Tips and Notes for International Students: 

Safety and Security

Most people you meet in the United States will be friendly and helpful. However, there is still a moderate amount of crime against person and crime against property, some of it directed specifically at foreigners. A few simple precautions will help safeguard you from crime.

**Emergency Telephone Numbers**

In most communities in the United States, but not all, dialing 911 on any phone will connect you to emergency services such as ambulance, fire, and police. You do not need to put money in a pay phone to dial 911. In cities that do not provide 9-1-1 service, there may be a specific local telephone number. Likewise, your college or university will have an on-campus emergency service with its own telephone number. You should memorize these telephone numbers.

Another way to get emergency help is to dial 0, which reaches a telephone operator. Tell the operator that you have an emergency and the street address and city where help is needed. The operator will connect you to the appropriate emergency service.

You can find a listing of local emergency numbers on the first page of the local telephone directory. You should compile a list of the local emergency numbers, including poison control and the local hospital emergency room.

Call the emergency telephone numbers if you need help immediately in a life-threatening situation. For example, you should dial 911 if a crime is in progress, someone is badly injured or ill, there's a fire, or you fear for your life.

For non-emergencies you should call the non-emergency telephone number for the local police station or campus police. For example, if a car is blocking your driveway, someone broke into your apartment but is no longer there, or to report vandalism.

**Safety Precautions**

Violent crime in the United States has been decreasing in recent years, and you are more likely to be a victim of a crime against property than a crime against person. College campuses tend to be very safe, even when located in urban areas. Nevertheless, cities in the United States are not as safe as those in Europe and Japan. Ask the foreign student advisor at the school which neighborhoods are safe and which should be avoided.

The following common sense rules will help prevent you from becoming the victim of a crime.

- **Tips for the Home.** Remember to lock the doors and close the windows to your apartment when you are not at home. When you first move into the apartment, have a locksmith change the locks, since you don't know who might have a key to the apartment. It is best to install jimmy-proof locks, because the interlocking jaws on such locks prevent a thief from spreading the frame of the door with a crowbar. You should also install window locks or stops on all the windows, especially if you are renting a first-floor apartment. Some people even run lights and a radio on timers, to give the impression that someone is home all day.
• **Tips for the Car.** Keep your car doors locked at all times. Get a map and know where you are going and how to get there before you leave on a trip. If you are involved in an accident, stay in your car with the doors locked until the police arrive. Some criminals will deliberately cause a minor accident in order to rob or hurt you, especially if you seem lost. Likewise, if you pass an accident or someone needing assistance, don't stop. If you are on a busy street or highway, someone with a cellular phone will call the police to summon help. Always park your car in a well-lit area. Never leave valuable articles or packages on the seat; lock them in the trunk. Before getting in your car, look at the back seat to make sure nobody is hiding there.

• **Walking at Night.** Don't walk alone at night. Try to walk with a group of friends. If your school offers an escort service, use it. Walk on busy well-lit streets and avoid poorly lit and deserted areas. If you are lost, walk as though you know where you are going and stop at the police station or a gas station for directions. Do not hitchhike, especially if you are female. It is not safe.

• **Crossing the Street.** In the United States cars drive on the right side of the street, not the left. So on most streets cars will be approaching you from your left. Many international students have been hit by cars because they expect the cars to approach from the right. Always cross the street at a corner and look both ways before crossing the street.

A pickpocket can work in many surroundings, especially at the airport, bus station, or other places with large crowds. They might bump into you or spill something on you to distract you while an accomplice steals your bag. They might use a knife to cut open the bottom of your backpack or bag and steal the contents without your knowledge.

Don't give money to panhandlers. There are public agencies and charities that provide food, shelter, and job assistance to the poor. A panhandler will probably spend the money on alcohol and illegal drugs. Most likely their appearance and story is a carefully contrived lie. Panhandlers often collect several hundred dollars a day from gullible students.

The following are a few precautions to help protect you from pickpockets and thieves:

• Put your wallet and important documents in your front pocket, not your back pocket. Pocketbooks should have a strong strap and be worn across the front of the body, not over a shoulder.
• At the airport, use a luggage cart if you are having trouble managing your bags. Hold onto your bags tightly.
• Avoid crowds.
• Keep photocopies of important documents at home, since this will make it easier to replace them if they are lost or stolen.
• Keep some money separate from your purse or wallet to use in an emergency or if your other money is stolen. For example, if your wallet is in one pocket, keep a $20 bill in the other or in your sock.
• Be alert as you walk. Keep your head up and be aware of your surroundings. Don't stare at the ground in front of your feet. Walk with a definite purpose.

**Legal Aid**

If you are arrested in the US for a serious crime, say nothing until you have spoken to an attorney. You have the right to remain silent. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you by the court.
free of charge. You will be given the opportunity to make one telephone call. You should use this telephone call to call your embassy or consulate.

The American legal system differs significantly from legal systems in other countries. The accused is considered innocent until proven guilty by the state beyond a reasonable doubt. The accused is also entitled to a trial by jury for serious offenses, such as murder, rape, burglary, and drug trafficking. Attorney-client communications are privileged, meaning that your attorney cannot be called to testify against you and that your conversations with your attorney are private. These rights are guaranteed by the US Constitution. If you are not already familiar with the US legal system, your attorney can explain it to you.

If you plead guilty to a serious crime, or are convicted of a serious crime, you will be subject to deportation.

**Scams**

If a person you don't know greets you on the street, ignore them. Do not say anything or make eye contact. Just continue walking. They will almost certainly be a con artist, panhandler, or other hustler. If they persist, call the police.

Many international students become victims of scams because of their generosity and their unfamiliarity with the US. Coming from countries with lower crime rates, they assume that all people are honest. They are alone and no longer in close contact with family and friends, so they don't have anybody to ask for advice. They are often desperate to make new friends. They find it difficult to say no and break off a conversation because they are very polite and eager to please. They may have very limited financial resources, and so be interested in bargains and ways to earn additional money. They may have heard the United States described as the land of opportunity, and hope to get lucky and strike it rich. They may be a little naive and not have enough experience to distinguish legitimate offers from frauds. All of these characteristics make them more likely to become the victim of a scam.

Con artists can be of any age, sex, or race, and may even look respectable. Sometimes they work alone, and sometimes they work in pairs. Often they will present you with a sob story, such as needing money for a taxi to the hospital to visit a relative or to buy food for their children. Sometimes they will show you a roll of money and ask for your help in returning it. For example, they might say that the automatic teller machine (ATM) disbursed too much money. The story might sound innocuous, but at some point they will try to get you to give them money or something of value. Sometimes they'll just go for the money you have on your person. Other times they ask you to withdraw a larger sum of money from your bank account. Once you give them the money, you'll never hear from them again (except perhaps to bilk you out of even more money).

A good scam often involves some of the following characteristics:

- **Playing on your greed.** They will tell you how you can make a lot of money quickly. Many normally cautious people forget their good sense when they see an opportunity to profit or are desperate for money. That's why some of the best con artists make you think that you're scamming them or getting a bargain.

- **Sugar money.** They may show you a bundle of money or pay for your lunch because they know that they'll be able to defraud you of an even greater sum of money. Or they'll pay off the first few people they encounter to lend credibility to their scam. These people will recommend the scam artist to all their friends, yielding an even greater number of victims.
Some of the more common scams include:

- **Illegal activity.** Not all scams involve the victim in illegal activity, but some do. After all, if the scam artist cheats you while you're participating in an illegal activity, you're unlikely to report the scam artist to the police. The most common illegal activity involves gambling.

  It is in the nature of the lie that it is very close to the truth. That's what makes it so convincing and so easy to believe the scam. For example, scholarship scams work because there are legitimate organizations that give away money for college. The difference is the scams ask you to pay money to get money, and the real scholarship sponsors don't. It helps to be cautious and a little paranoid. If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- **The Block Hustle.** The con artist will try to sell you an article of value for a fraction of the cost. They will say something to provide a sense of urgency. They may even suggest that the items are stolen. Only after you part with your money do you discover that the item is fake. For example, you may be offered a set of expensive stereo speakers off the back of a van. Later, when you open the boxes, you find that you bought a wood frame with a cloth face but no speaker components. If you're offered a diamond ring, you'll later discover that the stone isn't a real diamond.

- **The Pigeon Drop.** The con artist approaches you with a wallet or envelope filled with money, and asks you if you dropped it. When you say no, he asks for suggestions as to what to do. He will then suggest splitting the money after advertising the wallet in the lost and found section of the local newspaper. As a sign of "good faith", he will ask you to withdraw a large sum of money from your bank account (he'll probably withdraw an equal sum from his bank) and he'll put this money together with the wallet. He might hand the wallet to an accomplice. In any event, the person with the money will disappear with a reasonable excuse, such as needing to make a phone call or visit the toilet.

- **The Fake Charity.** The scam artist will show you a notebook of information and pictures for a charity and ask you to make a donation. The charity might even be a well-known organization or have a name that sounds like a legitimate charity. But even if the charity is real, it will never see even a penny of the money.

- **The Boiler-Room.** Telephone scammers will call you by phone and try to sell you something or sign you up for a service. The call may be disguised as a survey, but ultimately they will get to the sales pitch. Such offers are rarely in your best interest.

- **Credit Repair Scams.** This scam promises to fix any problems in your credit report and guarantees to provide you with a credit card. International students are frequently victimized by this scam because few US banks will issue a credit card to international students.

- **Sweepstakes and Prizes.** You receive a telephone call or a postcard notifying you that you've won a prize, but must pay a redemption fee, taxes, or other fees to claim the prize. Sometimes the call itself costs you money or you may be required to purchase a product. Variations on this scam include vacation certificates and free hotel rooms.

- **Door-to-Door Sales.** They may be selling home repair, magazine subscriptions, water purifiers, cosmetics, vacuum cleaners, or encyclopedias, but almost all of them are frauds. Tell them you are not interested and shut the door immediately. Don't waste your time or money on such unsolicited offers. If you have need of such services, seek out legitimate businesses on your own.

- **Fake Deliveries.** A delivery person asks you to pay a C.O.D. charge for a package you weren't expecting. After you pay the charge, you open the package to find nothing of value inside. If the
delivery service isn’t one you recognize (e.g., not listed in the telephone book) or the delivery person refuses to show identification, ask them to return later.

- **Chain Letters and Pyramid Schemes.** The chain letter asks you to send money to the addresses listed in the letter, sometimes in the guise of selling you "reports". The letter tells you to put your name and address at the top of the list and to mail out hundreds of copies of the letter. You comply, because you believe that you will earn a lot of money from this scheme. Unfortunately, it doesn't work, and such schemes are illegal. Pyramid schemes are similar, but involve "distributorships" or "multi-level marketing".

- **Ponzi Schemes.** In a Ponzi scheme, the investor is promised a high rate of return on their investment. In reality, money from later investors is used to pay early investors. The early investors recommend the investment to their friends, who invest as well. The early investors may even reinvest the interest because the investment has been so amazingly successful. This continues until the scheme collapses, often after the scam artist disappears with most of the money. For example, the scam artist may promise to pay for your full four years of college tuition, in exchange for payments of 10% to 20% per year before you matriculate. Even colleges and universities have been victimized by a variation on this scam, in which they were promised matching contributions from benefactors to double the amount of their investments.

The following are a few precautions to help protect you from scams:

- Be suspicious if someone approaches you for money, even if for a charitable purpose. If you feel like giving money to a good cause, do so of your own accord and make the contacts yourself. Don't give money when someone solicits you, because it is likely to be a scam.

- If you have to pay money to get money, it is probably a scam.

- Don’t trust promises from people you don’t know. If you receive an unsolicited offer, get a second opinion from someone you know and trust.

- Be wary of offers you receive during unsolicited telephone calls. Certainly, if you initiate a call to an established business to make a purchase, there’s no problem. But if you receive an unsolicited sales call, it almost certainly is not in your best interest to respond. Tell them that you're not interested and hang up immediately.

- Never give out personal information to any unsolicited caller. Don't give out your name, address, social security number, bank account numbers, or credit card numbers.

- If you're being pressured to make an immediate decision, that's a good sign of a scam.

If you sign a contract in your home, you have a right to cancel the contract within three days. So if you do have second thoughts or buyer's remorse and the outfit is legitimate, you can cancel the contract within the cooling off period. But if the outfit isn't legitimate, your money will be long gone.

If you are the victim of a scam, report it to the police. If the scam was more than just a street hustle, you can also report it to the National Fraud Information Center at 1-800-876-7060. They pass the information they receive on to the Federal Trade Commission and state consumer protection offices. The FTC and states Attorney General are only like to take action when there is a pattern of fraudulent activity.

Most of the information was extracted from the following website: www.edupass.com