

## SMALL PET PROPOSAL

Hello,

I recently bought a hamster. I am trying to start a petition to allow small animals to stay in the apartments here at Johnson College. This course of action worked before to go from no animals to fish. This brings me to my question. Would you be able to help and give me ideas and hints for writing a petition? I would like to do this in the most professional manner possible and I have never written one before. Thanks.

Jess

Hi Jess,

Change happens slowly and it is a process. I have been working for changes ever since I was 16 and instrumental in changing my high school dress code. I am more patient with the process than I was then, but it is still frustrating when other people are resistant to a (in my opinion) good idea. This will be an excellent learning experience for you. I am delighted to be able to help. Thanks for asking me.

This is going to require a lot of work, so:

- It is always good if you can kill two birds with one stone by using it as a project for one of your classes. Hey, get a good grade for doing something you want to do.
- If you do not have a class it will apply to this year, save ALL your work anyway, it may be usable for a class later, or as a template for a later project.
- In addition, civic action work like this is excellent on a resume. Document all your actions, save copies of all your work, and put it into resume form as you go. (As my older son says, a resume should be a work in progress. Start it now and add things immediately as they happen. That way you do not forget to add anything and you always have a current resume when needed.)
- Form a committee! You are going to need more brains for brainstorming and more people to share the work, and you need the support and encouragement of other like-minded people. You want only a couple people for your core group. You need enough to be helpful but not enough to have conflict.
- Name your committee. A simple name like "Small Pet People" would be acceptable. Then advertise, around campus for other like-minded people to come to a meeting. You may get a few more folks to add to your core committee.
- Test the waters and find out how much support you have from other students. A general population survey would be very helpful. Emailing the whole student body would be easy (if possible), put an article in the campus newspaper, or make posters to hang everywhere. Have them email the responses to you. (You need to use your campus mail so that the messages are official. To keep your mailbox from getting too full, immediately transfer the responses to a word file – but keep them all!) Specify the final date (give them a week, no more than two) to respond to the survey. You want the percentage of students that respond out of the total on-campus population and the positive and negative percentages out of the number that respond. Sample questions may be:
  1. Would you like to have/own/keep a small caged pet in your room? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you live in a room with a roommate who has/keeps/owns a small caged pet? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_
3. Would you live in a building where other tenants have/own/keep small caged pets? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

If you have enough support, you continue.

Before writing a petition and asking students, staff and faculty to sign it in support of your proposal, you have to write the proposal.

Your proposal is VERY IMPORTANT. Its first and most basic, purpose is to state clearly and succinctly what you want. However, that is not enough to get action. The more work you do for the people you are asking, the more likely you are to get what you want.

This may be the point where you actually define "small caged pets" and list inclusions and exclusions. Hamsters, Gerbils, Guinea pigs, mice, rats, snakes, chameleons, iguanas, tarantulas, birds etc; list as many as you can and propose a process to make decisions on other pets in the future.

Expect objections, anticipate as many as possible and deal with them ahead of time. Do not let them get you down, its part of the process.

The meat of your proposal is addressing the pros and cons of the issue. If you are asking the administration to make changes you have to address their concerns and give them the answers they need.

Cons:

1. Health Issues
  - Diseases passed from animal to animal or animals to people – could possibly be aided if you can get the veterinary school to do health checkups – maybe by a student run clinic, which would be another whole project
  - People with allergies – maybe this can be addressed by only having one floor or one building that allows the caged pets, depending on the response numbers from your survey
  - People with phobias – same as above
2. Sanitary Issues
  - Will the students keep the cages clean so they do not smell and attract flies or other insects?
  - Will the janitorial staff have more work to do?
3. Legal Liability – This is always the bottom line. What will the university have to pay if something goes wrong and they are sued? Go online and look it up.
4. Think up more.

Pros:

1. Mental health and welfare of the students – research online to find stats about psychological effect of having pets.
2. Making students more responsible – again look for articles online.
3. Think up more - Lots more. You need as many pros as cons.
4. You need solid reasons why this is good, not only for you, but for the general welfare of the university.

5. Come up with a plan to continue this program in the future after you are gone. Who will administer it and make decisions.
6. Do research online to find if other schools allow them and refer to their policies.

After completing the proposal, circulate it with the petition. You could publish it in the newspaper with petitions at specific locations or collect an email response.

It is necessary to have some staff and faculty on your side. Talk to your advisor, teachers, the housing people/residence life, student affairs and/or any other campus organizations that might be helpful.

Then you are ready to present it to the powers-that-be.

As an alternate plan, you could ask the veterinary school for a room where students could keep their pets. Owners could go there anytime to feed, care for and play with them. This could actually be some sort of project for your studies. For this, you use the same plan, just on a smaller scale, focused on the veterinary school staff and faculty.

Universities take a long time to implement changes due to the ramifications to the entire university not only now but in the future. They have to form committees and have meetings and do much research and deliberation. All of that takes time and resources and they prioritize those carefully. Therefore, be prepared for this to take a long time. However, do not let anything stop you from doing something you truly believe in and want to do. Even if you do not get the result you want, the experience of trying is invaluable.

I hope this is helpful. It is just a general plan on how to get started. I will be glad to help more as you move along. Good Luck! Please keep me posted.

Pat