



Pets During College Life?

A simple walk around a college town will show that quite a few businesses offer pet sales and services to college students. While there is some debate over whether college students have the time and energy (or even the space) to maintain pets, many students do have pets for the companionship and the stress relief. (College students who lived with a pet were found to be less likely to report feeling lonely or depressed.)

Considerations for Pet Ownership

Pets are not allowed in residence halls because of the living circumstances and for health reasons. However, many students do live outside of campus housing settings. Many rent apartments or homes with liberal pet policies. Some non-traditional students own their own homes.

For stress relief, some counselors suggest that students bring some aspects of their home lives with them—including a close pet if their living circumstances and life commitments might allow that. (Pets may feel stressed from the transition of a familiar living situation to an unfamiliar one, too.) That advice is balanced against some other important considerations.

The Level of Commitment

Often, animal shelters near college campuses may not adopt pets out to undergraduate students because of some challenging situations in which pets have not been cared for well or have been returned to the shelters. Some shelters have reported that many students will return pets at the ends of the academic year or the ends of their studies.

College students have to deal with an overwhelming amount of study. They often have to manage their own budgets. They have busy social lives. If they have roommates, there will be challenges with accommodating the roommates' various needs.

Pets involve plenty of costs. The upfront costs may involve the purchase of a pet. Dogs may range in the hundreds to several thousands of dollars depending on the dog breeders and the types of dogs. Even adopted pets will require a regimen of immunization shots and often a check-up before they are released to the new owners.

There are many costs involved to caring for pets. These involve food, toys, bedding, medicine, soaps and shampoos, health check-ups, transportation carriers, and unexpected costs. The maintenance of a pet will vary depending on the type of pet it is. For example, pet fish will require complex fish tanks, lights, foods, cleaning materials, plants, filters, and other elements; they will require a balanced ecosystem to survive. Rodents and hamsters (and snakes—but not in the same space) will require regulated terrariums as well. Birds will often require some cages.

Dogs will require regular affection and exercise. They will require baths and grooming.

Some Lifestyle Restrictions

The living spaces will have to be pet-proofed. For example, those who own dogs often have to use fasteners to close cupboard doors, to ensure that their pets don't get into toxic foods (for example, chocolate is toxic to dogs). They'll have to put wires and cords out of sight and reach to prevent chewing. Heating and air vents should be covered. Toilet seats should be put down. Washer and dryer doors should be kept shut. Gates should block stairways (at the top and the bottom).

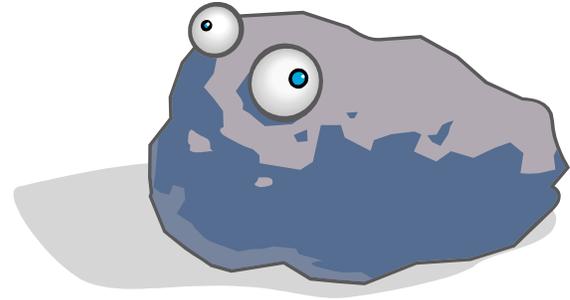
Students may find their travel times greatly restricted, unless they have a backup pet sitter or a local kennel (for dogs). A day trip, a weekend trip, or even a spring break trip will involve additional planning to pull off successfully—with the pets safe and well cared for. If a pet is traveling along, airfare or other types of travel costs will add to the bottom line costs.

Students who are familiar with the requirements of pet ownership may find these lifestyle limitations minimal ones.

Pet...Rocks?

While pets may be a good fit for some college students, many suggest that the only pets students should have in their first year or two at college should be pet rocks, which require very little maintenance. In that time, students may acclimate to their new responsibilities and academic lifestyles. And they may set up a more positive

situation for their pets when they actually are ready for them.



A Response: Thinking Ahead about Getting a Dog or Cat?

By Laura Oesterhaus

If you are thinking about getting a dog or cat, please consider the following

- Does your landlord allow pets?
- Can you afford vet bills and food, etc?
- What happens to your pet during winter and summer vacations?
- Will you be planning on taking your pet with you when you finish college and move?

You need to understand that getting a pet is a commitment that you are making to care for that animal for the rest of his/her life. Pets are not disposable, like furniture. They do suffer and go into depression when they are left at the shelter.

Also, understand that the busiest times at the shelter are at the end of each semester. Too many pets end up at the shelter with no place to go. Most shelters are not big enough to handle that many pets and a lot of them get put down. So, please think about the pet before you decide to get one.

A Foster Parenting Option

A good alternative is for you to volunteer as a foster parent with your local Humane Society. Usually, they will provide the food and pay for vet expenses. All you need to provide is a loving home, a little bit of training for your pet, if needed, and for you to get the pet to adoption days. Adoption days are usually once or twice a month during the weekend. Fostering is a great way to learn about the different breeds, animal care, training and what it entails to own a pet. Besides you will be giving a pet, that most probably would have died at the shelter, the chance of finding a good home. If you are an animal lover, being a foster parent, will be one of the most rewarding experiences that you will have.

Think before you go get that cute puppy or kitten. If you are not willing to take him/her with you when you move, then please don't get it. Consider fostering instead.



© All articles are used by permission of the respective author(s). Copyright belongs to the University Life Café. No part of this may be used without authorization.