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December 13, 2006

## 800,000 Affected by Data Breach, U.C.L.A. Says

By BRAD STONE

The University of California, Los Angeles, said yesterday that hackers had gained access to a restricted university database, exposing the private information of 800,000 current and former faculty, staff and students.

U.C.L.A. said there was no evidence that any of the data had been misused, but it has contacted the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which is conducting an inquiry.

The university is the latest among a growing list of companies, colleges and government agencies to reveal that its computer security had been breached. The U.C.L.A. breach appears to be the largest such case among universities. The City University of New York, Ohio University, the University of Southern California and Tufts University have all suffered computer break-ins that exposed personal information.

The intruder exploited a software flaw in the university's Web site to gain access to the internal database, said Jim Davis, U.C.L.A.'s chief information officer. The intruder showed a specific interest in names and Social Security numbers, he said. The database also contains birth dates and addresses.

Mr. Davis called the attack "well orchestrated and well designed. The attacker covered his tracks." The university discovered the intrusion on Nov. 21, when it began experiencing problems with the computer system. The university investigated and discovered unusual patterns of traffic dating to October 2005.

Yesterday, U.C.L.A. began notifying the 800,000 affected people and recommending they place a fraud alert on their consumer credit reports, which will encourage lenders to call them if new accounts are opened in their names.

The episode is raising questions among privacy advocates about the way universities maintain their electronic records. "To me it begs the question, why was the university even retaining the Social Security numbers of students? At the very least they should have been encrypting them," said Beth Givens, director of the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse.

The breach at U.C.L.A. follows similar computer security intrusions. In February 2005, the consumer information broker ChoicePoint revealed that hackers posing as legitimate companies had gained access to a database containing the confidential information of 163,000 customers. Since then, Bank of America, MasterCard and the United States Departments of Energy and Veterans Affairs have all announced similar breaches.

In addition to staff, faculty and students, the affected database at U.C.L.A. includes some parents of students who are receiving financial aid, students and faculty from the campus in Merced, and employees of the office of the president of the University of California system.