

# The Effects of Canine Assisted Therapy on Emotionally Stressed Undergraduate College Students: A Systematic Review

Mackenzie Hansen, Department of Health Sciences.  
Carroll College, Helena, Montana.

## Introduction

College students usually encounter higher levels of psychological distress when compared to the overall population due to the many challenges of school and changes the students may encounter. Due to the excess stress levels, harsh effects on social and emotional health, and a decline in academic performance and achievements, college students would benefit from a relatively new and promising treatment known as canine assisted therapy.

Canine assisted therapy has the ability to act as a buffer against situations, settings, and tasks that are deemed as stressful. Canine assisted therapy shows to provide and promote healing of the body, mind, and spirit. The purpose of this study is to systematically review how canine assisted therapy affects emotional stress in undergraduate college students.

## Methods

- PubMed and CINAHL databases
- Keywords “canine-assisted therapy”, “undergraduate students”, “emotional strain”, “emotional stress”, and “college students”.
- Participants had to be undergraduate college students.
- The intervention had to include all canine-assisted activities and all canine-assisted therapies.
- The number of participants ranged from 48 to 1,960.
- Initially 70 articles were retrieved and 7 were selected (Figure 3).
- 3 randomized-controlled studies, 2 experimental studies, 1 randomized crossover exploratory study, and 1 cohort study.



<https://chhs.source.colostate.edu/gift-boosts-animal-assisted-therapy-research-education-csu/>

Figure 1. Colorado State University provides canine-assisted therapy to students in need like the college students pictured here.



<http://renoalternativetherapies.bstandingwater.com/wp/?p=6>

Figure 2. A stressed college student utilizing a college university canine assisted therapy program called Paws4Love to help reduce stress and anxiety.



Figure 3. Process for identifying and including articles in systematic review.

## References

- 1) Besser, A., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2012). Positive personality features and stress among first-year university students: Implications for psychological distress, functional impairment, and self-esteem. *Self and Identity*, 13(1), 24-44. doi:10.1080/15298868.2012.736690
- 2) Binfet, J. (2017). The effects of group-administered canine therapy on university students' wellbeing: a randomized controlled trial. *Anthrozoös*, 30(3), 397-414. doi:10.1080/08927936.2017.1335097
- 3) Halm, M. (2008). The healing power of the human-animal connection. *American Journal of Critical Care*, 17(4), 373-376.

## Results

- The literature included in this systematic review strongly suggests that canine assisted therapy reduces the amount of emotional stress in undergraduate college students.
- Overall, all the studies found statistically significant correlations between canine assisted therapy and reducing stress.

## Public Health Implications and Recommendations

Colleges across the globe should educate and enlighten their students about the harmful effects of stress on college students and how canine assisted therapy can help minimize those issues. Schools should also strive to incorporate canine assisted therapy in areas of college students' lives that are immensely stressful.

In the future, more research on canine assisted therapy needs to be conducted. Future research could include larger sample sizes including students from all over the world, as well as including personal interviews to get an understanding of how canine assisted therapy benefitted the participants.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Carroll College Health Sciences Department and Katie Wagner for her guidance and support in this presentation, my education, and my career goals.