

## **SAFETY - SECURITY - AND SCAMS IN USA – INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

### **PERSONAL SAFETY**

- Keep your doors locked even when you are at home.
- If someone knocks at your door or rings your doorbell, do not open the door until you have identified who is there. Never feel pressured to open your door to anyone you don't know.
- Leave both an outside and an inside light on if you will be away from your room or apartment after dark.

The Department of Public Safety at your college offers a number of services to help educate students, faculty, and staff as well as keep the community as safe as possible. These services can include coded color phones, educational programs, Nite Ride, special event staffing, and the Threat Assessment Team.

### **TRANSPORTATION AT NIGHT**

Most cities in U.S are generally safe, but crime can happen in your city as it can anywhere else. There are numerous taxi services available in your city for anyone wanting transportation home if it is after dark or you otherwise feel uncomfortable walking home.

Many Universities now offers **NITE RIDE**, a free shuttle service operated by the University Security Officers that operates specific hours at nights during the week. Find this information at your current campus.

### **PROTECTING VALUABLES**

- Lock the doors to rooms, apartments, and cars.
- At the library: Do not leave valuables unattended, even briefly.
- At bookstores: Some bookstores ask patrons not to take a backpack or other bag into the store. (The bookstore does this to reduce shoplifting.) Some of these stores provide a place for you to leave your bag or backpack while you are shopping. Do not leave valuables in your backpack.
- Bicycles: If you park a bicycle outside in your city, be sure you secure it to a bicycle rack with a sturdy lock and chain. You can reduce the chance of losing your bicycle to theft by registering it with the police department.
- Garments: Winter coats, hats, and scarves are sometimes stolen from coat racks in libraries or restaurants. If you own expensive winter clothing, you may wish to keep it in your sight in public places.

### **SCAMS**

Every year international departments at various Universities all across America learns of "scams" that target international students and scholars. A "scam" means someone is being deceptive in some way, usually trying to cheat you out of your money or your personal information. International students are common targets of scams because they are often unfamiliar with what is "normal," or may feel pressured into participating. Only you can ultimately protect yourself from being taken advantage of, but your campus might have put

together a list that you can access - of common situations that may help you begin to identify when someone is trying to take advantage of you. Always report these things to the police department in your area. If you are on campus when it happens, notify the University Campus Police. If you are at home or off-campus, notify the local police department in the city where it happens.

Always remember that scammers count on you to be easily intimidated, gullible, scared, and ignorant of how things "work" in the U.S. (although plenty of Americans fall victim to scammers as well). The best thing you can do to arm yourself is to think critically about your interactions and what people are trying to tell you, don't let fear or sympathy prompt you to do something you would not otherwise do, and don't let yourself feel you have to be "nice" to someone or fear offending them by saying no. Also trust that inner voice that often alerts you when something may be wrong.

Also remember that legitimate groups such as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS, for taxes), the Department of Homeland Security (immigration), your bank, and the police department are never going to call or email you and ask/pressure you to provide information such as a Social Security Number or to send them money immediately. When that sort of thing happens, it should be an immediate "red flag" (warning sign) to you that something is not right. In such cases, hang up, close the door, or walk away and alert International Student and Scholar Services if you have concerns about whether something was legitimate or a scam.

### ***Phone Scams***

You may get a phone call from someone who says they are with an authority such as the police, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), or even immigration/Department of Homeland Security. They may indicate you owe some kind of money, and if you do not pay immediately, they will send law enforcement to arrest you, and in some cases that you will be deported. They may threaten or yell at you. In some cases, they may even have basic information about you such as your name, address, even home country. Some phone scams are so sophisticated that they have the technology to make it appear the call is coming from the local police department or other legitimate number, when it isn't, so you can't even completely trust caller ID. The best course of action is to simply hang up. Don't try to engage the person in conversation. Report this to your local police department and also inform International Student and Scholar Services.

We particularly see such scams pop up seasonally, such as during and right after tax season (spring), or during times when immigration is in the news (such as executive orders regarding travel bans), and try to take extra advantage of the situation to help convince people it is real.

Often scammers may find information about you on the internet to make it appear they have access to "protected" personal details. You can at least guard your local home address and/or phone number so that they do not appear on your university student/staff directory. You may log in to your account on your University website and go to the section for updating your address. Many Universities now offers International Students and Scholars the option to choose to make your address, phone, or both private so that no one can get this information from searching your university directory.

## **Scams Targeting Family at Home**

A recent scam has been reported by international students at the University of Nebraska, as well as in other countries.

### ***A complex new scam is targeting international students and their families.***

*According to the University Police Department, the scam involves international students being told they are implicated in crimes back home. The scammers coerce victims into a series of actions and threaten to harm family members in their home country.*

*Simultaneously, family members overseas are informed by the scammers that their relative has been kidnapped and will only be released if a large sum of money is paid. In each case, the scammers communicate with the victims in their native language and falsely claim to be government officials from the student's home country.*

*Similar version of this scam have been reported worldwide, including Canada and Australia. Students and family members should know that embassy or consulate officials will not advise of legal cases or seek to verify personal information over the phone.*

*University of Nebraska–Lincoln administrators are advising students and family members who believe they being or have been scammed to contact university police or a consulate immediately.*

### ***In-Person Scams***

Occasionally some individuals will target people they believe are international and may approach you with stories that they are selling magazines to go to college or win a trip, or some other moving personal story that they hope will motivate you to give them money. Don't fall for it. If anyone on or off campus approaches you asking for money, or personal information, don't provide it. If you are interested in making charitable donations, there are many legitimate and reputable charitable organizations in your local community and staff at your campus can help identify those for you.

### ***Email Scams***

Students, staff, and faculty are often sent emails that try to make it appear is coming from the University, such as from Information Technology Services (ITS). The email may ask you to log in and reset your password or enter other personal information.

Or the emails may appear to come from a bank, a federal government office (such as the IRS or Department of Homeland Security), or even announce a package coming to you from DHL or another express mail carrier. Always treat unexpected emails as suspect, and as with everything else if you are uncertain, stop, email or call your University Information Technology Services and ask them to help you assess whether something is "real" or not.

Another common email scam may come from someone who claims they have "secret" or embarrassing information about you, and that you'll have to pay them money so they will not release it to your family/friends/the public.

### ***Employment Scams***

Apparently, some scammers will search things like LinkedIn and other sites, and target international students by contacting them to say they have a job offer. Often there may be an invitation to meet in person for lunch or coffee. Or there may be a request for you to send them personal information to get the employment process started. Again, never trust these. In some cases they may be attempting to get personal information from you in order to gain financially.

This is not the typical way that job offers are made in the U.S. You should not respond when contacted, and definitely do not agree to meet the person. If you are uncertain whether the offer may be real or not, contact your University Career Center.

A while back, we learned of a court case involving local scams conducted against international students in one city where investment money was taken in promise of helping the students obtain the EB-5 green card. ALWAYS be cautious if you are being offered unauthorized employment, or opportunities to give someone "investment" money in promise of getting you a green card. Consult your student international advisor or an immigration attorney before you take any action.

### ***Scams Related to Sales/Purchases***

Refer to **our resources page** for specific information on how to avoid scams in prizes, door-to-door sales, telemarketing, Craigslist, and other methods where goods may be purchased.

## ***EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS***

### **Alert**

Many Universities use Alerts to notify the campus community of threats to physical safety in emergency situations. Please keep your contact information updated with your campus in order to receive such Alert in a timely manner.

### **Siren Warning System**

Along with the Alert system, some campuses have Siren Warning System essential to providing clear and prompt information to the community in the event of an emergency such as severe weather or violence on campus.

Source: Ideas, summaries and content taken from, University International Programs, April 2021, Iowa, USA.