HBCUs Are Failing in Financial Aid Accountability

Contributed by Jabari Payne -- Black College Wire
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There have to be more ways to keep track of funds

Historically, black colleges and universities have been the cornerstone of black education since the founding of the first HBCU in 1837, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania.

Black colleges offer black youth the opportunity to attend institutions of higher learning with individuals who look like themselves. However, HBCUs have had financial problems due to in-house theft and other corruption scandals for years. These low accountability standards tarnish the integrity of these historic institutions.

Corrupt practices have led to grave repercussions for envolved institutions from the government and accrediting bodies. However, these schools should still be held accountable.Recently, there have been several cases of financial aid theft at Florida A&M University. The Famuan reported: "FAMU police report that the fraud occurred when the suspects gained unauthorized access to another FAMU student's information contained in their iRattler account and used this information for personal gain by diverting funds to another bank outside the state."

Although the suspects have been arrested, fingers should not only be pointed at the thieves, but at university administrators. If the systems were safer, there wouldn't be problems like students hacking into iRattler, the university online data system where students' information is stored.

 "This is not what I expected college to be like, late money being stolen," said Jamire Riles, a 19-year-old general education student from Miami, referring to financial aid checks that students often receive late. "It's things like this that make me think about transferring to Florida State."

Morris Brown College went through similar financial problems during the 1990s and the early 2000s. In the May 2006 issue of Jet Magazine, former president Dr. Dolores Cross "pleaded guilty to embezzling millions of dollars in federal funds that were intended to cover student tuition."

With the aid of the former financial aid director, Parvesh Singh, Cross robbed Morris Brown of just over $3 million. Cross' tenure lasted nearly three years, but her monetary hoarding forced the school into a loss of accreditation and turned the campus into a ghost town.

Alabama A&M University in Normal, Ala., is another black college with accountability issues. The school has been missing over $1 million since 2008, according to an editorial written by John Beck of the Huntsville Times.

"The missing money was reported in 2008 by state auditors, who went so far as to name a half dozen people who had access to the money. There's been no indication so far that the attorney general or district attorney offices or even the university itself has pursued the matter further," read the editorial. Huntsville's CBS Affiliate WHNT 19, reported that the students petitioned for their money.

An absence of liability for Morris Brown's and Alabama A&M's money is just another example of why students question the leaders and integrity of our HBCUs. There has to be more than one or two ways to keep track of all the money that is being stolen from the schools. If there isn't, then our schools are to blame just as much as the thieves themselves.

Jabari Payne writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.

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