



## The Animal Behavior College Story

Steven Appelbaum founded Animal Behavior College (ABC) in 1998. At the time, he was the owner of Animal Behavior & Training Associates Inc., (ABTA), then the largest independent dog training company in the United States. ABTA was Mr. Appelbaum's first company and was founded in the 1980s. By 1994, he secured exclusive agreements to provide dog training classes in all Petco Animal Supplies Inc. (Petco®) stores in the United States. Two years later, this growth extended to Canada, and at its peak, the company employed more than 500 dog trainers in 44 states and every Canadian province west of Quebec.

### The Creation of a Unique Dog Trainer Testing Procedure

Mr. Appelbaum knew that hiring qualified dog trainers was paramount to ABTA's continual growth. Since there was no state, provincial or federally recognized testing procedures in the U.S. or Canada that adequately measured a dog trainer's aptitude and training skills back then, he figured out a way to measure a dog trainer's knowledge and potential effectiveness by creating and implementing a mandatory testing procedure. The results were disappointing. Approximately 70% of the dog training applicants who took the examination failed. He found this disconcerting, as the candidates were professional instructors who held animal-related jobs and had at least two years of experience. It was then that Mr. Appelbaum realized the need for ABTA to institute an educational process to increase its professional instructors' knowledge and skill sets necessary to meet ABTA's high-quality training standards.

Despite testing and apprenticing thousands of trainers, ABTA still could not find enough qualified trainers to meet its professional standards and growing demand. Mr. Appelbaum soon realized that the next natural step was to create an educational program that assisted trainers and others who aspired to reach ABTA's exacting standards. At the time, there were only two kinds of dog trainer schools: The first required students to travel to a school and live on or near campus for the duration of the program. While this kind of school was effective, it wasn't convenient and it severely limited enrollments, especially since the average person who wanted to become a trainer could not afford to relocate for months at a time. Costs for these brick and mortar programs were also cost-prohibitive for many with tuition and living expenses ranging anywhere from \$5,000 to \$12,000. The second kind of school was a traditional correspondence course. While this type of training program was far less costly, it was also less effective as it lacked the all-important hands-on training component necessary for trainers to become effective dog trainers.

### The Birth of Animal Behavior College

Instead, Mr. Appelbaum combined aspects of both educational models. He understood that the convenience and lower cost of a distance learning program was a real benefit as well as the hands-on component found in traditional brick and mortar schools. This resulted in his creating a distance learning program with a hands-on apprenticeship. With this hybrid idea, Animal Behavior College was born in 1998. ABC students aren't required to give up their jobs, pay exorbitant tuition and fees and relocate away from their families and friends. Except for the apprenticeship portion, the program can be taken from their homes and at their convenience. As it was then and still is now, the program consists of 11-stages, and students learn the theoretical and scientific principles of dog training followed by an intensive, hands-on Externship with an approved mentor trainer. Mentors are assigned through ABC's extensive database of tested and qualified training professionals in the U.S. and Canada. Mr. Appelbaum created a unique educational model that is accessible and serves its students everywhere. Dog trainer program graduates are deemed ABCDTs (Animal Behavior College Certified Dog Trainers).

Soon after introducing the program, ABC was inundated with inquiries from dog enthusiasts and professional trainers nationwide. By the time of a negotiated deal in 2004 with Petco and ABTA that resulted in Petco taking dog training classes conducted in their stores in-house, ABC had become a stand-alone entity, larger than ABTA and completely independent. In 2009, to meet the ever-increasing demand from individuals wishing to fulfill their animal-career ambitions, Mr. Appelbaum moved the school from a modest office in Northridge, California to Valencia, California, where it now employs more than 100 people.

### Animal Behavior College Programs

Since its inception, ABC has evolved to address the ever-changing needs of students and the animals they aspire to help. Concerned about the large number of dogs that were being euthanized after frustrated owners surrendered them due to behavior problems, Debbie Kendrick, Vice President of ABC, created a volunteer program in 2004 to train shelter dogs to increase their chances for adoption. The program, Students Saving Lives, is included in ABC's dog trainer coursework and is an international campaign to improve shelter dog rehabilitation and adoption. To date, ABC dog training students have volunteered more than 137,000 hours since the program's inception.

In 2008, ABC launched the certified Veterinary Assistant Program. The program's model is similar to that of the Dog Obedience Program except each student's externship takes place at veterinary clinics or animal hospitals. The program is NAVTA (National Association of Veterinary Technicians of America) approved and graduates are deemed Animal Behavior College Certified Veterinary Assistants (ABCVA). By 2012 the Veterinary Assistant Program became the school's most popular, and as of September 30, 2017, 7,564 students have graduated from the program.

As a result of the success of ABC's Dog Obedience and Veterinary Assistant Programs and due to popular demand, the school decided to create a third program in 2009. After a year and a half of research and development, ABC launched the certified Grooming

Instruction Program in 2010. This program was an important addition since according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics professional pet groomer occupations are projected to grow by 11% in the next 10 years. The pet grooming course has become quite popular, and as of September 30, 2017, ABC has graduated 2,541 Animal Behavior College Certified Pet Groomers (ABCPGs).

In 2013, ABC introduced a dog trainer classroom program for students who prefer a more traditional classroom setting. The In-Classroom Dog Obedience Instructor Program requires that students attend class 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for 5 months. The course is taught by an ABCDT and veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. Enrollment is open to students with no military affiliation or experience as well as military veterans, their spouses or dependent children who are eligible under the provisions of Title 38 of the United States Code under various programs. ABC offers the course twice a year and the 9th class session began in the fall of 2017. Students come from all across the U.S. to attend this program.

After much research and discussion, ABC created and offered a fifth pet services career program in 2017, the Cat Training Program. With approximately 94.2 million cats kept as pets in North America and a growing willingness on the part of cat owners to seek trainers for them, the program was a natural fit for ABC. The only difference between this program and ABC's other core programs is it doesn't include an Externship component. Instead, students observe and interact with cats while volunteering a minimum of 25 hours at a local shelter, humane society or rescue group in their communities. Graduates of the Cat Training Program are deemed Animal Behavior College Certified Cat Trainers (ABCCTs).

With record numbers of households owning pets and needing services for them, the animal services industry exploded during the first decade of the 21st Century and has continued to grow. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that employment of animal care and service workers in the U.S. will grow 23% from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. As of September 2017, ABC has graduated 24,500 students with 18,859 members of the school's Alumni Group.

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