



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
AMHERST

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Department of Veterinary
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Dear colleagues,

A student in your class is enrolled in ANIMLSCI 398D, a 3 credit class designed to provide students with an understanding of canine communication, health, handling, development, and behavioral psychology through hands-on experience in training psychiatric, medical alert, and mobility service dogs. ANIMLSCI 398D is a partnership between UMass Amherst and Diggity Dogs Service Dogs, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Students are paired with a dog, attend a weekly 3 hour class, document their training weekly and monthly, and are evaluated on their progress. The service dog in training lives with the student and accompanies them to most places that they go, including classes, public spaces, and businesses. This is an essential part of the training, as the service dog will need to accompany the client. A fully trained service dog represents an 18-24 month investment and can cost more than \$25,000.

Access for service dogs, including those in training, is governed by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and the Mass. General Law MGL c.129, s.39F. **A service dog is defined as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.** This disability may not be visible. Examples include alerting a person with diabetes, epilepsy, or a psychiatric illness. Thus, a trained service dog with full access to public, educational and work settings allows people with disabilities to function fully in society.

There are three types of dogs that you may encounter on the UMass campus: **service dogs** (in training or in active service), **ESA** (emotional support animals), and **therapy dogs**. Service dogs are the only type that is granted legal access to classes and businesses by the ADA and MGL. ESA and therapy dogs differ from service dogs in that they are not trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. ESA provide comfort for an individual by their presence; therapy dogs are taken into settings like nursing homes to provide comfort to multiple individuals. **Instructors have the right to limit access to their classrooms to service dogs or service dogs in training, and to exclude ESA and therapy dogs. They have the right to ask a student to remove any disruptive dog from the classroom. Instructors have the right to ask (1) whether the dog is a service dog and (2) what the dog is being trained to do, or what the dog has been trained to do for the student, to differentiate between service dogs and ESA/therapy dogs.** Information about the student's disability in the case of an active service dog is private.

Diggity Dogs service dogs in training wear a service dog vest with a turquoise ribbon. Unfortunately, there has been an increase in the number of people who are buying service dog vests and putting them on their pets in order to obtain greater access. These fake service dogs are not trained, have been disruptive, and have made the lives of disabled people who depend on focused, highly trained service dogs more dangerous. The

presence of fake service dogs also makes the job of training service dogs more difficult, especially if the poorly trained dog is aggressive towards the service dog in training. There is currently no service dog registry that certifies whether a dog is a service dog, so there is no valid paperwork that will prove a dog is a service dog. There is a law (H.2277) under consideration in Massachusetts that would impose a \$500 fine for the misrepresentation of a service animal. If passed, Massachusetts would join 12 other states in making it illegal to misrepresent a service dog. California imposes a fine of \$1000 and up to 6 months in prison.

The top priority of the UMass/Diggity Dogs service dog training program is to assist people, which also means that we accommodate, and do not impinge upon, the needs of others. We work very hard on training the dogs to be non-disruptive and virtually invisible in classrooms and public spaces. Students do not take dogs into settings such as laboratories or the immediate vicinity of laboratory animal facilities. Upon notification, we keep the dogs away from people who are not comfortable with, or are allergic to, them. Students understand that it is their responsibility to address any canine behaviors that are disruptive and, if necessary, to immediately remove a dog from the classroom.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.mass.gov/ago/consumer-resources/your-rights/civil-rights/disability-rights/information-about-service-animals.html>

I encourage you to contact me, or the director of Diggity Dogs Service Dogs, Sarah Meikle, with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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