

Therapy Dogs comfort SIU SDM and SIUE students during finals

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - Newman, Kylie, Elsa and Wrigley were a comforting site for students at the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) on Thursday, May 4. The four are therapy dogs with [CHAMP Assistance Dogs](#), whose relaxed temperament offered students a bit of lightness amidst the stress of finals.

“I’ve always been a dog lover,” said Michael Hawk, a second year dental student, while petting Elsa. “They are all incredibly calm and willing to let us pet them.”

Approximately 300 students at SIUE also enjoyed the sweet pets on Monday, May 1. Newman is a Black Lab, Kylie is a Border Terrier, Elsa is a Portuguese Water Dog and Wrigley is a Golden Doodle.

“The therapy dogs offer a nice break from routine, since students are feeling stressed and are extremely focused on their many finals,” said Jessica Hinz, PhD, associate professor at the SIU SDM, who coordinated the visit. “School of Dental Medicine students are essentially in class from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. every day, and some have hours of lab afterward, while others are seeing patients. So, it’s a high-stress, high stakes environment at this point in the semester.”

“It’s definitely a stressful time,” confirmed Coleman Choate, a first year dental student. “This is a nice offering, because a lot of our apartments don’t allow pets. It’s great being able to pet these dogs and kind of feel as if you are home with your own pets.”

Located in Florissant, Mo., CHAMP Assistance Dogs trains and places services dogs at no cost. According to Jill Vallow, a member of CHAMP’s board of directors and therapy dog handler, the company places public access dogs, home services dogs and facility dogs.

“Therapy dogs have to have a rock solid temperament to do this,” Vallow explained. “Sometimes they’ll have six or seven people around them, petting them, so you have to be a laid back dog to handle that.”

“This time of year is busy as we travel to many schools during finals,” she added. “Students tell us after visiting with the dogs their stress is gone, and they feel more positive and relaxed. That is what these visits are all about.”

“I’ve loved petting the dogs,” said Jaterra Ross, a second year dental student. “We need a lot of stress relief, especially during this finals week. It’s nice to see something that brings happiness and momentarily takes you away to another place outside of school.”

[The SIU School of Dental Medicine](#) students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students

offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.



