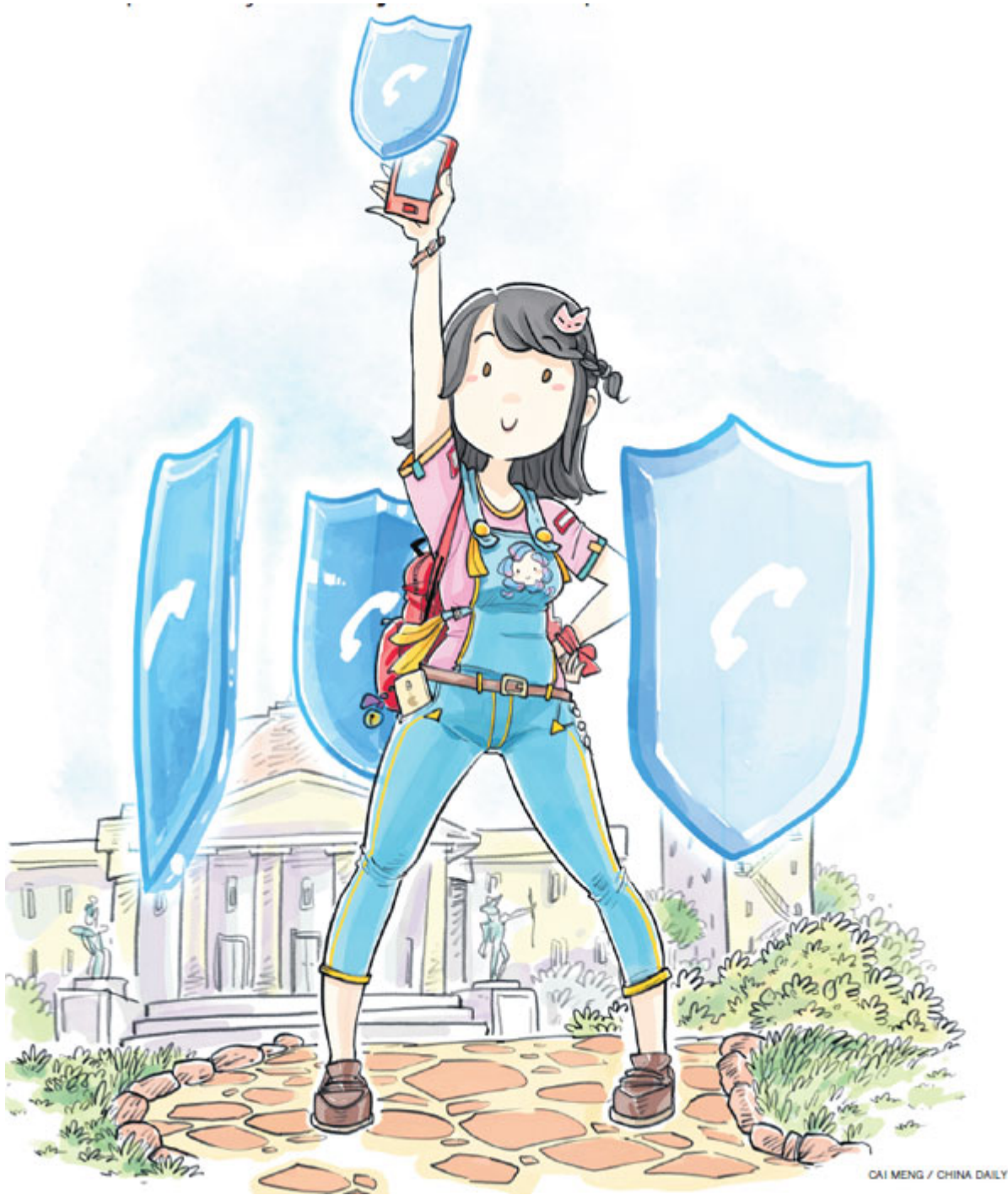


## Experts offer safety tips for students overseas



The alleged abduction of a Chinese scholar in the US has prompted colleges to emphasize on-campus security, as Li Xueyao and Xia Lin report for Xinhua China Features.

A new school year is beginning in the United States, and as recently arrived international students adjust to the campus environment, security experts are offering tips to help them stay safe.

“The international students are enjoying the area. This may be their first visit, so they are looking around, taking pictures, maybe looking like tourists,” said Wade MacAdam, who works for the Police Department’s Safety Programs at the University of California, Berkeley.

MacAdam believes that those behaviors will make the new arrivals easy targets “so they need to be more aware of their surroundings”.

According to the Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report 2016, released by the FBI this year, the number of violent crimes in the US rose by 5.3 percent in the first six months of last year compared with the same period in 2015.

FBI data shows that the number of aggravated assaults rose by 6.5 percent, murders by 5.2 percent, rapes were up by 7.9 percent, and robberies rose by 3.2 percent.

Many international students arrive at their dream school in the US to enjoy a high level of education, but seeking a safe experience should be more important than academic success, the experts said.

That point is illustrated by the story of Zhang Yingying, a physics student from China who attends the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who has been missing – allegedly abducted – since June 9. The 26-year-old Fujian province native is presumed dead, and a local man has been arrested in connection with her disappearance.

“Some international students, including those from China, are usually introverted, unfamiliar with the new environment, and even speak poor English,” said Qiao Fengxiang, a professor at Texas Southern University in Houston.

“When the police chief introduces security services during school orientation, some may not listen carefully or even fully understand what is being said. So they lack such knowledge.”

California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts and Illinois are the five top destinations for international students, according to the Institute of International Education.

Xinhua interviewed students, local residents, security officers and professors from universities in those states to discover useful safety tips. They provided four essentials for international students.

### **‘Blue light’ phones**

Most US colleges employ “Blue Light” emergency phones. If a student feels threatened, he or she can push the “call’ button on the phone, which will alert campus police who will be dispatched within a few minutes. Students are usually familiarized with the system during campus tours and freshman orientation.

The emergency phone system is a timely way to call campus police, especially

in areas where local conditions result in unstable or weak network or wireless coverage.

“Don’t necessarily call 911, because it goes straight to the Houston Police Department and they’ll call us, causing a delay,” said Fred Brown, deputy chief of the police force at Texas Southern University.

MacAdam, from UC Berkeley, agreed. “If you call 911 from your cellphone, it might go to a neighboring department and route to the university police. The big advantage with the blue light phones is that we know where they are located. If you call from your cellphone, we don’t know, and you have to relay that information to us,” he said.

### Security escorts

The security escort service is another useful campus aid students can rely on. The service is usually provided late at night. Different universities have their own specific operating times and locations.

The service offered by New York University is called Safe Ride. It is a shared ride service, which is available for transportation to and from NYU facilities, and on three local mass transit stations during the academic term from midnight to 7:30 am.

Northwestern University, in Illinois, also provides a “Safe Ride” service. “If you are out late, you can call a police officer to walk with you, or even request a squad car,” said Shi Jiayan, an NU student.

Similarly, UC Berkeley has the “Bearwalk” program. It operates from sunset to 3 am. The major difference is that with Bearwalk, a uniformed security officer will walk students safely from point A to point B within the campus boundaries.

According to MacAdam, many robberies occur when individuals are walking by themselves. “So if someone is walking with someone in uniform, they are unlikely to be a victim of crime,” he said.

### **Avoid becoming isolated**

Even though most of the students interviewed by Xinhua said the general on-campus safety environment is positive, the situation changes when they leave college boundaries, especially at night.

“When you go off-campus, it becomes a little bit more dangerous, at least at night it does,” said Molly Hurley, a sophomore at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

Qingni Yu, a junior student at UC Berkeley, echoed that view: “I don’t usually stay at school very late. If I have to stay at school, I will ask my roommate if we can go home together, or I will take the bus. My apartment is close to the school, so I can walk. However, I avoid walking alone, especially at night.”

Yuan Wang, a student at NYU, said, "Whether it is boys or girls staying outside at night or in places with few people, it is better to team up with friends, both for confidence and power."

## **Awareness**

Students and security officers said being alert to the surroundings and not wearing headphones are sensible approaches to staying safe.

According to Shi, from Northwestern University, students should always be aware of their surroundings. "If you buy a ticket at the subway station, you should take account of the surroundings before you take out your wallet, or you should make sure you have the right amount (in your hand) before buying your ticket. You should not wear headphones when you are walking. I think these tips are good for all students."

Henry Cheng, a student at UC Berkeley, also warned of the dangers of a lack of awareness and the use of headphones.

"Don't plug both your ears while you are walking home in the middle of the night because that will make you very vulnerable and an easy target," he said.

MacAdam made the same point. "They (students) should not be on their cellphones, texting, looking at Facebook and therefore advertising their electronic devices. They need to be aware of their surroundings. Also, they should not wear headphones, because that also advertises their electronic devices, and they cannot hear if someone is sneaking up on them."