



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Scams

Pitt students and scholars have lost **tens of thousands of dollars** through scams. Scams are deceptive schemes or tricks used by individuals to access other people's personal information (bank accounts, Social Security Numbers, etc.) Scams often create a sense of urgency, or invoke strong emotions, to trick people to act quickly. Scams can occur in a variety of different ways:

- [Social media](#) (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- [Email](#)
- [Telephone](#)
- [Text](#)

If you ever have questions about a call or message you receive, do not hesitate to contact the Pitt Police. The police are here to ensure that everyone in our community is safe from criminals – these scams are crimes.

How the Scams Work

- The caller identifies themselves as an official from a US government entity (e.g., IRS, FBI, USCIS), or a foreign government entity. They could also identify themselves as someone from the University or an internationally known company (e.g., DHL, UPS). Their goal is to use any known institution, agency, or company to try to appear legitimate.
 - The phone number may appear to come from one of these organizations. This is "[spoofing](#)."
- The caller has detailed information about the person and/or their family.
- The caller makes threats (police, jail, deportation, etc.) about what will happen if the person doesn't comply with demands.
- The caller demands money be sent via wire transfer, or tells the person to purchase gift cards and relay numbers over the phone.

News and Resources about Scams

- [Pitt Police webpage and video](#)
- [Federal Trade Commission Information about Telephone Scams](#)
- [Sample Scam call](#) that was recorded by police

Actual Examples from Pitt Students/Scholars

- A student received a call from someone claiming to be from the Chinese consulate, demanding the transfer of more than \$50,000 or she and her family would be committing a crime.
- A student received an email from someone claiming to be from the University of Pittsburgh about applying for a research assistant position. After a conversation via text message, the student was asked to provide her bank account information. The student notified Pitt Police and OIS.
- A scholar received a call from someone claiming to be with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, demanding \$5,000 in Google Pay gift cards or the scholar would be deported.
- A Chinese student received a call from someone claiming to be from the shipping company DHL saying that the student had a package confiscated by the police with fake passports and other documents. The student was then transferred to someone claiming to be the police who asked for personal information including their Chinese ID# and then asked who their closest family member is in China.

Quick Tips

- Be very cautious about the information that you send or share online
 - Do not send copies of identity documents (passports, ID cards, etc.) via email
- **Don't answer the phone if you don't recognize the number**; let the caller leave a message
 - Scammers won't leave you a voicemail
- If you do take the call and it seems suspicious, **hang up** to end the call **and block** the number
- Government officials will **NEVER**:
 - Demand immediate transfer of money from your bank account
 - Demand you to send them gift cards
- **REPORT** calls to [Pitt Police](#) and the [U.S. Federal Trade Commission](#)
- **Keep [OIS](#) informed** if you receive a call or message that is suspicious.