



Justin P. Wilson, Comptroller

January 24, 2018

Investigation Finds UT Athletics Staff Accepted Trips and Entertainment from Vendors

An investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office has revealed a number of issues related to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Sports Surface Management. These issues include trips and entertainment that were provided to UT Athletics staff by a department vendor and prospective vendor.

The investigation began after the University of Tennessee Department of Audit and Compliance notified the Comptroller's Office of possible discrepancies.

Investigators determined the director of sports surface management violated university policy when he accepted at least two paid trips and related entertainment from a department vendor which had previously been awarded an equipment lease worth \$763,898. In 2016, the director traveled to Illinois for two days of golf, and he also participated in a golf scramble in Georgia. The vendor provided lodging, air fare (when applicable), green fees, and other privileges. This violated UT's policy prohibiting university employees from accepting entertainment or other gifts exceeding \$75 in value.

The director was also absent from work during a two-day trip to the Masters Golf Tournament in April 2016. Although the director reimbursed a prospective vendor for his event pass, he failed to record two days of leave on his university time records.

In 2014, two current UT athletics department employees attended one day of the Masters Golf Tournament as guests of a potential vendor that was actively marketing its product to the university. This trip also violated the university's policy prohibiting the acceptance of gifts or entertainment exceeding \$75 in value.

Investigators also determined the athletics department had placed restrictive mandatory requirements on its request for quotation (RFQ) to purchase or lease 30 pieces of sports surface and golf facility maintenance equipment. These restrictive requirements may have inhibited bidding competition. On June 2, 2016, the UT purchasing department awarded the contract to the sole qualifying vendor.

"The University of Tennessee may wish to consider annual or periodic employee training related to its gift acceptance policy," said Comptroller Justin P. Wilson. "Officials should not engage in actions which might result in, or create the appearance of, private gain or preferential treatment."

To view the investigation online, go to: <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/ia/>.

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