

Should Students Pay for SGA President's Tux?

Contributed by Benjamin Evans III -- Black College Wire
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Committee to investigate alleged misuse of funds by FAMU student leader

The executive branch of the Florida A&M University's Student Government Association will be audited after claims of misuse of funds, which included a \$714 tuxedo for SGA President Andrew Collins.

Former student senator Brittany Aikens made the claims during the Feb. 25 Student Government Association senate meeting and requested an audit. "Every administration that crosses SGA doors stand for accountability and transparency," said Aikens 19, a sophomore actuarial science student from Port of Spain, Trinidad. "They should have no problem submitting the necessary documents to justify every purchase."

Aikens discovered the purchase of the suit after she asked to review SGA financial documents following the school's announcement that the athletic department had a \$4.2 million deficit.

"When I heard the news, I wanted to make sure we were using funds wisely across the board," Aikens said. "It's our duty to hold our elected officials accountable."

Collins said he believes the claims of misuse are "opinionated" and he said he does not remember the exact price of the tuxedo, but said the cost was near what Aikens claimed.

"Unfortunately, certain individuals with personal aspirations are seeking ways to call attention to themselves by taking away from things students should truly be concerned about," Collins said in defense for the claims of misuse.

According to Aikens, the purchase was made around the same time Collins was preparing for an Annual Pink Tie Ball, which was sponsored by the executive branch.

According to SGA financial documents, the ball, an event to raise awareness of breast cancer, cost approximately \$7,000 and the executive branch only raised \$1,000.

"A committee is being formed to audit the executive branch," said Senator Kashif Smiley. "The executive branch audit was coming up any way, Aikens' concerns just sped up the process," said Smiley 23, a graduate MBA student from Miami.

The audit committee will consist of each SGA member's four committees, the SGA comptroller and the SGA Activity and Services liaison.

"The committee has two weeks to report their findings," Smiley said. "The committee will be investigating misuse of expenditures...if there are findings Collins' accounts will be frozen and ramifications will be in the hands of the judicial branch."

Morris Hawkins, SGA chief financial officer, approved the tuxedo purchase.

"The suit was paid for by purchase order just like everything else is," Morris said. "It is not my responsibility to stop officials from purchasing requested items."

Collins defended his purchase of the suit and said the funds came out of the discretionary account.

"The discretionary account is used every year by student body presidents in a manner they feel best serves the student body," Collins said.

Collins added that his position as SGA President requires him to appear at different events where the tuxedo would be necessary.

"As president, I'm required to wear a tuxedo on multiple occasions," Collins said. "I don't remember the exact price, but I had to purchase a tuxedo and the accessories, shirt, shoes, cufflinks, belt and tie...these are things I did not own."

Typically questionable use of funds is uncovered during routine audits. The senate is required by university statutes to audit organizations receiving A & S funding each semester, according to Senate President Ricquel Jackson.

"This doesn't mean all organizations receiving funding will be audited within the school year," Jackson said. "It's based on who is chosen by the senate."

Although the SGA audits organizations like the Famuan, WANM 90.5, and Journey magazine, it appears that the SGA president's office does not receive the same scrutiny.

"Troubles [in SGA] come in cycles," said Henry Kirby, dean of student affairs. "If each branch of student government is audited on an annual basis, financial issues will be closely monitored decreasing the number of mishaps. Best practices won't allow for spur of the moment audits. There must be consistency in order to maintain accountability."

SGA President-elect Gallop Franklin opposes annual audits.

"Periodic audits are best considering the number of organizations receiving A & S funding," Franklin said.

"My administration will be extremely transparent and will post all executive branch transactions online and in the SGA newsletter," said Franklin, 21, a fourth-year pharmacy student from Tallahassee. "We will be committed to serving the best interest of the student body."

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Benjamin Evans III writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published this article.