that includes evidence of an existing impairment, history, current symptoms and severity of the disorder
- Provide the diagnostic criteria and methodology used to diagnose the condition/s
- Description of the expected progression or stability of the disorder
- Description of the current functional limitations impacting academic performance resulting from the disorder
- Description of how an emotional support animal is integral to a comprehensive ongoing treatment plan