Phishing is the term for phony email messages in which the sender hopes to fish personal information out of the recipient.

The creators of phishing messages have grown very sophisticated in the last year. Both the style of writing and the grammar increasingly mimic the language many Americans use in their email correspondence. In 2009, the most authentic-looking messages became brief: two or three sentences and a link to a web site where victims were to enter their personal information and passwords.

To block phishing messages, IT can write scripts that search in-coming email subject lines for words found in recent hoaxes. These scripts are tedious and manually updated, so they are not always effective. This process also depends upon customers to report spam messages when they first begin arriving in Rice inboxes so that the scripts can be updated and subsequent messages in the campaign deleted from the Rice email system.

For example, if five people report the same or similar phishing message from Bank of the Americas-UK, then “Americas-UK” can be added to the anti-phishing scripts and further messages with this subject line will be dropped from the Rice email system.

It is possible that a legitimate message could trip the phishing script trigger, however, we have only discovered one person --IT Technical Communications Manger Carlyn Chatfield-- who has sent a legitimate internal message that was deleted by the phish-blocking scripts. The subject line was: “IT Security Update - NetID login required to send Rice email by Oct 15” and the message was deleted by Rice’s anti-phishing scripts each time she attempted to send it to the IT security officer for his review. The three trigger words in the subject line were security, update, and login, and matched an early 2009 phishing campaign.

Although it is unlikely that anyone else at Rice would craft a message with a subject line that matches a current phishing campaign’s trigger words, please contact the IT Help Desk if you feel your message is not reaching its destination.