LAW ENFORCEMENT
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What kinds of law enforcement are there in the United States?
There are two basic kinds of law enforcement: those agencies that enforce federal laws and those that enforce state or local laws. On the federal level, some of the larger agencies include the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). In this local area, you are likely to encounter the Corvallis Police Department, the Benton County Sheriff’s Office (which covers areas that are not part of a city), and Oregon State Police.

What is the difference between what the FBI investigates and what local police investigate?
The FBI investigates national security matters, including terrorism, espionage (looking for people spying inside the U.S.), and major cyber crimes (intrusions, hackings, etc.). Beyond that, the FBI investigates public corruption (such as officials taking bribes); organized crime groups (including gangs, drug trafficking and sex/human trafficking organizations); fugitives; and crimes against children (including kidnappings, child pornography and child predators).

Local police will investigate more community-based crimes, including violent crimes (rapes, robberies, murders, assaults) and property crimes (car thefts, burglaries). They are more likely to be first responders to an incident involving domestic violence, child abuse, shootings and the like.

In many cases, the FBI and local police both have jurisdiction and interest in a particular case, and they will work the case jointly. Gang and drug crimes are good examples of this.

How are law enforcement agencies in the United States different than those in other countries?
Many Western countries have similar laws and approaches to law enforcement. However, in other part of the world the law enforcement agencies can be very different. In the U.S., our police officers and federal agents are required to undergo very extensive training; they are required to operate under laws that protect the rights of the citizens; they are not allowed to be influenced by corrupt officials; and they are held accountable if they act inappropriately or illegally.

What should I do if I am stopped while driving?
If a police officer turns on his or her lights and siren or otherwise indicates that you need to stop, simply pull into the nearest, safest location (a parking lot or alongside a road). Keep your hands on the wheel. After a few minutes, the officer will approach and ask for your driver’s license, proof of insurance and vehicle
registration. Do not get out of the car unless asked. Do not reach into pockets, bags or compartments inside the car unless asked.

If you receive a ticket, you will be required to appear before a judge and/or pay the ticket by a certain date. The officer will NOT ask for or accept money during the traffic stop.

**What if a federal agent or officer knocks on my door?**
In most cases, they simply want your help with some issue. Perhaps there is a missing person or suspicious activity in your area. Perhaps your music is too loud and a neighbor complained, or they are trying to resolve some dispute. They will appreciate your help by talking to them.

If you feel as though you are in trouble, you can ask to speak to an attorney. Under the U.S. Constitution's Fifth Amendment, you have the right to not speak if the information will incriminate you. If you are stopped or arrested, you will still be expected to identify yourself. In many cases, officers are simply trying to determine the truth of the situation and/or stop further crimes. Speaking to them, in most cases, will be in your best interest.

Whether you feel you are in trouble or the request is unexpected, remain calm. Do not run, act in a belligerent manner, ignore the request or lie. Any of these behaviors will immediately escalate the situation. Lying to an officer/agent is a crime.

**What if I witness what I think is criminal activity? Or something suspicious?**
We would encourage you to contact a law enforcement agency. If it is an emergency situation, call 911. If it is not, you can call campus police, the local police or your local FBI office. If that agency is not the right one to handle your issue, the people there will refer you to a more appropriate one.

**What if someone calls, emails or approaches me and says that I must pay him/her to maintain my visa status? Or that I will face criminal charges if I don’t pay them?**
Law enforcement officers, including local police, the FBI and immigration authorities, will NEVER demand money in a situation like that. There are a number of scams that target vulnerable populations, including visiting students, for money. Do not pay, and make sure to call the local police or FBI right away.

**What if I am a victim of a crime? I am afraid law enforcement won’t believe me?**
We cannot help you unless you work with us. Whether a person is a victim of a violent crime, a fraud, or something else – we really need your help to stop the criminal from hurting someone else. Beyond any law enforcement investigation, every agency has victim assistance people to help get you any additional resources you may need (such as medical, counseling, etc.).