

**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 (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) or the Online Dog Trainer Course (ODTC) with VSA, you've taken the first step towards a richly rewarding and successful career helping people to build and maintain relationships with their dogs based on mutual trust, respect 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 run 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



VSA Student Handbook

Educational Programs and Objectives

VSA's professional dog trainer educational tracks include the Dog Trainer Course (DTC) and the Online Dog Trainer Course – both six-month courses 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, 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)

- 6 months
- No previous dog training experience required

VSA's comprehensive DTC program curriculum includes:

- **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.](#)
- **Field Studies with Mentor.** Students complete two extensive periods under their mentor's supervision; a 60-day Field Study module centers on observing and assisting their mentor, while a second 90-day Field Training module includes more hands-on training and teaching with the mentor's real-world clients.
- **At-home study.** VSA provides scientifically up-to-date course materials and online lessons which students access via a variety of platforms.
- **Real-time cyber classes.** Online meet-ups led by Victoria and other faculty enhance the learning experience while keeping students engaged and on track.



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DTC Mentor Modules

Upon enrollment in the Dog Trainer Course each student is paired with a VSA Mentor, a professional trainer selected by VSA to lead the student through the Field Study and Field Training Modules. During each field module students complete activities designed to facilitate their assimilation of key course learning goals while gaining real-world experience with the mentors clients (pet owners and their dogs). 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.

Online Dog Trainer Course (ODTC)

- 6 months (recommended – up to 12 months to complete)
- No previous dog training experience required
- Same curriculum taught as in the DTC but without:
 - Mentor modules
 - In-person intensives
 - Real-time Cyber Classes
- ODTC 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.

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 (from Animal Planet's hit show, *It's Me or the Dog*), the VSA team is comprised of industry leaders in the field of dog training and behavior, business marketing and interpersonal client relationship skills.

Both the DTC and the Online DTC programs' 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 curricula are 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/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.

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.

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.

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.

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

Aly is a graduate of Georgia Tech and Karen Pryor Academy. She operates The Animal Scientist, a private in-home animal training company, and works with mostly high-rise reactivity cases. Aly is also a FitPAWS Master Trainer and completed her Certification in Canine Fitness from the University of Tennessee. Her blog, The Furry Black Box is leading the way in canine linguistics citizen science and Aly hopes to incorporate her linguistics studies, fitness programs, and behavior modification work into a comprehensive package to help reactive teams communicate more effectively.

Sarah Fisher, Faculty

Sarah Fisher is a TTouch Instructor and behaviour counsellor who trained with Linda Tellington Jones and Robyn Hood and organises the TTouch trainings for the UK. She has worked with animals for over seventeen years and teaches staff workshops for many of the UK's top animal shelters. Sarah also assesses dogs for court cases. Sarah is a regular teacher on the Dogs Trust International Training Programme and teaches workshops both here and abroad. She also teaches on the TTouch Equine Practitioner Training Clinics in the UK and South Africa.

Sarah has contributed articles to many national magazines and has appeared at many educational events. She has also made numerous television appearances including Talking to Animals (ITV1 and National Geographic), BBC Breakfast News (BBC1), GMTV (ITV1) Richard and Judy (Channel 4), The One Show (BBC1), Only Fools on Horses (ITV1), Underdogs (CBBC), Pet Rescue (Channel 4), Animal Rescue Live (BBC1), My Pet Shame (Sky 1), Celebrity Dog School (BBC1) and as the pet expert for the ITV1 show This Morning. Sarah has also worked with Blue Peter dog, Barney, and has appeared on the television show (BBC1). She was a judge on Over the Rainbow (BBC1) for Andrew Lloyd Webbers search for Toto. Sarah has also been interviewed many times on local radio stations including BBC Radio Somerset, BBC Radio Bristol, BBC Guernsey and BBC Radio Berkshire giving advice on animal training and behaviour and is a regular guest on the 12 o'clock show for BBC Radio Bristol.

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.

Joey Iversen, Faculty

With over 18 years experience training and showing both dogs and horses, Joey Iversen has worked with all breeds of dogs and their owners. She has taught seminars around the world, including China, Taiwan, Australia, Denmark, Tokyo, Sweden, France, Switzerland and Canada. Joey received her Certified Pet Dog Trainer title from the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers and is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. She is a graduate of the Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training and Behavior. Joey is also TAGteach Level 2 Certified.



In 2007, Joey relocated to Washington from Iowa where she developed and co-owned a successful training, daycare, agility center and boarding facility. There, Joey developed and taught all levels of dog and puppy obedience classes, agility, CGC, Rally-O, private lessons, and behavior counseling. She coached competitors in all canine sports and personally holds titles in Obedience, Rally-O, and Agility.

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.

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 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 / Administration

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 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://vsdogtrainingacademy.com/why-vsa/victoria-stilwell-team/advisory-board>

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Enrollment Agreement

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

[A sample of VSA's standard Online DTC 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 a high school diploma (or equivalent), 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 (DTC 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 DTC 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 and Academic Standards Policy

DTC Students:

Once each group of students begins their studies, all students undergo an online orientation which outlines VSA policies, protocols and expectations for each component of the course. Students are expected to attend every day of the in-person intensives, complete all required activities and assignments during the mentor modules, 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 Module 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 Module as prescribed by VSA before resuming the course. The scheduling of the repeated Module 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 Module (from a different 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 Modules 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.



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Online DTC Students:

Online Dog Trainer Course 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 engage in discussions with the Faculty Advisor throughout the course.

The Online Dog Trainer Course curriculum (including Faculty Advisor meetings and assessments) are expected to be completed within 12 months of the student's enrollment date.

Grading Policy

DTC Students:

Students are graded at various points throughout the course, with minimum scores on each component required for graduation. Minimum scores are required as follows:

- 90% - Midterm Exam (10% of final weighted grade)
- 90% - Online Final Exam (20% of final weighted grade)
- 80% - Online Written Exam (35% of final weighted grade)
- 80% - Final Assessment Video Submissions (35% of final weighted grade)

In addition to the above minimum required scores, to be eligible to graduate students must be in compliance with VSA's attendance policy (see above), participate and engage thoughtfully and consistently throughout all modules 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 Assessment component scores 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.

Online DTC Students:

Online Dog Trainer Course 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 and exams may be retaken a total of 3 times each.



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- If a passing score 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'.
- Skills assessments are graded via a uniform rubric on a pass/fail 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.)

Faculty Advisor Protocols (Online DTC Students only)

Each Online 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/fail 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 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 Online DTC tuition may be used at any time during the student's enrollment period.

DTC Graduation Requirements

In order to successfully complete and graduate from the DTC 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 Module, Primer Intensive Module, Field Study Module, Core Essentials Intensive, Field Training Module, all at-home study, Cyber classes, and Final Exam and Completion Assessments), and the successful completion and submission of all final exam components.

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Online DTC Graduation Requirements

In order to successfully complete and graduate from the Online DTC 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.

Graduating with Distinction

Students who display an exemplary level of skill, knowledge, participation, attitude, and engagement throughout the Dog Trainer Course will graduate with distinction.

Prerequisites to graduate with distinction:

- A combined, weighted average of all final assessment 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 students are eligible to graduate with distinction.

Student Learning Center

The Student Learning Center (SLC) is the portal through which students access Online Lessons, join real-time Cyber Classes (for DTC students only), 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 resources are available to students depending on where they are in the overall course.

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

The Online DTC 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 Online DTC 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



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- Have ready any necessary items or supplies for the tasks at hand
- Be proactive in planning meetings with 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
- 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 the Online 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 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 certification designation 'VSA-DTC' (for Dog Trainer Course students) or 'VSA-DTC Online' (for Online Dog Trainer Course students.)
- 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."
- 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 the DTC or the Online 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 Mentor (if applicable), the student's Faculty Advisor (if applicable), the VSA staff, 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, 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 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, 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.



VSA Student Handbook

- 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 is \$6,950 (£6,950 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 £1,220 for UK-based classes) is due upon acceptance and credited towards full tuition.

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.

Full DTC tuition and financing terms can be found on the DTC's Financing page at www.vsdta.com/courses/dog-trainer-course/financing/.

Online Dog Trainer Course Tuition:

Standard tuition for the Online DTC is \$2,950 and includes all course materials.

Financing is available for Online DTC tuition in the form of 2 payment plans:

- 3-Payment Plan: Initial enrollment fee of \$1,450 upon registration followed by two monthly payments of \$875 each beginning 30 days after enrollment. Total tuition for this plan is \$3,200.
- 6-Payment Plan: Initial enrollment fee of \$1,250 upon registration followed by 5 monthly payments of \$440 each beginning 30 days after enrollment. Total tuition for this plan is \$3,450.

Full Online DTC tuition and financing terms can be found at www.vsdogtrainingacademy.com/courses/online-dog-trainer-course/#dtcol-tuition.

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.

By the time they graduate, students will be provided a package of VSA Graduate Badges, materials and suggestions regarding how best to harness the value of their experience learning from one of the dog training world's most accomplished and respected dog behavior experts in Victoria Stilwell.

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.

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

1. Full refund if Student provides written notice of withdrawal within three (3) business days of signing Enrollment Agreement OR within three (3) business days of making a payment, as long as the three (3) days occur prior to the course start date.
2. Refunds available to Students upon written notification to VSA of their desire to withdraw are as provided below.
3. 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.
4. 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 the course after the course has begun and before 50% of the instruction has been provided will be eligible for a pro-rated refund. Refunds are determined based on the proration of tuition and percentage of program completed at withdrawal, up until 50% of the program.
 - Students completing more than 50% of the course instruction based on instructional time (including Online Lessons, Cyber Classes, in-person Intensives, mentor activities and other resources provided by VSA) are not eligible for refunds.
 - 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.
5. 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.