Operation Varsity Blues

Author name

Affiliations

White-collar crimes refer to the nonviolent crimes that organizations or people commit for different financial gains. These crimes involve dishonesty, concealment, or defilement of trust (Tonry, 2011). People have different incentives behind these crimes such as avoid losing money as well as securing a business advantage. In the U. S history, numerous white collar crimes are reported. Among these, a famous crime committed recently is of college admissions bribery. This paper will review and evaluate the 2019 college admissions bribery scandal in the context of its nature, damage to individuals/society as well as its outcomes society and social policies. This review will also criticize the handling of this crime and will include different suggestions for improving the control of similar crimes in the future.

The 2019 college admissions bribery scandal also code-named Operation Varsity Blues was a criminal conspiracy that was affecting the undergraduate admissions decisions at several best American universities. The scandal was about the admission of unqualified children into top colleges. United States federal prosecutors on March 12 disclosed about at least 51 people that were part of it. This list has many CEOs and actresses such as Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman. The organizer of the scheme was William Rick Singer, who received more than 25 million between 2011 and 2018 from thirty-three parents of college applicants.

This alleged scheme had two parts; William Rick Singer was getting money from parents to be used to deceitfully inflating entrance exam test scores. The singer was then bribing to test-prep moderators for correcting student's answers on the ACT and SAT entrance exams. In addition, in this scandal, third parties were also involved that were taking classes and exams on student’s behalf. These third parties were submitting fabricated applications for admission that enclosed deceitfully obtained exam scores, results, and athletic activities. The other part was the offering of a bribe to coaches at selected schools or colleges to accommodate students into sports programs although they were having no confirmed athletic ability. The singer was also having Key Worldwide Foundation, a nonprofit set up as well as fit counseling and Admissions Company, named The Edge College & Career Network. He was disguising bribe payments as charitable contributions to the KWF.

The college admission bribery scandal is really inexplicable as it was also involving families from China. These were the most worthwhile clients of this scandal. Different institutions involved here were; Yale, USC, Georgetown, Stanford, UCLA, UT-Austin in addition to the University of San Diego. Furthermore, Huffman, the Oscar-nominated actress was charged with intrigue to commit this fraud also and she faced a prison of nearly 20 years. Huffman daughters got extra time to take the SAT on the basis of having a learning disability. This disability was fake and all was arranged by Singer after accepting $15,000 from the actress (Garrison, 2019). He ostensibly employed someone to supervise the test and to correct actress daughter answers. Huffman was fixed in the rip-off when a cooperating witness recorded her phone call in which she was deliberating the suspected bribery scheme in detail. Likewise, Loughlin was also found involved in this case for her two daughters. Loughlin along with her husband, Mossimo Giannulli had paid bribes of $500,000 so that their daughters can be recruited on the USC crew team. They were being caught through their emails and calls for that “game plan”. Neither of their daughters was meeting the academic standards for recognition at USC.

Singer was charged with racketeering scheming, money-laundering plotting, conspiracy to deceive the U.S., and impediment of justice. It is not known how the parents established their connections with Singer and how they were connected with each other. Singer, in this case, had shown himself as a college admissions expert. Before this, he was working at retail bank call centers such as Money Store and First Union Bank. He also had a self-published, book “Getting In” which is about gaining admission to colleges and universities. He was charged with racketeering under RICO, a federal law of the 1970s. The law requires the guilty person to forfeit any money obtained from the unlawful activity. The money, in that case, was having totals in the millions.

In addition, the arrests in the case included at least one examiner, nine coaches at colleges and universities, two SAT/ACT administrators, and 33 parents (Garrison, 2019). Many parents among these were CEOs of major companies in addition to a fashion designer, actresses, a winemaker, and a co-chairman of an international law firm. If these are convicted they might have nearly five years in prison in addition to fines. In addition, no school was fined in the indictment but only coaches at selected schools were the emphasis of the inquiry. Most of the students and schools themselves were not part of this wrong-doing.

When the scandal was broken, different news sources, for instance, The New York Times considered the fraud as a broken college admissions system. They considered it as the nastiest scandal in the history of the United States that was including elite universities. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which is the chief governing body for college sports, in response to the scandal, declared plans to evaluate the claims. The aim is to check the extent to which NCAA rules have been dishonored. In addition, parents were also annoyed at this scandal. They were protesting that wealthy families had cheated their way to elite universities. Outraged parents also filed a federal lawsuit against claiming the wastage of their time and money.

The University of Southern California is at the main university in the scandal. Actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli were part of this scandal linked to this university. Now the university is striving to have fallout from allegations as they are fronting with questions about the future of students involved. They are planning to use any money that they get in relation to this alleged scheme to fund scholarships for underprivileged students. Moreover, it is also going for numerous changes to its lapse and assessment of student-athletes for the 2019-2020 academic year.

The aim of parents behind this 2019 college admissions bribery scandal was securing the future of their children. Graduates of elite institutions get more chances of earning as compared to less prestigious colleges. However, hardworking students having higher grades should have first rights to these universities. Institutions must select them first as secure their future. Chinese families are seen to have more focus on the education of their children, particularly billionaires. They consider U.S. credentials as an investment for their children so they can earn well in their careers. Therefore, Chinese families were a major part of this crime.

However, to check these white collar crimes, the government is planning to make a bill that will make the donations to schools taxable. These donations will be taxable if donors have children attending or applying to the college. Different elite American universities are known to have huge donations. These donations stimulate an admission committee to reconsider children of those parents for admission. Moreover, efforts were also made to find the reasons for parent tempting by Singer's scheme. The results of the investigations were showing defendants having similar attribute; they were all rich (Johnston, 2014). The results of the investigations had stimulated governments to reintroduce 2017 legislation that levies a fine on colleges and universities for having the lowest percentage of low-income students. This will indeed be an effective strategy for reducing the number of such crimes.

References

Garrison, J. (2019). *Former Stanford sailing coach avoids prison in the first sentence of college admissions scandal*. Retrieved from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/06/12/no-prison-first-defendant-bribery-scandal-college/1429812001/

Johnston, M. (2014). *Corruption, contention, and reform: the power of deep democratization*. Cambridge University Press.

Tonry, M. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of crime and criminal justice*. Oxford University Press.