

# Auburn University Graduate School

## Procedures for Securing Background Reports for Graduate Student Employees Before Hiring

### 1.0 General

1.1 As a matter of routine, Auburn University (AU) obtains background reports, also known as consumer reports and investigative consumer reports, on many of its employees. Pursuant to [the Graduate Student Employee Background Check Policy](#), this will now include all graduate student employees (including hourly paid). The background report will include the results of:

- **ID Trace:** The ID Trace search, also called an address trace, reveals current/former residences and aliases. Unlimited matches can be returned from a vast database from government and private sources. Reported addresses and aliases are often used to perform other background searches, such as county criminal history checks.
- **Alabama Statewide Criminal History:** A statewide Alabama criminal search provides an overview of criminal history for students that have resided in the state of Alabama
- **County Criminal History:** This search provides the most current, complete criminal information directly from county courthouses. Results include: number of years searched, case number, charges, disposition, dates, sentencing details and more. The ID Trace and other searches can provide additional jurisdictions for county criminal history searches. The standard scope for the county criminal search is seven years, with extended searches available in some jurisdictions.
- **National Sex Offender Public Registry:** This registry includes sex offender information from the federal government and agencies from all 50 individual states. Maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice, the public registry search returns sex offender profiles, including up to level 3 offenders. Results and details available vary by state.
- **Driving Records (If Applicable):** A report of the candidate's driving history is accessed through state Departments of Motor Vehicles. Results may include: driver's license number, status of license, state, class, issue/expiration dates, violations, incidents, convictions, DUI information and more. Driving record information that is reported varies by state.

The background report may also include other information intended for use for employment purposes. In addition, to the extent a Graduate School applicant indicated on his/her application for admission that he/she had not ever been convicted of, pled guilty to, or pled no contest to a felony or sexual offense, and the background report indicates otherwise, the Graduate School will use this information to determine whether false or inaccurate information was provided on the application, making the student potentially ineligible for admission and enrollment or subject to suspension, as indicated on the Graduate School admissions application. Verity of admissions disclosures and/or proper admission (admission that is based on truthful information) is a pre-requisite to graduate student employment; consequently, verification of admission disclosures will be used to evaluate employment eligibility, and if false information was provided, may impact student status.

1.2 Background reports are required for all hourly paid student assistants and all temporary short-term appointments, but excluding those students on monthly-paid fellowships or scholarships.

1.3 In order to maintain confidentiality and privacy for all applicants, only whether or not the background report was approved, but not the report's details, will be released to hiring departments.

1.4 The Graduate School dean retains ultimate discretion and authority for approving or not approving graduate student employee applicants based on information in background reports. The dean will be responsible for determining under this policy the appropriate responses to each category of background disclosure; including acceptances, rejections, and which background reports must be reviewed by the Graduate Student Employee Background Review Committee (GS Committee).

1.5 All approved background reports will result in approval for potential hire.

1.6 For all adverse background reports, a "pre-adverse action letter" (PAAL) will be sent by the Graduate School to the prospective graduate student employee advising him or her of the adverse background report. This will provide the potential graduate student employee the opportunity to respond (within five business days) to verify the accuracy of the background report and/or submit additional information if needed or requested.

1.7 The GS Committee will review adverse background reports for potential graduate student employees and any responses from the same to the PAAL and decide whether or not to approve a hire. Background reports will not be used to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religious creed, gender, sexual orientation, disability or handicap, age, or veteran's status. Moreover, the existence of a conviction does not automatically disqualify a graduate student from employment. Relevant considerations by the GS Committee may include, but are not limited to, truthfulness in disclosing the offense(s) or conduct; the facts or circumstances surrounding the offense(s) or conduct; the length of time since the offense(s) or conduct and the age of the applicant at the time of the offense(s) or conduct; relevance of the offense(s) or conduct to the position for which the applicant is being considered; whether the offense(s) or conduct arose in connection with the applicant's prior employment; the sentence or sanction for the offense(s) or conduct; whether the applicant made full restitution and/or participated in any rehabilitation programs; subsequent criminal activity; whether there is a pattern of offense(s) or conduct; work record and references subsequent to the offense(s) or conduct; evidence that the individual performed the same type of work, post-conviction, with the same or a different employer, with no known incidents of criminal conduct; the length and consistency of employment history before and after the offense(s) or conduct; whether the individual is bonded under a federal, state, or local bonding program; discrepancies between the background report and information self-reported by the applicant to the Graduate School and/or Auburn University on the Graduate School application and/or in any other communications or documents. Any decision to accept or reject for employment a graduate student with a conviction is solely at the discretion of the Dean upon the recommendation of the GS Committee. In addition, if the criminal background report obtained suggests that the graduate student provided false or inaccurate information on the Graduate School application, the matter will be referred to the Dean of the Graduate School to determine whether the student may be deemed ineligible for admission and enrollment or subject to suspension, as the student had acknowledged when signing the Graduate School admissions application.

1.8 Where the applicant does not respond to the PAAL or where the Dean , on the recommendation of the GS Committee, rejects the graduate student’s response to a PAAL, the Graduate School will issue an “Adverse action letter” (AAL) to the graduate student stating they will not be hired by AU.

1.9 The background report and its contents are deemed private and confidential and shall be disclosed only for the purposes described in these Procedures for Securing Background Reports for Graduate Student Employees Before Hiring, to those University employees who have a need to know, or as otherwise required or permitted by law.

## 2.0 Matrix of Responses and Actions

<b>Type of Response</b>	<b>Action</b>
1. Approved Report	Approve for potential hire
2. Not approved Report	Pre-adverse notice issued, 5 business days to verify information in report and can submit additional information
3. Applicant response to PAAL	Refer to GS Committee
4. Dean, upon recommendation of GS Committee, accepts applicant response to PAAL	Approve for potential hire
5. Applicant does not respond to PAAL	Not approved for hire—issue AAL
6. Dean, upon recommendation of GS Committee, rejects applicant response to PAAL	Not approved for hire—issue AAL
7. Committee learns of false or misleading information by student on AU Graduate School application	Student referred to Dean of the Graduate School for determining whether student subject to revocation of admission, denial of enrollment, or suspension

## 3.0 Timing of Checks and Transition Arrangements

3.1 No graduate student employee appointment can be made without first obtaining an approved background report, and no department may hire any graduate student employee unless the Graduate School has confirmed in Banner that the student is cleared for hire.

3.2 Each department must make prospective graduate student employees aware that a background report is required and that the student must initiate the process by authorizing and requesting a background report through the AU authorized vendor by the communicated due date. Only when

consent has been obtained from the prospective graduate student employee, as required under federal guidelines, will the background report be initiated. Departments must allow sufficient time for the background report to be completed before an unconditional appointment can be offered.

#### **4.0 Process for Identifying, Requesting, and Managing Background Reports**

4.1 Only students who have been admitted to Graduate School for study in a degree-seeking program and who satisfy the general qualifying requirements to hold a graduate student employee position may be conditionally offered employment.

4.2 All applicants for graduate student employment must submit to a background report as part of the appointment and may only be hired if that report is approved or the Dean, on the recommendation of the GS Committee, approves the report.

4.3 A conditional offer letter will be issued by the hiring department by the supervisor of the position or the department head, whichever is appropriate for each department. The letter will include the appropriate paragraphs that advise the graduate student that the appointment is contingent upon receiving an approved background report. Each applicant must give his or her consent for the background report as part of the acceptance of the offer. This must be evidenced by the applicant signing two authorization and release forms: one authorizing and consenting to the background check for employment purposes and one authorizing use of the results to compare with answers to criminal history questions the student provided on his/her application to Graduate School. (See Appendix 2 and 3 for authorization and release forms). See Appendix 1 for the standard language which must be included in ALL graduate student employee offer letters.

#### **5.0 Reacting to Results**

5.1 For all approved reports, no further action is needed by the hiring department, and the appointment may proceed.

5.2 For all unapproved background reports, the Graduate School will notify the prospective graduate student employee of an adverse background report by sending a PAAL.

5.3 If the student does not respond to the PAAL or the Dean, upon the recommendation of the GS Committee, rejects the student's response to the PAAL, the Graduate School will then send the prospective graduate student employee an AAL.

5.4 To the extent it is determined from the criminal background report that the student provided false or misleading information on the Auburn University Graduate School application, the Graduate School Dean will contact the student regarding his/her ineligibility for admission or enrollment or potential for suspension, as indicated on the Graduate School application.

5.5 For all unapproved reports, the GS Committee will notify the Graduate School. The Graduate School will then advise the reporting agency, communicate the decision to the hiring department, and update the master database record in Banner to indicate "unapproved."

## **6.0 Recording the Results**

6.1 For unapproved reports, the Graduate School is responsible for notifying the potential graduate employee that the employment offer has been withdrawn.

6.2 The Graduate School will update the master database record in Banner for each graduate student employee for the background report initiation and completion. This will show the current status for each graduate student employee. Departments may access this record at any time in order to determine the current status of any graduate student with regard to whether or not an approved background report has been received.

## **7.0 Communicating and Managing the Results**

7.1 The Graduate School is responsible for coordinating the graduate student employee background reports and will communicate the report's results to the hiring department by updating the master database record in Banner.

7.2 The result which will be reported will only be either "approved" or "unapproved."

7.3 Approved background reports will be noted in Banner and the hire may proceed.

7.4 For all unapproved background reports, the Graduate School will send to the prospective graduate student employee a "pre-adverse action letter" (PAAL). The applicant will then have 5 business days to respond and verify the accuracy of the information in the report or provide the GS Committee with additional information.

7.5 All unapproved background reports will similarly be noted in Banner.

7.6 All reports sent to the GS Committee must be reviewed in a timely manner.

7.7 If the Dean, upon the recommendation of the GS Committee, determines that a background report will not be approved, then that determination will be noted in Banner and the hire may not proceed.

7.8 The GS Committee will meet regularly to review reports, and may consider e-meeting options for processing reviews more quickly.

## **8.0 Frequency of Checks**

8.1 An approved background report will only be required once for any graduate student employee appointment. Exceptions to this include Background Report results with "Please Review" for the ID Trace or Driving Records with Discrepancies that are "Conditional" or "Watch." Graduate Student employees with these results will be required to complete a Background Report annually while employed until the Background Report is clear of such conditions. Approved background reports for graduate student employees will be valid for all future semesters from the date of the report.

Your department will receive letters from Verified Credentials with the new update codes shortly.

8.2 However, at any time after the approved background report is received and a graduate student is hired, if AU learns of new arrests, convictions, or any other misconduct, violations, behavior or information that is of concern to AU, then AU can require the graduate student employee to re-submit to a background report as a condition of continuing employment or re-employment.

8.3 For all students previously hired in an undergraduate position, the student must consent to a new background report as part of the graduate student employment process.

## **9.0 Parties to the Process**

Graduate Student Employee Background Review Committee  
Hiring Departments  
Prospective graduate student employees  
Background Reporting Company

## **10.0 Graduate Student Employee Background Review Committee (GS Committee)**

10.1 The Dean of the Graduate School determines the composition of the GS Committee and invites candidates for membership.

10.2 There is no fixed term for Committee members. An offer, acceptance, termination, and resignation can be made at will by the Dean of the Graduate School or the member.

10.3 The minimum membership of the GS Committee must be:

- Dean of the Graduate School
- Associate Dean of the Graduate School
- Dean of the academic college or administrative division of the hiring department (or the dean's delegated representative)
- Representative from the Office of Risk Management and Safety
- Representative from Student Counseling Services
- Representative from the Student Discipline Committee

The Graduate School dean may invite additional members from time to time at his discretion.

## **11.0 Requests to Allow Reports from Alternative Vendors**

11.1 All background reports will come from the consumer reporting agency that the University currently uses for all employee background reports, i.e. Verified Credentials. However, a college may petition the Graduate School to allow reports from an alternative vendor, approved in advance by the Graduate School, to substitute for the background check required by the Graduate School. The request for the exception should include evidence in the form of a contract (or other documentation) demonstrating that the background check provided by the alternative vendor is more stringent than the background check required by the Graduate School. If the Graduate School approves the use of an alternative

vendor, the unit making the request is responsible for compliance with all federal regulations and with the provisions of the Fair Credit Reporting Act. The unit also agrees to provide the Graduate School with a list of all students who have passed or failed the alternative background check in a timely fashion (by no later than two weeks before the date of appointment as a graduate student employee).

**11.2 The cost of obtaining the background reports will be charged to students or departments.**

Base Package Searches & Verifications	Price
<b>Package 1</b>	\$35.00
<b>ID Trace *</b> Provides name and address history for searches above	Included
<b>Alabama Statewide Search</b> for all names from I D Trace if student has lived in Alabama	Included
<b>County Criminal Record Search*</b> Includes all Names and Addresses from ID Trace and application for counties outside of Alabama	Included
<b>National Sex Offender Public Registry Search*</b> Includes all Names from ID Trace and application	Included
<b>Package 2</b>	\$50.00
<b>Package 1 Plus Driving Record</b>	

## **Appendix 1**

### **STANDARD BACKGROUND REPORT CONDITIONAL STATEMENT FOR LETTER OF OFFER**

#### **To be inserted in the offer letter for ALL graduate employees:**

This offer of employment is contingent upon receipt of acceptable results on a background report.

Please complete the Standard Release Forms for Graduate Student Employees: 1) AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF A CONSUMER AND/OR INVESTIGATIVE CONSUMER REPORT; and 2) AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE FOR USE OF CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK TO CONFIRM ACCURACY OF INFORMATION PROVIDED — both are available and may be completed on the Verified Credentials, Inc. website:

<http://scholar.verifiedcredentials.com/auburngradassistants>

The background report and its contents are deemed private and confidential and shall be disclosed only for the purposes described in Procedures for Securing Background Reports for Graduate Students before Hiring, to those University employees who have a need to know, or as otherwise required or permitted by law.



## Appendix 2

### **AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF A CONSUMER AND/OR INVESTIGATIVE CONSUMER REPORT**

I hereby authorize Verified Credentials, Inc. to procure a consumer report and/or investigative consumer report which, I understand may include information regarding my character, general reputation, personal characteristics or mode of living. This report may be compiled with information from credit bureaus, court record repositories, departments of motor vehicles, education institutions, governmental occupational licensing or registration entities, and any other source required to verify information that I have voluntarily supplied.

I authorize the appropriate individuals, companies, institutions or agencies to release information, and I release them from any liability as a result of such inquiries or disclosures.

I further understand and waive my right of privacy in this investigation and release and hold harmless Verified Credentials, Inc., from any liability that arises from my providing this private information other than liability created by Verified Credentials Inc.'s gross negligence or willful misconduct. You have the right to obtain additional disclosures about the nature and scope of the investigation by contacting Verified Credentials, Inc. located at 20890 Kenbridge Court, Lakeville, MN 55044, (800) 473-4934.

A copy of your rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act is available at the following link: [A Summary of Your Rights Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act](#).

By signing electronically below, you are authorizing Verified Credentials to conduct a background check.

### Appendix 3

#### **AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE FOR USE OF CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK TO CONFIRM ACCURACY OF INFORMATION PROVIDED ON AUBURN UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION**

To the extent I applied to the Auburn University Graduate School at the time its application contained questions regarding my criminal background, I consent to the Graduate School using the information obtained from the criminal history and national sex offender registry search to confirm the accuracy of my response to questions on the Graduate School Admissions application related to criminal offenses. I further acknowledge that on my Graduate School application, I certified that the information I provided at that time was complete and accurate, and I verified my understanding that withholding information requested or giving false information could make me ineligible for admission and enrollment or subject to suspension. I understand that if there is an inconsistency between my answer on the application and the information from the criminal history and national sex offender registry report, that my status as a graduate student is subject to review as indicated on the Graduate School application.

I also understand that verity of admissions disclosures and/or proper admission (admission that is based on truthful information) is a prerequisite to graduate student employment; consequently, verification of admission disclosures will be used to evaluate employment eligibility and, if false information was provided, may impact student status.

I AUTHORIZE A PHOTOCOPY AND/OR ELECTRONIC COPY OF THIS AUTHORIZATION TO BE ACCEPTED WITH THE SAME AUTHORITY AS THE ORIGINAL AND IF EMPLOYED BY THE ABOVE NAMED COMPANY THIS AUTHORIZATION WILL REMAIN IN EFFECT THROUGHOUT MY EMPLOYMENT.

**By signing electronically below, you are authorizing Verified Credentials to release for use a criminal background check to confirm the accuracy of information provided on Auburn University Graduate School Application.**