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College admissions scandal: Canadian businessman, a former pro football player, to plead guilty



David Sidoo is a Canadian businessman and former football player who has been charged with paying \$200,000 to rig his sons' exams. Under an agreement that calls for 90 days in prison, he will plead guilty to fraud. (Jonathan Wiggs / Associated Press)

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David Sidoo, a Canadian businessman and former football player charged with paying \$200,000 to rig his sons' exams, will plead guilty to fraud under an agreement that calls for 90 days in prison.

Sidoo signed his plea agreement in February but the document was not made public until Wednesday. He is scheduled to appear in court Friday to reverse the not-guilty plea he entered a year ago, when he and 32 other parents were charged with conspiring with William "Rick" Singer, a Newport Beach consultant who has admitted to overseeing a sprawling plot that defrauded some of the country's most prestigious universities with doctored exams, fake athletic credentials and bribes.

In addition to the 90-day prison term, Sidoo has agreed to pay a \$250,000 fine and remain on supervised release for two years after he leaves prison, according to his plea agreement.

His attorney, Martin G. Weinberg, said Sidoo was motivated by "a desire for finality."

"There are some defendants who feel that more deeply than others," Weinberg said.

If U.S. District Judge Nathaniel M. Gorton accepts his plea, Sidoo will become the 22nd parent charged in the admissions scandal and the 32nd defendant overall to plead guilty to an array of fraud and money laundering charges lodged by federal prosecutors in Boston.

Parents who have admitted to conspiring with Singer have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 14 days for Felicity Huffman, an award-winning actress, to nine months for Douglas Hodge, the former chief executive of Pimco. One parent was spared prison altogether.

Twenty-one parents and university coaches — a group that includes actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, Mossimo Giannulli — have maintained their innocence and are bound for trial. The first trial, which will include Loughlin and Giannulli, is scheduled to begin Oct. 5.

Sidoo, a Vancouver energy executive and one-time defensive back in the Canadian Football League, resigned from the helm of publicly-traded East West Petroleum after his arrest last year. From 2011 to 2016, prosecutors alleged in an indictment, Sidoo had conspired with Singer to fix tests that his sons needed to apply to undergraduate, graduate and law school programs.

Sidoo has agreed to plead guilty to the indictment's first count, which charges him with conspiring to commit mail and wire fraud. If Gorton accepts his plea, prosecutors have agreed to dismiss a money laundering count.

In 2011, Sidoo emailed Singer copies of his older son's driver's license and student ID. Singer fashioned a fake ID with the name of Sidoo's son and the likeness of an accomplice, Mark Riddell, a Harvard-educated administrator at a Florida prep school, the indictment said.

Because Sidoo's son had notched a low score when he first took the SAT — 1460 out of 2400 — Singer "directed Riddell not to obtain too high a score," which could have drawn scrutiny, the indictment said. Riddell flew to Vancouver, used the fake ID to pose as Sidoo's son and scored 1670 out of 2400 on the test, according to the indictment. Sidoo paid Singer \$100,000, it said.

The following year, Riddell returned to Vancouver and took the boy's high school graduation exams, the indictment said.

Sidoo repeated the scheme for his younger son, the indictment charged, but because the boy had not yet taken the SAT on his own, Singer told Riddell to aim high. Riddell, again using a fake ID, took the exam in the boy's place and obtained a 2280 out of 2400, the indictment said. Sidoo paid Singer another \$100,000, according to the indictment.

When Sidoo's son applied to college the following year, Singer wrote an essay that described the boy's volunteer work with Los Angeles gangs. It was a sham, the indictment said. Singer emailed the draft to Sidoo, who wrote back: "Can we lessen the interaction with the gangs. Guns...? That's scare stuff." Sidoo's son ultimately submitted the essay with no mention of guns to several universities, the indictment said.

In 2015, with his older son applying to graduate and law schools, Sidoo and Singer conspired again to fix his GMAT and LSAT exams. Singer abandoned the plan to rig the LSAT when he learned test administrators were using fingerprinting technology to verify test-takers' identities. Riddell wired someone in China \$520 for fake driver's licenses, but the IDs were of such poor quality that Riddell decided against taking the GMAT for Sidoo's son, the indictment said.

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In October 2018, a month after he had been apprehended and convinced to cooperate with the authorities, Singer called Sidoo on a recorded line. Sidoo told him his son was applying to business school. "I thought you were gonna call me and say I got a 2100 on my GMAT," Sidoo said, according to the indictment, which noted the GMAT is scored on a scale of 200 to 800.

"They don't have a 2100 for the GMAT," Singer said. "But I would do my best to get it for ya."

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