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## Admissions scandal: Mother arrested in Spain and charged with bribing son's way into UCLA to take deal



Royce Hall towers over the UCLA campus in Westwood. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

By MATTHEW ORMSETH | STAFF WRITER JAN. 29, 2020 | 5 AM

Both prosecutors and lawyers for Xiaoning Sui, a Chinese mother detained in Madrid on charges of securing her son's admission to UCLA through bribery, have proposed she spend no additional time in prison once she is extradited to the United States, according to court records and her attorney.

Sui, a Chinese national and resident of British Columbia, will plead guilty to a single count of federal program bribery, according to a plea agreement filed in federal court. She was arrested by Spanish authorities in September.

Her attorney, Martin Weinberg, and prosecutors from the U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts agreed that a penalty of time served — the months the 48-year-old mother will have spent in a Madrid jail by the time she is sentenced in Boston — would be “a reasonable and appropriate” resolution to her case, her plea agreement said.

“This was an agreement that accomplished her principal objective, which was to have the government agree that no additional term of imprisonment would be required when she reached the United States,” Weinberg said by telephone. A spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts declined to comment.

In the plea agreement, Sui admitted working with [William “Rick” Singer](#), the Newport Beach consultant who for a decade oversaw a multimillion-dollar fraud that breached some of the country's most prestigious schools to the alleged benefit of his star-studded clientele. A \$100,000 bribe to a UCLA soccer coach ensured Sui's son was green-lit for admission to the university as a soccer recruit with a 25% scholarship, prosecutors said. The boy didn't play the sport competitively

If a judge accepts the joint proposal of no additional prison time, it would bring an unusual end to a case that stood apart from the outset. Sui was indicted in March and a warrant was issued for her arrest. But for months, as dozens of Singer's clients were arrested and arraigned in packed courtrooms on the Boston waterfront, the indictment remained secret — and along with it, Sui's dealings with Singer.

The Times [reported some details of Sui's deal](#) with Singer in August. Sui, who lived near Vancouver, at some point traveled to Madrid and was arrested by Spanish authorities in September. She has since been detained, unlike 33 other parents charged in the scandal, who were allowed to post bond and remain out of custody while their cases are decided. Two additional parents brokered plea deals without being arrested.

A judge in October handed down the longest sentence in the case so far — a five-month term — to Agustin Huneus Jr., a Napa vintner who pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit fraud. Sui has been jailed in Spain for four months.

Prosecutors calculated Sui's offense level, which would determine her recommended sentencing range, at one that calls for 37 to 46 months in prison, according to federal sentencing guidelines. While there is “no agreement” between prosecutors and Sui's lawyers on how those guidelines apply in her case, the plea deal said, both sides proposed to U.S. District Judge Douglas P. Woodlock that a sentence of time served would be appropriate.

Woodlock must accept Sui's guilty plea; no hearing had been scheduled as of Tuesday.

In her plea agreement, Sui “unequivocally” admitted to taking part in a bribery scheme with Singer and Jorge Salcedo, the former UCLA men's soccer coach. Singer has pleaded guilty to four felonies and is cooperating with the government. Salcedo, who resigned from UCLA shortly after his arrest in March, has pleaded not guilty to conspiring to commit racketeering, fraud and bribery.

On a conference call in August 2018, Singer told the mother he would ensure her son was admitted to UCLA by writing his application in a “special way,” according to a charging document to which Sui will plead guilty. Singer told her to set aside \$400,000 in an escrow account, the document said. Agents were recording the call with court authorization.

Singer sent her son's transcripts and a falsified athletic profile to Ali Khosroshahin, a former USC soccer coach, who forwarded the materials to Salcedo, the document said. Khosroshahin, who led the USC women's soccer program from 2007 to 2013, pleaded guilty in June to racketeering conspiracy and is cooperating with prosecutors.

In paperwork that gave the boy priority status during the admissions process, Salcedo said he saw Sui's son play soccer "in China during a coaching education visit last year," and that he demonstrated "good quickness and speed," the document said.

A month later, Singer — who by then was cooperating with authorities and letting them record his phone calls — told Sui in English to wire him \$100,000, which would be "paid to the coach at UCLA." A translator on the call told Sui in Chinese: "Your son is admitted to this school through UCLA's soccer team. That \$100,000 is directly transferred to that soccer coach."

"OK," Sui said, according to the document. She wired the money two days later, and Singer mailed Salcedo a \$100,000 check, prosecutors alleged in an earlier indictment. Khosroshahin received a \$25,000 payment for acting as the go-between.

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