

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SCAMS (PART THREE): PHISHING AND ONLINE DEGREE SCAMS

Columbia, SC..... The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is helping students and parents prepare for the school year with a three-part series dedicated to “Back-to-School Scams.”

SCDCA began with a look at scholarship and student aid scams and modeling contract and club membership scams. Finally, SCDCA provides tips on student activity online.

Phishing

As students head back to the classrooms, they usually take the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and make new friends. To build those relationships and continue socialization, today’s generation turns to technology. Social networking sites, chatrooms, file sharing, and many other broadband technologies replace face-to-face communication. While these avenues provide a convenient, real-time way to meet and greet friends, they pose several dangers. Scammers, knowing students are flooding these sites particularly at the beginning of a school year, take advantage.

What do scammers do? They often send large spam blasts that contain viruses or malicious links, hoping to reel in just a few unsuspecting “mouse clickers.” These virus and links may record keystrokes, allowing scammers to identify personal passwords, security codes, and other sensitive information. This information is then used for criminal activities, both violent and non-violent. So, before heading online, keeping the following in mind:

- Never give out personal information. Ever.
- Consider your privacy settings and who may have access to your page.

About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers.

Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit www.scconsumer.gov.

- Do not share seemingly harmless information like cell phone numbers, street addresses, and class schedules in a public forum.
- Make sure your computer is equipped with spyware and anti-virus protection.

Online Degrees and Distance Education

Accessibility. Flexibility. Affordability. These are just some of the reasons online degrees and distance education courses are becoming increasingly popular. Many programs offer night classes, allowing working adults to maintain a full-time salary while earning additional education. Many workplaces will even assist in tuition costs, provided the school's schedule does not conflict with work responsibilities. Online degrees may also allow students to accelerate their course load and graduate sooner. If you choose to go this route, however, be aware of the many red flags that accompany the "scam versions" of these online classrooms.

- Degrees are based solely on "experience."
- Tuition is charged per-degree, instead of per credit, course, or semester.
- GPA, academic records, or standardized testing are not required.
- The school is not accredited.
- The school is not recognized by the [Council on Higher Education Accreditation](#).
- Diplomas are guaranteed with your application fee.
- Faculty is not listed on the school's website.
- Most of the faculty received their "degrees" from the school itself.

One of the key factors that identify a legitimate distance education program is third party accreditation. After determining that an institution has a third party accreditation, check to see if another major institution (with a physical campus) accepts transferred credits and acknowledges the institution's accreditation.

For more information on back-to-school scams, contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4296, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or visit www.sccconsumer.gov.