

**Victoria Stilwell Academy  
Student Handbook**



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Welcome and Introduction.....2**

**Educational Programs and Objectives.....3**

**Course Listing & Structure.....3**

**Dog Trainer Course (DTC)..... 3**

**Dog Trainer Course plus In-Person Track ..... 4**

**Faculty/Administration ..... 5**

**Enrollment Agreement.....12**

**Admission Requirements .....12**

**Attendance and Academic Standards Policy.....12**

**Grading Policy.....13**

**Faculty Advisor Protocols .....14**

**DTC Graduation Requirements .....15**

**DTC In-Person Track Graduation Requirements.....15**

**Graduating with Distinction .....16**

**Student Learning Center.....16**

**Keys for Successful Completion .....16**

**Graduate Benefits.....17**

**Training Method & Ideology Pledge.....17**

**Code of Conduct and Liability Waiver .....18**

**Tuition and Fees .....19**

**Career Opportunities & Placement Services.....20**

**Grievances.....20**

**Refund policy.....21**



## Welcome and Introduction

Congratulations and welcome! We're thrilled and honored that you've chosen the Victoria Stilwell Academy for Dog Training & Behavior (VSA) to help you achieve your goal of becoming a high-quality professional dog trainer. By enrolling as a student in the Dog Trainer Course (DTC) with VSA, you're taking the first step towards a richly rewarding and successful career helping people to build and maintain relationships with their dogs based on mutual trust and understanding instead of pain, fear and intimidation.

Over the next six months, you will learn not only about how to train dogs, but also about how to successfully run a small business in the pet services industry. Equally important, you will discover how to communicate most effectively with your human clients. What sets VSA apart from other dog training schools is our commitment to giving you the tools to be a complete dog trainer – teaching both human and canine while empowering them both to learn how to learn from each other most effectively. All too often, students leave other dog training schools with some good knowledge about how to train dogs, but without the unique people and business skills necessary to truly communicate what you're trying to teach to clients, no matter what type of listener or learner they may be.

Welcome to VSA. We're honored to be a part of your journey towards becoming the best positive dog trainer you can be. Congratulations on chasing your dreams!

Positively,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Stilwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Victoria Stilwell, President  
Victoria Stilwell Academy



## Educational Programs and Objectives

VSA's professional dog trainer educational offerings include the online-only Dog Trainer Course (DTC) and the DTC's add-on In-Person Track – both options represent a six-month course designed to prepare students for a career as a professional dog trainer by providing a comprehensive educational experience. Students learn about and gain practical hands-on experience in these core areas:

- **Dog Training:** Students develop a keen understanding of dog behavior and the science of learning, and gain valuable hands-on experience with a variety of dogs to help them assimilate the skills necessary to competently train client's dogs.
- **Teaching:** Dog training is really about teaching people – the pet owners that are clients. In VSA students learn about human communication and acquire teaching skills that promote professional, empathetic, and effective human-client relations.
- **Business:** VSA equips students with the knowledge and tools to start up and operate a dynamic dog training business including legal considerations, business writing, marketing and branding, curriculum development, and more.

VSA's mission is to promote healthy, positive relationships between pets and their people while empowering new generations of dog training professionals with the knowledge, tools and confidence to create thriving, profitable careers.

## Course Listing & Structure

### Dog Trainer Course (DTC)

All Dog Trainer Course students begin their studies with the online-only components of the program of instruction.

- 6 months (recommended – up to 12 months to complete)
- No previous dog training experience required
- All DTC students are assigned a dedicated Faculty Advisor with whom they meet once per week for 'Office Hours' to guide them through the course, answer questions, and assess skills and knowledge via periodic assessments via videoconference.
- Downloadable learning guide supplements and printable course resources.
- 20 full modules of 100% faculty-narrated, self-paced, online lessons:
  1. Positively Philosophy
  2. Canine History & Ethology
  3. Canine Cognition
  4. Canine Communication & Body Language
  5. Canine Enrichment
  6. Learning Theory & Functional Assessments
  7. Managing Behavior
  8. Positive Training Tools & Methods
  9. Reinforcement & Training Applications
  10. Teaching Basic Behaviors
  11. Solving Common Behavior Problems
  12. Teaching Private Lessons



## VSA Student Handbook

13. Teaching Group Classes
14. Working with Humans
15. Canine Health & Science
16. Dog Sports & Working Dogs
17. Advanced Training & Behavior
18. Animal Advocacy
19. Business Management
20. Marketing & Branding

[See the full course syllabus here.](#)

### **Dog Trainer Course plus In-Person Track**

VSA's comprehensive DTC In-Person Track experience includes everything from the Dog Trainer Course online-only program *plus*:

- **In-person Intensives.** VSA Faculty lead students through two multi-day intensive learning experiences that include classroom study, hands-on experience, field trips, and more. [See locations of Intensives classes.](#)
- **Professional Mentor Shadowing.** Students complete two multi-month field units under the supervision of a local VSA-supplied professional dog training mentor.
- **Real-time cyber classes.** Online interactive webinars led by Victoria and other faculty enhance the learning experience while keeping students engaged and on track.

The DTC plus In-Person Track is comprised of six course units:

1. **Introduction Unit (60 days):** Students begin the program by completing the online lessons in Modules 1-9, attending several Cyber Classes, taking their 1st VSA trimester exam, conducting Office Hours with their Faculty Advisor via videoconference, and completing their 1st skills assessments.
2. **First Intensive Unit (5 Days):** VSA Faculty lead students through multi-day in-person intensive experiences custom designed to enhance learning through activities, field trips, classroom study, hands-on experience with dogs and more.
3. **Field Study Unit (60 Days):** Students will complete online lessons in Modules 10-14, attend Cyber Classes, meet with their Faculty Advisor, conduct skills assessments, take their 2nd VSA trimester exam, and begin their mentor shadowing experience with a local professional mentor.
4. **Second Intensive Unit (5 days):** VSA Faculty lead students through multi-day intensive learning experiences that include classroom study, hands-on experience, field trips, and more.
5. **Field Training Unit (60 Days):** Students will complete the online lessons in Modules 15-20, attend Cyber Classes, meet with their Faculty Advisor, conduct skills assessments, and continue their mentor shadowing experiences.
6. **Final Assessments Unit (7 days):** Students complete any complete any outstanding skills assessments and take both an online and written final exam. VSA confirms completion of all course components and requirements.



## **DTC Faculty Advisors**

Every DTC student (whether enrolled in just the online-only program or both the online and In-Person Track), is assigned a dedicated personal Faculty Advisor (FA). FA's serve as the student's personal liaison throughout the learning experience, providing feedback and opportunities for Q&A about curriculum content questions as well as a powerful support system for the student. FA's also conduct all of the skill assessments throughout the course via videoconferencing tools.

## **DTC Mentor Units**

Upon enrollment in the Dog Trainer Course each student is paired with a VSA Mentor, a professional trainer selected by VSA to provide shadowing opportunities to the student through the Field Study and Field Training Units. During each field unit students shadow their mentor at various activities designed to facilitate their assimilation of key course learning goals while gaining exposure to real-world professional experience. VSA attempts to pair students with geographically close mentors, generally within two hours driving distance. For students that must travel a greater distance to complete activities with their mentor, VSA encourages the student and mentor to work together to optimize scheduling so that more activities can be completed per visit. Mentors' schedules of classes and lessons will vary, so VSA cannot guarantee a specific schedule of when students will be able to complete required activities with their mentor.

## **VSA Organizational Structure**

VSA's faculty is competent in the subject matter and teaching techniques and is highly qualified to implement the VSA curriculum. Led by renowned TV dog trainer Victoria Stilwell (*It's Me or the Dog*, *Dogs With Extraordinary Jobs*, *Dogs Might Fly*, *Greatest American Dog*), the VSA team is comprised of industry leaders in the field of dog training and behavior, business marketing and interpersonal client relationship skills.

The DTC program's curricula is designed to provide a comprehensive introductory education in the field of dog training and behavior to students with little to no background in the dog training and behavior field. All VSA course content is carefully designed and executed by VSA's expert staff which features extensively qualified individuals as well as an industry-leading Advisory Board.

## **Faculty/Administration**

### **Victoria Stilwell, President/Founder/Faculty**

Victoria is a world-renowned dog trainer, TV personality, author and public speaker best known as the star of the international hit TV series *Greatest American Dog* and *It's Me or the Dog*, through which she



reaches audiences in over 80 countries. The torchbearer for force-free positive reinforcement dog training methods, Stilwell is the Editor-in-Chief of Positively.com and is the CEO of both Victoria Stilwell, Inc. and Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training (VSPDT): the world's premier global network of positive reinforcement dog trainers. Appearing frequently in the global media, Stilwell is widely recognized as a leader in the field of animal behavior. She serves as a National Ambassador for the American Humane Association and is on the Advisory Boards of DogTV, Dognition, RedRover and Canine Assistants. She is also the CEO of the Victoria Stilwell Foundation, providing animal behavior expertise and funding to smaller rescue shelters and positive training-based canine assistance organizations.

### **Irith Bloom, Faculty**

Irith Bloom, CPDT-KSA, CDBC, VSPDT, KPA CTP, CBATI, certified TAGteacher, has been training animals since the 1980s, and has worked with everything from parrots and rabbits to dogs and horses – not to mention humans. A biologist by training, Irith is fascinated by the science of learning, and loves taking part in conferences and seminars. Irith has presented at a variety of venues both in the U.S. and internationally, including the VSPDT Conference, ClickerExpo, and the Association of Professional Dog Trainers' Annual Educational Conference, among others. She has given webinars for the APDT and the Society for Veterinary Behavior Technicians. She has also written numerous articles for online outlets, and has been published in *The APDT Chronicle of the Dog* and *Everydog*.

Irith volunteers with National English Shepherd Rescue, and is on the Steering Committee of the Los Angeles County 2020 Healthy Pets Healthy Families Coalition, a One Health Initiative aimed at improving the health and well-being of people and their pets throughout Los Angeles County. Irith is the owner of *The Sophisticated Dog*, a pet training company based in Los Angeles, and shares her home with a rescued English Shepherd named Franklin and her husband Aaron.

### **Dr. Paula Bloom, Faculty**

Dr. Paula Bloom is a practicing clinical psychologist, author, TEDx speaker and frequent on-air CNN contributor. She is called on by the media to offer perspective on a wide range of events and topics including national tragedies, international events and mental health topics such as happiness, resilience and relationships. Paula is the co-author of *Why Does he Do That? Why Does She Do That?* and has contributed blogs to PBS's *This Emotional Life* and *The Huffington Post* and has been featured in *Men's Health*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Day* and [CNN.com](http://CNN.com). Paula is a proud pet parent of a 5-lb Chihuahua-terrier mix and a 35-lb boxer puppy.

### **Alynn (Aly) J. Lecznar, Curriculum Manager/Mentor Coordinator/Faculty**

Aly (VSPDT, CPDT-KA, CCFT, KPA-Graduate, FitPAWS® Master Trainer, ATD Master Trainer™) is both a certified dog trainer and master trainer of people as well! She received her Applied Biology degree from Georgia Tech, and worked in collaboration with Zoo Atlanta for her senior thesis on animal cognition. While at Tech, Aly received her Honorary Member status with the Atlanta Police Department for her



work training horses at the APD Mounted Patrol Department. After years of working with horses, Aly turned her efforts towards her first love, dogs. She attended the Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Behavior and Training where she completed the Dog Training Professionals Program and became a Certified Training Partner. Upon launching her own dog training business, Aly realized that teaching behaviors is most effective when paired with a wellness program. To enhance her programs, Aly continued her education at the University of Tennessee Veterinary School to become a FitPaws® Master Trainer and Certified Canine Fitness Trainer.

As the Curriculum Manager for the Victoria Stilwell Academy and the Positively brand, Aly analyzes, develops, delivers, implements, and evaluates online and in-person learner-centered, performance-based experiences for aspiring professional dog trainers, pet professionals, and dog owners. She received the Master Trainer™ certification from the Association of Talent Development (ATD) for her work training people, as well as completing a certificate in Instructional Design. In her spare time, Aly enjoys canicrossing with her standard poodle, Klaus.

### **Sarah Fisher, Faculty**

Sarah Fisher is a canine and equine behaviour advisor and educator. She has worked with animals for over twenty years and is the founder of Animal Centred Education. Sarah teaches Animal Centred Education (ACE) courses for trainers, groomers, veterinary nurses, physiotherapists and animal behaviour counsellors who wish to broaden their expertise by learning detailed observations combined with ACE Free Work, TTouch bodywork, and techniques inspired by animals and other professionals working in the fields of animal welfare, education and behaviour.

Sarah is experienced with a wide range of breed types and teaches staff workshops for many of the UK's animal welfare organisations including Battersea. She has also worked in Europe teaching staff workshops for shelters and has taught workshops and clinics for dog trainers and behaviourists in Holland, Greece, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, South Africa, Ireland, Cyprus, Romania and Poland.

Sarah gives presentations on a variety of topics at dog training and behaviour seminars in the UK and abroad, and is a regular speaker at the annual Dog Behaviour Conference organised by Victoria Stilwell Positively. Sarah serves on the faculty of the Victoria Stilwell Academy and also conducts behaviour assessments for private clients, animal welfare organisations, and court cases. Sarah is a published author and has participated in numerous television and radio programmes over the years including the recent Nightmare Pets SOS for BBC1.

### **Tia Guest, Faculty**

Tia is a professional animal trainer, and a graduate of the Exotic Animal Training & Management Program at Moorpark College in California, where she gained experience training a variety of species of animals using positive reinforcement techniques. By the mid-1990s, Tia's training practice was focused primarily on dogs, enabling her to combine her love for dogs and her passion for teaching to help foster



great relationships between pet owners and their dogs. She has written numerous training articles and presented to other professional trainers on topics such as teaching pet owners and positive approaches to solving common pet behavior problems. Tia believes that learning should be fun and successful not only in the short term, but empowering for the long term – providing learners with skills and confidence they will retain for a lifetime.

Tia is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer – Knowledge Assessed through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers, an Associate Certified Animal Behavior Consultant with the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, a Karen Pryor Academy Certified Training Partner, a Level 1 TAGteacher through TAGteach International, and a Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Tia’s own dogs compete in agility, dabble in numerous other dog sports, and offer training demonstrations and entertainment at schools and animal events.

### **Sarah Heath, Faculty**

Sarah Heath qualified as a veterinary surgeon from Bristol University in 1988 and spent four years in a mixed general practice before setting up Behavioural Referrals Veterinary Practice in 1992. She is an honorary lecturer in Behavioural Medicine within the faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool and responsible for the behavioural medicine curriculum for undergraduate veterinary students. In addition to her clinical and teaching work Sarah has written a number of books and regularly contributes to veterinary publications on behavioural topics. She also lectures at home and abroad on the topic of animal behaviour.

She became the first veterinary member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors in 1990. In 2001 she was awarded the Melton Award by the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) for meritorious contributions to small animal practice and in 2002 was awarded the Vetlink Award for outstanding service to the Veterinary Nursing Profession. She was a founding member of the BSAVA affiliated Companion Animal Behaviour Therapy Study Group and served as its secretary for 7 years. Sarah is the co-founder of the International Veterinary Behaviour Meeting which is now established as the most important international congress on Veterinary Behavioural Medicine and is held every other year. In 2002 she became a Founding Diplomate of the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine and served as the second President of that College from 2003 to 2008. She is a European Veterinary Specialist in Behavioural Medicine (Companion Animals). She is Immediate Past President of the European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology.

### **Dr. Duffy Jones, Faculty**

Dr. Jones is a veterinarian and the owner of Peachtree Hills Animal Hospital in Atlanta, GA. Having attended the University of Notre Dame, he received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine in 1999 from the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University. He is currently on the Board of the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association and has recently become a WebMD Pet Health Community guest expert, and has contributed articles and podcasts for Victoria Stilwell's Positively web site.





### **Lorena Patti, Information Specialist & Faculty**

The owner and operator of Waggers Dog Works, LLC in the Orlando, FL area for over 10 years, Lorena Patti, MS, BS, KPA CTP, CPDT-KA, VSPDT, has a passion for learning and teaching about canine behavior and training. She's been featured as one of Orlando's top 5 trainers and is co-founder of the Central Florida Force-Free Trainers & Veterinary Behavior Network.

Holding a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering degree and a Masters in Aeronautical Science degree, Lorena understands the importance of science and its place in learning, teaching, and applying it to improve lives. Her published articles are viewed through LinkedIn and as a Positively Contributor on Positively.com. She has been featured in the Orlando Sentinel, online radio and video blogs, and has reached over 30 thousand viewers on YouTube.

### **Alex Sessa, Faculty**

Alex is a dog trainer and the owner of Peach on a Leash dog training business in the Atlanta area. Alex previously worked within Positively as the Director of Digital Content, where her job included writing and managing content for the Positively website, managing website, social media and newsletter operations, working with Victoria's VSPDT trainers, and filming and traveling with Victoria. She was a camera operator for Victoria's *Guardians of the Night* and *Arson Dogs* web series, and is also a regular contributor to the Positively website and the Dogington Post.

### **J. Nichole Smith, Faculty**

J. Nichole Smith is a commercial pet photographer, *marketing consultant* and dog expert. In 2005 she founded *dane + dane studios*, a creative studio for pet businesses. In 2007 she co-founded *Dog is Good*, a lifestyle company for dog lovers, which is now a multi-million dollar business. In addition to championing her own brands, Nichole has spent the last decade crafting creative strategies and campaigns for the most influential individuals and brands in the pet industry, including the likes of Purina, Petco and Victoria Stilwell.

In 2012, Nichole's coffee table book, 'Puppyhood' was released to critical acclaim. In 2014 Nichole graduated *with Distinction* from Kingston University's MA Marketing program. In early 2016, Nichole launched *Working with Dog*, a community based around providing petpreneuers with simple, actionable marketing strategies. Later in 2016, her book "*Million Dollar Dog Brand – insights from the pet industry's most inspiring startups*" was published. Nichole also keeps busy offering marketing courses, one-to-one consulting and keynote speeches (primarily to women) on topics relating to 'marketing genius' and entrepreneurship.

### **Lisa Lyle Waggoner, Faculty**

Lisa is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, a Pat Miller Certified Trainer-Level 2, a Certified Separation



## VSA Student Handbook

Anxiety Trainer, a dog\*tec Certified Dog Walker/Instructor, a professional member of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT) and member of The Pet Professional Guild (PPG).

Lisa has many years of experience training dogs of all types and ages. A passionate advocate for humane, science-based dog training, Lisa has studied animal behavior and the latest training techniques throughout her career with dogs—and she devotes a minimum of 40 hours a year to continuing education. She has attended numerous workshops and seminars with leaders in the training and behavior field, for example Karen Pryor, Ian Dunbar, Patricia McConnell, Jesus Rosales-Ruiz, Pia Silvani, Karen London, Suzanne Clothier, and Ken Ramirez.

Lisa writes expert articles on dog training, is a columnist for the *Cherokee Scout*, a reviewer of dog training books and DVDs for *The APDT Chronicle of the Dog*, and a regular contributor to *Whole Dog Journal*. She is a frequent public speaker and conference speaker on humane education and other dog-related topics. Lisa and her dog Willow also earned a DockDogs National Big Air Title of Junior in the dock diving competition and a National Association of Canine Scent Work (NASCW) NW1 Title.

### **Brad Waggoner, Faculty**

Brad Waggoner is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, a graduate of Karen Pryor Academy of Animal Training & Behavior, a dog\*tec Certified Dog Walker/Instructor, and a professional member of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT). Brad is also a Pet Tech Inc. pet First Aid and CPR instructor.

A veteran of professional dog training, Brad was awarded the prestigious B.F. Skinner scholarship to attend the Karen Pryor Academy. During his internship at Peaceable Paws, he received top honors in the practical exam, demonstrating his ability to use positive reinforcement training to get great results with dogs.

Brad keeps his knowledge and skills finely honed through classes, seminars, and workshops with such dog-training luminaries as Ian Dunbar, Kay Laurence, Patricia McConnell, Pat Miller, Kathy Sdao, Pia Silvani, Suzanne Clothier, and Ken Ramirez.

### **Christina Waggoner, Enrollment Coordinator / Faculty**

Christina is a graduate of the Karen Pryor Academy and a 500-hour certified yoga teacher. Christina has been quoted in Dog Fancy Magazine's Popular Dog Series "Training Secrets For Siberian Huskies", Orange Coast Magazine, Whole Dog Journal, the elephant journal, and has authored several articles for clickertraining.com. Christina has presented at Clicker Expo San Diego and Long Beach. Christina lives in Oregon with several dogs, goats, and a potbellied pig named Tofu.

# VSA Student Handbook



## VSA Advisory Board

**Jennifer Arnold** – Founder and Executive Director of Canine Assistants and author of *Through a Dog's Eyes* and *In a Dog's Heart*, Jennifer's dedication both to helping people and to teaching dogs with kindness has changed countless lives.

**Dr. Marty Becker, DVM** – The resident veterinary contributor on “Good Morning America” for 17 years and author of 22 books, Dr. Becker's Fear Free program encourages veterinary practices to learn about and implement fear-free vet visits for their patients.

**Dr. John J. Ciribassi DVM, DACVB** – Board Certified Veterinary Behaviorist with the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists, Dr. Ciribassi is devoted to educating veterinarians and technicians about animal behavior and the benefits of working with trainers to improve their animal clients' vet-visit experience.

**Dr. Brian Hare** – Director of the Duke Canine Cognition Center, co-author of *The Genius of Dogs*, and co-founder of Dognition. Dr. Hare's research aims to show people the genius of their own dogs while contributing to a greater understanding of all dogs.

**Dr. Alexandra Horowitz** – Director of the Dog Cognition Lab at Barnard College, and #1 bestselling author of *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*, Alexandra has studied the cognition of humans, rhinoceros, bonobos, and dogs.

**Daniel Mills** – Professor of Veterinary Behavioural Medicine, and co-author of *Stress and Pheromonotherapy in Small Animal Clinical Behavior*, which pioneered the use of pheromone therapy within the field of clinical animal behaviour.

**Alicea Howell RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA CTP** – Trainer and presenter. One of 10 veterinary technicians that have achieved earned their Veterinary Technician Specialist in Behavior certification through the Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians.

**Tia Torres** – Founder of the Villalobos Rescue Center, and host of the hit show “Pit Bulls and Parolees,” which follows her inspiring rescue, training, rehabilitation, and placement work.

**Steve White** – Police officer and dog trainer who specializes in teaching behavior modification, tracking, and scent work through the use of positive reinforcement-based operant conditioning. His presentations to police and military organizations are changing the way they think about training and reliability.

**Nicole Wilde, CPDT-KA** – Award-winning author of 11 books, Nicole is an internationally known presenter who strives to educate pet professionals and the public on canine behavior so that people will treat dogs with more compassion and understanding.

See full ABM bios at <https://www.vsdogtrainingacademy.com/about/team/advisory-board>.

# VSA Student Handbook



## Enrollment Agreement

[A sample of VSA's standard DTC online-only student Enrollment Agreement is available here.](#)

[A sample of VSA's standard DTC online-only plus In-Person Track student Enrollment Agreement is available here.](#)

## Admission Requirements

To be eligible for admittance, students must be fluent in English, at least 18 years of age when their class begins, have the emotional capability to interact with human dog owners, have the physical capability to handle dogs of different sizes and activity levels, and be able to travel twice to the location of the Intensives (In-Person Track only).

There are no dog training-related pre-requisites necessary to be considered for enrollment as a VSA student. The VSA curriculum is designed and optimized specifically for people who have never had any experience or instruction, formal or otherwise, in dog training and behavior or regarding how to become a dog trainer. What is required is a keen interest in becoming a great positive reinforcement dog trainer, a willingness to learn from Victoria Stilwell and her team of world-class educators, good people skills, and a love of the animal behavior field. Upon registration, all In-Person Track students are sent a travel information document which includes details about the location of the in-person intensives.

Due to the nature of the course curriculum, VSA does not accept credits from other institutions, nor can it guarantee that graduation from VSA will result in any transfer of credits to any other educational institution.

## Attendance, Duration and Academic Standards Policy

### DTC Online-Only Students:

Dog Trainer Course online-only students complete a series of orientation lessons which outline VSA policies, protocols and expectations throughout the course. Students are expected to attend all scheduled Office Hours meetings via videoconference with their assigned Faculty Advisor and proactively engage in discussions with the Faculty Advisor throughout the course.

The Dog Trainer Course online curriculum (including Faculty Advisor Office Hours and skills assessments) is designed to be completed within 6 months, however students are granted up to 12 from the student's enrollment date to finish. Students are eligible to purchase up to four 3-month course extensions (\$295 USD each).

Students who have not completed the Dog Trainer Course curriculum within the standard duration (including any eligible extensions) and/or are inactive in the Student Learning Center – including both online lessons and/or Faculty Advisor skills assessments – for any period of three months without contacting their Faculty Advisor and arranging an approved course extension with VSA will have their access to the course automatically suspended and their 'seat' with their Faculty Advisor will be released to serve additional students. Inactive students with suspended status can contact VSA to discuss reinstatement subject to a reactivation fee and pending course and Faculty Advisor availability.



## **DTC In-Person Track Students:**

Once each group of students begins their studies, all students undergo an additional In-Person Track-specific orientation which outlines VSA policies, protocols and expectations for each component of the In-Person Track of the course. Students are expected to attend every day of the in-person intensives, complete all required activities and assignments during the field study units, successfully complete all online course materials, attend all cyber classes, and complete all final assessments. All assignments and requirements are expected to be successfully completed within the timeframe assigned for each unit by VSA.

If the student misses more than one part or day of a learning component, the student will be subject to a deferment fee and must repeat the incomplete/unsatisfactorily completed unit as prescribed by VSA before resuming the course. The scheduling of the repeated unit will be determined by VSA at its discretion and subject to availability, however efforts will be made to coordinate with the student regarding timing. When resuming, VSA may require a student to repeat a unit (from a different in-person class at a later date) if in VSA's judgment it is required for a student's continuity in the program of instruction and best sets them on a path for successful completion. Deferrals are on a space-available basis and are subject to a fee determined by how many units were successfully completed before deferral. If scheduling prohibits VSA from providing a deferral within one year from the end of the original course completion date, student will be eligible for a pro-rated refund of any paid tuition subject to VSA's Refund Policy.

## **Good Standing**

Students are considered to be in good standing if the following criteria are met:

- All tuition payments are made in a timely manner as defined in the Enrollment Agreement
- All components of the Attendance, Duration and Academic Standards Policy are followed
- All components of VSA's Training Method & Ideology Pledge are followed
- All components of the Code of Conduct are followed.

## **Grading Policy**

### **Online DTC Students:**

Dog Trainer Course online students are assessed periodically throughout the course via both online testing and Faculty Advisor graded skills assessments. Students must complete the quizzes included in online lessons which conclude each chapter. Each course module includes a module test and the course includes 3 cumulative exams.

- Students must earn a minimum score of 90% on all tests and exams.
- If a passing score is not achieved, tests may be retaken an unlimited number of times.



## VSA Student Handbook

- If a passing score is not achieved, exams may be retaken a total of 3 times each.
- If a passing score on an exam is not achieved by the third attempt, the student is instructed to contact VSA to determine next steps.
- All quizzes, tests and exams are 'open book', though students are encouraged to take all tests and exams 'closed book' for enhanced learning if possible.
- Skills assessments are graded via a uniform rubric on a pass/did-not-pass basis by each student's Faculty Advisor.
- Unlimited attempts are provided to pass skills assessments (subject to the student's requirement to purchase additional Faculty Advisor Office Hours packs if needed.)

### **DTC In-Person Track Students:**

Students enrolled in the In-Person Track are graded using the same structure as online-only students, but must also pass written exam at the end of the course for which they must receive a minimum score of 80% or higher.

In addition to the minimum required scores, to be eligible to graduate In-Person Track students must be in compliance with VSA's attendance policy (see above), participate and engage thoughtfully and consistently throughout all modules and units of the course, and demonstrate competence of all the skills and concepts introduced throughout the course. Note that VSA Mentors do not play a role in determining students' grades on any portion of the curriculum.

Students receive instant notification via email and on-screen of their scores on all online test/exam components of the course, and are notified of their final written exam score via email within one month following the completion of the course. During and after the course, students can request transcripts, copies of certificate of graduation, records of attendance and standing, and other VSA-provided materials by contacting [administration@vsdta.com](mailto:administration@vsdta.com).

### **Faculty Advisor Protocols**

Each Dog Trainer Course student is assigned a dedicated Faculty Advisor to help guide them through the course. Student and Faculty Advisor will meet via videoconference up to 25 times for one hour each during the course enrollment period for Office Hours during which student will ask questions and discuss areas of the curriculum with which they need more help understanding. Faculty Advisors will also conduct periodic assessments as listed in the course outline of the student's knowledge and skills on a pass/did-not-pass basis. Unlimited attempts are provided for each assessment if needed, however if additional Office Hours time is needed to conduct additional assessment attempts, student will be required to purchase Office Hours add-on packs at a price of \$150 per 5 one-hour packs. These add-on packs can be purchased at <https://vsdogtrainingacademy.com/payments>.

Students are not to communicate with their Faculty Advisor outside of scheduled Office Hours. This includes email, phone calls, videoconferencing, or other communications. Exact Office Hours scheduling



## VSA Student Handbook

will be conducted by both student and Faculty Advisor on a mutually agreeable basis with the understanding that every attempt will be made by both parties to meet at regularly scheduled times every week. However, in some cases it may not be necessary for a student to meet with his/her Faculty Advisor every week, in which case Office Hours may be saved to use at a later mutually agreeable time and date in the future. The 25 Office Hours included in DTC tuition may be used at any time during the student's enrollment period.

Students must provide Faculty Advisors with at least 48 hours' notice when cancelling or rescheduling an Office Hours appointment. After one courtesy exemption, any missed appointment or appointment rescheduled with less than 48 hours' advance notice will be counted against the student's overall Office Hour allotment.

Note that students enrolled in either the 12-Payment Plan or the 18-Payment Plan (*see 'Tuition & Financing' section below*) will not be assigned a Faculty Advisor until their initial installment payment is received by VSA.

### DTC Graduation Requirements

In order to successfully complete and graduate from the DTC online-only track, students must be in good standing as described in the VSA Student Handbook and successfully complete all components and modules of the program. Completion is comprised of attendance at and participation in discussions during Faculty Advisor Office hours, demonstrated competence of all of the skills and concepts introduced during each module of the program via Faculty Advisor-graded assessments, and the successful completion and submission of all final exam components.

Note that upon course completion, students must have made all required payments and have a zero balance due before being deemed a graduate of the enrolled course. There is no penalty for paying the full balance due early at any time.

### DTC In-Person Track Graduation Requirements

In order to successfully complete and graduate from the DTC In-Person Track students must be in good standing as described in the VSA Student Handbook and successfully complete all components and modules of the program. Completion is comprised of attendance, participation, demonstrated competence of all of the skills and concepts introduced during each component and module of the program (including the DTC Introduction Unit, First Intensive, Field Study Unit, Second Intensive, Field Training Unit, all at-home study, Cyber classes, and Final Exam and Completion Assessments), and the successful completion and submission of all final exam components.

Note that upon course completion, students must have made all required payments and have a zero balance due before being deemed a graduate of the enrolled course. There is no penalty for paying the full balance due early at any time.



## VSA Student Handbook

### Graduating with Distinction

In-Person Track students who display an exemplary level of skill, knowledge, participation, attitude, and engagement throughout the In-Person Track of the Dog Trainer Course will graduate with distinction.

Prerequisites to graduate with distinction:

- A combined, weighted average of all trimester exams and final written exam scores of 95% or higher.
- Recognition by VSA staff throughout the course of student's overall positive attitude, active participation, willingness to learn, openness to others, understanding of dog training & behavior, and likelihood to be a positive force for change as a professional dog trainer.

Only DTC In-Person Track students are eligible to graduate with distinction.

### Student Learning Center

The Student Learning Center (SLC) is the portal through which students access Online Lessons and view your progress during the course. Access to the SLC is username and password-protected, and students receive login credentials via email during registration.

Within the SLC, links, lessons and learning guide resources are available to students depending on where they are in the overall course.

The Student Learning Center can be accessed at <https://online.vsdogtrainingacademy.com>.

### Keys for Successful Completion

To gain the greatest benefits from both the DTC and the DTC In-Person Track programs and be confidently prepared upon graduation to begin your dog training career, we recommend that you actively engage throughout the program and approach every learning opportunity as a way to deepen and enrich your knowledge and experience.

Some tips for success include:

- Arrive on time and prepared for all scheduled events
- Dress appropriately and professionally for the tasks at hand
- Have ready any necessary items or supplies for the tasks at hand
- Be proactive in planning meetings with Faculty Advisor, Mentor and others
- Treat others with kindness and respect
- Be reliable and consistent
- Be observant and engaged
- Be flexible and creative, especially when working with clients and dogs
- Be mindful of safety for yourself and others at all times
- Be open and responsive to feedback
- Ask questions and share ideas
- Listen and be open to different points of view



## VSA Student Handbook



- Share your own needs and objectives to facilitate your growth
- Take initiative to be successful

### Graduate Benefits

Graduates of both the Dog Trainer Course and In-Person Track of the Dog Trainer Course receive marketing and business support facilitated by VSA's Graduate Liaison department. Graduates become part of a community that fosters continued learning and sharing. Additionally, graduates have access to marketing information and materials to promote and encourage the growth of their dog training business.

Among the marketing support and benefits provided to graduates are:

- Use of the certification designation 'VSA Certified Dog Trainer – In-Person' (for In-Person Track DTC graduates) or 'VSA Certified Dog Trainer' (for Dog Trainer Course online students.)
- Use of the certification designation 'VSA-CDT-In-Person' (for In-Person Track DTC graduates) or 'VSA-CDT' (for Dog Trainer Course online students.)
- Use of a course-specific VSA Graduate Badge on graduate's website, social media sites, and other marketing materials.
- A profile listing on VSA's website trainer search.
- Use of the title "Graduate VS Academy," and use of the phrase "graduate of Victoria Stilwell Academy's Dog Trainer Course" or "graduate of Victoria Stilwell Academy's Online Dog Trainer Course."
- Access to VSA Graduate partner affiliations and discounts
- Use of images of graduates with Victoria Stilwell, subject to VSA approval.

### Training Method & Ideology Pledge

Student agrees to use and promote only "positive training" tools, methods and ideologies in their public and private work in all cases, regardless of client, circumstance, dog behavior, or any outside force. "Positive training" is defined collectively as the complete absence of the use of physical force, fear, compulsion or intimidation either intended or implied, as well as an understanding of the misunderstood concept of dominance, so called "alpha dog" or "pack leader" hierarchy theories. Student agrees to avoid the use of the term "pack leader", "top dog", "alpha dog" and similarly misunderstood phrases in all practices and to actively work to educate others regarding positive, force-free, science-based dog training and behavior advice. Student understands and agrees that force-free, non-compulsion training techniques and ideologies are more successful, safer, longer-lasting and more effective than traditional, punishment and dominance-based dog training.



## Code of Conduct and Liability Waiver

VSA sets forth standards of conduct and by enrolling in any version of the DTC the Student hereby acknowledges and agrees to the following:

- Student will attend and fully participate in all learning sessions and complete all requirements and assignments therein.
- Student will exhibit an attitude of respect toward others and present themselves professionally during all VSA activities and learning opportunities.
- Student shall not take any action and/or inaction that would bring shame, embarrassment, public recrimination, harm to reputation or ill repute to Student, VSA, the student's Faculty Advisor, the Student's Mentor (if applicable), the VSA staff, Victoria Stilwell, or any employees, officers, directors, other students, vendors, suppliers, affiliates or personnel of VSA. Student shall not make any disparaging, hurtful, harmful or negative statements, whether orally or in writing, about VSA, the Student's Mentor, the VSA staff, Victoria Stilwell, or any employees, officers, directors, other students, vendors, suppliers, affiliates or personnel of VSA.
- Student will not engage in behavior that endangers or threatens to endanger the health or safety of any person or animal.
- Student will not engage or participate in any criminal act including (but not limited to) theft, fraud, or endangering the public.
- Student will practice academic honesty; submitting only his or her own work and not sharing any login or credentials that would enable someone other than the student to access VSA course materials.
- All course materials including but not limited to printed and online materials are the copyrighted intellectual property of VSA. The Student will not reproduce or distribute any course materials, and will not use VSA materials for any purpose other than for the enrolled Student's personal educational use in the program in which the student is enrolled.
- Failure to maintain financial responsibility or non-payment of tuition may result in suspension or dismissal from the program, forfeiture of all fees paid to date, and all rights and privileges thereof.
- The Student, on behalf of himself/herself and on behalf of Student's estate, heirs, administrators, executors, affiliated entities and other representatives hereby irrevocably waives all liability and forever holds harmless VSA and its members, shareholders, employees, officers, directors, independent contractors, attorneys, assigns, licensees, beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subsidiaries, Victoria Stilwell, Van Zeiler, VS Enterprises and their respective members, employees, officers, directors, independent contractors, attorneys, assigns, licensees, affiliated entities, shareholders, agents and other representatives along with the VSA faculty, Mentors, and Faculty Advisors for any injury, damage, loss or other harm that is sustained or occurs during the student's involvement with VSA.
- Any violation of the Student's obligations as stated in the Student Handbook or as stated elsewhere in VSA's materials may be sufficient grounds for dismissal from the program.



## VSA Student Handbook

- The Student Handbook will change from time to time and it is the student's obligation to remain current and in conformity with current policies. VSA shall have the right to make any changes, amendments, deletions or additions to the Student Handbook and/or its other policies at any time without notice to the Student.

### Tuition and Fees

#### Dog Trainer Course Tuition:

Standard tuition for the DTC online-only program is \$3,450 and includes all course materials. Financing is available for all VSA tuition via VSA-approved third party lenders (link below).

VSA also offers several tuition payment plans:

- **3-Payment Plan:** Initial enrollment fee of \$1,450 upon registration followed by two monthly payments of \$1,075 each beginning 30 days after enrollment. Total tuition for this plan (including the \$99 application fee – if applicable – and a 7.5% administration fee) is \$3,593.
- **6-Payment Plan:** Initial enrollment fee of \$1,250 upon registration followed by 5 monthly payments of \$473 each beginning 30 days after enrollment. Total tuition for this plan (including the \$99 application fee – if applicable – and a 7.5% administration fee) is \$3,608.
- **12-Payment Plan:** Twelve monthly payments of \$309 (or £258), the first of which is due at the time of registration. This payment option includes an administrative fee of 7.5%. Total tuition for this plan (including a 7.5% administration fee) is \$3,709 (or £3,096.)

Students choosing to pay via the 12-Payment Plan in GBP (pounds sterling): note that the monthly payment amounts are based on a GBP/USD exchange rate of 1.20. In the event that this exchange rate fluctuates and resets to a constant rate more than 25% up or down from 1.20, the monthly payment amounts will be recalculated accordingly.

Students who are more than 10 days late on any applicable installment payments and who have not contacted VSA to make alternative arrangements will have their course access automatically suspended and their Faculty Advisor reassigned, but they can request to have course access restored after paying a \$295 Reactivation Fee plus the next applicable installment payment in advance.

Full DTC tuition and financing terms can be found at <https://www.vsdogtrainingacademy.com/enroll/tuition-financing/>.

#### Dog Trainer Course In-Person Track Tuition:

Standard tuition for the DTC including the In-Person Track is \$6,950 (£5,950 for UK-based classes) and includes all course materials. Other scheduled payments include:

- Application fee (\$100) is due upon submission of a student's application and is applied towards the full tuition due upon registration.
- Registration fee (\$1,395 or £1,200 for UK-based classes) is due upon acceptance and credited towards full tuition.



## VSA Student Handbook

The balance of tuition (or the first installment if student finances tuition) is due no later than 2 weeks prior to the start of the program.

Tuition does not include student costs for travel, lodging or other expenses.

Students originally enrolled in just the online portion of the DTC may 'upgrade' at any time during the online course or up to one year following graduation from the online course to add the In-Person Track by paying the difference between the full In-Person Track tuition and the tuition previously paid for the online-only DTC. Financing is available to pay the upgrade fee.

Students who are more than 30 days late on any applicable installment payments and who have not contacted VSA to make alternative arrangements will have their course access automatically suspended and their Faculty Advisor reassigned, but they can request to have course access restored after paying a \$295 reactivation fee.

Full DTC tuition and financing terms can be found at <https://www.vsdogtrainingacademy.com/enroll/tuition-financing/>.

### Career Opportunities & Placement Services

VSA aims to provide students with the skills, knowledge and confidence to open their own dog training business to offer clients training options such as group classes and private lessons, and the VSA community is committed to providing support to its graduates in order to help them achieve their career goals.

VSA's Graduate Liaison department provides graduates with ongoing business and marketing guidance, and VSA's educational programs include information regarding how to set up and operate a successful dog training business. VSA's curriculum covers best practices and techniques for securing employment with third parties such as resume-creation and interviewing skills, and in the event a VSA graduate seeks employment with a third party, upon request VSA will provide a list of known entities currently seeking employees. Please note that VSA cannot guarantee employment following completion of the DTC program.

By the time they graduate, students will be provided a package consisting of VSA Graduate Badges, materials and suggestions regarding how best to harness the value of their experience learning from VSA.

### Grievances

Please bring any complaints or concerns to the attention of VSA's Executive Director:

- By phone: +1 (678) 459-5786
- E mail: Use "Contact Us" link found on the website or email VSA at [administration@vsdta.com](mailto:administration@vsdta.com).



## VSA Student Handbook

Complaints from students regarding any issue should be submitted to VSA using the contact methods listed above. Complaints should be submitted in writing within 10 days of the student's grievance. VSA will respond to any complaints no later than 2 weeks after being notified of the grievance submitted using the above procedures.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint to the school, you may file a complaint with the State of Georgia, Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission at 2082 East Exchange Place, Suite 220, Tucker, GA 30084-5305, 770-414-3300, <https://gnpec.georgia.gov/>.

### Refund policy

Refunds are available to Students upon written notification to VSA of their desire to withdraw under the terms listed below.

If VSA materially changes or cancels the program of study after a Student has already started the program, VSA will work with the student to place him/her in a comparable program of study within VSA or refund all tuition paid by the Student.

#### Refund Policy Terms:

- Students providing written notification of their withdrawal within three (3) business days of signing Enrollment Agreement or making any payment (provided the course has not begun within those three days) are eligible for a full refund of tuition.
- Students providing written notification of their withdrawal from a course after the course has begun and before 50% of the course has been completed will be eligible for a pro-rated refund. Students completing more than 50% of a course are not eligible for refunds.
- Online-only course completion percentage for prorated refund amounts is defined as a calculation based on the duration (in days) since the course start date divided by the allotted course duration (365 days). In-Person Track course completion percentage for prorated refund amounts is based on the percentage of program components completed at withdrawal (including but not limited to virtual and in-person intensives, cyber classes and mentor activities) until 50% or more of the program has been completed.
- In the event of serious student injury, prolonged illness, death, or other extenuating circumstances which prohibit completion of the course, VSA may, at its discretion, grant a partial refund in an amount to be determined by VSA on a case-by-case basis.
- Any value included in a student-redeemed 'add-on package' (if applicable) will be deducted from any refund amount due.
- All refunds of fees or payments made via credit card are subject to a 3% fee. Up to 3% of total payments made by credit card will not be refunded. All refunds of eligible payments made by wire transfer or check will receive 100% of the total refund amount due to the student.

Refunds will be remitted to Student within 45 days of refund request.