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**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS ON CAMPUS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

by

Timothy Alexander Lauth

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education

at

Rowan University

April 23, 2020

Thesis Chair: Dr. Andrew Tinnin

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## Acknowledgments

A good life is not one devoid of struggle or conflict, it is one in which you are granted the mindfulness and mettle to overcome the path set before you. I would not be here today without the guiding hands of so many. I want to acknowledge and thank the kindness that lives within all of us, for at my most weary, my most vulnerable, I have encountered and been honored by the kindest souls. Thank you to everyone out in the world who has touched my life in some way, you likely do not know the gift you have given me.

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## **Abstract**

Timothy Alexander Lauth  
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS ON CAMPUS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE  
2019-2020  
Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D,  
Master of Arts in Higher Education

This is a study of student interactions and opinions regarding emotional support animals (ESAs) or service animals in on-campus residential housing. Specifically, this study was designed to garner the opinions of residential students who live in close proximity to an ESA or service animal but do not have one of their own, essentially the roommates of an approved animal owner. An online survey was distributed to students at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ during the 2019-2020 academic year. All participants were enrolled students who resided in on-campus housing in close proximity to an ESA or service animal.

The results of the study were mixed. The vast majority of participants reported having a positive interaction with an animal in their residence hall, but only about half of the group reported that an ESA was beneficial to their student experience. Having an allergy or fear of certain animals seemed to correlate to a more negative experience for students, but the margin was slim. Overwhelmingly, regardless of a negative or positive experience, 100% of participants reported that there should be some level of university approved animals in on-campus residence halls. This shows that despite individual negative experiences that they may have experienced, students feel that ESAs or service animals are important to those who need them.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Modern day service animals can be traced back to World War I but more relevantly, to a program called Hearing Dogs for Deaf People started in 1982 (Audrestch, Whelan, Grice, Asher, England, & Freeman, 2015). Service animals began only as dogs and with the express purpose of assisting individuals with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, or various psychiatric disorders (Audrestch et al., 2015). Emotional Support Animals (ESA), while acknowledged by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), are a very different classification than service animals (Service Animals, 2019). ESAs are intended to support individuals with mental or emotional health concerns such as anxiety or depression (Von Bergen, 2015). Recently the divide between the two has been coming to a head and animals on college campuses are at the forefront of the discussion.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Emotional support animals on college campuses are becoming more and more common (Von Bergen, 2015). Higher education administrators are grappling with how to best address policy and requests regarding ESAs but there are multiple facets to the issue. One concern is the perception of ESAs by administrators and other students. The prevalence of websites and services potentially providing fraudulent certifications for ESAs has helped cultivate the belief that there is a significant population of students abusing the accommodation system in order to have pets on campus (Salminen & Gregory, 2018). This can have a negative impact on students who truly benefit from the presence of an ESA (Salminen & Gregory, 2018).

An adjacent issue, administrators are struggling with a method of vetting requests for ESAs without risking legal backlash for disability discrimination. Campus counselors and administrators need to find a system of evaluating ESA requests using an unbiased method that does not overly beleaguer students who would genuinely benefit from having an ESA on campus. Some institutions are also struggling to address concerns from other students regarding allergies or fears of animals such as dogs or cats (Phillips, 2016). However, the Department of Justice ruled that being allergic or afraid of these animals is not enough of a reason to deny students with service animals access (Phillips, 2016). As previously noted, the line between service animals and ESAs does exist, although federal and state law can sometimes overlap or contradict one another regarding the rights of individuals with these animals (Salminen & Gregory, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the impact of emotional support animals (ESAs) on residential higher education students using a case study design. This study centers around the student experience of interacting with emotional support animals on campus. Research and policy regarding ESAs in particular have been a hot button issue over the last few years (Von Bergen, 2015). While research has been conducted regarding institutional responses to ESAs, there is a considerable lack of information pertaining to the interactions between students with ESAs and those without. This study seeks to delve into the student experience of living side by side with ESAs and better understand their interactions.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study will be limited to students attending Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ during the 2019-2020 academic year who have lived in an on-campus residence hall within the last two years. Two groups of students will be surveyed, those who have lived with an ESA and those who have not. The information will all be self-reported by students and is based upon their opinion of ESAs. The second survey group is limited by the number of students who fit the criteria of living with an ESA on Rowan's campus within the last two years.

## **Definition of Terms**

Residence Hall - Buildings on a college or university campus where students live in single or group rooms/suites.

Resident Assistant - A student housing employee who is tasked with building community and assisting to maintain a safe residential environment.

Psychological Disability – A broad term that encompasses mental or emotional conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and eating disorders (Psychological Disabilities, 2016).

Emotional Support Animal (ESA) – A companion animal that is intended to provide some benefit for a person disabled by a mental health condition or emotional disorder (Emotional Support Animal, 2019).

Service Animal - any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric,

intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not considered service animals (Service Animals, 2019).

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

What are the experiences of on-campus residential students living with an ESA?

Do students living with ESAs feel they are beneficial or detrimental to their experience?

How strict of a policy regarding ESAs do students want?

### **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II is a review of relevant literature from the last 20 years regarding ESAs and service animals. In particular, the review will focus on literature pertaining to on-campus housing and institutional administrators addressing ESAs and service animals. The review will also cover a brief history of assistance animals. The key distinctions between an ESA and a service animal will also be discussed.

Chapter III will cover the methodology and procedures used for this case study.

Chapter IV elaborates on the collective findings of the study.

Chapter V is a discussion of the findings and their relevance to the research questions.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

In this chapter, the current literature surrounding ESAs on college campuses will be summarized. Specifically, this chapter will review the differences between emotional support animals and service animals, including the various definitions set forth by the ADA. The scope of students with disabilities will be discussed as well as some of the current institutional infrastructure to support them. In recent years there have been a number of high profile lawsuits regarding accommodations on campus. These cases will be reviewed and broken down to explain their significance to this study. Lastly in this chapter, the distinction between the current general institutional responses will be compared to the student's responses to ESAs, or the lack thereof.

#### **Emotional Support vs Service**

In order to better understand the current literature surrounding the topic of animals on campus, it is imperative to understand the distinction between an emotional support animal and a service animal. Emotional support animals are also known as therapy pets, comfort animals, comfort pets, assistance animals, and various other iterations. The lack of a unified term leads to issues for policy makers as different terms can elicit different responses (Phillips, 2016). Conversely, service animals have been specifically defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act as, "...dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities" (Service Animals, 2019). The distinction between the two is causing strife between students petitioning to have an animal on campus and institutional administrators (Von Bergen,

2015). The ADA's succinct definition of a service animal also excludes a lot of the federal protections for ESAs.

The ADA is the prime federal source for definitions regarding disability resources, including animals. While the ADA does refer to assistance animals, instead of defining them, it defers the reader to the Fair Housing Act (FHA) for more information (Service Animals, 2019). The ADA also acknowledges that state laws may have broader definitions of service animals. This is a further complication of the issues surrounding ESAs as federal, state, local, or institutional policy's overlap, expand upon, or contradict one another (Phillips, 2016). This becomes difficult for students or administrators to try and navigate multiple definitions of an animal, not to mention the various laws or policies that may apply to them.

Most ESAs are usually dogs or cats, but accepted cases include a menagerie of creatures from reptiles to rodents (Von Bergen, 2015). The accepted definition for ESAs is much broader than service animals, but it generally speaks to the idea that the animal helps to alleviate psychological symptoms resulting from illnesses such as anxiety, depression, stress, or insomnia (Lee, 2014). Service animals are generally known for assisting individuals with physical disabilities whereas ESAs help with "invisible" disabilities. Some researchers have credited the idea that because emotional and psychological disorders are still not as universally accepted as physical disabilities, there is more speculation about the use and impact of ESAs (Adams, Sharkin, & Bottinelli, 2017). The question is raised of whether or not the issue lies with the animals themselves, or the lingering stigma regarding mental and emotional health.

## **Magnitude of Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting access to an ESA on campus is only one of the most recent iterations of disability services on campus. Thirty years ago there was not equal access for students with a disability, physical or psychological (Lee, 2014). Because of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the ability to make an environment less restrictive for people with disabilities became a requirement (Lee, 2014). Prior to the ADA there was legislation supporting K-12 students who required special services pertaining to their disabilities but there was little else at the federal level for adults (Lee, 2014). After the ADA was enacted, other federal and state legislation was passed including amendments to the ADA in order to fine tune its practical applications and clarify certain terminology.

The universal symbol for disability is a wheelchair, denoting physical disability. This symbolism is also representative of the changes that occurred as a result of the ADA. New ramps were constructed, elevators were installed, and accessible parking spaces were created across the nation (Von Bergen, 2015). The majority of the changes were tailored to people with physical disabilities. It makes sense anecdotally, if a person is blind, having braille on the signage inside a building will help them be able to locate rooms or other items easily. What the current struggle consists of, is people with emotional or mental disabilities seeking equitable accommodations in order to better suit their lives.

It is difficult to quantify exactly how many ESA requests have been submitted or approved but anecdotally researchers agree that the number is going up (Salminen &

Gregory, 2018). One could interpret this to mean that the number of students with a psychology disability has increased drastically in recent years. However, most researchers hypothesize that as mental health becomes more legitimized and broadly accepted, students feel more comfortable speaking out (Von Bergen, 2015). Despite there being more acceptance for disclosing these disabilities, there is still some resistance from people who either feel these disabilities are made up or are a ploy in order to have a pet live on campus. Others credit the rise in ESAs to a growing mental health crisis in America and that the issues pertaining to mental health are only going to grow (Kogan, Schaefer, Erdman, & Schoenfeld-Tacher, 2016).

### **Disability and Discrimination**

ESAs and even service animals have been highly scrutinized at colleges and universities. Administrators are questioning the value of allowing students to have an ESA vs the cost to the institution. This is a noticeable juxtaposition as ESAs are under close review by institutions that are also under fire for what is perceived to be lacking mental health support systems (Adams et al., 2017). Indeed, it has become a common practice for institutions to host pet therapy events with the intent of providing students with the opportunity to interact with approved therapy animals (Adams et al., 2017). With the value and positive impact of animals being shown by current literature and by current practices on campus, the question remains of why there is such strong resistance toward ESAs.

Based off of the current literature, there does not appear to be much of a conversation regarding the dollars and cents cost of allowing ESAs on campus. Indeed,



most of the available information is pertaining to whether or not ESAs should be allowed or ways in which to better screen ESA requests. Institutions seem to have the perception that once an animal has been allowed, the flood gates will open and they will be overrun with exotic pets (Polking, Cornelius-White, & Stout, 2017). Where this friction between university officials and students occurs, the question is raised of whether or not the denial of an ESA qualifies as discrimination against a student with a disability (Von Bergen, 2015). With the ADA, discrimination against individuals with a disability is a very serious offense.

Traditionally aged college students have a considerable stake in cases of institutional discrimination against mental or emotional disorders. In a study conducted with over 9000 respondents, results showed that 75% of pervasive mental disorders typically begin to cultivate and appear between the ages of 18 to 24 (Kessler et al., 2005). What this implies is that while traditionally aged students are struggling with the social and academic transition from high-school to college, they may also be experiencing the symptoms of a pervasive mental or emotional disorder for the first time (Von Bergen, 2015). Discrimination cases have grown in number after the ADA and the Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) (Von Bergen, 2015). Some students who are experiencing discrimination are not backing down as the fight continues to address the concerns of individuals with disabilities.

### **Legal Discourse**

There are a number of high-profile legal cases in recent years that are giving university administrators pause while considering policy surrounding ESAs. In 2012 was

the case *Velzen v. Grand Valley State University* (2012), where a student sought to gain approval to have her guinea pig live with her on campus. The student, Kendra Velzen, had been receiving treatment for her depression and stress-induced cardiac arrhythmia since 2007 (Lee, 2014). She was prescribed a pacemaker and an ESA in the form of her pet guinea pig, Blanca. Grand Valley State University (GSVU) originally denied her request to keep Blanca on campus. Velzen submitted a complaint along with the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (FHCWM) to the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and GSVU granted her a temporary exception for Blanca (Lee, 2014). Velzen and the FHCWM then sued GSVU on the grounds of violating multiple state and federal statutes such as the FHA and the Michigan Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act (*Velzen v. Grand Valley State University*, 2012). Ultimately, GSVU was found to have failed to reasonably accommodate Velzen's disability and the institution settled for \$40,000 and agreed to work with FHCWM to create new policies (Lee, 2014).

In *U.S. v. University of Nebraska at Kearney* (2013), a student at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), Brittany Hamilton, moved into an off-campus apartment that was owned by the institution (Salminen & Gregory, 2018). Her request to keep her dog, an approved ESA, was denied because of the building's no-pets policy. The U.S. Department of Justice sued the university, claiming that the institution was violation the FHA by denying Hamilton her ESA (*U.S. v. University of Nebraska at Kearney*, 2013). With a shocking defense, UNK claimed that due to the cyclical nature of students, the numbered rooms, and stricter policies enacted on campuses, that residence halls are more akin to jails and thus should not qualify as residences under the FHA (Salminen & Gregory, 2018). The court was unassuaged by UNK's defense and cited previous

precedence that ensured the qualification of residence halls and apartments as residences. UNK later was required to change its policies and submit regular compliance reports (Salminen & Gregory, 2018).

A third case pertaining to ESAs on campus was *U.S. v. Kent State University* (2014). Jacqueline Luke, a student at Kent State University (KSU) was approved by a psychologist at KSU's Health Services office to have an ESA to treat her severe anxiety and panic attacks. Luke applied for an accommodation to have a dog in her apartment owned by KSU and was denied. Luke procured the dog anyway and when discovered by university officials was given two days to remove the dog. She and her husband Brandon Luke, who was also a resident of the apartments, left the premises rather than abandon the animal. A complaint was filed with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission who in turn collaborated with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

As other institutions had before, KSU argued that its apartments were not residences under the FHA. The court disagreed and cited specifically that the apartments were at least in-part, federally funded and therefore under the protection of the FHA (*U.S. v. Kent State University*, 2015). Additionally, because the location in question was an apartment and not a traditional college dormitory, the argument that it did not qualify as a residence was quickly squelched. KSU settled and awarded the Luke's \$100,000. In addition, KSU agreed to review and update its housing policies to better accommodate ESA requests.

An interesting theme across these three cases is that in each instance the university would rather go to court and into a legal battle than broaden their policies

regarding ESAs. Institutional resistance toward allowing ESAs is somewhat puzzling as there is little empirical data regarding the negative impact of animals on campus and a plethora of research with positive results (Adams et al., 2017). Anecdotally some university officials fear the damages an ESA or service animal may incur in the residence halls or in class rooms but by providing a stricter agreement for ESA owners to have fiscal responsibility for damages caused by their animal, the problem could at least be alleviated (Phillips, 2016).. As shown in these cases, some institutions will go to great lengths, such as comparing their residence halls rooms to jail cells, to try and avoid policies set forth by the FHA (Salminen & Gregory, 2018). With some institutions digging in their heels, this study will seek to gain a better understanding of the student perspective of ESAs.

### **Institutional vs Student Response**

In the current climate, many institutions are hesitant to make a move to either affirm or deny ESAs. With the looming threat of legal backlash, institutions are allowing ESAs but seem to be dragging their heels. Some anti-ESA supporters claim that the allowance of ESA's on campus is unhealthy (Adams et al., 2017). They argue that the maladies experienced by the students requesting an ESA is better treated with therapy or medication (Phillips, 2016). There is also the perception that once one student is allowed to have an animal, all of the students will want one. Professors have also spoken out with concerns that an ESA in the classroom could reduce student focus or cause a disruption depending on the variety of lesson being taught. (Phillips, 2016).

Some institutional officials have argued that students who do not have or need an ESA but are in some way “forced” to live with one could be negatively impacted by its presence (Phillips, 2016). The root of the arguments stems from the idea that other students may be afraid of the type of animal or may be allergic to an animal’s fur, dander, saliva, or urine (Adams et al., 2017). These concerns are legitimate, but residential room changes and accommodations can occur in order to better satisfy both parties. In addition, the Department of Justice has stated that being allergic or afraid of dogs are not a legitimate reason for denying someone access. While there may not be a precedent set for ESA in the same capacity, the language is certainly there to support it.

Institutions are claiming that ESAs could be detrimental to other students due to a variety of reasons, but the research including residential student accounts is lacking. The main purpose of this study is to go right to the primary source and ask students for their opinions about ESAs. It is important to understand what students who currently live with or have recently lived with an ESA think about the animal, especially whether or not it enhanced or detracted from their educational experience. It will be important to understand other student perspectives like those gathered from residential students who do not and have not lived with an ESA. It will be interesting to see whether or not the institutional opinion of ESAs align with the residential students living with them day to day.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Context of Study**

The study was conducted at Rowan University, a large public university in Glassboro, New Jersey. Student data and information for the study was provided by the Division of Student Affairs which encompasses the Disability Resources office, and the Residential Learning and University Housing office. Student Affairs at Rowan University encompasses a staggering number of different offices and responsibilities (Rowan SSP, n.d.). Some of the entities within Student Affairs are academic advising, career advancement, disability resources, testing services, tutoring, and military services (Rowan SSP, n.d.). The disability resources center is the primary point of contact at Rowan regarding ESAs or service animals.

For students who need an ESA to live with them in on-campus residence halls, they are required to register for a housing accommodation. Housing accommodations are specialized requirements that a student has for their room or apartment. Housing accommodations can run the gamut from requiring a room on the first or second floor due to a fear of heights, or air conditioning in order to better control asthmatic issues. In some cases, students may require multiple accommodations such as access to a private bathroom, and air conditioning. As various accommodation requirements accrue, it can become difficult for university administrators to match students into a residence that suits all of their needs.

As part of the process, students seeking to add an accommodation must provide evidence that shows why the accommodation is necessary. This evidence is typically in the form of a letter or documentation from a medical professional. It is worth noting that there is speculation that some students may seek to abuse the accommodations system in order to live with a pet or to secure more desirable housing such as air conditioned apartments. The foundation of the accommodation process remains in place to help provide access to students who would otherwise be unable to reside on-campus without significant impairment on their educational experience.

ESAs are perhaps under the most scrutiny as anecdotally, many believe that students are claiming to have an “invisible” disability and need to live with an animal. Colleges and Universities have grappled with the issue as allowing animals in the residence halls may cause issues related to maintenance, housekeeping, or student resistance (Von Bergen, 2015). However, denying ESA requests has led to several high profile law suits against institutions, so few administrators are willing to take a hard stance on the issue (Lee, 2014). Students’ opinions on ESAs have not been broadly publicized so it is unclear how they feel about their peer’s ESA requests. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the student experience of living with or near an ESA and if it is more likely to be a positive or negative experience.

### **Population**

The surveyed population for this study was 112 on-campus residential students at Rowan University who lived in the same room, apartment, or suite as an ESA. All

students meeting this criteria received a voluntary email invitation to complete the survey online. Sixteen completed the survey.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Using Rowan University's Qualtrics survey program, I created an online survey that will be shared with the selected population of students. The survey contains 15 questions in total, 1 question confirming the subject's consent, 12 multiple choice, and 2 open ended responses. The beginning questions are regarding allergies or fears of animals that the respondent may experience. These first questions are quantitative and will allow for easier data analysis regarding potential predispositions toward animals. The following questions focus on ESA or service animal awareness, and inquiring questions about the respondent interacting with them. These questions are qualitative and were of my own design. They are intended to gather data regarding the respondent's personal opinions about ESAs or service animals. The survey was piloted twice to ensure it functioned as intended. A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The population of students who have received an invitation to complete the survey are all on-campus residential students at Rowan University who live in close proximity to an ESA. These residential students may not even be aware that they live near an ESA, which is a question posed in the survey. Others may have regular, impactful interactions with an ESA and have a strong opinion regarding animal policies. The survey is designed to ask clarifying questions regarding the respondent's interactions with any ESAs and questions with subjective answers in order to gauge their opinions. The survey



is online, so a link to the survey site will be provided via email to the students along with a brief synopsis of the importance of the survey.

The survey was conducted from January 2020 through March 2020 at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Upon opening the survey, the first question is a statement of consent explaining that the survey is voluntary. The subject can stop taking the survey at any time. Once the subject consents to participate, the remaining questions may be answered. The data that is collected was stored online and was only used to complete my Master's thesis. No personal identifiers were collected from this survey, and the list of students who received an invitation to complete the survey was permanently deleted after the invitation was sent.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using a convergent parallel design in order to account for the quantitative nature of the multiple-choice questions and the qualitative open-ended questions of the survey (McMillan, 2016). This is a mixed methods approach that is best suited for this study due to the nature of the data collected. Data was pulled from the Qualtrics Survey website and used in conjunction with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel. The open-ended questions were reviewed to look for key words and common themes (McMillan, 2016). The hope is that the quantitative data provides a baseline of which students have interacted with ESAs while the qualitative data illuminates their personal opinions on the matter.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

#### Profile of the Sample

The participants of the study were all students at Rowan University Glassboro Campus during the 2019-2020 academic year. Additionally, all participants lived in on-campus residence halls in close proximity to a university approved emotional support animal or service animal. Participation was voluntary. There were 112 students who met the criteria and were requested to complete a brief online survey. Of the 112 survey requests, 16 participants finished the survey, a 14% completion rate. There were no partially completed surveys. No personally identifiable data was collected.

#### Data Analysis

The survey was designed to ask broad questions about participant's individual experiences with animals. The initial questions were centered on discovering their base level of comfort with animals. As the survey continued, the questions became more qualitative and respondents could choose to write about their experiences specifically with emotional support animals (ESAs). These qualitative questions were used to provide context to the quantitative data collected from the survey. The data was reviewed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel in order to quantify responses into percentages and averages.

**Research question 1.** What are the experiences of on-campus residential students living with an ESA?

Table 1 shows the responses regarding a participant’s potential allergies or fear of animals.

Table 1

*Allergies and Fears (N=16)*

	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Might or might not	Probably not	Definitely not
Are you allergic to any animals?	4	2	0	5	5
Are you afraid of any animals?	0	4	1	8	3

Of the 16 participants, 6 indicated some level of allergies associated with animals. Of the 6 who indicated having an allergy, 5 participants reporting being only allergic to cats, and 1 reported being allergic only to dogs. No participant reported being allergic to more than one type of animal, or as having an allergy to birds, rodents, or reptiles. This implies that 37% of participants have some level of allergies and thus potentially a negative connotation toward animals. Data showed that 31% of participants are allergic to cats, while only 6% are allergic to dogs. Of the participants, 63% reported that more likely than not, they were not allergic to animals.

Regarding a fear of animals, 4 participants reporting being probably afraid of animals. Interestingly, no one reported a definite fear of animals, and 1 participant reported being unsure if they were afraid or not. Of the 4 participants who indicated a fear of animals, 25% of them reported a fear of dogs, 50% a fear of cats, and 75% a fear of reptiles and/or amphibians. The 1 participant who was unsure of whether they were afraid of animals, responded that they were only afraid of rodents.

These allergy and fear questions leads to an interesting point as the highest number of reported allergies were of cats, yet only 2 participants acknowledged being afraid of cats. The 1 participant who reported an allergy of dogs, did not indicate that they were afraid of dogs. This is too small of a sample size to make any certain determinations but it seems based upon these respondents that being allergic to an animal does not necessarily correspond to a fear of that animal. Indeed, 66% of participants who indicated an allergy did not indicate any kind of fear associated with animals.

**Research question 2.** Do students living with ESAs feel they are beneficial or detrimental to their experience?

An important function of this study was to better understand participant's understanding and interactions with ESAs. The majority of the group, 87%, reported that they did know the difference between an ESA and a service animal, an important distinction. Ever higher, 93% of participants were aware that they were living in close proximity to an ESA or service animal. Additionally, 93% of the group reported interacting directly with an ESA in their residence hall. Participants experienced a broad range of interactions with ESAs. However, 50% of the group reported that their

interaction with an ESA was extremely positive. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the various responses.

Table 2

*Response to ESA Interaction (N=16)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Positive	8	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Moderately Positive	1	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Slightly Positive	2	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Neither Positive nor Negative	1	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Slightly Negative	1	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Moderately Negative	1	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Extremely Negative	2	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Total	16	99.8	99.8	99.8

As shown in Table 2, 69% of participants reported a positive experience interacting with and ESA or service animal in their residence hall. This is interesting because 50% of respondents stated that they felt living near an ESA was beneficial to their student experience. An additional 44% stated that they did not benefit from living near an ESA, and 6% were unsure. That would imply that there are residents who had at least one positive interaction with an animal and did not feel that it benefitted their student experience. One participant who reported a slightly negative experience, also reported that living near an ESA was beneficial. That respondent elaborated when asked what had been beneficial about living near an ESA and stated that their roommate had a dog who was pleasant to be around, but their neighbor had a dog that would jump on

them. They reported that this gave them a mixed opinion about ESAs and service animals.

When asked what was beneficial about living near an ESA or service animal, 75% of those who reported having a positive experience stated that the animal helped to reduce anxiety and/or stress. Others reported that it helped them to feel happy and help initiate friendly peer interactions. Responses showed that 31% of participants reported that living near an ESA or service animal led to a negative impact to their experience. Of those participants, three elaborated when asked what the negative impact was caused by. They stated some different reasons, one of which was that the animal was not being properly cleaned up after. The next was that the animal bit them and was not a registered ESA or service animal, but the roommate's illegal pet. The last response stated that it was a dog that bit them in the apartment.

**Research question 3.** How strict of a policy regarding ESAs do students want?

The final question of the survey asked what the best policy for animals would be in the residence halls. All 16 participants stated that there should be some level of service animals allowed in on-campus housing. Table 3 show all the responses.

Table 3

*Best Type of ESA Policy On Campus (N=16)*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Open Policy	4	25.0	25.0	25.0
Broad Policy	2	12.5	12.5	12.5
Moderate Policy	6	37.5	37.5	37.5
Slightly Strict Policy	4	25.0	25.0	25.0
Strict Policy	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Unsure	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	100.0

Regarding the information in Table 3, open policy was defined as most animals being approved, broad policy as easier approval for service, ESAs, or other animals, moderate policy as university approved service animals and ESAs only. The slightly strict policy was defined as only approved service animals being allowed, and the strict policy was defined as no animals allowed. Data showed that 25% of respondents indicated that they believed only approved service animals should be allowed to live on campus. Half of the total participants were in the broad to moderate range of allowing ESAs and service animals with some university oversight and approval.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

This study was conducted in order to better understand the effects of ESAs and service animals on residential college students. Specifically, the study was intended to help understand if students who do not have an ESA, but reside directly with, or near one will receive auxiliary benefits as a result. The study was conducted at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. The subject population consisted of enrolled students during the 2019-2020 academic year. Subjects also resided in an on-campus residence hall in close proximity to an ESA or service animal.

Of the approximately 6000 students that reside on campus, 112 met the criteria of the study. An online survey was created through Qualtrics with multiple choice, and open-ended questions. The questions were created in order to gather data specifically regarding student opinions and interactions regarding ESAs. All 112 students who met the criteria were contacted via email twice inviting them to complete an online survey. A total of 16 complete surveys were collected. These 16 completed surveys make up the entire data set, a 14% completion rate. No personally identifiable information or demographic information was collected from the survey.

The last participant completed the survey on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The survey remained open until April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 and was then closed so no further data would be collected. The data was downloaded from Qualtrics onto a personal desktop computer.



The data was then input into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel in order to quantify it. Chapter IV discusses the results of the survey. The data was reviewed using frequencies and percentages.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

**Research question 1.** What are the experiences of on-campus residential students living with an ESA?

According to the data that was collected, students can have a broad range of experiences with animals in their residence halls. I found it interesting the differences between the students who reported having an allergy and/or a fear of animals. A significant number of participants, 31%, were only allergic to cats, which are a fairly common ESA but not a service animal. Only 1 participant, 6% of the group, reported being allergic to a dog. Cats being a larger concern for students also relates to their reported fears. Only 4 of the subjects reported a fear of animals and of those, 2 participants, 12% of the total group, reported a fear of cats.

I hypothesized that having either an allergy or a fear of animals may impact a student's experience. Eight participants, 50% of the total group, reported either a fear and/or an allergy to animals. Of those 8, 62.5% reported that living near an ESA or service animal was not beneficial to their student experience. Of that same group of 8 subjects, only 37.5% of them reported that living near an ESA or service animal had a negative impact on their experience. We can infer then that some of the subjects felt that they had neither a positive nor a negative experience as a result of living near an animal.

As a result, it seems that an allergy or fear of certain animals does relate to a student's overall experience.

Additionally, participants were asked if they had directly interacted with an ESA or service animal in their residence hall. The vast majority, 93%, of the group reported having an interaction. Of the subjects who interacted with an animal, 50% felt that it was an extremely positive experience, and overall 70% reported some level of positive experience. Based on this information, students mostly had positive experiences with animals in their residence halls. Only 2 participants, 12.5% of the total group, who had interacted with an animal reported an extremely negative experience. Only 1 of those participants elaborated on their experience and reported being bit by their roommate's emotional support dog. These interactions certainly seem to impact a student's opinion of animals in the residence halls, even though the vast majority reported a positive interactional experience.

**Research question 2.** Do students living with ESAs feel they are beneficial or detrimental to their experience?

The survey prompted students to report if they felt living near an ESA or service animal was beneficial to their college experience. Half of the total participants reported that yes, it was beneficial. Meanwhile, 44% reported that no, it was not beneficial, and 6% said that it was maybe beneficial. This is interesting because only 31% of participants reported that living near an animal had a negative impact on their experience. As previously mentioned, it seems that there is a significant population who feel that living near an animal has neither a positive nor negative effect on them.

When prompted to report what was beneficial or detrimental to their experience, students reported some common themes. Of those who reported a positive experience, 75% stated that the animals helped to relieve their stress or anxiety. ESAs in particular are most commonly prescribed to individuals who suffer from mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, or panic attacks. It is interesting that a significant portion of the subject group received auxiliary mental health benefits residing near an ESA or service animal.

While the results largely pointed to an overall positive experience for resident living near an animal, the margin was thin. The other consideration is the relatively small number of respondents. Such a small participant pool which makes it difficult to claim definitively that ESAs were beneficial or not. There is certainly some relation to an allergy or fear of animals to a student's experience, but there was not significant data to support a claim one way or another.

**Research question 3.** How strict of a policy regarding ESAs do students want?

This research question was designed as a summarizing point not only me, but for the participants as well. The final question on the survey asked participants what they felt was the best kind of policy for ESAs on campus. It was intentionally placed last so that respondents could mentally process their own feelings regarding ESAs or service animals. The questions regarding allergies and fears, positive and negative experiences, and even understanding the difference between an ESA and service animal was to prompt them to question their own experiences. It is possible that they had previously considered

animal policies on campus, but assuming that they had not, by answering this question last allowed them to reflect on their own thoughts.

Despite a fairly broad mix of responses, both positive and negative, the results for ESA policies leaned heavily on the positive. None of the participants chose the strict policy of no animals allowed on campus. Interestingly, the highest percentage of responses, 37.5%, was for a moderate policy of only allowing university approved service animals and ESAs to reside on campus. There was a 25% response rate for both an open policy of most animals being approved, and a slightly strict policy of only service animals allowed in on-campus residence halls. The choice of slightly strict policy is noteworthy as it includes the approval of service animals on campus, but not ESAs which may be indicative of some of the negative experiences participants reported with ESAs.

## **Conclusions**

Based upon the participants and their responses, there seems to be mixed feelings about animals living in on-campus housing. Of the 16 surveys that were received, there is a slightly more positive perception and opinion of ESAs and service animals than negative. However, with only a 14% survey completion rate there is not enough data to say definitively if living near an animal on campus is more likely to have a positive or negative effect on a student's experience. Likely, the answer is highly dependent on an individual student's experience which may vary drastically depending on a number of different factors. Ultimately, the results of the study are somewhat ambiguous which is still informative.

Some of the responses indicated that a participant had a very positive interaction with an ESA or service animal but did not feel that it had a beneficial impact on their college experience. Other participants reported a very negative interaction with animals in their residence hall. Of that group, 33% had a negative interaction with an animal that was not actually university approved and acknowledged that. Some participants also felt that the animal was not being cared for properly and its smell was what led to a negative impact. All participants agreed that some level of university-approved animals should be able to reside on-campus, despite some of their negative experiences.

### **Recommendations**

Based upon the outcome of the study, there are some areas of improvement that are recommended for future research.

1. Expand the survey to include more tailored questions regarding student experience and institutional policy.
2. Ask more succinct questions about how allergies or fear impact a student's opinion of animals.
3. Contact the potential participants more frequently to increase the response rate.
4. Differentiate between ESAs and service animals and choose one or the other to include in the study.

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## Appendix A

### Research Instrument - Qualtrics Survey

# Emotional Support Animals

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 The purpose of this survey is to discover the impact of emotional support animals (ESAs) on students living on a university campus. This survey will consist of 14 questions and will take less than 5 minutes to complete. The survey is completely voluntary and you may stop taking it at any point without repercussion. This survey is anonymous; no personally identifiable information will be recorded or kept.

You may contact Timothy Lauth at 856-256-4255 any time you have questions about the research.

You may contact Dr. Drew Tinnin at 856-256-4909 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject or what to do if you are injured

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call: Office of Research Compliance: (856) 256-4078 – Glassboro

Approved by Rowan University EIRB:

Pro2019000773 \_\_\_\_\_

**All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.**

Yes (1)

No (2)

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Q2 Do you know the difference between an emotional support animal (ESA) and a service animal?

- Yes (1)
  - Maybe (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q3 Are you allergic to any animals?

- Definitely yes (1)
  - Probably yes (2)
  - Might or might not (3)
  - Probably not (4)
  - Definitely not (5)
-

Q4 What animals are you allergic to? (Select all that apply)

Dogs (1)

Cats (2)

Reptiles/Amphibians (Snakes, Lizards, Frogs, Turtles) (3)

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Rodents (Mice, Hamsters, Rats, Guinea Pigs) (4)

Birds (5)

Other (6)

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Q5 Are you afraid of any animals?

Definitely yes (1)

Probably yes (2)

Might or might not (3)

Probably not (4)

Definitely not (5)

---

Q6 What animals are you afraid of? (Select all that apply)

Dogs (1)

Cats (2)

Reptiles/Amphibians (Snakes, Lizards, Frogs, Turtles) (3)

Rodents (Mice, Hamsters, Rats, Guinea Pigs) (4)

Birds (5)

Other (6)

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Q7 Are you aware that you reside on campus near an ESA or service animal?

Yes (1)

No (2)

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Q8 Have you interacted with an ESA or service animal in your residence hall?

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q9 Was your interaction with the animal (not with the owner) positive or negative?

- Extremely positive (1)
  - Moderately positive (2)
  - Slightly positive (3)
  - Neither positive nor negative (4)
  - Slightly negative (5)
  - Moderately negative (6)
  - Extremely negative (7)
- 

Q10 Has living near an ESA or service animal been beneficial to your student experience?

- Yes (1)
  - Maybe (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q11 What has been beneficial about living near an ESA or service animal?

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Q12 Has living near an ESA or service animal had a negative impact on you?

- Yes (1)
  - Maybe (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q13 What is the negative impact caused by living near an ESA or service animal?

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Q14 What kind of policy would you like to see regarding animals in the residence halls?

- Strict Policy - No Animals (1)
- Slightly Strict Policy - Only Approved Service Animals (2)
- Moderate Policy - University Approved Service Animals and ESAs (3)
- Broad Policy - Easier Approval for Service, ESA, or Other Animals (4)
- Open Policy - Most Animals are Approved (5)
- Unsure (6)

End of Block: Default Question Block

## Appendix B

### IRB Protocol Document



**Title of Project:** Emotional Support Animals on Campus: An Analysis of Student Experience  
**\*Principal Investigator:** Dr. Drew Tinnin  
**\*\*Funding Source(s):** Internally Funded

#### 1. Purpose/Specific Aims

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the impact of emotional support animals (ESAs) on residential higher education students using a case study design. This study centers around the student experience of interacting with emotional support and service animals on campus. Research and policy regarding ESAs in particular have been a hot button issue over the last few years. While research has been conducted regarding institutional responses to ESAs, there is a considerable lack of information pertaining to the interactions between students with ESAs and those without.

##### 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of student's experience living with ESAs on campus. If institutions of higher education are planning to revise their policies surrounding animals on campus, the students are liable to be the most impacted and thus should have their opinions known.

##### 1.2 Hypotheses

Not Applicable

#### 2. Background and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the impact of emotional support animals (ESAs) on residential higher education students using a case study design. This study centers around the student experience of interacting with emotional support animals on campus. Research and policy regarding ESAs in particular have been a hot button issue over the last few years. While research has been conducted regarding institutional responses to ESAs, there is a considerable lack of information pertaining to the interactions between students with ESAs and those without. This study seeks to delve into the student experience of living side by side with ESAs and better understand their interactions.

#### 3. Research Design and Methods

The study will begin by emailed a group of students identified as the target population. The email will explain the context of the survey as well as its importance. The email will also stress that this is a voluntary research study and that they can choose not to participate. Students who chose to participate will anonymously complete an online survey composed of 12 multiple-choice questions, 2 open-ended questions, and 1 question at the beginning to confirm their knowledge and consent to complete the survey. No personally identifiable information will be collected. This illustrative case study will employ a mixed methods approach to data analysis as the survey questions will provide both qualitative and quantitate data.

### **3.1. Duration of Study**

The study will take place from January 1, 2020 until March 25, 2020. The survey is expected to take less than five minutes to complete.

### **3.2 Study Sites**

Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ.

### **3.3 Sample Size Justification**

The sample size is 112 students. The rationale for this number is that it is the total number of residential students who live in the same room or apartment as an ESA, but do not personally have an accommodation for an ESA at Rowan University.

### **3.4 Subject Selection and Enrollment Considerations**

To obtain participants for the study, a list of students who reside in close proximity to an ESA was provided by the Residential Learning and University Housing (RLUH) office at Rowan University. All 112 of persons on the list where sent an email explaining the purpose and importance of the survey. They were invited to take the online survey voluntarily and provided a digital link to the survey.

#### **3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria**

All persons who currently reside in an on-campus residence hall at Rowan University in the spring 2020 semester that live in close proximity to an ESA are the target subject population for this study. There is no inclusion or exclusion regarding demographics or personal identifiers of any kind.

#### **3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria**

All persons who do not currently live in an on-campus residence hall in close proximity to an ESA will be excluded. There is no other exclusionary criteria.

#### **3.5.3 Subject Recruitment**

Subjects will be invited to participate in the study via an email that will be sent to their Rowan University provided student email account. The content of that invitation email can be viewed in Appendix A. Participation in the study requires the subject to complete a one-time online survey of 14 questions pertaining to their experience living with an ESA on campus that should take approximately 5 minutes.



### **3.5.4 Consent Procedures**

In the invitation email it was stated that this is a voluntary study. The online survey also begins by outlining the study and requests the subject's consent.

### **3.5.5 Subject Costs and Compensation**

Not Applicable

### **3.6 Chart Review Selection**

Not Applicable

## **4. Study Variables**

### **4.1 Independent Variables or Interventions**

Not Applicable

#### **4.1.1 Drug or Device Interventions**

Not Applicable

### **4.2 Dependent Variables or Outcome Measures**

Not Applicable

### **4.3 Risk of Harm**

Not Applicable

### **4.4 Potential for Benefit**

Though there may be no benefit, results may inform policy and practice around ESAs on college campuses.

## **5. Data Handling and Statistical Analysis**

The data analysis plan will be exploratory. The plan is to find relation or correlation between the different quantitative variables of the survey. The data will be analyzed using a convergent parallel design in order to account for the quantitative nature of the multiple-choice questions and the qualitative open-ended questions of the survey. Data will be pulled from the Qualtrics Survey website and used in conjunction with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. SPSS will be used to note key indicators and will be able to help sort through the quantitative survey data. The open-ended questions will be reviewed to look for key words and common themes.

## **6. Data and Safety Monitoring**

Not Applicable

## **7. Reporting Results**

### **7.1 Individual Results**

Not Applicable

## **7.2 Aggregate Results**

Not Applicable

## **7.3 Professional Reporting**

The results will be shared with the community of Rowan University, specifically in the College of Education. There is no plan for professional publication and no personal identifies of subjects will be published or provided.

## **8. Bibliography**

Not Applicable

## **APPENDICES**

Not Applicable

## Appendix C

### Survey Invitation



Dear Students,

My name is Tim Lauth, I am a graduate student here at Rowan University in the Higher Education Administration program. I am researching the effects of living on campus with an Emotional Support Animal (ESA). I would like to invite you to complete a brief survey regarding your experience and opinions of residing on campus with an ESA. The reason you are receiving this email is because you are currently a Rowan University student living in a university residence hall or apartment complex with an ESA. I want to know more about your experience and how it has impacted your time at Rowan.

The survey is completely anonymous. This initial email is the only personally identifiable information related to my study. If you should choose to complete the survey, you will not need to provide your name or student ID number. The survey is voluntary and should take less than 5 minutes to complete. The survey and its results are a part of my Master's thesis needed to earn my degree. The results of the survey will go toward furthering the available information regarding ESAs and student's interactions with them. University policy regarding ESAs are being reviewed across the country and your opinions on the subject matter.

If you choose to take the survey, you may stop at any point and for any reason without consequence. If you have any questions about the survey or the study, please feel free to contact me at [lautht52@rowan.edu](mailto:lautht52@rowan.edu) or my Principal Investigator overseeing the study, Dr. Drew Tinnin at [tinnin@rowan.edu](mailto:tinnin@rowan.edu). Thank you for taking the time to review my email.

Follow this link to complete the survey: [Emotional Support Animals](#)

Or copy and paste this address into your mobile or desktop internet browser:  
[https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5nWu2uFVAP7jH4V](https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5nWu2uFVAP7jH4V)

Approved by Rowan University EIRB: Pro2019000773