

Tufts Institute for Human-Animal Interaction



Tufts Institute for Human-Animal Interaction Fall 2020 Newsletter

Announcements and Events

TIHAI Student Scholars Applications due December 1!

To accommodate challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TIHAI is offering a mid-year deadline for the 2020-2021 Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) Student Scholars Program. The HAI Student Scholars program will accept requests for funding events, projects, and programs related to HAI in the realms of research, education, and service. All proposals must align with university COVID-19 policies.

Projects may be geared towards activities that benefit people, animals, or both, although activities that benefit both will be given priority, and proposals that involve harm or stress to animals will not be considered. Topics may be related to any area of HAI, such as science and engineering education, pet ownership, animal-assisted therapy, and others. Funding will be considered for individual students or a group of students, though all applications require a Tufts University faculty or staff mentor. Applications for graduate or undergraduate students from all Tufts campuses are welcomed, and cross-campus collaborations are highly encouraged.

All application materials are due via email to hai@tufts.edu by 5:00 pm on December 1, 2020. Visit our [Student Scholars](#) webpage for more information.

In Memoriam – Paws for People Therapy Dog Boo



We would like to take a moment to honor our good friend and longtime Paws for People therapy dog, Boo, whose passing has affected so many of us. We don't have any words that weren't written better by Boo's handler, Deb Gibbs, in a tribute that can be read here:

<https://petpartners.org/volunteer/honoring-our-therapy-animals/deborah-boo/>.

Thank you, Boo, for your years of service.

Paws for People

We were extremely fortunate to receive a generous grant from the Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund. The intent of the three-year award is to provide enough dedicated support to help with program growth and sustainability. We are very grateful to the Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund and are excited to see what will come about with such support! In September, we welcomed Jennifer Ebert as our Paws for People Office Assistant. Jen brings a wealth of valuable experience and we anticipate her knowledge to be of enormous benefit to the program. Additionally, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have explored and undertaken new virtual approaches involving handler-animal interactions that maintain the engagement of current teams of handlers and animals with audiences. We have conducted a number of virtual workshops and therapy animal visits since August, and both handlers and audiences have loved the experience!

Visit the Paws for People website for further information here:

<https://www.pawsforpeople.org/>. Additional events are being scheduled to provide some fun stress relief to several employee groups at the Cummings School. We hope to encourage similar requests from other groups on other Tufts campuses.

Education

Student Spotlight



We are thrilled to welcome Erin King, M.S., who is starting in Fall 2020 as a student in the human-animal interaction track at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine PhD program. Erin will be working in Dr. Megan Mueller's lab and in the [Center for Animals and Public Policy](#), as well as continuing her role as Civic Life Coordinator at [Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University](#).

Her current research project areas include equity and accessible veterinary care, student service -learning and civic engagement, and human- animal interaction. She was a project coordinator for an NIH grant assessing the impact of therapy dogs on stress for adolescents with social anxiety, as well as the coordinator for a canine dental health clinical

trial. Past research has also focused on link between animal cruelty and human violence, as well as USDA Animal Welfare Act Enforcement Actions.

She is interested in continuing work in Human-Animal Interaction research, focusing on both individual and community health through the human-animal bond. She was drawn to this area of research through her experience with HAI, and her love for data and statistics. Her goals are to provide empirically rigorous research to the field of HAI, while preparing for a career as a professor in academia with the ability to teach and mentor students.

Spring 2021 Course Offerings

CSHD-0189: Human-Animal Interaction

- Spring 2021 (Registration opens in November), Thursdays 1:30-4:00 PM
- Medford Campus (virtual), Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
- Instructor: Megan K. Mueller, Ph.D.

Course Description: This is an interdisciplinary course exploring mutually beneficial human-animal relationships: the role of animals in promoting positive development in childhood, adolescence and across the life-span, animal-assisted therapy, the role of animals in mental and physical health, animals in the family setting, animal policy and welfare, and animals in educational and programmatic contexts.

TIHAI in the News

Megan K. Mueller, along with Linda Charmaraman and Amanda M. Richer, co-wrote a study published in the Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal that examined how pet companionship is associated with social technology use and the quality of online social connections. Read more about the study here:

<https://www.newswise.com/articles/new-study-shows-associations-between-adolescents-relationships-with-their-pets-and-their-social-media-use>

Dr. Mueller was also featured in a recent Chronicle episode discussing pets during the pandemic: <https://www.wcvb.com/article/four-legged-friends-pet-adoptions-have-significantly-increased-during-covid-19/34278123>

Calling Tufts Student Groups!

Are you a member of a Tufts student group that is related to humans and animals or doing work related to HAI? We would love to highlight you on our webpage! Please email us at hai@tufts.edu.

Research Spotlight



Megan Mueller (TIHAI Co-Director) and Gary Bedell (TIHAI Board of Advisors) were recently awarded a Tufts Springboard grant to modify the successful Social Participation and Navigation (SPAN) program to help teenagers with social anxiety work with their pets to promote social interaction. This project is a collaboration between the Department of Occupational Therapy and the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine.

Our Canines for Autism Activity and Nutrition (CAAN) study is currently preparing to institute a pilot program that will investigate the feasibility of including a family's dog in their child's applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy sessions. This is a multidisciplinary study with a research team that consists of Aviva Must, Deborah Linder, Christina Mulé, Sara Folta, and Sean Cash. The study also includes stakeholder engagement, which has proven to be invaluable to our work. We are now in the process of designing the training curriculum for therapists that we will be working with during the course of the research. We look forward to instituting the program in the months to come.

