

Background Check and Boundaries Workshop Policy

In October 2005 the board of directors for Luther Seminary adopted a policy concerning background checks and participation in boundary workshops for all enrolled students. The policy went into effect on January 1, 2006.

Introduction

The mission of Luther Seminary is to educate leaders called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world. The leaders who are prepared need to be healthy and mature. The communities in which they learn and to which they are called need to be safe places for all persons. Luther Seminary is committed to strengthening congregations in becoming such safe places. Furthermore, Luther Seminary is committed to being a safe place itself by ensuring that all of its members—students, staff, faculty, and associated individuals—are aware of the expectations regarding ethical behavior in the management of appropriate relational boundaries and practice such standards of behavior in all interactions.

In order to fulfill its mission Luther Seminary is fully committed to the goal of educating leaders for the church who are trustworthy as well as competent, faithful as well as focused on mission, and who are authentic and healthy persons of integrity. Luther Seminary values its partnership with other segments of the church in the education of such leaders and is committed to fulfilling its ethical responsibilities in preparing such leaders

Background Checks

In order to embody such values and commitments, Luther Seminary is prepared to partner with all degree students in assessing their level of awareness and health around such matters of professional and ethical behavior and will provide educational opportunities with respect to such concerns on a regular basis. The initial step in that process will be submission and review of a background check by every student enrolled in a degree program at Luther Seminary. Students will authorize Luther Seminary to conduct the background check by submitting a signed release form. A Previous Employer Record Form will be required of each student, providing employer information covering the last seven years.

In order to ensure the participation of all students in such a process, Luther Seminary will have on file the results of such a background check for each student by the end of the first semester or applicable term in which a student has been admitted to a degree program. The background check will address a seven-year period covering a criminal history database search, a county record criminal check, motor vehicle check, and an employment background check (looking at issues of inappropriate conduct). Payment of the fee for the background check will be the responsibility of the student.

The results of such a background check will be received by the dean of students, who will maintain the records in secure files to insure confidentiality with regard to information received through such background checks. The results of the background check will be reviewed by a regularly convened review committee. The committee will be comprised of the dean of students, the director of contextual education, the associate dean for graduate theological education, the associate dean for missional pastors, and the associate dean for specialized ministries. Background checks will be assessed pursuant to institutional standards and processes developed by the review committee in accordance with this policy. Written documentation that a student's file has been reviewed will remain on file in the office of the dean of students for the duration of the student's enrollment. At the time of graduation or withdrawal from studies a student's file will be kept in a secure location.

A student will be notified of any information of concern to the review committee, which has been discovered in the review process, and will be given an opportunity to present a written response to the review committee which may include a clarification of the report and/or an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the noted incident. In such circumstances, a student may request a face-to-face meeting with the review committee. Such requests are to be submitted to the dean of students in writing. If the review process reveals information of concern to the committee that is not sufficiently explained, Luther Seminary reserves the right to take appropriate action, including but not limited to, requiring the student to withdraw from enrollment.

Doctor of Ministry students may satisfy this requirement by providing a written certification by an adjudicatory, congregation, or employer currently providing oversight attesting that the student has undergone a similar background check as a precondition for their present service or employment. Other students may request that information from a similar background check, pursued through a church oversight process or denominational candidacy committee, be released to Luther Seminary in lieu of undergoing a parallel process upon admission. The review committee will decide whether such materials adequately address this requirement.

Enrolled students are expected to update the information in their background check file to reflect any criminal charges and convictions, non-routine motor vehicle citations (e.g. D.W.I., reckless driving, etc.), and/or any allegations of inappropriate conduct in the workplace, which occur subsequent to the date of completion of the background check. Failure to do so will be cause for disciplinary action.

For students placed in church or agency settings as part of their degree requirements, the background check will be completed and reviewed prior to the beginning of active leadership within that assigned setting. During the first semester of enrollment a student may observe or assume a position of leadership only in the presence of the contextual supervisor until the background check and review have been completed. Each student's file will be updated as part of the preparation for internship placement.

Boundaries Workshops

The second requirement of this effort to prepare healthy church and community leaders includes participation in a boundaries workshop by every student in a degree program at Luther. Boundaries workshops will be offered at least once a year with leadership provided by a team of trained faculty and/or staff members. As with the background check, documentation of a student's successful participation in a boundaries workshop will be required and kept on file.

For Master of Divinity students no internship placement will be possible without documentation of successful participation in such a workshop. For M. Div. students who have the internship requirement waived, completion of the workshop is required for registration for senior level courses.

Master of Arts students will need to have completed the workshop prior to the semester in which they intend to complete their academic program. MTh, PhD, and Doctor of Ministry students need to complete such a workshop prior to graduation.

A request to substitute an alternate experience as fulfillment of the workshop requirement may be submitted in writing to the review committee in a timely manner respecting the above noted deadlines.