

UCSC - Faculty

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# UCSC worker accused of embezzling huge sums

A UC-Santa Cruz employee has been arrested and charged with embezzling large sums of university money.

Mary Nicholls, 53, of 22 Kilburn St., Watsonville, was arrested at her home at 5:22 p.m. yesterday on suspicion of embezzlement and fraudulent possession of completed checks. She is suspected of taking at least \$293,900 of university funds over a 20-month period, according to UCSC Police Chief Jan Tepper.

Investigators say Nicholls illegally requested, authorized and deposited at least 68 checks to her personal bank account between January 1992 and September. An investigation into the matter is continuing.

Nicholls is accused of having filled out check-request forms for fictitious campus speakers, picking up the checks from the university accounting office, forging signa-

tures and endorsing the checks to herself. At this point, it appears she acted alone.

It is not yet clear how much of the money can be recovered.

In addition to the criminal probe, the university's investigation will focus on procedural lapses that apparently occurred on campus.

"Our investigation makes it clear that accepted business practices — separating the check request, check authorization and ledger reconciliation functions — were not followed in this case," said Geraldine Gail, manager of the university's Internal Audit.

A query received by the accounting office from Nicholls' bank last week lead to the investigation and arrest.

Tepper said the campus police are working on the criminal investigation in conjunction with the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office.