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August 12, 2022

Dr. Adela de la Torre  
San Diego State University  
5500 Campanile Drive  
San Diego, CA 92182

Dear Dr. de la Torre:

**Subject: Audit Report 21-10, Admissions, San Diego State University**

We have completed an audit of *Admissions – Special Admits* as part of our 2021-2022 Audit Plan, and the final report is attached for your reference. The audit was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

There were no reportable observations revealed during the review. The final audit report will be posted to Audit and Advisory Services' website.

I wish to express my appreciation for the cooperation extended by the campus personnel over the course of this review.

Sincerely,



Vlad Marinescu  
Vice Chancellor and Chief Audit Officer

c: Jolene Koester, Interim Chancellor  
Lateefah Simon, Chair, Committee on Audit  
Yammilette Rodriguez, Vice Chair, Committee on Audit

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**ADMISSIONS –  
SPECIAL ADMITS**

**San Diego State University**

Audit Report 21-10  
August 12, 2022

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objectives of the audit were to ascertain the effectiveness of operational and administrative controls related to admissions exception processing, commonly referred to as special admits, and to ensure compliance with relevant federal and state regulations, Trustee policy, Office of the Chancellor (CO) directives, and campus procedures.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based upon the results of the work performed within the scope of the audit, the operational and administrative controls for special admits as of July 15, 2022, taken as a whole, provided reasonable assurance that risks were being managed and objectives were met.

There were no reportable observations revealed during the review.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### BACKGROUND

The California Master Plan for Higher Education, originally adopted in 1960, established a framework for higher education in the state of California that differentiated the functions of the three segments – the California Community Colleges, the California State University (CSU) system, and the University of California system – and established the principle that California high school graduates would have access to at least one of these segments. According to the plan, the top one-third of graduating California high school students, as determined by systemwide screening criteria such as grade point average and completion of specific course subjects, would be eligible for admission to the CSU system.

In recent years, due to both a lack of state funding and an increase in student admission demand, a number of campuses have not had the capacity to accommodate all CSU-eligible students who apply. This can occur at the campus level or in a specific program or major and is designated as impaction. Campus-level impaction restricts admissions to the campus for a specific enrollment category (e.g., first-year students or upper-division transfer students), based on the instructional resources and physical capacity available at the campus. Program or major impaction restricts admission to a designated discipline, division, or major. In both cases, more rigorous supplementary screening criteria are used for admissions decisions. Before declaring impaction at the program or major level, or before making significant changes to its screening criteria, a campus must provide a series of public hearings and notifications and obtain approval from the CO. As of FY 2022/23, 15 of the 23 CSU campuses were impacted at the first-year student level, and 15 campuses were impacted at the upper-division transfer level.

The pandemic in 2020 caused difficulties with admissions for a variety of reasons, one of which was the lack of availability of ACT/SAT testing dates and facilities. Accordingly, the CSU suspended the use of ACT/SAT standardized test scores beginning with fall 2021 admissions. These scores were a significant factor in the eligibility index for the entire system. In June 2020, the CSU asked each individual campus to develop its own multifaceted admissions system (MFAS) to be used as a quantitative tool to replace the Eligibility Index, a formula which used ACT/SAT scores and high school GPAs. SDSU developed and implemented such a scoring system in fall 2021 and continued use of it in fall 2022 to administer regular admissions decisions.

Further, public concern about students gaining admissions through donor or alumni relationships, fueled by national news stories, resulted in increased oversight requirements over the process to admit students not otherwise qualified for admission. Existing California State University Board of Trustees policy provides for a limited number of undergraduate admission exceptions to regular admission criteria. Title 5 §40900 and §40901 allow the CSU to admit exceptions in two categories, *General Admissions* and *Exceptions for Applicants to Special Compensatory Program (Disadvantaged)*, if the number admitted under each category does not exceed 4 percent, or 8 percent total, of all undergraduate students enrolled for the first time during the previous year. The CO performs the calculation each year and notifies each campus of its allocation limits. Campuses may not shift any of the disadvantaged slots to the general category, but students who qualify as disadvantaged may be included in the general allocation slots. In June 2021, the policy was revised to incorporate new safeguards

implemented as part of Assembly Bill 1383, which was designed to ensure that there is no preference given to students who have relationships with alumni or donors. The new policy requires that the campus clearly articulate its standards for special admits and further requires that each exception be approved by a minimum of three senior administrators. It further added a requirement that any students admitted by exception into an intercollegiate athletic program be required to participate in that sport for a minimum of one academic year. For the fall 2021 academic year, SDSU was allocated 125 general and 50 disadvantaged special admits, for a total of 175. The campus enrolled 122 special admit students under the general allocation and no special admit students under the disadvantaged allocation, remaining within the limitation set by the policy.

For the fall 2021 semester, SDSU received 93,416 applications and enrolled approximately 9,228 new undergraduates. Total enrollment for the CSU system in the fall 2021 semester was approximately 477,466.

At SDSU, the campus has been impacted at the first-year and transfer levels since fall 2010. In addition, all majors are impacted at the undergraduate level. California applicants from high schools and community colleges within SDSU's defined local area are admitted as first-year students and upper-division transfers based on the minimum CSU systemwide requirements. California applicants outside the local area, both first-year and transfers, are subject to more stringent admissions criteria (first-year students). These criteria are adjusted annually based on available space.

Additional screening criteria for impacted majors differs depending on the major, but some of the requirements may include a supplementary application, higher GPAs, or completion of pre-requisite courses.

## SCOPE

We performed fieldwork from May 2, 2022, through July 15, 2022. Our audit and evaluation included the audit tests we considered necessary in determining whether operational and administrative controls are in place and operative. The audit focused on procedures in effect from July 1, 2020, to July 15, 2022.

This was a limited scope review of admissions processes that focused specifically on the approval and documentation of admissions exceptions.

As a result of changing conditions and the degree of compliance with procedures, the effectiveness of controls changes over time. Specific limitations that may hinder the effectiveness of an otherwise adequate system of controls include, but are not limited to, resource constraints, faulty judgments, unintentional errors, circumvention by collusion, and management overrides. Establishing controls that would prevent all these limitations would not be cost-effective; moreover, an audit may not always detect these limitations.

Our testing and methodology, which was designed to provide a review of key operational and administrative controls, included interviews, walkthroughs, and detailed testing on certain aspects of the admissions program, specifically, special admits. Our review was limited to gaining reasonable assurance that essential elements of the admissions exceptions program were in place and did not include a detailed review or analysis of other admissions processes.

## CRITERIA

Our audit was based upon standards as set forth in federal and state regulations and guidance; Trustee policy; Office of the Chancellor directives; and campus (and auxiliary, if applicable) procedures; as well as sound administrative practices and consideration of the potential impact of significant risks. This audit was conducted in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

This review emphasized, but was not limited to, compliance with:

- Executive Order 962, *Undergraduate Admissions Exceptions*
- ASA 2019-04, *Admissions Exception Allocations; 2020-2021 and 2021-2022*
- CSU Admission Handbook 2021-22 and 2022-2023
- SDSU Enrollment Services Special Admit Policy Fall 2021
- Title 5, §40900, *General Exceptions*
- Title 5, §40901, *Exceptions for Applicants to Special Compensatory Programs*

## AUDIT TEAM

Senior Audit Manager: Ann Hough  
Senior Auditor: Cinthia Santamaria