Victoria Stilwell Academy
Student Handbook

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Welcome and Introduction

Congratulations and welcome! We're thrilled and honored that you've chosen the Victoria Stilwell Academy for Dog Training & Behavior to help you achieve your goal of becoming an elite certified professional dog trainer. By enrolling as a student in the Dog Trainer Course and/or its associated In-Person Track with VSA, you're taking the next important steps 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 several 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 humans and canines while empowering them both to learn how to learn from each other most effectively. All too often, students leave dog training schools with decent 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,



Victoria Stilwell, President & Founder
Victoria Stilwell Academy

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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 (IPT). These flexible-length courses are designed to prepare students for a career as elite professional dog trainers by providing a comprehensive educational experience. VSA's professional courses are authorized under the Nonpublic Postsecondary Educational Institutions Act of 1990.

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. At 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 (average) - 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

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10. Teaching Basic Behaviors
11. Solving Common Behavior Problems
12. Teaching Private Lessons
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 In-Person Track (IPT)

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 a 6-day in-person intensive learning experience that includes classroom project work, hands-on experience, field trips, and more. See locations of Intensives classes.
- **Virtual Intensives.** VSA Faculty and classmates meet virtually for two 2-day real-time online intensives for deep dives into the VSA curriculum, creating unique opportunities to take their learning process to a deeper level.
- **Professional Trainer Observation.** Students complete multi-month field units virtually observing professional dog trainers.
- **Real-time cyber classes.** Online interactive webinars led by Victoria and other faculty enhance the learning experience while keeping students engaged, connected and on track.
- **Enhanced Assessments.** Additional final exams allow for a deeper understanding and elevated applications of course material for students.

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

1. **Unit 1 (90 days):** Students begin the program by completing the online lessons in Modules 1-8, attending several Cyber Classes, taking their 1st VSA trimester exam, conducting Office Hours with their Faculty Advisor via videoconference, and completing their first skills assessments.
2. **First Virtual Intensive (2 days):** VSA Faculty lead students through a 2-day virtual intensive experience custom designed to enhance learning through group exercises, virtual training sessions, interactive lectures, and powerful online learning opportunities.
3. **Unit 2 (60 Days):** Students will complete online lessons in Modules 9-11, attend Cyber Classes, meet with their Faculty Advisor, conduct skills assessments, and take their 2nd VSA trimester exam.
4. **Second Virtual Intensive (2 days):** VSA Faculty lead students through a 2-day virtual intensive experience custom designed to enhance learning through group exercises, virtual training sessions, interactive lectures, and powerful online learning opportunities.

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5. **Unit 3 (60 days):** Students will complete the online lessons in Modules 12-14, attend Cyber Classes, meet with their Faculty Advisor, conduct skills assessments, and begin attending their virtual professional trainer observation sessions.
6. **In-Person Intensive Unit (6 days):** VSA Faculty lead students through an in-person multi-day intensive learning experience that includes classroom study, hands-on experience with dogs, field trips, group project work and more.
7. **Final Lessons & Assessments Unit (60 days):** Students complete modules 15-20 and any remaining skills assessments followed by both an online and a 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 Professional Trainer Observation Experience

Dog Trainer Course students attend virtual events designed to provide opportunities to observe various professional trainers selected by VSA. During the course, students observe working trainers in practice with actual clients performing typical activities such as private consultations and group classes, gaining exposure to real-world professional experiences.

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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, The Dog Academy, The Dog Academy, 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 both to students with little to no background in the dog training and behavior field as well as existing trainers looking to level up their knowledge, skills and certifications. 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/Faculty Advisor

Irith Bloom, certified TAGteacher CPDT-KSA, CBCC-KA, CDBC, VSPDT, KPA CTP, CSAT, CBATI, FFCP (Trainer), 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. She is a sought-after presenter, and her writing has been published in countless online outlets, as well as in print media, including the book "Your Puppy and You: A step-by-step guide to raising a freak'n awesome dog."

Irith's company, The Sophisticated Dog, LLC, offers online services to animal guardians and pet professionals worldwide. Along with Dr. Kristina Spaulding, Irith co-founded and is faculty at Carefree Companion, a program that helps people teach greater stress resilience and better emotional regulation to their non-human animal companions.

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Irith is faculty at both Victoria Stilwell Dog Training Academy and Fenzi Dog Sports Academy, a member of the Advisory Board for Pets for Vets, on the Expert Review Board for Daily Paws, and Chair Emeritus of the Education Committee of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT). She volunteers for National English Shepherd Rescue, and served on the board of the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) from 2019 to 2024. Irith is between dogs at the moment, but shares her home with a well-behaved human spouse named 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*. Paula is a proud pet parent of a 5-lb Chihuahua-terrier mix and a 35-lb boxer puppy.

Laura Bussey, Enrollment Coordinator

Laura is a Certified Dog Trainer with the Victoria Stilwell Academy (VSA-CDT). She is the owner and founder of Little Paws, established in 2019, where she provides pet care, training, and off-leash adventures for groups of dogs. Laura achieved an FdSc in Animal Behaviour and Psychology from the University of Plymouth (UK) and then graduated with honours from the BSc Applied Zoology course; during this course, she gained vast experience working with a wide variety of exotic and domestic animals.

As a graduate of VSA and an Enrollment Coordinator, Laura is always excited to talk to potential new students and help them on their own dog training journey.

Laura is passionate about animal care and has a kind and gentle approach to training. She became a dog trainer in order to help owners and their dogs achieve harmonious relationships with each other and lead happy and fulfilling lives. At home, she has two cats, Sebastian and Teddy, and a miniature dachshund named Cosmo.

Sarah Fisher, Faculty

Sarah Fisher was a canine and equine behaviour advisor and educator who worked with animals for over twenty years and was the founder of Animal Centred Education. Sarah taught 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.

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Sarah was experienced with a wide range of breed types and teaches staff workshops for many of the UK's animal welfare organisations including Battersea. She 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 delivered presentations on a variety of topics at dog training and behaviour seminars in the UK and abroad, and was a regular speaker at the annual Dog Behaviour Conference organised by Victoria Stilwell Positively. Sarah served on the faculty of the Victoria Stilwell Academy and also conducted behaviour assessments for private clients, animal welfare organisations, and court cases. Sarah was a published author and 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 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

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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.

Maia Huff-Owen, Faculty/Faculty Advisor

Maia is a university lecturer in philosophy of science, a dog trainer, and a passionate student of animal behavior. Growing up on a working cow-and-calf ranch in Hawaii, and Maia's first animal partnerships were with horses--riding and working long days together. She went on to compete successfully on a national and international level in three-day-eventing, and then ran a small but successful eventing barn that focused on positive reinforcement-based training for competition horses. When she moved to the city to pursue her PHD, she "downsized" from horses, falling in love with dogs and dog training. Eventually she was spending so much time and money on dog training education that she decided she had better justify this by pursuing it professionally.

With her own dogs, Maia has competed in obedience, agility, frisbee and herding trials. Outside of dogs and philosophy, she's currently attempting to become a pretty-ok bread baker.

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.

Alynn (Aly) J. Lecznar, Faculty

Aly (VSPDT, CPDT-KSA, CCFT, FitPAWS® Master Trainer, ATD Master Trainer & Instructional Designer™) 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. 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 guardians. She received the Master Trainer™ and Instructional Design™ certifications from the Association of Talent Development (ATD).

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Tiffany Lovell, Operations Manager

Tiffany is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer – Knowledge Assessed (CPDT-KA) through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) and excels in both dog training and client communication skills. Tiffany had the honor of becoming the very first graduate in the country with a specialty of Animal Assisted Interactions (AAI). Tiffany was also the top scoring graduate of the Pat Miller Peaceable Paws Level 1 Intern Academy and Level 2 Behavior Modification Academy. She is a Certified Separation Anxiety Trainer (CSAT) and was a longtime co-instructor of Malena DeMartini's Separation Anxiety Certification Program.

Tiffany got her start as a professional trainer at Cold Nose College with Lisa and Brad Waggoner as her mentors. She took her dog through all of their classes, couldn't seem to leave, and the three mutually decided that she belonged there. She is a native speaker of force-free training, having never used aversive methods.

Tiffany has a special love for helping anxious and fearful dogs learn that the world around them is safe. She is expert at bridging the gap of understanding that can exist between dogs and their guardians and never tires of "light bulb moments" at both ends of the leash.

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/Faculty Advisor

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

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education. She has attended numerous workshops and seminars with leaders in the training and behavior field, for example Patricia McConnell, Jesus Rosales-Ruiz, Pia Silvani, Karen Pryor, Ian Dunbar, Karen London, Ken Ramirez, and Suzanne Clothier.

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/Faculty Advisor

Brad Waggoner is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, a dogbiz 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.

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, Faculty

Christina is a Certified Family Dog Mediator 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 elephantjournal, and has authored several articles for clickertraining.com. Christina has presented at Clicker Expo San Diego and Long Beach.

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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 Pheromonatherapy 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.

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Enrollment Agreement

A sample of VSA's standard DTC online-only student Enrollment Agreement is available here.
A sample of VSA's standard DTC In-Person Track student Enrollment Agreement is available here.

Admission Requirements

To be eligible for admittance, students must:

- Be fluent in English
- Be at least 18 years of age when their class begins
- Have the emotional capability to interact gracefully and professionally with human dog guardians
- Have the physical capability to handle dogs of different sizes and activity levels
- Not have any past criminal record that involved actions or events related to the harming of animals or other vulnerable beings
- Be able to travel as needed 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 both 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, as well as for existing trainers interested in taking their knowledge, skills and certification to a higher level. 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.

VSA is committed to ensuring accessibility and availability of its services to everyone who meets the above eligibility criteria regardless of race, creed, nationality, background, sexual orientation, age, or gender. VSA strives to foster a welcoming, inclusive and supportive environment where students, faculty and staff are free from the threat of harassment, belittlement, or hate speech of any kind.

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.

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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 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 any applicable reactivation and extension fees 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 course. Students are expected to attend every day of both the virtual and in-person intensives, complete all required activities and assignments during the course 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 reactivation fee determined by how many units were successfully completed before deferral as well as costs associated with Faculty Advisor reassignments.

IPT students are expected to have completed related sections of the online Dog Trainer Course by the time certain IPT course components occur as follows:

- 1st Virtual Intensive – Student must have completed all lessons and Skills Assessments through DTC module 8
- 2nd Virtual Intensive – Student must have completed all lessons and Skills Assessments through DTC Module 11
- In-Person Intensive – Student must have completed all lessons and Skills Assessments through DTC Module 14

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IPT students will not be able to participate in an IPT component If they have not completed the related DTC curriculum by the time that IPT course component begins. They will be permitted to participate in a future IPT class's related IPT course component subject to availability per the terms described above.

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.
- 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

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consistently throughout all modules and units of the course, and demonstrate competence of all the skills and concepts introduced throughout the course.

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.

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.

VSA stores recordings of assessments and related interactions with Faculty Advisors for future quality assurance, consistency, and internal auditing purposes. By participating in video-based skills assessments, students agree to waive any rights to ownership or limitations on such recordings.

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 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.

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Synchronization Points

Beginning January 1, 2025, synchronization points after Module 9 and Module 16 will be implemented to ensure alignment between what students learn in online lessons and during Skills Assessments with their Faculty Advisor. Synchronization points serve as opportunities for the student and their Faculty Advisor to reflect on their progress, assess their goals, and make any necessary adjustments to their academic plan. Upon reaching a synchronization point, students may progress to the next module they have successfully completed all of the required Skills Assessments introduced during the preceding modules of the course as follows:

- Module 9 synchronization point: The following Skills Assessments must be completed before continuing to Module 10:
    - Dog Body Language Assessment
    - Enrichment Assessment
    - Learning Theory & ABC's Assessment
    - Management Assessment
    - Positive Training Methods Assessments (5)
- Module 16 synchronization point: The following Skills Assessments must be completed before continuing to Module 17:
    - Basic Behaviors Assessments (12)
    - Solving Issues Assessments (3)
    - Private Lesson Assessment
    - Group Class Assessment

Note that as of January 1, 2025, any student who has progressed past Module 9 or Module 16 without completing the respective Skills Assessments required for those synchronization points will see their ability to advance to further online lessons paused until the appropriate Skills Assessments are successfully completed.

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.

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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 units of the program. Completion is comprised of attendance, participation, professional engagement, demonstrated competence of all of the skills and concepts introduced during each component and unit of the program (including the IPT Introduction Unit, Virtual Intensives, In-Person Intensive, and Final Lessons & Assessments Unit, all at-home study, Cyber classes, and skills 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.

Level 5 Qualification via OCN London

Victoria Stilwell Academy is a Qualified Center with Open College Network (OCN) London, and the Dog Trainer Course has been accredited by OCN London as a Bespoke Qualification benchmarked at Level 5 using the UK's national qualification framework's level descriptors. OCN London is a national awarding organisation, recognised by the qualifications regulator for England (Ofqual). In general terms, a Level 5 qualification is roughly equivalent to two years of university education in the UK.

DTC students are not required to opt in to receiving Level 5 qualification via OCN London, but it is available to all VSA students who are interested in participating, regardless of location. A student's decision whether to opt in to Level 5 qualification or not does not affect their VSA-Certified Dog Trainer status earned upon graduation from the DTC.

What it means to be Level 5 qualified

You will be eligible to promote yourself publicly as a Level 5 Dog Trainer, which, in general terms, is roughly equivalent to two years of university education in the UK. In addition to the VSA-CDT certificate awarded to all graduates of the VSA Dog Trainer Course, OCN London will issue both a printed certificate and a verifiable e-certificate. You will also receive a digital OCN London badge for use on your website, marketing materials, and other platforms.

How to become Level 5 qualified

Students opting in to Level 5 qualification pay a fee to VSA for qualification registration (this is unrelated to any VSA tuition balance due). VSA will then pay for and register the student with OCN London. Upon graduation from the DTC, VSA notifies OCN London of the student's completion, and OCN London's External Quality Assurance (EQA) team conducts a review of the student's assessment materials provided by VSA. The OCN London EQA team may review a random sampling of certain students' submitted skills assessment videos, including both the footage of their assessment and the subsequent exchange with the Faculty Advisor regarding the submission. These video reviews are chosen at random by OCN London to ensure consistency across all learning experiences.

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If any additional supporting or clarifying documentation is needed by OCN London, VSA will provide it or notify the student and/or Faculty Advisor. Otherwise, the student is granted Level 5 qualification and receives all related certificates, badges and documentation.

Upon successful completion of all DTC course requirements, students will receive a reminder regarding the OCN London Level 5 qualification and instructions for submitting the applicable qualification fee. The qualification fee must be received within fourteen (14) days of the reminder and paid before graduation processing can be finalized and submitted to OCN London.

To opt in to receive Level 5 qualification:

1. Pay the "OCN London DTC L5 Fee" on the UK Payments page
2. Complete the DTC in full
3. Await notification of qualification granted or additional materials requested by OCN London

The awarding of Level 5 qualification is determined solely by OCN London without further input from VSA other than its verification that the student has completed all requirements for graduation successfully.

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
- Treat others with kindness and respect
- Be reliable and consistent
- Be observant and engaged

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- 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
- 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 DTC In-Person Track 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.)
- Level 5 qualification accredited by Open College Network London
- Use of a course-specific VSA Graduate Badge on graduate's website, social media sites, and other marketing materials.
- A profile listing on the Positively and VSA websites' trainer search engine.
- 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."
- Limited-time access to newly-created course content.*
- Access to VSA Graduate partner affiliations and discounts
- Use of images of graduates with Victoria Stilwell, subject to VSA approval.

*Graduates are eligible to receive updated course materials at no cost for a limited period following the initial publication of the new course materials, provided the updated materials represent lessons that either completely replace existing content or are entirely new additions to the curriculum. Note that refreshed and/or moderately-edited lesson content (as determined at VSA's discretion) will require SLC access per the standard SLC Graduate Access Policy.

Graduate SLC Access Policy

Upon course completion, graduates are provided ongoing access to all course materials via the SLC for 12 months. Beginning one year after their course completion date, graduates may purchase one year of

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access to course materials and lessons by paying an SLC Access Extension fee of $199. Such extensions may be purchased multiple times at any point after graduation.

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 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 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.

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- 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.
- 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 $3,950 or £2,999 and includes all course materials. Financing is available for all VSA tuition via VSA-approved third party lenders (Iink below).

VSA also offers several tuition payment plans for its online Dog Trainer Course:

- **3-Payment Plan:** Three monthly payments of $1,317 or £1,000, the first of which is due at time of enrollment. Total tuition for this plan is $3,950 or £2,999.
- **6-Payment Plan:** Six monthly payments of $708 or £537, the first of which is due at time of enrollment. Total tuition for this plan including a 7.5% administration fee is $4,246 or £3,224.
- **12-Payment Plan:** Twelve monthly payments of $354 or £269, the first of which is due at the time of registration. Total tuition for this plan including a 7.5% administration fee is $4,246 or £3,224.
- **18-Payment Plan:** Eighteen monthly payments of $236 or £179, the first of which is due at the time of registration. Total tuition for this plan including a 7.5% administration fee is $4,246 or £3,224.

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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 add-on In-Person Track only is $3,500 (or GBP equivalent – approximately £2,700) and includes all IPT course materials. This add-on option is available to students already enrolled in the online DTC. 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 Financing is available to pay the $3,500 IPT fee.

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

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/.

VSA Student Referral Program

DTC students and graduates that have completed or are in the midst of the VSA DTC learning experience are encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences regarding the Dog Trainer Course with others who they feel may be good candidates for the program and earn extra income while promoting positive training.

For every VSA Dog Trainer Course student that is directly referred by active DTC students or graduates, VSA will pay $150.

To be eligible for the referral fee, the following criteria must be met:

1. The referred applicant must initiate the standard VSA Dog Trainer Course enrollment process via the VSA website.
2. The referred student must email helpdesk@vsdta.com prior to course enrollment registration completion to notify VSA that they were referred to the program by the student/graduate, giving the full name of the student/graduate.

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3. The referred student must be accepted for enrollment, sign the VSA Dog Trainer Course enrollment agreement, begin study as a VSA student, complete at least 50% of the course curriculum and pay at least 50% of the total tuition amount due.

Note that the referred student must initiate information regarding the referral – there is not an area in the enrollment process where they will explicitly be asked if they were referred by anyone. In the event multiple individuals are listed as referrers, the $150 referral fee will be split between all eligible individuals, provided all names were provided to VSA as referrers prior to course enrollment completion.

This referral program is only available to VSA students and graduates, VSPDT members and VSA Faculty Advisors – it is not open to the public.

Career Opportunities & Placement Services

VSA provides students with the skills, knowledge and confidence to open their own dog training business, offering clients training options such as group classes and private lessons. The VSA community is committed to supporting graduates as they work toward achieving their career goals.

VSA provides ongoing guidance related to business development and marketing, and its educational programs include information on how to set up and operate a successful dog training business. The curriculum also covers best practices and techniques for pursuing employment opportunities with third parties, including resume development and interviewing skills. To support graduates in their career development, VSA regularly posts job opportunities within the industry to keep graduates informed of available employment options. Please note that VSA cannot guarantee employment following completion of the DTC program. Placement and employment statistics for the most recent year of DTC graduates can be found here.

Upon graduation, students are provided with a package consisting of VSA Graduate Badges, along with materials and suggestions on 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.

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.

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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/student-resources/complaints-against-institution.

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 virtual professional trainer observation 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.

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