



**Common scams
every
international
student should
know**



Compared to domestic students, international students are at an increased risk for falling victim to scams.

Scams are crimes that involve strangers targeting unsuspecting victims and lying to them in order to illegally receive money or personal information. Oftentimes, the criminal is posing as a government or university official, or a job recruiter.

Being in a new country and unfamiliar with the way its government and institutions operate makes international students more vulnerable. Furthermore, scam artists who target international students can attempt to deceive the student with immigration scams and job scams, which may not apply to domestic students.



Know the red flags

Red flags are warning signs that usually indicate danger ahead. Look out for these common red flags in requests and appeals by email or phone.

- 1. Emails appear in your spam folder:** Common email providers like Gmail and Microsoft Outlook do a pretty good job of screening out scam attempts. In general, you can trust the technology and assume the emails are not worth your time.
- 2. The email is in English and there are spelling and grammar mistakes:** This is often the first red flag.
- 3. The caller/emailer requests unnecessary personal information related to a job opportunity:** U.S. companies **will not** ask for your age, gender, birthdate, home address or other identifiers in a legitimate recruitment email.
- 4. The scammer says there is a problem that you didn't know about:** The person might tell you that you are in trouble, or that you owe money to the government, or that you have a computer virus, or that there is a problem with one of your online accounts.
- 5. The scammer emphasizes immediate action:** The scammer will often threaten or intimidate you into taking action now, warning that if you don't you will be in trouble. This doesn't give you time to verify their identity.
- 6. The scammer asks you to pay them in a specific way:** Regardless of the scam type, usually they want you to pay them in the form of gift cards, money transfers or some other unusual form of payment.



Watch out for spoofing and phishing tactics

Spoofing is an especially sophisticated deception involving phone numbers and email addresses. Using technology, scam artists can make it appear as if they are calling from a legitimate government phone number or contacting you from an official email address.

Consider this victim's story from the **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**:



“A local student received a phone call from the FBI office in La Crosse, WI. The caller told the student that she was being investigated for tax fraud...(A) Google search confirmed that the number was the La Crosse FBI office. She was told that failure to pay would result in her being arrested and immediately deported...She was told to purchase gift cards and give the gift card numbers to the scammers. They immediately transferred the balances.”

Beware that you can not trust someone based on the phone number that appears in your smartphone or even the email address that appears in your inbox.

Phishing is similar to spoofing. It's when an actual person poses as a trusted source, either via email or phone, to convince you to share your sensitive information with them.

Many common scams involve phishing or spoofing or both.

Know the common scams

1. **Recruitment scams:** Some commission-based recruiters may tell you that you must go through them to get a student visa or gain acceptance to a U.S. school. While you can choose to go through a recruiter, it is not a requirement.
2. **Immigration scams:** The caller claims to be part of a U.S. government agency such as Homeland Security or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. They may ask you to:
 - Pay immigration fees via money transfer.
 - Give Form I-9 information over the phone.
 - Pay to download free immigration forms.
3. **Deportation and arrest scams:** The caller may claim the student has done something wrong and threaten to arrest or deport the student unless some sort of restitution is made, often through gift cards or wire transfers.
4. **Credit Score Scams:** Finding out your credit score requires you to submit sensitive personal information to credit bureaus. Scammers take advantage of this by setting up “free credit score” services online that steal your personal and financial information and often lead to identity theft. Only use trusted companies, such as your bank or credit union, your credit card company, or the website **freecreditreport.com**, which is owned by the credit bureau Experian.
5. **Job opportunity scams:** In this common scam, someone offers you a great job opportunity, sponsored position or unpaid internship with the future promise of job sponsorship.



The scam is that they ask you to pay money in advance or work for free for an extended period in order to receive reimbursed wages. This is a warning sign. Legitimate employers will not ask you to pay money for a job or internship opportunity.

- 6. Rental listing scams:** Posing as landlords, a scam artist may get you to place a deposit on a property that does not exist.

These are just a few of the common scams. Beware that scam artists are coming up with new ideas daily. The bottom line is this: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- 7. Prize scams:** They say you've won money and that you have to pay a fee first.
- 8. Check scams:** Someone sends you a check and asks you to send a portion back. This is always a scam. Even if your bank deposits the check, don't be fooled. It can take banks a while to figure out that the check was fake.
- 9. Identity theft:** This age-old scam is just as common outside the international student community as it is within. Someone will use deception or intimidation to get you to divulge sensitive information such as your birthday, your visa number, or your social security number (if you have one). They then use your information to open accounts, often with credit card companies, and use your identity to buy goods and services.

Fight back with a “S.C.A.M.” of your own

Rice University's Office of International Students and Scholars has a **great suggestion for how to respond**. It involves fighting a scam with a “S.C.A.M.”

S.C.A.M. stands for:

Stop: If you feel you are being pressured to divulge personal information or send a payment, stop.

Collect Caller Information: Ask for the caller or emailer's name, agency, and contact info. Say you must verify this information before you proceed further, and hang up.

Alert Authorities: Contact your university's international office or police department to determine if the call or email is a legitimate request.

Make a report: Your international office or police department can help you determine the best way to report the scam.

Furthermore, stay in close contact with your international office and make certain to read any emails you receive from them. International offices often send out warnings of specific scams that are ongoing and affecting students at your university.

So, beware. But rest assured that by remaining cautious and alert, most scams can be easily avoided.