

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS  
AUDIT AND MANAGEMENT ADVISORY SERVICES**

**Admissions Donations Review  
Audit & Management Advisory Services Project #21-01**

**July 2021**

**Fieldwork Performed by:**

Mariyam Azam, Senior Auditor  
Hannah Keeshan, Senior Auditor

**Reviewed by:**

Tony Firpo, Associate Director

**Approved by:**

Leslyn Kraus, Director

**Admissions Donations Review  
Audit and Management Advisory Services Project #21-01**

**Introduction and Background**

As part of the fiscal year 20-21 audit plan, Audit and Management Advisory Services (AMAS) completed a retrospective review of donations to UC Davis to identify undergraduate admissions decisions that could have been influenced by these donations. These reviews were initiated in response to a recommendation from the June 2019 systemwide internal audit of undergraduate admissions.

**Objectives and Scope**

The overall objective for this project was to review donations to UC Davis to identify undergraduate admissions decisions that could have been influenced by these donations.

The scope of the review included the following:

- Donations received by UC Davis during the period January 1, 2017 through October 31, 2020.
- Applications for undergraduate admission submitted from November 1, 2017 through March 31, 2020 for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years (date range includes both the regular and late application periods).

**Approach**

To conduct this review, AMAS performed the following procedures:

- Obtained a dataset of donations received during the audit period.
- Obtained a dataset of applications for undergraduate admission submitted during the audit period.
- Performed data analysis to identify admissions of applicants who may be related to donors from the donations dataset. AMAS created custom data fields in the donations and applications datasets by concatenating the last names of donors, applicants, and applicants' parents with elements of their addresses, and compared these fields across datasets to identify "matches." A single applicant, identified by the CPID (application ID number) could potentially match to multiple unique donations (identified by receipt numbers). The matching analysis was limited to cumulative matching donations of \$10,000 or more received during the audit period.
- Reviewed data trends and other available information to assess the risk of questionable admissions decisions (i.e., those at risk of being influenced by donations) for the "matches" identified. Criteria/factors considered as part of this assessment included all or a subset of the following:
  - Dollar amount of the donation;
  - Pattern or timing of giving;
  - Applicants admitted by exception or outside of the holistic review process;
  - Applicants admitted to selective majors;
  - Applicants who were recommended for admission on basis of special talent;
  - Lack of participation in special talent for which the application was recommended; and
  - Low application review scores/ratings.

- We will provide data on any admissions decisions identified as potentially questionable based on the results of the risk assessment to the Locally Designated Official to determine whether to further investigate any of the matches.

**Overall Conclusion**

AMAS' analysis identified 20 admissions of applicants who may be related to donors who gave a cumulative amount in excess of \$10,000 during the audit period. Based on the risk assessment performed on those matches, AMAS flagged two admissions for the Locally Designated Official to prioritize for further analysis and/or investigation<sup>1</sup>.

UC Davis has implemented improved processes and controls related to admissions as a result of the Admissions Phase I and Admissions Phase II reviews, as well as a result of the Admissions Audit performed by the California State Auditors. The admissions decisions being referred to the Locally Designated Official occurred prior to implementation of these improvements.

---

<sup>1</sup> Referral to the Locally Designated Official for further analysis is not necessarily indicative of improper influence or inappropriate activities associated with the admissions decision.