

Where Have All the Free Dogs Gone?

I grew up on stories from my mom about her college days at Cornell. She loves to talk about her time on the hill, from things that have stayed the same like the wait at The Nines, to things that have since gone away like Johnny O's. The stories I remember best were about the dog-friendly campus at Cornell because she used these stories to dismiss any attempts I made at getting a family pet. Whenever I asked for a dog growing up, my mom brushed off my requests by promising that when I went to Cornell I could get one. So naturally, I was pretty upset when I committed to Cornell for that reason alone, only to find out that university policies regarding dogs had drastically changed.

There are no dogs roaming around campus anymore. No pets sitting quietly in class rooms, no animals scurrying around the arts quad aside from squirrels, and no pet in my Collegetown home. What happened to the bastion of canine freedom that I had grown up dreaming about? Why are the only pets at Cornell relegated to the farthest reaches of North Campus in the Ecology House?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence of any statute giving free range to dogs on campus. A story is often told of a wealthy alumnus who donated a substantial amount of money with the stipulation that Cornell should remain a dog-friendly University.¹ A member of the Cornell Policy Office confirmed that, while he had heard the story of the 1920s canine-loving patron, there does not seem to be any evidence to support the fact. Even if there was a donation in the 1920s, free roaming dogs would have well predated it. In 1899, not only were dogs free to roam libraries, the quietest and most sacred of University establishments, but the penalty to get

¹ Gingold, Alfred. *Dog World: And the Humans Who Live There*. New York: Broadway, 2005. 76-77. Print.

your dog back after completely abandoning it in a library, according to an 1899 Cornell Daily Sun article, was only \$1, or about \$28 today.² The article recounts however, a specific instance in which a man was given back his dog even after refusing to pay the fine when another student left his dog in the library.³ In *Dog World*, Gingold tells another story about “a bulldog named Napoleon [who] regularly rode a streetcar down the hill into town, loitered around the bars, and caught the last car back to campus.”⁴ Many other stories are told about dogs shaping the personality of early Cornell’s campus. However, the lives of the free dogs were not all cute anecdotes about daily commutes.

For as long as dogs roamed free on campus, ugly incidents accompanied them. The Veterinary College often picked up stray dogs for experiments.⁵ Students only experimented on dogs that would “be missed by no one.”⁶ While this policy seems a little extreme, there were campus hounds that were known as “instigators of fights in Goldwin Smith Hall” in a 1922 Daily Sun article, so some animals deserved their contributions to science.⁷ It was a more purposeful death than that of the pure bred St. Bernard belonging to the Delta Upsilon fraternity who was shot by a local man for slightly bruising his son’s face.⁸ Students also suffered from wayward canines. Many students were bitten by dogs, some of which did not have rabies shots, like the one that bit a poor freshman in 1967.⁹ These type of events, along with City of Ithaca’s changing pet policies resulted in stricter regulation in the 1970s.

² “Dogs in the Library,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, February 9, 1889.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gingold, *Dog World*, 76-77.

⁵ “Rags, Familiar Campus Canine, Out of Danger,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, March 28, 1924.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Noted Campus Hounds are Fast Disappearing,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, November 14, 1922.

⁸ “Valuable St. Bernard Killed,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, December 16, 1905.

⁹ “Dog Lacked Shots,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, October 27, 1967.

In November of 1971, the University decided that it was time to start dealing with the packs of stray dogs in campus buildings. The University Senate called a town hall meeting to discuss an amendment to the University's policies, proposed by a grad student named Ellen Mandell. The "Dogs on Campus Care and Control Act" was a result of a study Mandell conducted that "found some two dozen abandoned dogs and two cases of dogs being thrown into the gorge."¹⁰ She claimed that tighter restrictions on campus dogs would result in more humane treatment, which was important to her, being a dog lover herself. A variety of students, faculty, and even the Dean of Students attended the meeting in the Noyes Center Lounge. There was a general consensus that Mandell's proposal was too restrictive, but people differed on what should be done. One professor claimed that the "freedom that is seen on campus [was] a result of the dogs." Others pointed out that most Cornell dogs behaved well, save for a few trouble makers.¹¹

Most meeting participants agreed to the best course of action was to impose mandatory registration of campus dogs and allow them to roam anywhere they wanted except laboratories for safety reasons.¹² After the town hall gathering, the Senate convened for their weekly meeting and decided to ban dogs from "University food areas and residence halls."¹³

The next semester, on March 30th, 1972, the Sun picked up a story angrily claiming that the University had banned dogs from all academic buildings, and had hired three student dog-catchers to round up all stray dogs in University facilities.¹⁴ The next day, the Sun weakly redacted the story, claiming that the Cornell Chronicle had written the false article, without

¹⁰ Julia Benezet, "Committee Considers Dog Policy," *Cornell Daily Sun*, November 11, 1971.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Animals Banned from Classrooms," *Cornell Daily Sun*, March 30, 1972.

¹⁴ Ibid.

mentioning that they had picked up the same story.¹⁵ Jackson Hall, executive assistant to the University President, clarified that dogs were not banned from all university buildings, the new policy simply “provide[d] a mechanism to take care of those who become nuisances.”¹⁶ Thus, dogs could still roam free in campus buildings, provided they behaved themselves, but it was not long before students’ fears of a canine-free campus became a reality.

University Policy 2.8 states:

“Cornell University prohibits pets from university-controlled buildings, except for those animals that are specifically exempted by this policy. In addition, while on university-controlled property, animals must be attended and restrained at all times.”¹⁷

This is a long stretch from the laissez faire policy that a fledgling Cornell University grew up on, and much of the population prided itself on. So why, then, were no reports written about it in the *Sun*? One would think that such a radical departure from the dog-loving campus, to a place where dogs were completely banned from academic buildings would bring about upheaval at least on the magnitude that suggesting that dogs in University buildings be under control stirred up in the 70’s.

In order to get some answers, I got in touch with a high-ranking Cornell Policy Department employee. This employee was a student in the 1970s, so he was able to provide insight into a large span of the history of Policy 2.8. First, he listed a few reasons the school needed to adopt the new policy, which included the obvious: dog bites, owner neglect, the campus maintenance cost of cleaning up ruined campus landscaping and widespread

¹⁵ Gary L. Rubin, “University Clarifies New Dog Policy,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, March 31, 1972.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Cornell University Policy Volume 2, Chapter 8, 2000.

defecation.¹⁸ More unusual reasons prompted the response as well: wild dogs sometimes interacted with service dogs, which presented problems for those relying on the service animals. Further, the University's Disability Services alleged that pet dander allergies were the fastest growing disability on campus. Obviously, having stray dogs in campus buildings only served to aggravate those allergies. Perhaps the most interesting reason for the new policy, the employee claimed that there was an equity issue in allowing dogs in campus buildings. While a faculty member with an office could bring a dog to work and have a place to leave it, a janitor, for example, could not bring a dog to campus because there would be nowhere to put it while working. This created a "bifurcated level of entitlement," where the higher an employee was in the administration, the easier it was to keep a dog.¹⁹ Because of all of the reasons mentioned, University officials decided to adopt a stricter dog policy in August of 2000.

Even though this answer explained why there were no longer dogs in campus buildings, it did not explain why there was no resistance to the policy by students. One would think that a policy that changed student life so significantly would receive at least a little push back, but there was no evidence of student disapproval in the *Sun* around when the policy was adopted. While the employee had no obvious answer to this, he postulated that the difference between the activism of the students in the 1970's versus the "complacency" of the students in the late 1990's, whom he called the "Me" Generation, could account for the silent acceptance of the policy. He claimed that this policy was one of the most contentious since he started working at Cornell, but most of the uproar came from faculty, rather than students. Eventually, incoming students did not notice the difference, because a dog-free campus was all they ever knew. In

¹⁸ Author interview with Employee, April 8, 2015.

¹⁹ Ibid.

reality, the absence of animals in campus buildings is not really so strange. It seems much stranger to have packs of uncontrolled dogs prowling Goldwin Smith Hall. The Policy Office employee also pointed out that bringing a dog to class is “a pain in the ass” to keep quiet and well behaved.²⁰ He claimed that even when he went to Cornell in the 1970s, he rarely saw dogs in class; maybe a handful in his whole time as an undergraduate student. Looking at the policy from this perspective, it seems strange change did not come about sooner.

The reason Cornell maintained a dog-friendly policy for so long was because dog owners and dog lovers really liked having them around. In 2008, the Vice President of Human Resources, Mary Opperman, and the Vice President of Student Affairs, Susan Murphy, brought up a bill that would relax some Policy 2.8’s measures after it was pointed out that dogs made great companions, relieving stress for students.²¹ Unfortunately, this occurred right around the Recession, so Steve Golding, a Senior Vice President, pointed out that the University did not have the money to support the infrastructure needed to bring dogs back to campus buildings, tabling the discussion. Thus, even though the administration has remained mute on the dog issue since then, there is hope that Cornell’s campus may once again be an oasis for dogs.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

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