



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
INTERNAL AUDIT AND ADVISORY SERVICES**

**FY23 Admissions Data Analytics Review Report
Report No. M23A006**

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As part of the annual fiscal year 2023 audit plan, Internal Audit and Advisory Services (Internal Audit) completed a retrospective review of donations to UC Merced and local Senior Management Group (SMG) personnel data to identify undergraduate admissions decisions that could have been influenced by these donations or personnel. This review was initiated in response to a recommendation from the June 2019 systemwide internal audit of undergraduate admissions.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The objective of this review was to perform data analytics to identify undergraduate admissions decisions that could have been influenced by donations to UC Merced or the applicant's relationship to an SMG member.

The scope of the audit included the following:

- Donations received by UC Merced during the period January 2019 through November 2022.
- Applications for undergraduate admission submitted from November 2019 through March 2022 for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years (date range includes both the regular and late application periods).
- Data set of local Senior Management Group (SMG) personnel active from January 2019 through November 2022.

APPROACH

To conduct this review, Internal Audit performed the following procedures:

- Obtained a dataset of donations received during the audit period.
- Obtained a dataset of local SMG personnel active 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 who made cumulative donations of \$10,000 or more and/or SMG personnel active during the audit period. Data fields compared across datasets to identify “matches” included all or a subset of the following:
 - Names of donors and donors’ spouses
 - SMG employees and/or SMG employees’ spouses
 - Names of admitted students and parents
 - Addresses
 - Email addresses
 - Phone numbers
 - Foundations or businesses with the same name as the admitted student
 - Campus ID number

The donations portion of the 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 or applicant’s relationship to an SMG member) 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
 - Communication with donor or SMG employee
 - Timing of personnel actions under SMG employee’s authority
 - Applicants admitted by exception
 - Applicants admitted to a school with impacted majors
 - Applicants who were recommended for admission on basis of special talent
 - Lack of participation in special talent for which the application was recommended
 - Low application review scores/ratings
 - Department or program to which donations have been directed as well as their specified purpose

- Provided the results of the risk assessment to the Locally Designated Official to determine whether to further investigate any of the matches.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Internal Audit's analysis did not identify any undergraduate admission decisions that could have been influenced by factors such as donations and/or SMG personnel active during the audit period. Internal Audit identified three applicants that were related to three of the 223 donors that gave a cumulative amount of \$10,000 or more to UC Merced during the audit period. The applicants were automatically admitted based on GPA and coursework, therefore, the applicants' admission decision did not appear to have been influenced by the donations the donors made. Lastly, Internal Audit did not identify any applicants that were related to any local SMG personnel active during the audit period.