

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 criminal background checks from every student participating in a field experience.

Each semester we have a few students with one relatively minor charge on their criminal 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 criminal 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 Counseling Program Director to discuss specific circumstances. Ultimately, students with criminal charges continue in the program at their own risk of not being allowed to take courses (e.g., practicum and internship) necessary for program completion.

Be aware that criminal background check results are sent to the Counseling Program Director, Field Placement Coordinators, and COUN 602 instructors. Results may be requested by school personnel, program and agency administrators, and advisers, as necessary for field placement purposes.

Initial Criminal Background Check:

- Prior to approval of their first field experience at WCU, students are required to obtain a comprehensive criminal background check. This is typically performed during the COUN 602: Professional and Ethical Issues in Counseling course.
- Students must pay a fee and complete the comprehensive criminal background check through Castle Branch, which can take 3 – 5 business days or more to receive results. Students should plan well ahead of deadlines. Be advised, some counties take longer to report.
- Letters from school personnel offices, criminal background checks through a local courthouse, and criminal background checks from work are not acceptable replacements for the initial comprehensive criminal background check.
- Go to <https://discover.castlebranch.com/>, click on “Place Order” in the top header, and use package code “WD79”.
- You may be asked to show evidence of a criminal background check for every field experience you have, so be certain to save the results so you will not have to call the company later to find it again. They may assess a fee to resend the criminal background check results.
- 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 Counseling Program Director 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.

Follow-Up/Updating Criminal Background Check:

- Prior to starting a field experience in a school or agency, students are required to obtain a follow-up criminal background check, and may be required to update it annually if it takes more than a year to complete field placement.
- Go to <https://discover.castlebranch.com/>, click on “Place Order” in the top header, and use package code “WD79re”. Make sure to use this code and not the previous code used for the initial criminal background check.
- Students should be aware it takes 3 – 5 or more business days to receive results with some counties taking longer, so completing early is important to meet the practicum/internship application deadline.
- Letters from schools, agencies, or courthouse background checks are not acceptable replacements for the required follow-up comprehensive criminal background check. However, the only exception to completing the follow-up with Castle Branch is if the practicum or internship site requires their own comprehensive criminal background check (i.e., similar to Castle Branch’s initial criminal background check and not a yes/no questionnaire), and the student can provide a copy of the criminal background check results to the appropriate Field Placement Coordinator prior to beginning practicum and/or internship.
- 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.