



Campus Life Building - Room 220 - DeKalb, Illinois 60115
Website: www.niu.edu/CareerServices
Phone: (815)753-1641
E-Mail: CareerServices@niu.edu

Pre-Employment Background Checks

After months of job searching and interviewing, you find the job of your dreams! You know you nailed the interview and the company extends a **conditional job offer** to you, which will become finalized after a **background check** is done. A few days after your interview, the company's Human Resources Department calls and tells you that they cannot hire you because they found out about that misdemeanor bar fight conviction from your freshman year. How did they find out about this? In order to secure the best and most trustworthy employees they possibly can, many employers are conducting **pre-employment background screening** of candidates. Employers generally either conduct the check themselves or hire an outside vendor to screen prospective employees.

Why go through all this time and expense, which probably won't even turn up anything unusual? In the long run, background checks actually save employers time and money because if they eventually discover that an employee has a criminal or other problematic background, they are usually fired and it costs the employer time and money to fire and train a replacement. Also, if an employee commits a criminal act on the job, the employer may be responsible since they should have known of the employee's background. Background checks are especially important for jobs that require a lot of trust in the employee, such as working with children, supervising others, or operating a motor vehicle. As part of the application process, you may be asked to **sign a waiver** that allows the recruiter to conduct a background check on you. Employers can also do background checks on current employees if they suspect they are committing crimes. Here are tips that will ensure that your pre-employment screening goes smoothly:

What the employer can check

What this means for you

County criminal record

It is best to be honest up front. If you fill out an employment application, be honest when they ask if you have even been convicted of a crime.

Residence history

Employers are looking to see if you move around a lot, which could mean you are on the run from the law or default on loans.

Credit reports, bankruptcies

If you have financial problems, the company may think you will steal from them, or are simply a poor money manager. You are entitled to one free credit report per year, so take advantage of it and check your report to make sure everything is correct and that nobody is committing fraud in your name.

Social security number verification

An employer will call the state to make sure you are who you claim to be

Driving records

When the job involves driving, the company will want to ensure that you are a safe driver without a lot of tickets or a DUI conviction

Verification of past employment and education

Even a little white lie in this area can lose you a job offer. List your employment dates on your resume with the months. For example, if you list employment at a job from 2003-2004, the employer may assume that you only worked from December 2003 to January 2004. Make sure to leave old jobs on good terms with your past employers because a potential employer will likely call them to ask about you. An employer may also call your college to verify that you actually earned the degree that you said you did.

Prospective employers can also check:

Age
Names, addresses, and phone numbers of neighbors
Sexual offender searches
News/Periodicals search (by "Googling" your name)
Marriage licenses
Medicaid sanctions

Worker's Compensation claims
Reference checks
Postings you made to Internet newsgroups
Child support obligations
FAA and other professional licensing
Pending lawsuits

As a rule, **honesty is the best policy**. Do not "stretch the truth" on your resume or job application, because the employer can and will find out. If you are not sure about listing something, make an appointment to see a Career Services career counselor.

Addendum: Just as a prospective employer can do a background check on you, you should also do your own background check on the employer. Before interviewing, make sure to thoroughly research the company both to prepare for the interview and to make sure that it is the type of place where you would want to work.

To access all Career Services' handouts, visit: www.niu.edu/careerservices/handouts.html

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