

## 7-Year Sentence in FAMU Grade-Change Scandal

Contributed by The Famuan Staff -- Black College Wire  
Tuesday, 22 September 2009

Former student maintained his innocence despite evidence

Former Florida A&M University student Marcus Barrington was sentenced to 84 months (7 years) in federal prison for his involvement in the March grade change scandal.

Barrington's accomplices, Lawrence Secrease and Christopher Jacquette, pleaded guilty and are currently serving their 22-month sentence. This brings to an end Barrington's sentencing schedule, which has been delayed several times. In a unanimous decision in March, a 12-member jury found Barrington guilty on five counts of conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, and wire fraud.

Barrington, 23, and two other former FAMU students, Lawrence Secrease, 22, and Christopher Jacquette, 27, were indicted last October for changing 650 grades that affected 90 students. Some students had failing grades changed to A's and students who had out-of-state tuition had their residency changed, which lowered their tuition fees.

FAMU lost more than \$100,000 as a result of the computer changes. During the trial, Assistant U.S Attorney Eric Mountain, who prosecuted the case, said early detection of the security breach saved the university from losing more money.

"Had the investigators not caught it when they did...the university could have suffered massive loss, massive injury," Mountain said at the time.

Following the trial, Mountain said he felt that Barrington's attitude and lack of accountability for the grade changes may hurt him on sentencing day.

"There is no question," said Mountain regarding a possible harsher sentence for Barrington. "Not because he took the stand, but because he chose not to accept responsibility at any point. In the federal system, acceptance of responsibility is a significant consideration for the court in assessing punishment."

The judge also cited Barrington's lack of remorse in revoking his bail and keeping him in custody for six months until his sentencing, which has been rescheduled several times.

During his five-day trial, Barrington took the stand and denied any wrongdoing. His defense attorney argued that no fingerprints were taken when evidence was collected during the investigation.

According to the federal indictment, between June and December 2007, the three men installed keystroke loggers on university computers in the "registrar's office to access and alter student records stored on the PeopleSoft" system.

On Dec. 2, 2008, Jacquette entered a guilty plea to the indictment alleging that he had conspired with Secrease and Barrington, to hack into the FAMU system to change grades and residency status. The federal courts considered Secrease and Jacquette's guilty pleas and their court testimony as part of their sentencing.

Secrease was sentenced to 22 months in federal prison, four months probation and a \$300 fine, while Jacquette was sentenced to 22 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release.

This article was originally published in The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper.