

Guidance to Graduate Students, Program Coordinators and Graduate Advisors Regarding Criminal Background Check and Other Requirements

I. Misconduct Disclosure

Students are expected to abide by the Georgia Southern University [Student Conduct Code](#) and to disclose any failure to do so. If a case has been brought to the University's Judicial Affairs office, the student's advisor and department chair should be informed. If Judicial Affairs rules in favor of the student, then no negative action should occur at the program level. However, if Judicial Affairs rules against the student, the program should have a process in place for determining if the student should be prevented from continuing in the program. If a student is excluded from the program as a result of the misconduct, the student may appeal to the [COE Student Affairs Committee](#) which will make a recommendation to the COE Dean.

II. Criminal Background Check

It is required that all students admitted to educator preparation programs at Georgia Southern University submit to a criminal background check. To do so, they are directed to the following site: www.certifiedbackground.com and click on "Applicants." We provide them with the Georgia Southern University Package Code, which is **ge00**. A release form, which allows Georgia Southern to receive a student's information, is required by CertifiedBackground.com and obtainable from their site. The cost is \$30 for in-state applicants and an additional \$13.50 for out-of-state applicants, payable by credit card (Visa or MasterCard) or money order; later rechecks, required every two years, cost \$12 each.

This requirement is waived if valid Georgia certification is held in a teacher, leadership or service field and the graduate student is employed by a school system or other education/community agency and can provide verification of that employment and completion of a criminal background check. A letter from the employer's Human Resources/Personnel director or submission of the *Employment and Background Check Verification* form will be sufficient verification.

Procedures:

1. Applicants complete the "[COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form](#)" as part of their application packet.
2. Program designee checks that background check requirement is met as part of admission decision. The requirement is met if the background check has been completed (by the employer or through www.certifiedbackground.com).
3. The COE's Graduate Administrative Coordinator will check the CertifiedBackground.com site on a daily basis and, if a negative finding occurs on an applicant, she will notify the associate dean for COE graduate programs.
4. If a negative finding occurs, the COE's Graduate Administrative Coordinator will then send a letter to the student (using an approved template) to notify him/her of the finding and provide information and instructions, with a copy sent to the program coordinator. The student will be instructed to contact the associate dean for COE graduate programs to discuss options.
5. If a negative finding has occurred on a student and the student is being placed in a field placement, the graduate program coordinator, advisor, or course instructor (as determined by the program) will share the background check information with the administration of the host school/system or agency in advance so they can make an informed decision as to whether to allow the placement or not. A letter to the school/system/agency administrator/s (using an approved template) will be mailed (or emailed) with the CertifiedBackground findings. The letter will be sent by the program. [Note: The program must have a system in place for assuring that the letters will be sent to administrators of field placement sites in these cases. This may be done by the program coordinator, advisor, or instructor or by the COE's Graduate Administrative Coordinator, if a system is arranged in advance and adequate information is provided. The program will identify those courses that require field experiences to assist in this process.] The administrator will sign and return the form acknowledging receipt of the information and indicating the placement decision. The decision to accept the student for the placement will be at the sole discretion of the school system/agency administration. A copy of the signed form from the school/system/agency administrator should be maintained in the student's advisement folder.
6. For graduate students who satisfied the background check requirement through CertifiedBackground.com and do not complete their programs within a two year period, a recheck is required (every two years). The COE's Graduate Administrative Coordinator will maintain a spreadsheet that identifies when graduate students completed the background check with CertifiedBackground.com and will notify the graduate students by e-mail and their advisors when a recheck is due. Cost of rechecks with CertifiedBackground.com is \$12. It is the responsibility of the program faculty to ensure that all graduate students placed in field experiences are up-to-date with the background check and that school/agency administrators are properly notified if an adverse finding occurs. Assistance is available to programs through the COE's Graduate Administrative Coordinator.

Please be aware that admission to the program and/or field placements will have no effect as to whether the Professional Standards Commission will certify an individual. The Professional Standards Commission makes certification decisions without regard to prior criminal background check evaluations by an educational institution. School districts conduct and evaluate criminal background checks prior to hiring.

III. Code of Ethics for Educators

As part of the admissions process (on the “COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form”), students are provided initial information about the Georgia PSC *Code of Ethics for Educators* requirement and are referred to the site <http://www.gapsc.com/Ethics/NEthics.asp>. Students are told that this code of ethics is binding on all certified personnel employed in the State of Georgia and are also binding on all persons in programs that prepare educators for work in schools. They are informed that the COE expects all of its candidates (graduate and undergraduate) to abide by this professional code of ethics. All applicants are then expected to read the *Code of Ethics for Educators* and agree to apply the standards in the performance of their professional responsibilities while in the program and affirm that they will do so. This is documented on the “COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form.”

IV. Tort Liability Insurance

Students are informed as part of the admissions process (with the “COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form”) of the requirement to have tort liability insurance due to the required field experiences in our programs (including practica, internships, and field-based research). They are told that this insurance coverage is available through membership in professional organizations and their student organization affiliates such as PAGE/SPAGE and GAE/SGAE or through private homeowner’s insurance policies. The “COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form” requires students to indicate the source of their liability insurance coverage. Students are also informed on this form that tort liability insurance coverage must be in effect before enrollment in any course that requires a field experience or field-based research. Programs should reinforce this requirement at the time field placements are made.

Note: The “COE Disclosure and Affirmation Form” will be maintained in Xtender as part of the student’s on-line application. The program/advisor may access this document in Xtender as needed or may copy it from Xtender for the student’s advisement folder.