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UC employee suspected of \$200K embezzlement

BY JENNIFER SQUIRES

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

A University of California office that manages online learning has seeped cash, and authorities say they've traced the leak to the former program director.

Moises Torres, who resigned from his post earlier this month, is accused of embezzling \$200,000 from the UC College Prep online initiative, which is housed at UC Santa Cruz and employs 21 people.

"They had an internal audit going on, and they discovered some improprieties," said prosecutor Bill Atkinson, who filed charges against Torres last week and convinced a Santa Cruz County Superior Court judge to issue a warrant for his arrest.

Torres, who lives outside the county, turned himself in Monday and was released on \$150,000 bail, UCSC spokesman Jim Burns said.

"He knew there was an investigation going on," Burns said.

Torres is suspected of padding contracts he made with an Arizona-based software vendor and received a \$200,000 payment in December. UC officials called it a "subcontracting scheme."

Further details on how Torres allegedly took money were not made public. UCSC police were not available to discuss the case, Burns said.

"It has to do with the mechanics of how the contracts were being run," said Paul Schwartz, UC Office of the President spokesman.

UCSC police were tipped off to the scheme through the campus's Whistleblower Program, UC officials reported. Torres worked for UC College Prep for 3 1/2 years and served as program director for the seven months prior to his resignation, UC officials reported. Police continue to investigate if other funds were stolen, officials said.

UC College Prep is a statewide initiative created by the UC Office of the President in 1999. It provides online courses, supplemental online course content, online tutoring, college planning resources, an online academy and test preparation materials for SAT/ACT, AP exams and CAHSEE exams.

The suspected embezzlement "hasn't affected the program in terms of the delivery of produces and services," Schwartz said.

After Torres resigned, UC College Prep staff member Gloria Ploss was appointed as acting director, Schwartz said. The college prep program and UCSC also strengthened budgetary oversight and added accounting controls as a result of the investigation, UC officials said.

Torres faces one count of embezzlement and an allegation the theft was greater than \$100,000, according to Atkinson. The charges carry a five-year state prison sentence, Atkinson said.

Contact Jennifer Squires at jsquires@santacruzsentinel.com.