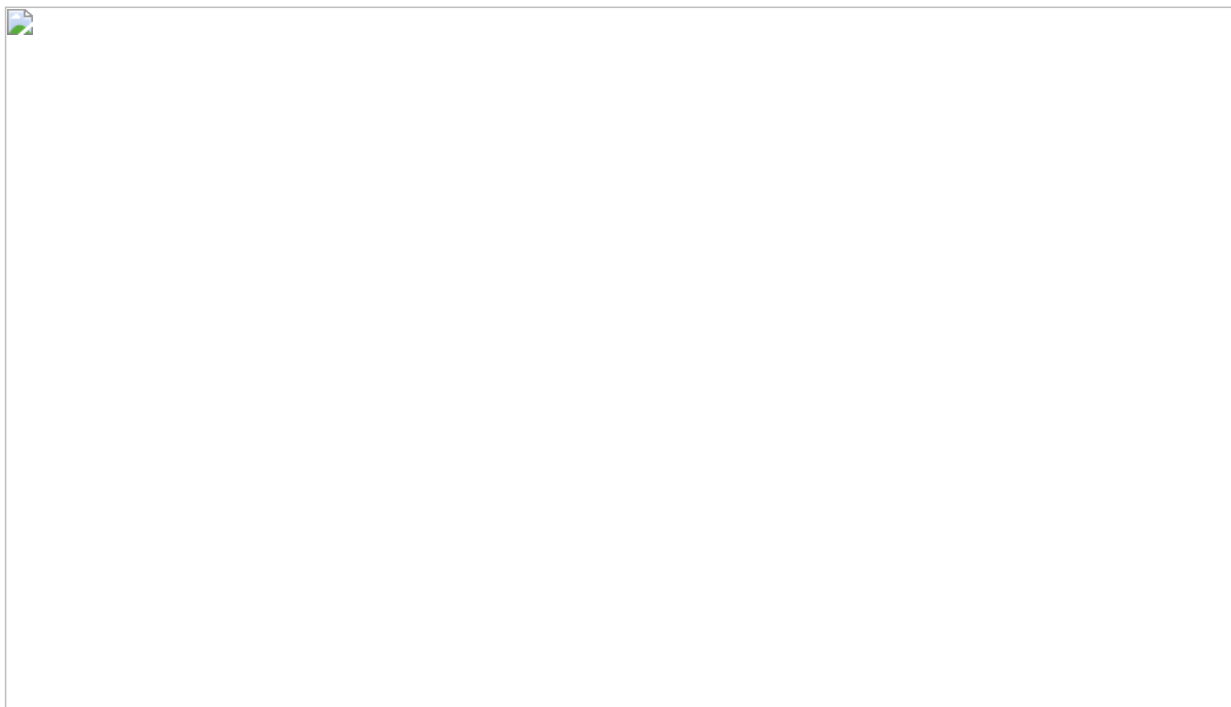


Massive Scandal Alleged in College Admissions As Silicon Valley Elites And Their Hollywood Mob Rig College Access

Dozens of people -- including college coaches and Hollywood actresses -- indicted.

By

[Scott Jaschik](#)



Andrew Lelling, U.S. attorney, announces the indictments.

Federal authorities in Boston on Tuesday announced the indictments of dozens of people on charges related to an alleged scheme to get people into elite colleges and universities through purported, but not necessarily real, athletic talent.

The indictments include charges of conspiracies related to racketeering, wire fraud and more.

The charges involve coaches, parents and some who administered exams. Two prominent actresses -- Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin -- are among those charged.

The institutions involved include Georgetown, Stanford, Wake Forest and Yale Universities and the University of Southern California.

In one document released today, one of the cooperating witnesses described the scheme -- and how it contrasted with trying to get one's child into an elite college through a donation:



Federal authorities are only this morning releasing documents in the case, but the general pattern appears to be helping non-athletes gain the benefits of being admitted as athletes. At top colleges, being a recruited athlete can create an enormous advantage.



For example, one of those indicted today is John Vandemoer (at left), who is Stanford's sailing coach, and was [still listed on the team website as such as of noon Tuesday](#). He is charged as participating in a racketeering conspiracy with a business that provides help to those seeking college admission. The conspiracy, according to the indictment, was designed to enrich those involved, including the Stanford coaches.

According to the indictment, the various parties worked at "designating applicants as purported recruits for competitive college athletic teams, including the Stanford sailing team, without regard for the applicants' athletic abilities, in exchange for bribes" and engaged in

"concealing the nature and source of the bribe payments."

In one case discussed in the indictment, \$110,000 was paid to Stanford sailing accounts in return for a false designation that someone was outstanding at sailing.

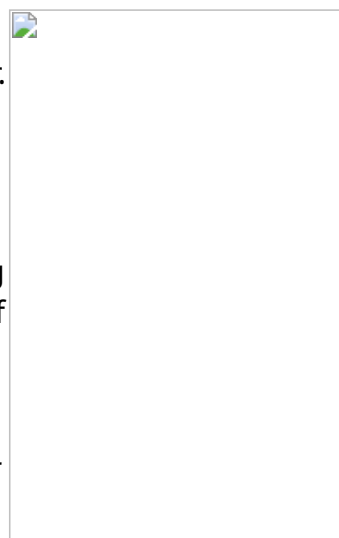
The allegations also extend to cheating on the SAT and the ACT. According to the indictments those involved in the conspiracy encouraged students they were being paid to help to file papers with ACT or the College Board saying that they had learning disabilities. When they received permission to take the test under special

circumstances (typically with extra time), these applicants were told to use one of two testing centers that one of the defendants said he could "control." Those taking the tests were then told to come up with fake reasons, such as a family wedding, for needing to take the exam in one of these centers, which were far from their homes. Bribes were then allegedly given to have others take the tests.

In other cases, the federal documents say, "a purported proctor for the exams while providing students with the correct answers, or to review and correct the students' answers after they completed the exams."

A sad detail in the materials released today: "In many instances, the students taking the exams were unaware that their parents had arranged for this cheating."

Felicity Huffman (at right), the actress, is among those charged with such cheating on behalf of her oldest daughter. The indictment charges that Huffman considered doing the same for a younger daughter but opted out.



The other actress indicted today -- Lori Loughlin -- is charged with (together with her husband) paying \$500,000 for having her two daughters designated as recruits to the University of Southern California crew team, even though the indictment says neither daughter participated in crew.

The indictment details how the couple was advised that their older daughter was on the "lower end" of USC's admissions standards, and that they then agreed to the bribery scheme.

An email from Mossimo Giannulli, Loughlin's husband, to one of those involved in the alleged bribery includes the line: "I'd like to maybe sit with you after your session with the girls as I have some concerns and want to fully understand the game plan and make sure we have a roadmap for success as it relates to [our daughter] and getting her into a school other than ASU!"

At least one of the couple's daughters, a YouTube personality named Olivia Jade Giannulli, may not have wanted to go to USC for the intellectual experience. As [People](#) reported last year, she faced widespread criticism for a video in which she described this approach to her first year in college: "I don't know how much of school I'm gonna attend but I'm gonna go in and talk to my deans and everyone, and hope that I can try and balance it all. But I do want the experience of like game days, partying...I don't really care about school, as you guys all know."

As shocking as the indictments are, the concept described was already been the subject of a federal indictment in July.

Philip Esformes is a Florida business executive facing numerous federal charges of Medicare fraud related to the nursing homes and assisted-living centers he has owned. In July, he was charged with bribing a basketball coach at the University of Pennsylvania to help get Esformes's son admitted to Penn. The indictment said that Esformes gave \$74,000 in cash. While the son did play basketball in high school, and was admitted to Penn, he never played basketball on the team there. The coach is [Jerome Allen](#), who led the Penn program for six years and is now an assistant coach of the Boston Celtics.

At a briefing on the new indictments Tuesday, Andrew Lelling, a U.S. attorney for Massachusetts, said that some parents paid up to \$6.5 million "to guarantee admission" for their children to elite colleges. He said that a total of 33 parents have been charged.

"There will not be a separate admissions system for the wealthy. And there will not be a separate criminal justice system either," Lelling said.

David Hawkins, executive director for educational content and policy at the National Association for College Admission Counseling, via email offered these thoughts on the indictments:

"This is an unfortunate example of the lengths to which people will go to circumvent and manipulate the college admission process, particularly at highly selective colleges," Hawkins said. "The activities involved are indicative of why NACAC has maintained a code of ethics since 1937, which is to ensure that those involved in college admission abide by an ethical process built on a commitment foundation of fairness, trust, responsibility, and equity. We know that with such high demand, acceptance to college can drive unethical (and illegal) behavior."

Added Hawkins: "This is an extreme response to the 'commodification' of the college admission process -- one that is focused on college acceptance as an end unto itself, when, as NACAC members are quick to point out, the ultimate end is the development of the student at a college that is the best fit for them."

The University of Southern California released a statement shortly after the indictments were released. "We are aware of the ongoing wide-ranging criminal investigation involving universities nationwide, including USC," the statement said. "USC has not been accused of any wrongdoing and will continue to cooperate fully with the government's investigation. We understand that the government believes that illegal activity was carried out by individuals who went to great lengths to conceal their actions from the university. USC is conducting an internal investigation and will take employment actions as appropriate. USC is in the process of identifying

any funds received by the university in connection with this alleged scheme. Additionally, the university is reviewing its admissions processes broadly to ensure that such actions do not occur going forward.”