

# SmartGuard Newsletter

## Enjoy Your College Life...Don't Hand it Over to A Stranger

By Kristen Wolfgramm

With the new spring term, millions of students are headed back to college and are trying to establish their independence. They are busy studying, hanging out with friends, and cheering on their sports teams. When college students think about complications at school, identity theft is usually the last thing on their minds. However, in a time when this age group makes up the largest single demographic of all identity theft victims-right at 30%-they cannot afford to be so carefree.

### Why Are College Students High Risk?

College students are easy prey because they do not know how to protect themselves. Their credit records are mostly blank, meaning they can easily secure new credit. In fact, 49% of college students receive frequent applications for credit cards. About 30% of those students throw these applications away in their original condition, personal information and all. In addition, a recent survey conducted by Chubb Group Insurance Companies discovered that 33% of college students ignore their checking account and credit card balances. Another reason is that colleges and universities are guilty of practices that make students susceptible to identity theft. The most alarming practice is identifying students by their Social Security Numbers. These numbers appear on class rosters, campus ID cards, and next to a student's grade. Finally, many students carry "their life" in their backpack or purse. This increases their risk if their belongings are stolen or lost.

### How Can Students Protect Themselves?

#### Shred It and Forget It:

Report cards, financial aid forms, housing information, and class schedules are among the many types of paperwork created each term that includes personal information. Be sure to add a paper shredder to your supply list and shred all personal paperwork. It's that easy!

#### Get Your Free Credit Report:

Each year the three major credit bureaus are required to give you one free credit report. It is important to order your report and check to see if something does not look right. This is a great tool for parents to use to ensure your student is safe.

#### Secure Your Living Space:

Consider a small safe or lock box for your important papers and personal information. Also, install the best security software affordable on your computer. Another step is to use strong passwords that do not include any personal information. A good rule of thumb is to change your password at least every 90 days.

#### Check Your Statements:

By reviewing your bank and credit card statements you can monitor what is being bought and how it is being purchased. Balance your check books regularly so that you can compare your personal account with the banks. This will be your first alert in the event that someone has taken your identity.

Identity thieves are persistent. They are constantly attempting to acquire confidential information needed to assume an identity. If you are vigilant and take these simple steps to protect yourself or your student, you are far less likely to become a victim.