

Web site blasts Paine president, seeks his ouster

By **Tracey McManus**

Staff Writer

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Allegations of financial and ethical wrongdoing by Paine College officials were published on an extensive Web site launched this month by an anonymous source, who contended the well-being of Paine "can only be accomplished by the ouster of (President) George C. Bradley and his administration."



FILE/STAFF

A Web site launched by an anonymous source criticizes Paine College President George C. Bradley, with documented examples of mismanagement of funds.

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The site, **The Paine Project**, provides documented examples of mismanagement of student financial aid funding and fiscal instability.

The site also criticizes the administration's move to build a multimillion-dollar Health Education Activities Learning Complex rather than renovate aging residence halls, and it questions the college's ability to repay various loans with balloon payments approaching.

The site's founders said the administration has led to an "extraordinary" turnover in employees with four chief financial officers, three auditing firms, and at least 28 employees who were fired or resigned in Bradley's six years at Paine.

The Paine Project points to the urgency for change given the school's third accreditation sanction in three years. For failing to resolve financial and management issues, Paine was placed on probation in June by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, the last action taken before accreditation is pulled.

Despite the call for a change in administration, no action had been taken by the board of trustees as of the July 12 alumni meeting held on campus. Alumni said the Paine community is split on what should be done.

"At this point, I think there should be a change in

violations

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structure in both the board of trustees and the administration,” said Jabal Moss, a 2013 graduate and former Student Government Association president. “SACS has been more than fair in working with the school, but I don’t think we have people now that can make the change we need.”

Moss, who said he is not involved in the Web site, launched an online petition last month calling for the replacement of Bradley and his administration that has garnered more than 400 signatures.

Moss said solutions are needed now because the community cannot afford to lose its only historically black college, which he said provides opportunity and hope for students from all over.

“I love Paine, and I think its 132-year legacy is imperative to the Augusta community, and if that school is not there and that foundation is lost it would hurt Augusta, it would hurt the state, it would hurt the nation,” Moss said. “I’m very fearful about this.”

When reached for comment about the site, Paine Vice President Helene Carter told a reporter to contact the school’s attorney. In a statement, Regina Molden, the legal counsel for Paine, replied:

“Paine College is deeply concerned and has expressed both outrage and disgust over the troubling allegations expressed in the ‘Paine Project.’ The allegations are neither complete nor accurate. Sadly, the Project appears to be nothing more than a futile attempt to tarnish Paine’s image. Both students and employees of the School should expect and can expect a culture of fairness, with absolutely no tolerance for the type of conduct alleged by the authors of the Paine Project. The School is firmly committed to upholding the highest standards of behavior and will continue to take action to see this through.”

Betty Beard, a 1960 Paine graduate and former Augusta Commission member, said she is not convinced that changing leadership is necessary but said something should be done immediately to resolve the 10 current SACS violations.

Beard said that she has been speaking with former board of trustees members and presidents but that a solid solution is not clear.

“I’m concerned about our credibility, but we’re pushing forward with whatever it takes to get us from under the situation we are under,” Beard said.

Jarrett Carter, the founding editor of *HBCU Digest*, said accreditation trouble and financial issues are not uncommon today at the roughly 105 historically black colleges and universities

nationwide because of several factors.

Once the only option for college-bound black students, historically black colleges and universities today have to compete with state universities, community colleges and online schools. That has caused a drop in enrollment, which can severely affect these schools, which are primarily small and heavily dependent on tuition money.

In addition, historically black colleges and universities have received less state and federal funding over the years, which, coupled with declining enrollment, can cripple a school's financial base.

"It hurts those private HBCUs even more because they don't necessarily have public funding to support different programs or capital planning," Jarrett Carter said. "It's cyclical because if you can't get the funding, you can't get the students, you can't get the bonds to build your campus to attract more students and you can't get a great faculty if can't afford them."

Coupled with those external factors, when a college has documented incompetence or mismanagement from its leadership, it's harder for smaller historically black colleges and universities to recruit more qualified administrators to resolve the issues, he said.

Today, however, it is still in a community's best interest to ensure its historically black colleges and universities are well-supported, Carter said.

The institutions offer a college opportunity for underserved students who might not be able to afford one otherwise, he said. They create hubs of like-minded students who can learn and grow together when larger universities might not be a good fit.

Because many larger state universities lack diversity, that environment can hurt students' social development if they feel out of place or like outsiders, Carter said.

"So many black students nationwide face that issue every day because they are convinced diversity is a great thing, but sometimes there's the student who goes to a (University of California Los Angeles) thinking it will be great but what you saw in the brochure isn't what you find," he said.

Historically black colleges and universities are some of the largest employers for blacks in some communities, which helps build a city's economic base, he said.

"The community depends on it to survive," Carter said. "If (the institutions) can't survive, these students who really need a shot at education won't get it. It's going to go away, and the country is going to suffer for it."