**Animal-Assisted Interventions in Counselor/Counselor Educator Training**

AAI is an interdisciplinary term that describes unstructured or goal-oriented activities delivered by a professional with appropriate specialized skill and expertise, that intentionally incorporate animals into human services, healthcare, education and similar fields. AAIs may be individual or group in nature, and are appropriate for a variety of ages and abilities. AAI is an umbrella term that encompasses Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Animal Assisted Education (AAE), Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). AAIs promote wellbeing and benefits for humans and provide a positive experience for the animals without force, coercion, or exploitation. AAIs may directly or indirectly involve the animal. Most of your potential experiences will represent a blend of AAT and AAE as appropriate to your learning/training goals, classroom experiences, and clinical skill development. In the context of clinical training, an instructor incorporates intentional human-animal interaction as a facilitating agent that is incorporated into the overall training process to improve clinical skills, and to facilitate the counselor-in-training professional and personal growth and development.

Researchers have published studies about the potential cognitive and emotional benefits of involving animals in learning environments, and preliminary, unpublished research from the ISU ROAR Lab supports the integration of AAIs in enhancing the professional development of counselors-in-training. It is for these reasons that your AAI facilitators selected AAIs as a potentially beneficial enhancement to your overall learning experience.

**Animal Handler(s)**

Dr. Stewart will oversee all AAIs and visits from all animal animals in our department. The American Counseling Association Competencies for Animal Assisted Therapy (Stewart et al., 2016) asserts that highly specialized formal training, supervised experience, and expertise are required to practice this intervention ethically. For this reason, Dr. Stewart will ultimately direct all AAIs in our department.

Dr. Stewart holds a current Certified Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist (C-AAIS) credential, and has over 25 years of experience working with animals in a professional context and is recognized as an international leader in the field of AAIs.

Shantelle Tjaden will be a handler on campus under the supervision of Dr. Stewart. Shantelle is a current doctoral student at Idaho State University and has completed the Certificate Program in Animal Assisted Interventions through the department of counseling. Shantelle holds the Certified Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist (C-AAIS) designation through the Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals and has completed significant work in continuing education and research in the area of AAIs.

For more information about the qualification required to facilitate AAIs in this department, please refer to the Animal Partner Policies and Procedures in your student handbook.

**Potential Risks**

In most cases, AAIs in educational settings offer potential relational, emotional, and cognitive benefits to the humans and animals involved. For this reason, your facilitators believe that the benefits associated with human-animal interactions in our department are greater than the potential risks. Your facilitators have taken considerable steps to maximize the potential for beneficial interactions and to minimize the potential risks associated with human-animal interactions.

However, *certain unavoidable risks are present when interacting with animals*. Under most circumstances, these risks include, but are not limited to: allergies to pet hair/dander, infections, minor scratches/bruises, or damage to clothing. *Under unusual circumstances such as if the animal feels fearful or threatened; risks may include but are not limited to: intimidating behavior (i.e. - barking/growling vocalizations, ritualized body language, etc.) and/or injurious bites.* It is important to note that all animals, regardless of temperament and training, can behave unpredictably or aggressively when stressed or threatened. To minimize the potential risk of the animal acting out due to stress or fear, it is important that participants follow your facilitator’s instructions regarding interaction with the animal partners.

*Animals in Training*. Idaho State University’s Department of Counseling acknowledges the importance of socialization for animals of all ages, and especially when in the critical socialization periods. As you may already be aware, animal-assisted interventions are often part of regular operations in our department. In addition to therapy animals, there may occasionally be a handler who brings in an animal in training who the handler hopes will be a therapy animal in the future. Additional risks are involved in having these animals in training present. Animals in training, especially young animals may also express natural behaviors for their developmental level such as mouthing, jumping up, and eliminating on the floors. It is important to note that *all* animals, regardless of temperament and training, can behave unpredictably or aggressively when stressed or threatened. *To minimize the potential risk of the animal acting out due to stress or fear, it is important that participants follow your facilitator’s instructions regarding interaction with the animal partners.*

**Animal Partner Selection and Preparation**

Dr. Stewart and/or Shantelle Tjaden have assessed the overall suitability of all animals potentially involved in this experience, and continuously assesses each animal’s suitability on an ongoing basis. All animals included in this experience have been assessed to have an overall suitable temperament and appropriate socialization and training to participate in purposeful human-animal interactions in this specific context. All animals under will be of robust physical health during interactions and will have regular veterinary exams, behavioral exams, high-quality care, and species-specific husbandry for the duration of their lives.

All animal training and handling will align with current scientific knowledge about animal husbandry and humane behavior modification. All animal training and handling are rewards-based and honor the relationship of trust and mutuality of a healthy human-animal bond. Under no circumstances will animal training/handling include aversive or coercive methods, the use of pain, intimidation, or aversive equipment. Because each animal’s handler is responsible for ensuring a balanced diet as well as maintaining safe, clean, and appropriate toys and brushes, please do not bring treats or other food items, brushes, or toys for the animals. The animal’s handler will provide these items for you.

*Animals in Training Approval Process.* Dr. Stewart has assessed the appropriateness of visits from animals in training in collaboration with the animal’s respective handler and both parties continuously assess on an ongoing basis. Each animal and handler must receive documented permission from Dr. Stewart for every animal and every visit. Handlers must hold the C-AAIS and comply with all department policies and procedures.

**Human Conduct Expectations**

All animal partners involved in your training experience have the right to choose their level of interaction and offered an opportunity to consent to or decline human touch or proximity. Students are expected to respect the animals’ choices and autonomy, even if the animals’ choice may feel disappointing. Animal partners have the right to avoid interaction at any time and will be permitted to retreat to a designated rest area without disturbance. *Students are not permitted to restrain or restrict the movement of the animals or to pick up the animals. Students under no circumstances are permitted to provoke, intimidate, strike, or otherwise threaten or cause pain/harm to the animals.* For the safety of the student and wellness of the animals, these actions will result in the immediate and non-negotiable removal of the animals from the interaction. Intentional harm to the animals may be prosecuted in accordance with local animal abuse laws and could potentially impact your standing in your academic program. The handler will remain the sole guardian/owner and care provider of the animals at all times. The instructor/handler will retain the right to limit contact with the animal or remove it from interactions for any reason. *The student retains the right to request that the animal not be present in session at any time for any reason.*

If, at any time, you have questions, comments, or concerns about the rights and welfare of the animals under the instructor’s care, you are invited, encouraged, and welcomed to discuss them with your instructor at any time. It is your instructor’s goal to provide a healthy, mutually beneficial human-animal interactive experience for all involved.

**Individual Animal Partners**

A description of the animal partners you are most likely to encounter may be found below. If other animal partners are ever invited into the learning environment, Dr. Stewart, Dr. Sacco, or the animal’s qualified handler will orient you as needed.

**Individual Animals in Training**

Students are encouraged to interact with animals in training at the pace and level decided by the individual animal. Ursa and Maeve are both adolescent dogs still being socialized and trained. Due to this, the goal is to have as many positive and neutral experiences with new people and environments as possible. Students are encouraged to ignore the dogs until invited by the handler to interact. Students are ***encouraged*** to invite touch with the dogs when instructed by the handler in the following areas: chin, chest, neck, and shoulders. Students are ***discouraged*** from touching sensitive areas of the dogs’ bodies, such as: paws, inner ears, muzzle area, mouth, and groin. Canine species often vocalize through barks, growls, grunts or whimpers to communicate excitement, stress, or fatigue. Such vocalizations are part of normal canine behavior and may occur during your interaction*.* As adolescent dogs, jumping, barking, licking, mouthing and playful nipping is also an expected behavior. If Ursa or Maeve begins mouthing or nipping you or your clothing, you and the handler will work to appropriately redirect the behavior. Animals in training are in the process of learning expected behaviors. If at any point one of the dogs engages in an unwanted behavior, such as jumping up on you, ignore that behavior or ask the handler to redirect the interaction.

**Ursa Major**

Ursa is a female Old-Fashioned German Shepherd Dog. Dr. Stewart is Ursa’s primary handler. Ursa was obtained as a puppy in 2023 from a nationally respected breeder of Old-Fashioned German Shepherds with a strong history of prioritizing the health and temperament of the breed. Ursa’s breeder specializes in preparing companion, therapy, and service dogs with low to medium drive and gentle temperaments. Her genetic lineage has a reputation for calm, affectionate, and social dogs, including one of Dr. Stewart’s previous therapy partners, Sophie. Ursa is generally calm, friendly, and enjoys meeting and interacting with people.

**Maeve**

Maeve is a female Old Time Scotch Collie Dog. Shantelle Tjaden is Maeve’s primary handler. Old Time Scotch Collies are described as steady, intelligent and loyal by the breed club. Maeve was obtained in 2023 from a reputable breeder of Old Time Scotch Collies who prioritizes health, temperament, and preservation of the breed. Maeve comes from a genetic lineage that includes social, low drive, and affectionate dogs. As is typical for the breed, Maeve sometimes takes time to feel fully confident with strangers.

**Mature Animal Partners**

**Cody**

Cody is a male (neutered) Labrador Retriever mix dog. His primary handler is Shantelle Tjaden. Cody was adopted as a puppy by Shantelle from the Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter in 2018. Students are encouraged to pet Cody on his back and shoulders and discouraged from petting him directly on top of his head. Cody passed his Canine Good Citizen test in 2021, passed his therapy dog evaluation through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs in 2024, and has taken many training courses in basic behaviors, tricks, and dog sports and is currently enrolled in a therapy dog preparation course.

**Saki**

Saki is rescued domestic female (spayed) chinchilla rabbit. Her primary handler is Dr. Stewart. The House Rabbit Society recognizes rabbits as a highly social domestic species, which, when appropriately socialized, form strong bonds with companions and enjoy human interaction. Saki was adopted from Remembering Ruby Rabbit Rescue in Shelley, Idaho in 2008 at approximately 6 months of age. In collaboration with her foster caregiver, Saki was specifically identified and selected as a good potential candidate for AAIs due to her natural enjoyment of human relationships. Saki’s temperament is calm, confident, and social. She particularly enjoys learning tricks, engaging in other rewards-based training games, and solving treat puzzles. For this reason, your supervisor has decided that Saki is suitable for inclusion in this setting. Saki is often present in your instructor’s office, regardless of whether she is engaging a participant in AAIs.

Students are encouraged to initiate touch Saki in the following areas: top of the head,

outer ears, and face. Students are discouraged from touching sensitive areas of the rabbit’s body,

such as: paws, legs, inner ears, back, and hindquarters. Please note that as prey animals, being

grasped or feeling restricted is highly stressful for rabbits. Please avoid chasing or cornering Saki

or attempting to pursue or lift her. Rabbits may thump their legs or attempt to escape/hide to

communicate excitement, stress, or fatigue. These behaviors are considered to be part of normal

rabbit behavior and may occur during your interaction.

**Star Sapphire**

Star is a female (spayed) English Shepherd Dog. Her primary handler is Dr. Stewart. The United Kennel Club (UKC) recognizes this breed’s intelligence, loyalty, intuitiveness, trainability, and strong desire for close proximity with people. English Shepherds are considered a herding breed, often highly prized by farmers and ranchers, thus are active, vigilant, and highly observant animals that often exhibit nurturing and protective behavior towards their companions. Star was obtained in 2015 as an 8-week-old puppy from a nationally respected heritage breeder of English Shepherds with a strong history of prioritizing the health, temperament, and original integrity of the breed. Her genetic lineage has a reputation for highly affectionate and active dogs with robust physical health and exceptional intelligence. Star’s individual temperament is observant, assertive, and active, as is typical for her breed. Further, Star demonstrates exceptional sensitivity and responsiveness to symptoms of distress and anxiety in humans. It is for these reasons that the instructor has decided Star is suitable for inclusion in this setting. Due to Star’s preference for interactions that are highly active, she rarely accompanies your instructor in indoor office settings. Instead, Star is more often included in outdoor sessions that include physically active components like walking or hiking, or other ecotherapy-based activities. Star particularly enjoys outdoor adventures, training games, solving puzzles, and receiving affectionate touch from trusted human companions.

Students are encouraged to invite touch with Star in the following areas: chin, chest,

neck, rump, and shoulders. Students are discouraged from touching sensitive areas of Star’s body, such as: paws, inner ears, muzzle area, mouth, and groin. Canine species often vocalize through barks, growls, grunts or whimpers to communicate excitement, stress, or fatigue. Such vocalizations are part of normal canine behavior and may occur during your interaction. As an active dog, Star is highly vocal and occasionally responds to high-stimulus situations with excitability. You may experience this type of behavior from Star at some point during your interactions. This type of behavior is considered normal in active canine breeds. You may choose to engage Star in these active interactions or ask that her enthusiasm be appropriately redirected.

*STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT AND HOLD HARMLESS AGREEMENT:*

I have read and understand the potential risks and benefits associated with the presence of animals and animals in training as described in the informed consent document; and, I consent to have the aforementioned animals present in my educational environment. I understand that certain unforeseeable risks, as described in the informed consent document, may occur when interacting with the aforementioned animals and I understand that human-animal interaction is inherently unpredictable under any circumstances and that safety cannot be guaranteed. I also understand that I have the right to request at any time that the animal in training not be present. I consent to have all sessions that include an animal partner recorded at the discretion of the handler.

I hereby agree to save and hold the entity of Idaho State University as well as the Counseling Department faculty, including the instructor/animal handlers, Dr. Leslie Stewart and Shantelle Tjaden harmless from all cost, injury and damage incurred by any of the above, and from any other injury or damage to any person or property whatsoever, any of which is caused by an activity, condition or event arising out of interactions with any animal in training or the supervisor. I hereby agree NOT to pursue any punitive action or lawsuits, against the dogs Ursa, Maeve, or Star, the rabbit Saki, or any other animal involved, the instructor(s), the handler(s), or Idaho State University if any incidences should occur. ***I hereby agree NOT to pursue any course of action against the dog Star, the dog Ursa, the dog Maeve, the dog Cody, or the other individual animals involved that would result in the quarantine or euthanasia (or any other course of action that would result in the animal’s destruction) of the dog Ursa, the dog Maeve, the dog Cody, or the other individual animals involved if any incidences as described in the informed consent or otherwise should occur, or for any other reason whatsoever.*** The above cost, injury, damage or other injury or damage incurred by or to any of the above shall include, in the event of an action, court costs, expenses of litigation and reasonable attorneys’ fees.