Counseling Program Policy on Criminal Background Checks

One of the highest priorities of any school or agency is the safety of their students and clients. Consequently, we require background checks from every student participating in a field experience.

Each semester we have a few students with one relatively minor charge on their background check. With a reasonable explanation demonstrating growth and why such a problem will not occur again, schools and agencies may be forgiving. However, students with more severe charges or multiple minor charges could face more difficulty. Students should be aware that schools or agencies may refuse to accept them for field experiences due to negative findings through a background check. Also, students may be turned down for licensure or employment. Students who have reports indicating violent or sexual offense convictions may face great difficulty in obtaining placement and may result in dismissal from the program. Students with concerns about their individual situation should make an appointment to see the Director of Counseling Programs to discuss specific circumstances. Ultimately students with criminal charges continue in the program at their own risk.

Be aware that background check results are sent to the Director of Counseling Programs and may be requested by school personnel, program and agency administrators, and advisers as necessary for placement purposes.

Initial Background Check:

- Prior to approval of their first field experience at WCU, students are required to obtain a comprehensive background check. This is typically performed during the COUN 602 Ethics in Counseling course.
- This comprehensive background check must be completed through CertifiedBackground.com and can take 3-5 business days or more. Students should plan well ahead of application deadlines. Be advised, some counties take longer to report.
- Letters from school personnel offices, background checks through a local courthouse, and background checks from work are not acceptable replacements for a comprehensive background check. The only exception is for students who will be completing their field experiences in the school district or agency where they are already employed.
- Go to https://www.certifiedbackground.com/ and use package code “WD79”.
- You may be asked to show evidence of a background check for every field experience you have, so be certain to save it so you will not have to call the company later to find it again. They may assess a fee to send the background check again.
- Be aware that students with any arrests, dismissals or convictions will need to write a full explanation including circumstances, court disposition, any penalties such as community services and lessons learned that provide assurances that there will be no further problems. Court documents may also be required. More complex issues will be forwarded to a full counseling faculty review to decide if placement should even be attempted.
Self-Disclosure:

If you are arrested after the criminal background check you must contact the Director of Counseling Programs within 72 hours to discuss the impact on current or future placements.

Failure to disclose criminal charges may disqualify you from further Practicum/Internship placement.

Field Experience including Practicum/Internship

- If students have completed the comprehensive background check in an earlier course, they are required to obtain a follow-up background check before starting a field experience in a school or agency.
- Go to https://www.certifiedbackground.com/ and use package code "WD79re" if this is a follow up from an earlier background check or "WD79" if this is your first background check for a field experience.
- Again students should be aware that it takes 3-5 or more business days to receive the results with some counties taking longer, so ordering early is important to meet the application deadline.
- Letters from school personnel offices, background checks through a local courthouse, and background checks from work are not acceptable replacements for a comprehensive background check. The only exception is for students who will be completing their field experiences in the classroom where they are already employed.
- Be aware that students with any arrests, dismissals or convictions will need to write a full explanation including circumstances, court disposition, any penalties such as community services and lessons learned that provide assurances that there will be no further problems. Court documents may also be required. More complex issues will be forwarded to a full counseling faculty review to decide if placement should even be attempted. Again - planning on your part will facilitate the field placement process.