

## Animals on Campus

### Interacting with Assistance Dogs

When assistance dogs are with their owner, they are working dogs and should not be regarded as pets. Individuals should:

- **Avoid distracting the dog** - If you need to approach the dog you should speak to the owner first and not go straight to talking to or touching the dog. This can cause the dog to pull away to greet people who are distracting them and could cause unbalance or injury to their owner.
- **Talk to the handler not the assistance dog** - It can be very frustrating for a person to have to interrupt your conversation with their dog, particularly when their dog is on duty. If you have been asked to help an assistance dog user to get somewhere with their dog, give the person directions and talk to them as they follow you. They will give the dog the correct commands as per their training. Do not attempt to gain the dog's attention; if they are responding to you, they are no longer focused on their primary task as an assistance dog.
- **Do not pet or praise the assistance dog** - You should avoid petting assistance dogs because they are working dogs not pets. If you would like to pet the dog, you should always address the owner permission. It can be very dangerous for the handler if their dog is distracted from their duties. It is important to remember that although assistance dogs are extremely intelligent and highly trained, they can display the same behaviours as other dogs, particularly if encouraged away from their task in hand. Praise is a reward for effective service and is given to the dog as and when it is appropriate, as facilitated by their handler. When in the company of an assistance dog, it is most appropriate to keep your eyes averted, speak to the handler directly and to refrain from using an excited or sweet-sounding voice that may distract the assistance dog.
- **Not offer the dog food** - The handler is responsible for maintaining their assistance dog's healthy and controlled diet. It can be detrimental to the assistance dog's health and training if they learn they can get food by other means. Food can be another way of distracting the dog and can be the biggest temptation for the dog and maybe difficult to ignore
- **Be respectful** - Show courtesy and respect, avoid making the owner uncomfortable or feel like their privacy is being intruded. Some owners may be comfortable talking about the assistance dogs and tasks they perform where others may not. The handler may have somewhere they need to be and have additional tasks, such as taking their assistance dog to the spending pen. The assistance dog will need to stay focused on their task and being distracted by questions from passers-by may cause undue stress for both the handler and the assistance dog.