



Immigration Officials: Tri-Valley U. and Students Involved in Visa Scam

Tri-Valley University Shut Down and More Than 1,000 Students Stripped of Visas

A little known college in California is being investigated by federal officials who suspect that it made millions of dollars by luring hundreds of foreign students to enroll by promising to take care of their visa problems.

Investigators also believe that many of Tri-Valley University's students shared in the possible fraud by collecting a share of the tuition of other students they recruited to the school.

"Once enrolled at TVU, each foreign national may also collect up to 5 percent of the tuition of any new student that his or her referred student refers. A large percentage of foreign nationals at TVU participate in this referral/profit-sharing statement," court documents allege.

Tri-Valley University, housed in a single building in Pleasanton, Calif., was shut down on Jan. 19 and labeled a "sham university" by [immigration](#) officials.

When the school was shut down, more than 1,000 [foreign students](#) were stripped of their student status that allows them to stay in America to study. Since January, at least 18 students were required by Immigration and Customs Enforcement to wear ankle bracelets so their locations could be tracked.

"This is an ongoing investigation involving possible visa fraud, mail fraud, wire fraud, and money laundering," Gillian Brigham, public affairs officer for ICE told ABC News.

Officials claim that the university and its chief operations officer, Susan Su, have been "paid millions of dollars by [foreign nationals](#) to illegally obtain student visas," according to a civil forfeiture complaint filed in California.

Susan Su

The students, who are [primarily from India](#), and their attorneys denied those allegations to ABC News, claiming that they were victims of fraud.

"We are even afraid to get a traffic citation. Why would we go and commit fraud...most of the students that

joined the university are well-to-do families back in India. They have a very good education and have come here to realize their dreams. It's a totally unfortunate situation," the husband of one student said.

Criminal charges have yet to be filed against the university or the students. Su, through her attorney, refused to comment on the accusations against her.

Tri-Valley University was incorporated in 2008 and claims to be a "Christian higher education institution," according to its web site.

In February 2009, the Department of Homeland Security approved the school to accept foreign students. The school was allowed to accept 30 international students, but by May 2010, when ICE began its investigation, Tri-Valley had 939 international students, according to court documents. By the fall semester of 2010, there were 1,555 students and Tri-Valley made over \$4 million, according to court documents.

Students mostly attended classes online from places as far away as New York.

U.S. Attorneys: 'Sham' University

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Fraudulently Issued Visas

Calls by ABC News to reach faculty members of the university revealed that at least one of the professors lived in China.

The students that ABC News talked to said that Su boasted about her "virtual classrooms" and said they were drawn to Tri-Valley by the cheap tuition fees, around \$2,700 a month, and the lure of taking classes online.

One male student who wished to remain anonymous told ABC News that he transferred to the school from the New Jersey Institute of Technology in the Fall of 2010.

"You call the office and they always told us you don't have to come here. The professors are live [on the internet] and you can interact with them," the 24-year-old man said.

He said that he took three online classes: computer architecture, data mining and software quality assurance from his New Jersey home.

He found out the university was closed by reading it online.

"When I was calling them for the next semester, they were not taking the calls," he said.

A female student who wished to remain anonymous said that she had received a masters degree from a university in Virginia and was legally working in the United States when she decided to attend Tri-Valley.

She paid her fees to start classes in January, but the university was shut down before she could take classes.

She's scared to tell her family in India what's happening.

"We're left in limbo. We paid a lot of fees, we wasted a lot of time and money, a lot of us are feeling nervous and it's totally depressing students," another student said.

Attorneys representing former Tri-Valley students living in California, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia claim that Su misled students into thinking that taking online classes complied with immigration laws and that they were taking full course loads.

Su was acting as the university's "designated school official," the liaison to the Department of Homeland

Security who has access to a database of foreign, non-immigrant, individuals. As the designated school official, international students rely on the administrator to make sure their course loads are in compliance with the terms of their visa.

The civil forfeiture complaint claims that Su lied in her application to receive approval to accept foreign students, then allowed many of the foreign students to attend all of their classes through online courses and lied about where the students were residing. Hundreds of students were listed as residing at the same address when in reality, many of the students did not live in California, according to court documents.

Foreign Students Given Ankle Monitors by ICE

At least 12 students remain with ankle monitors, said attorney Kalpana Peddibhotla, who jointly represents 14 Tri-Valley students with attorney Manpreet Gahra.

Reports of Indian students wearing ankle monitors has made big news in India and even led to discussions between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao.

"Those who are involved in this investigation have been issued ankle monitors. This is widespread across the United States and standard procedure for a variety of investigations," State Department Spokesman P.J. Crowley said at a press conference Feb. 16.

Last year, 5,862 ankle monitors were used as part of ICE's alternative to detention programs, ICE Public

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Affairs Officer Brigham said. Instead of detaining foreign nationals under investigation, immigration officials might opt to use electronic monitoring instead.

"I personally feel that this was a bit excessive because they weren't necessarily shown to be a flight risk and at least five students [of the 18 radiotagged] appear very much to be victims of fraud," Peddibhotla said.

Rajiv Khanna, a Virginia based immigration attorney, has been holding daily conference calls for Tri-Valley students offering guidance. He represents five students and has referred hundreds to other attorneys, he said.

"My concern is if any of our students [American students] were to face similar circumstances in China or India, we would be up in arms. Why are somebody else's kids deserving of lesser dignity than our kids?" Khanna asked.

Some students have been contacted by ICE and others have voluntarily talked to immigration officials. Some students have already received a charging document called a notice to appear. The document is the first step towards deportation.

"Some ICE officers have been extremely courteous, others have come in like Gestapo getting into students' faces and saying, 'you're lying.," Khanna said. "One student was incarcerated for 16 days for having a bad attitude."

The students so far have three options. They can report to ICE to pick a day to voluntarily depart the United States, they can depart the U.S. on their own or they can file to be re-enstated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The allegations against Tri-Valley wouldn't make it the first sham university. In October 2010, students attending CMG Computer Center were stripped of their student status. Unlike the Tri-Valley case, the students weren't immediately stripped of their student status. They had until Jan. 22, 2011 to transfer to another school to regain their student status or leave the country.

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