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 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 student teaching, are required to submit to a criminal background check prior to their admission to the program.

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.

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.

Policy:

**Background Check Policy – 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.

**Background Check 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.

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. Effective 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.

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 enrollment in a professional education program.

Procedure:

To initiate and complete the background check process, students should:

1. Go to www.certifiedbackground.com and click on “Students.”
2. Enter package code UA23 in the package code box. (This is the code for USM.)
3. 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.)
4. 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.)
5. Watch for mail from Certified Background (rather than USM) with results from the background check. Students should alert their parents to watch for the information from Certified Background if a permanent address was provided for correspondence.

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 certified background student badge indicating that the background check has been passed. The badge is valid as long as the student is enrolled at USM.

Replacement Background Check Badges

Effective fall 2012, Certified Background 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.

Exceptions

• 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 checked to see if it meets University requirements.