Students lean on furry friends for support amid the pandemic

TRISTAN BENNETT
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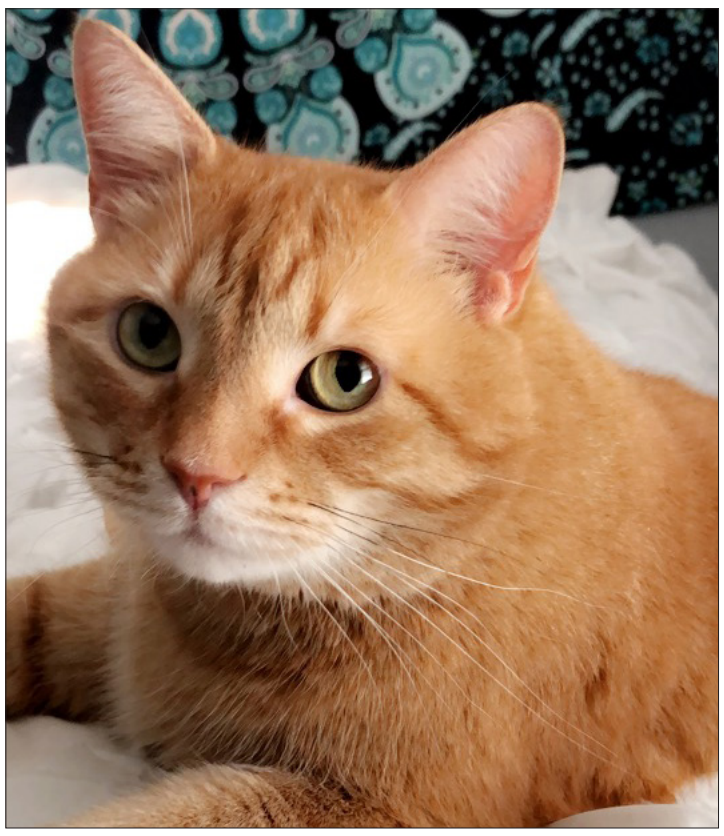


PHOTO COURTESY OF EMILY COOPER
Emily Cooper's ESA, Shiloh, helps her with feelings of isolation amidst the pandemic.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EDEN POSEY
Eden Posey relies on her ESA, Monroe, to get her through the tough times in her life.

With the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, 55 Arkansas State University students find comfort in a furry friend.

Dogs, cats and even one turtle serve as emotional support animals to students who live on campus. Blake Walker, associate director of Access & Accommodation Services, oversees the requests for ESAs.

"An ESA is just an accommodation basically," Walker said. "It's a modification to the no-pet policy on campus."

According to the Alvarado Parkway Institute, emotional support animals serve as home healthcare for those struggling with mental illness. Mental health doctors sometimes prescribe animals as an alternative to medicines for illnesses like anxiety and depression.

College students find them particularly helpful in lowering stress levels and curbing the feeling of loneliness amidst the pandemic.

Emily Cooper, a sophomore at A-State, said her bond with her emotional support cat, Shiloh, started many years ago.

"I've had him since I was like 8 or 9, and he is 12 years old," Cooper said. "He's very sweet and has separation anxiety. He loves to cuddle, especially at night."

According to a study conducted by the Human Animal Bond Institute, just owning an animal lowers levels of depression and social isolation and raises levels of life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being.

While college students normally take part in a multitude of social activities, the pandemic brought a halt to many of those. Students like Cooper found safe companionship through an ESA.

"Having him here gives me a purpose to be in my room more which makes me not feel as bad about not having a ton of friends or a crazy busy social life," Cooper said.

Isolation continues to be a recurring theme in the age of COVID-19. Eden Posey, a freshman creative media production major, said she is thankful to have her ESA, a Goldendoodle named Monroe, on campus with her this semester.

"He belonged to a 70-year-old couple, and they decided they couldn't take care of him, so we got him," Posey said. "He is the laziest and most well-behaved dog ever. He would rather be sleeping than running around. Ask my roommate; they forget he's there most of the time."

Posey leaned on Monroe heavily during a dark time in her life.

"At the beginning of the school year my grandfather passed away from COVID-19, and Monroe was my rock," Posey said. "He knew something was wrong, and he gave me the best snuggles. I don't know how I would have gotten this far in college without Monroe."

ESAs hold many benefits for college students, but they must go through the proper channels in order to keep their animal on campus. They first must register with Access & Accommodation Services as a student with a disability, provide documentation from their mental health doctor and provide information about their animal. Even then, not every animal is a good fit for life on campus, especially in the dorms.

Walker said, "It could be insufficient documentation. It could that the animal possibly poses a risk to student health or safety or facility health and safety."

If the student's request does get accepted, it then goes to Catherine Beaver, assistant director of housing services. University Housing holds animal owners on campus to certain expectations in order to keep their animal.

"They must be updated on their shots, and must have a copy in my office for that," Beaver said. "They must be house trained; we can't use puppy pads or anything like that, and that's pretty generic across the country."

Animals that do go outside must be on a leash, and owners hold the responsibility of cleaning up after them. If pest control must be called because of fleas or an animal damages any property, student-owners may be held responsible for the costs of those as well.

"We have a long list of expectations, but we have compared those to other institutions as well," Beaver said.

Generally, Beaver said, ESAs and their owners give very few problems.

"It usually happens towards the beginning of the year like when animals are getting used to the new environment," Beaver said. "That's typically, I think, when we see it more, but it's very rare. It doesn't really happen that often."

If there is a complaint against an ESA, such as a noise violation, Beaver and Walker work with Student Conduct as well as resident assistants to determine the best course of action. Most likely, they will just tell the owner about the problem and let them address it. However, if it continues to be a problem, though it is rare, they hold the right to ask that the animal be moved off campus.

"I've been here for almost four years, and I've only seen two instances where we asked that the animal be removed," Walker said. "Those were repeated issues that just weren't being addressed."

For the most part, ESAs stay in their owner's room; they cannot attend class or go into buildings on campus like a service animal could, but they still provide invaluable support to those who need them.

"I'm thankful I've had him to walk around campus and ride shotgun around Jonesboro with me," Posey said.

ESAs like Monroe and Shiloh serve their owners diligently with their cuddles to help ease the burden of being a college student in the midst of a pandemic.

Tutors across campus continue to help students despite COVID-19

BAYLEIGH FREEMAN
STAFF WRITER

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the Red Wolves continue searching for ways to learn and grow. Despite the ongoing sickness, the Arkansas State tutoring centers remain open in an effort to expand knowledge across campus.

The nine tutoring centers on campus are following all COVID-19 guidelines to help protect students and ensure their safety. With the intent to stay healthy, there are mask mandates as well as social distancing requirements at the centers. While these requirements have been enforced to maintain student health, Noah Van Deventer, a tutor for Learning Support Services, said they have led to difficulties.

"Tutoring during the pandemic has presented lots of challenges, such as social distancing and masks. But it has also presented opportunities for things like tutoring through Zoom," Van Deventer said.

Students using tutoring services have had to adapt to new ways of experiencing the tutoring itself. Tutoring is occurring predominantly online and by appointment through the app Penji.

In-person appointments are happening in planned out spaces with adherence to safety guidelines. While there have been drop-in opportunities at some centers in the past, that has been prohibited in light of the pandemic.

In addition, now most tutoring is occurring one-on-one rather than in groups. While group sessions have become scarce, a few have continued with great planning and attention to safety.

The unfamiliarity of current tutoring procedures has been a difficult transition for many, but Kelli Listenbee, director of Learning Support Services, said it has helped to improve the overall process.

"I think the process has been enhanced," Listenbee said.

While students have had to get used to the new procedures, Listenbee said they have made tutoring across the campus more consistent than it has been in the past. Centers have usually varied their drop-in and scheduling policies, but now every center is conducting their process in the same way.

Listenbee even anticipates that this way of organizing will be used in the future because it has been beneficial, but she does hope to be able to drop the safety guidelines and be able to do more in person sessions when it becomes safe.

"Now we don't have any drop-ins and we have very limited group tutoring. So I think there's a community piece that is missing that we had before," Listenbee said. "But I think as far as the process goes, this is a process we will keep and carry forward."

There have been many advancements made in the organization of the centers as they have been forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to change and improve. As for the learning part, Listenbee said she does not think it has necessarily gotten better or worse.

"I don't know that students aren't learning better, they are just learning in a different way," she said.

No matter what the future holds, the tutoring centers are going to find new ways to continue to enrich students and help them learn in the safest way possible.

CAMPUS CRIME

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Oct. 30 | 3:19 a.m.

University Police observed two white males walking on University Loop near Aggie Road. One of them appeared to the officer as trying to hide something large under his jacket. Officers made contact with Dakota Pieroni and Garrett Overstreet. While talking to them, the officers noticed a strong odor of intoxicants on them. Overstreet was asked what was in his jacket, and he pulled out a large bag of red wine. Both said they had been drinking. Because he said he did not have his driver's license on him, Overstreet gave officers his birth date for identification, but it did not bring up any information. When asked again, Overstreet gave a different birth date which revealed he was 19 years old. He was then placed under arrest for possession of alcohol and obstruction of governmental operations. While being searched, officers found his driver's license in his wallet.

Pieroni was told a referral to the university would be submitted for underage drinking, but he was allowed to return to his residence hall. Overstreet was transported to the Craighead County Jail, and his license was confiscated.

Nov. 1 | 1:26 a.m.

A University Police officer was at the intersection of Cherokee and East University Loop when he observed a white Dodge pickup truck with the doors open sitting at a stop sign. As the officer watched, Preston Ferris threw a large pumpkin at the stop sign and ran back to his truck. The officer stopped him by shining his flashlight at him. He approached Ferris along with Rhodney Phillips and Karsten Johnson, who all said they were not students but were on campus for the football game.

They were asked where they got the pumpkins, and Ferris told the officer they found them around campus. The officer said that pumpkins did not grow anywhere on campus and asked where he took them from. He then told the officer he stole them from some of the sorority houses.

All three individuals were given a PNG for criminal mischief and theft. Officers made them pick up the pumpkins they had thrown and return any pumpkins they had left in the vehicle.

Nov. 1 | 2:39 a.m.

While on patrol, an officer saw a vehicle parked in a handicap spot. As he approached the vehicle, he noticed it was running and occupied. He approached the driver's window, and informed Jonathan Adams that he could not park in a handicap spot. During the conversation, the officer noticed a strong marijuana smell coming from the vehicle, and Adams told him he did not have any on him but he had been at a party earlier. The officer also observed a marijuana paraphernalia and a burnt marijuana cigarette in the center console.

Adams was then asked to step out of the vehicle, and he complied. He admitted to having a gun in glove compartment. He was searched, but nothing was found on him.

Officers took possession of the gun, and Adams was arrested for possession of a handgun on a school campus and transported to the Craighead County Jail. A referral for the smell of marijuana and possession of a firearm will also be submitted to the university.