



---

**July 25, 2007**

## **California: Felony Charges in Grades-for-Cash Scheme**

**By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Nearly three dozen students and former students have been charged in what the authorities said was a grades-for-cash scheme at a Northern California community college. Arrest warrants have been issued for 34 people who face felony counts of computer fraud and conspiracy charges, the district attorney of Contra Costa County, Robert J. Kochly, said. Four of those charged are former part-time student employees accused of using the school computers at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill to change grades. The rest are former or current students who paid up to several thousand dollars to have grades raised or have classes and grades added to their transcripts, according to a statement from Mr. Kochly's office. Officials said the activity occurred from 2001 to 2006.

## Arrests in scam - grades for cash

Henry K. Lee, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Nearly three dozen former and current Diablo Valley College students involved in a scheme to change transcript grades for cash payments are facing conspiracy and other criminal charges, Contra Costa County prosecutors announced Tuesday.

Arrest warrants have been issued for 34 students or graduates of the Pleasant Hill community college who allegedly made the changes on the college's computer or paid to have the changes made. The charges range from felony conspiracy and fraudulent computer access to false use of a diploma, a misdemeanor. The suspects face up to three years in prison for each felony count.

About a dozen defendants have been arrested. Prosecutors are still reviewing evidence against 21 other people.

Court documents say the grade changes enabled some students to graduate or transfer from the community college to four-year universities, including UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Davis, San Francisco State University, San Jose State, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and San Diego State.

College officials believe as many as 400 grades were changed from 2000 to 2006 in deals that sometimes involved payments of thousands of dollars to at least four students who had worked in the admissions office and had access to change computerized transcripts: Erick Martinez, Ronald Nixon, Julian Revilla and Jeremy Tato.

The bulk of those charged were students who learned through word of mouth that their grades could be changed with the help of middlemen who relayed their grade-change requests. The scam continued for years because of overlapping stints by the students in the admissions office. For example, prosecutors allege that Revilla recruited Tato to take over for him.

The charges are outlined in three separate complaints filed Monday in Contra Costa County Superior Court in Martinez. The defendants could not be immediately reached Tuesday or did not respond to requests for comment.

"The whole scam just impacts the entire educational system," said Deputy District Attorney Dodie Katague, who filed the charges. "If we can't be convinced or assured of the integrity of the grades, no one's going to have any trust in the whole degree system."

The prosecutor added that some students who legitimately earned 4.0 grade point averages still weren't accepted at stellar institutions. "What do you tell these people?" asked Katague. "That's why we're prosecuting this hard."

Helen Benjamin, chancellor of the three-campus Contra Costa Community College District, said Tuesday that internal auditors assisted prosecutors with the investigation. "This is a very important day for us," Benjamin said.

Diane Scott-Summers, interim president of the college, agreed, saying, "We're happy to get to this point."

The complaints said Nixon illegally accessed school computers on Feb. 2, 2001, and changed four of his own grades: three Bs -- in social sciences, Russian and architecture -- became As, and one C in a humanities course became an A.

Three days later, Nixon added eight classes that he never actually took -- including astronomy, chemistry and business -- to his transcript and gave himself an A grade in each, the complaint said. He added six more classes -- four physical education courses, an Italian class and an economics course -- on Sept. 17, 2001, authorities said.

In an unusual move, Martinez actually lowered some of his grades: an A in chemistry became a D, and As in psychology and history became Cs, the complaint said.

To illustrate the alleged scheme, prosecutors said Tejvinder Virk, 24, of El Cerrito gave his student ID number and list of seven classes and grade-change requests to Revilleza on Jan. 29, 2006.

Revilleza sent e-mails to Tato, 25, of Pittsburg, with Virk's and other students' names and grade-change requests, stating, "Here's more! I'll get money for you Wed or Thurs" and "Let me know when you get this done," the complaint said.

Revilleza faces 23 counts and is being sought on a \$575,000 arrest warrant. The other suspects are being sought on \$25,000 warrants.

The defendants received different amounts of money to change grades, according to prosecutors.

In August 2005, Revilleza and Jason Catedrilla, 24, of Pittsburg agreed to change Catedrilla's grades for \$200, the complaint said. In January 2006, Tato received \$1,000 from Revilleza and deposited it into his bank account, authorities said.

Christopher MacAtulad, 24, of Bay Point, might have been among those who benefited the most from the scheme, prosecutors said. He had eight Fs changed to Bs or Cs, the complaint said. MacAtulad allegedly paid more than \$4,000 between June 2005 and January 2006 to change grades, even taking out credit-card cash advances, the complaint said.

"MacAtulad used his fraudulent grades and transcript to transfer to San Francisco State," authorities said. Another student, Joseph Chow, went on to UC Davis after paying \$1,000 to have his two Cs in chemistry turn into As, authorities said.

Student Danish Farooq, 22, of Concord, had Cs in engineering and physics classes turned into As and went on to UC Berkeley, prosecutors said.

In fall 2005, Revilleza met with Charmaine Abad, 25, of Vallejo and Jason Cabrera, and the group agreed

to change all of Abad's grades to As for \$500, the complaint said. Abad had received Bs and Cs in this classes, which included biosciences, chemistry, English, math, nutrition, psychology and sociology, the complaint said.

When confronted by Contra Costa Community College District Detective Ryan Huddleston in March 2006, Abad lied and told him that "she was approached by 'Chris' in the library and told her that he could make 'magic happen' with her grades. She stated she did not know Chris and denied paying any money for grade changes," the complaint said.

The alleged scheme wasn't uncovered until February 2006, when a professor grew suspicious when he tried to drop Erick Martinez from a class roster, only to have Martinez's name re-appearing on the list with a grade of A, authorities said.

At a news conference in May, officials said about a dozen of the suspects still attend the college and could face expulsion, while the others have transferred to schools across the country, where they could face disciplinary action.

When the grade scheme occurred, the district had about 100 people authorized to change grades, including some employees who also were students, school officials said. In the wake of the scandal, the college has changed its policies to allow only 11 people access to the grades and has set up a committee to review requests to add people to that group.