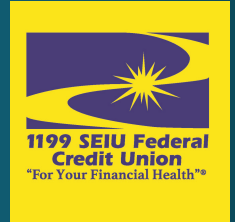


# Your Monthly Money

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## Tips for College Students to Prevent Identity Theft

Take these steps to avoid a crash course on repairing your stolen identity

### 5 Tips for College Students to Prevent Identity Theft

If you're college-bound or have a child headed to college soon, identity theft is probably the last thing on your mind. However, if a college student is a victim of identity theft, they can run into big problems – not only now, but also later. That's because identity theft can affect a student's credit rating and ability to qualify for credit cards or a car loan. And credit ruined by an identity thief can stand in the way of a college graduate's eligibility for a mortgage loan down the road.

Future employers may even change their minds about hiring after running a background check if someone opened credit accounts under the college student's name, ran up a bunch of debt and then never paid up. Taking precautions now, however, reduces a college student's chances of graduating into a world of identity theft.

#### 1. Shun school mailboxes

Instead of getting your mail delivered to a dorm or apartment, consider other options. School mailboxes are not always secure and often can be accessed easily in a dorm or apartment, according to the Better Business Bureau (BBB). Instead, have mail that contains sensitive personal information such as your Social Security number, credit card and bank accounts or student loan correspondence delivered to a post office box or a parent's address.

#### 2. Don't lend your credit or debit card to anyone

When you're busy studying for a big exam, it might be tempting to hand a college roommate your credit or debit card to shop for groceries or pick up takeout. That may be more convenient for you at the time, but giving access to your credit card or debit card number to another person – especially someone you only recently met at school – can make you an easy target for identity theft.

### **3. Store important documents safely**

Keep your Social Security card, bank and credit card statements, passport and other documents that contain sensitive personal information that someone could use to open unauthorized credit accounts under your name stored in a secure location, such as a locked file cabinet. Protect laptop and other device files from prying eyes by requiring a password to open.

### **4. Review your account statements**

Even if you're busy with your studies, school and other activities, take time to review your credit and debit card statements, looking closely for any suspicious activity. Watch for unauthorized transactions, even small ones. "The sooner you identify any potential fraud, the less you'll suffer in the long run," says the BBB.

### **5. Check your credit report regularly**

Did you know that reviewing your credit report regularly is one of the best ways to spot identity theft? That's because when someone opens an unauthorized account under your name, the account appears on your credit report. Also keep an eye out for any "hard inquiries," where a creditor pulled a copy of your credit report in response to a credit application listed.

You should check your credit report at least once a year. Usually, you can obtain one free credit report from AnnualCreditReport.com or the three major credit bureaus a year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, all three credit bureaus are now offering one free credit report a week through April 20, 2022.