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News Releases

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Bay Area university president indicted for student visa fraud scheme

OAKLAND, Calif. - A federal grand jury here has indicted the president of a Pleasanton, Calif., university on 33-criminal counts, charging her with an array of violations, including visa fraud, money laundering and alien harboring, as a result of a two-year investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Tri-Valley University President Susan Xiao-Ping Su, 41, who also served as the school's chief executive officer, is accused of engaging in a two-year scheme to defraud the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by submitting phony documents in support of Tri-Valley University's applications to admit foreign nationals on student visas. The indictment further alleges that after obtaining such approvals, Su fraudulently issued visa-related documents to student aliens in exchange for "tuition and fees."

Su was taken into custody Monday morning at her Pleasanton, Calif., home by HSI special agents. She made her initial appearance here in federal court shortly after her arrest.

In carrying out the scheme, Su is accused of making multiple false representations to DHS through Tri-Valley University's use of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), which the U.S. government uses to monitor the "F-1" student visa program. Through her false representations, Su was able to unlawfully obtain and issue F-1 visa-related documents without regard to the students' academic qualifications or intent to pursue a course of study required to maintain a lawful immigration status.

According to the indictment, Su admitted and maintained foreign students in exchange for tuition and other payments. In furtherance of the F-1 visa scheme, Su also allegedly harbored multiple Tri-Valley University student-employees to assist her in making the false representations to SEVIS. The indictment further alleges the defendant engaged in multiple money laundering transactions totaling more than \$3.2 million using proceeds she derived from the visa fraud scheme.

"Today's indictment alleges a visa fraud scheme through which the defendant accrued millions of dollars and took advantage of others' eagerness to come to the United States," said United States Attorney Melinda Haag. "My office remains committed to working closely with ICE Homeland Security Investigations to identify and prosecute those who undermine the integrity of this country's immigration laws through fraud and for personal enrichment."



"Student visas are intended to enable people from around the world to come to this country to enrich themselves with the wealth of educational opportunities available here," said ICE Director John Morton. "ICE is committed to protecting the integrity of that proud tradition and ensuring it is not corrupted by those seeking only to enrich themselves financially. ICE Homeland Security Investigations will aggressively pursue those who exploit America's legal immigration system solely for their personal gain."

The "F-1" student visa program is designed to allow foreign nationals who are bona fide students to be admitted to the United States on a temporary basis to study at an approved school. F-1 students are admitted for a temporary period during which they are required to pursue a full course of study at an approved school. When a student stops pursuing a full course of study, the duration of status ends and the temporary period for which the individual was admitted expires. In administering the F-1 visa program, DHS relies on the representations made by the schools and students.

The 33 counts contained in the indictment carry maximum penalties ranging from one to 20 years imprisonment. The charges include wire fraud; mail fraud; visa fraud and conspiracy to commit visa fraud; use of a false document; making false statements to a government agency; alien harboring; unauthorized access to a government computer and money laundering.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Hartley M.K. West and Wade M. Rhyne with the aid of Janice Pagsanjan and Rania Ghawi.

Please note, an indictment contains only allegations against an individual and, as with all defendants, Su must be presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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