

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMPLIANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of November 18, 2020

STATE AUDIT OF UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND PRACTICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California State Auditor performed an audit of the University of California's admissions policies and practices. The final report was released on September 22, 2020 and included 12 recommendations to the Office of the President (UCOP) to further strengthen the University's admissions policies and practices. The University will be required to periodically report to the State Auditor on its progress implementing the audit's recommendations.

BACKGROUND

State Audit Approval

On June 26, 2019, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approved a State audit of the University of California's admissions policies and practices. In accordance with the audit request letter, the initiation of the audit was delayed until after the University of California's Office of Ethics, Compliance and Audit Services (ECAS) completed its review, or six months from the date of the audit approval, whichever occurred first.

Internal Audit of Admissions

In response to recent nationwide issues involving third parties exploiting vulnerabilities in admissions processes at various colleges and universities and with the goal of strengthening the University's policies, former President Napolitano requested that ECAS conduct a systemwide audit of undergraduate admissions. The audit was conducted in two phases, and collectively identified 48 recommendations to strengthen internal controls over admissions processes. The first phase was completed on June 20, 2019 and the second phase was completed on February 14, 2020. As of September 2020, all campuses have reported full implementation of all recommendations from both phases.

State Audit Scope and Objectives

The published audit scope and objectives read as follows:

The audit by the California State Auditor will provide independently developed and verified information related to the admission policies and practices of the University of California (UC), including its efforts to detect and address fraud in the admission process. The audit's scope will include, but not be limited to, the following activities:

1. Review and evaluate the laws, rules, and regulations significant to the audit objectives.
2. Review and evaluate UC's systemwide admission policies and practices as well as the results of UC's internal investigations.
3. For at least the UC Berkeley (Berkeley), UC Los Angeles (UCLA), and UC San Diego campuses, assess admission policies and practices by doing the following:
 - a. Assess the factors considered when deciding which applicants to admit to the selected campuses.
 - b. Evaluate fraud risks associated with the admissions process including, but not limited to, potential deceptive practices related to standardized test scores, high school grades, essays, and student-athlete admissions.
 - c. Determine the extent to which donations, influence, and legacy factor into the admissions process. To the extent possible, evaluate the diversity of students admitted due to these factors.
 - d. Determine the extent to which UC considers student diversity during the admissions process and report on the diversity of admitted students.
 - e. Identify and assess any trends related to the admission of nonresident and resident students since academic year 2010-11.
4. For at least the past three years, identify how many students Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego admitted under its special admissions policy, with a focus on students admitted through the identification of a special talent or achievement. For those students, do the following, to the extent possible:
 - a. Determine the categories of students admitted by exception.
 - b. Evaluate the policies and practices related to verifying the eligibility of applicants admitted by exception and any follow-up performed by the campuses to determine whether students continue to participate in the sports or other activities for which they were admitted.
 - c. For a selection of students, determine whether they are still participating in the sport or other activity for which they were admitted by exception.
 - d. Assess whether the above data indicates any risk of fraud in the admissions process.
5. Review and assess UC and campus policies and practices related to interacting with other entities involved in the admission process including, but not limited to, the College Board, ACT, and private admission consultants.

6. Evaluate the sufficiency of steps taken by UC in response to admission-related recommendations in the California State Auditor's March 2016 audit report (2015-107) as well as other California State Auditor recommendations, if applicable.
7. Review and assess any other issues that are significant to the audit.

State Audit Process

The State audit of the University of California's admissions policies and practices was initiated in January 2020. Audit fieldwork was conducted at the Office of the President and four UC campuses: UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Diego, and UC Santa Barbara. The draft audit report was sent to UCOP on August 21, 2020, initiating a five-day agency review period during which UCOP developed its response to the report. Within that five-day period, as permitted by statute, the Board of Regents' Compliance and Audit Committee held a closed session meeting to discuss the draft results and obtain input from the Committee to inform the University's response. The final report was released publicly on September 22, 2020.

As part of the State Auditor's standard audit follow-up process, the University will be required to report its progress implementing the audit's recommendations at 60 days, six months, one year, and annually thereafter. The 60-day reporting due date is November 21, 2020.

AUDIT RESULTS

See Attachment 1 for a summary of the audit findings and recommendations and Attachment 2 for the State Auditor's full report.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Summary of Audit Findings and Recommendations

Attachment 2: California State Auditor Report of University of California Admissions Policies and Practices