
Revision Responsibility: Professional Education Council (PEC)
Responsible Employee: Certification Officer for Educator Licensure

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to define the Professional Education Unit's policy and procedure for background checks. For a variety of reasons, students enrolled in a teacher education program, a program that requires off-campus field-based assignments such as observation, methods, practicum, or student teaching in P-12 schools, are required to submit to a criminal background check.

The Professional Education Unit requires background checks as a condition of admission because:

- students have significant interaction with minors and vulnerable populations;
- students who cannot successfully complete a background check may not, in some instances, be eligible for licensure or employment upon graduation.

Policy:

Background Check at Point of Admission

- Adopted Fall 2009: Beginning fall 2009, all students at The University of Southern Mississippi who apply for admission to teacher education must undergo a background check. Students who apply for a Gold Card and have passed the background checking process are eligible for admission to teacher education, pending satisfaction of other admission requirements. Students who pass the background check process will be issued a Background Check badge and must be able to produce the badge when visiting P-12 schools. Teacher candidates issued Gold Cards prior to fall 2009 and currently enrolled in Southern Miss teacher education programs, as well as Southern Miss students enrolled in teacher education field or clinical experiences that do not require a Gold Card also undergo a background check as part of University policy.
- Amended Fall 2010: Teacher candidates who received Gold Cards prior to fall 2009 and are currently enrolled in the teacher education program, as well as other students at The University of Southern Mississippi who are sent into P-12 schools as a part of University coursework, must undergo a background check. Therefore, any student who is sent into a P-12 school to complete observation, methods, practicum, or student teaching requirements must complete the background check process.

- Amended Fall 2012: It is crucial for students to initiate the background check process no later than the first week of the semester because it takes approximately one week to receive background check results.
- Amended Fall 2013, no background check requests will be processed after the second week of the semester. Students that fail to meet the second week deadline will be forced to drop classes that require a background check.

Policy for Flagged Background Checks

This Criminal Background Check Policy is consistent with state law Sections 1 (2) - Section 2, of SECTION 37-9-17, Mississippi Code of 1972, as amended by Senate Bill 2658. Refusal to provide consent for a criminal background investigation will result in denial of admission. Further, failure of any portion of a background check may be the basis for barring the student from admission to a teacher education program depending on the findings. The existence of a conviction does not automatically disqualify an individual from admission. Flagged background checks are reviewed by the Professional Education Council (PEC) via the Dismissal, Appeals, and Remediation (DAR) Committee. The DAR committee is responsible for reviewing any flagged background checks and deciding if a background check identifies issues that preclude admission. The DAR Committee may grant waivers for such mitigating circumstances, which shall include, but not be limited to: (a) age at which the crime was committed; (b) circumstances surrounding the crime; (c) length of time since the conviction and criminal history since the conviction; (d) work history; (e) current employment and character references; (f) successful efforts toward rehabilitation; (g) other evidence demonstrating the ability of the person to perform the field experiences responsibilities competently and that the person does not pose a threat to the health or safety of the children at the school. In adherence with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, DAR ensures a student's flagged background check does not interfere with a student's ability to uphold the unit's mission as well as meet the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions of the program. DAR may either write the student a letter regarding their background check or ask that the student come in for a meeting with the committee to discuss the findings. Should a student be admitted to a University of Southern Mississippi professional education program with a flagged background check and later be denied license by the State of Mississippi or elsewhere, the University is not held responsible. Students are encouraged to educate themselves on licensing requirements. Additionally, a student who does not pass the background check might be advised to seek another major.

Process for Flagged Background Check

DAR may either write the student a letter regarding their background check or ask that the student come in for a meeting with the committee to discuss the findings. Standardized letter templates include:

- Letter Template 1: Student admitted but committee states it will be in the best interest for the student to get their record expunged
- Letter Template 2: Admission contingent upon student expunging their record first
- Letter Template 3: Committee requests a meeting with the student to discuss their background check and student signs "Student Acknowledgement Form of Background Check Procedures"

Policy for Automatic Denial or Dismissal

All offenses will be considered as potential disqualifiers, but those instances mentioned specifically in Mississippi code will be considered as immediate disqualifiers. The applicant shall not be eligible to participate in field experiences sponsored by the University of Southern Mississippi if such fingerprinting or criminal records checks

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disclose a criminal history of conviction, pending indictment, guilty plea or plea of nolo contendere, whether misdemeanor or felony, that bears upon an individual's fitness to have responsibility for the safety and well-being of children, including but not limited to the following offenses: possession, sale or distribution of drugs, murder, manslaughter, robbery, rape (capital or statutory), sexual battery, sexual assault, kidnapping, assault with intent to ravish, exploitation of a child, contributing to the delinquency of a child, child abuse, child neglect, condonation of child abuse or neglect, abandonment or desertion of a child, fondling, carnal knowledge of a child, child molestation, incest, child endangerment, endangering the welfare of a child, sodomy or unnatural intercourse, adultery or fornication between teacher and pupil, neglect of a vulnerable adult, sexual or physical abuse of a vulnerable adult, sexual servitude of a minor, human trafficking, obscenity, filming another without permission where there is an expectation of privacy, arson, larceny, burglary, gratification of lust or aggravated assault which has not been reversed on appeal or for which a pardon has not been granted, or any other offense resulting in a conviction in another jurisdiction which, if committed in this state, would be deemed to be such a crime without regard to its designation elsewhere; or any conviction of conspiracy to commit, accessory to commission, or attempt to commit any offense listed in this section. Students will still have the right to appeal to the DAR Committee.

Background Check as Needed Policy

In addition to admission, The University of Southern Mississippi reserves the right to request an additional background check at any point in a student's program of enrollment in professional education. If the student has had an arrest or conviction after their first background check at admission to the program, they could be dismissed. As stated in the "Disciplinary Procedures for Prohibited Conduct" section of the USM Student Handbook, there are set policies for such conduct. The DAR Committee and the Dean of the College of Education and Psychology will follow all University policies and procedures to ensure every student is provided due process.

Procedure:

The background check should be initiated by the student as part of the routine admission process. To initiate and complete the background check process, students should:

1. Go to <https://mycb.castlebranch.com>.
2. In the PLACE ORDER box (located at the upper right), enter package code UA23. (This is the code for USM.) Click GO.0
3. PLEASE REVIEW page: Click the "I have read...." box and click CONTINUE.
4. PLACE ORDER: Enter a Personal Identification Number (PIN) when prompted to do so. The PIN is the Southern Miss emplid (a 6-digit number without the "w" in front).
5. Follow the online instructions to complete the request for a background check. (Students will be asked to provide social security number, date of birth, gender, race, and residency history.)
6. Watch for mail from CastleBranch (rather than USM) with badge from the background check company. Students should alert their parents to watch for the information from CastleBranch if a permanent address was provided for correspondence.

Billing:

The student's account at The University of Southern Mississippi will be charged \$42 for the background check process. This price includes a residency history check; nationwide criminal database check, including nationwide sex offender check; seven year all-county criminal search; and a CastleBranch student badge indicating that the background check has been passed. The badge is valid as long as the student is enrolled at USM.

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Replacement Background Check Badges

Effective fall 2012, CastleBranch will issue replacement badges for only 30 days after the badge is mailed. After 30 days, students must complete and pay for the background check process again. If you have not received your badge in about 2-3 weeks, please contact the company directly and check on the status.

Exceptions to Completion of Background Check

- Some students may have completed the background check process for other USM classes. If a student can produce a background check badge, there is no need to complete a second background check.
- Some students may have completed the background check process as a part of their employment. Those students can fax a copy of a current background check to 601-266-5471, and it will be reviewed to see if it meets University requirements.

Courses that Require Background Checks

ARE	482	Student Teaching in Art Education I, II
BSC	495L	Application of Basic Concepts for Secondary School Laboratory
CD	400	Child Life Clinical Rotation
CIE	301L	Mathematics: Primary & Middle Grades Clinic
CIE	343L	Curriculum Methods Clinic
CIE	480	Student Teaching I: Lower Grades
CIE	482	Student Teaching I Upper Grades
CIR	306	Intro to Literacy: Integrate Language Arts Approach
CIR	309L	Early Literacy Instruction I Clinic K-8
CIR	407L	Early Literacy Instruction II Clinic K-8
CIR	412L	Literacy IV: Assessment and Instruction Clinic
CIS	313	Principles of Teaching High School
DED	260	Field Observations in Dance
DED	460	Student Teaching in Elementary Dance
DED	461	Student Teaching in Secondary Dance
ENG	491	Secondary English Practicum
ENG	494	Practice Teaching in English I
ENG	495	Practice Teaching in English II
FL	494	Student Teaching in Foreign Language I
FL	495	Student Teaching in Foreign Language II
HIS	487	Current Issues in History/Social Studies Education
HIS	488	Methods of Teaching Social Studies & Practicum
HIS	490	Student Teaching in Social Studies
HIS	491	Student Teaching in Social Studies
IT	493	Student Teaching in Business Technology Education
KIN	284	Creative Rhythms
KIN	318	Foundations of Teaching Physical Education

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KIN	321	Elementary Physical Education
KIN	333	Secondary Physical Education
KIN	462	Methods in Teaching Physical Education
KIN	463	Professional Preparation in Teaching Physical Education
KIN	490	Student Teaching in Elementary Physical Education
KIN	491	Student Teaching in Secondary Physical Education
LIS	417	Literature and Related Media for Children
LIS	508	School Libraries
LIS	517	Literature and Related Media for Children
MAT	220	Explorations in the Mathematics Classroom
MAT	489	Student Teaching in Mathematics I
MAT	490	Student Teaching in Mathematics II
MED	311	Elementary Music Methods
MED	312	Secondary Music Methods
MED	321	Instrumental Methods
MED	493	Student Teaching in Music Education I
MED	494	Student Teaching in Music Education II
PSY	771	Practicum in School Psychology
SHS	312	Practicum with Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
SHS	495	Student Teaching with Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
SME	432	Science for Elementary Teachers
SME	460	Methods in Teaching Science--Secondary
SME	489	Student Teaching in Science I
SME	490	Student Teaching in Science II
SPE	401	Systematic Interventions for Challenging Behaviors
SPE	401L	Practicum Interventions for Challenging Behaviors
SPE	402	General Teaching Methods in Special Education
SPE	430	Introduction to High-Incidence Disabilities
SPE	442	Transition/Life Skills: Students with Disabilities
SPE	442L	Practicum: Transition/Life Skills
SPE	480	Student Teaching: Mild/Mod Disabilities/Lower Grades
SPE	482	Student Teaching Mild/Mod Disabilities: Upper Grades
SPE	498	Families of Individuals with Disabilities
SPE	645	Assessment & Intervention - Severe Disabilities

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