

College of DuPage's spending under investigation, sources say

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DuPage County prosecutors have opened an investigation into spending at the College of DuPage following a series of controversies at the Glen Ellyn community college, including lavish drinking and dining by top administrators at a campus restaurant, the Tribune has learned.

The publicly funded community college has received two grand jury subpoenas for financial records in recent weeks, as prosecutors examine expenses from President Robert Breuder's office, according to law enforcement and other sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Those expenses are sometimes paid for by the taxpayer-supported college and at other times are picked up by the College of DuPage Foundation, which promotes the college and is its fundraising arm. The college already has turned over a number of records to prosecutors, the sources said.

"The college has and will fully cooperate with any government investigation," college attorney Respicio Vazquez said in a statement to the Tribune.

The investigation is being handled by the DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin's public integrity unit, which prosecutes white collar crime and official misconduct. Berlin on Sunday said he could neither confirm nor deny any investigation because of grand jury secrecy rules.

The subpoenas come during a time of intense scrutiny at the college, which is the state's second-largest provider of higher education after the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Trustees have been under fire for giving Breuder a \$763,000 severance package to end his contract three years early. Breuder, meanwhile, has faced criticism for spending that includes a hunting club membership, car allowance and large tabs at the school's upscale restaurant.

A Tribune investigation recently revealed that Breuder and his top managers had spent more than \$190,000 on food and drinks during the past three years at Waterleaf, a campus-owned restaurant. College trustees are investigating whether the tabs — which included pricey bottles of Champagne and wine as well as top-shelf vodka — violated school policy against expensing alcohol.

The prosecutor's inquiry comes with a potential complication. The state's attorney's office and the college share a lobbyist, attorney Scott Marquardt, who is also a foundation board member.

The grand jury also had issued a subpoena to the college's foundation, but it was withdrawn earlier this month, Catherine Brod, the foundation's executive director, said on Sunday.

Brod would not say what the subpoena requested.

"There was no substance behind (it)," she said.

Still, board of trustees Chairwoman Erin Birt this month ordered a review of contracts between the school and its foundation members. The move came after the Tribune raised questions about how the college awards contracts, particularly to vendors who also serve on the foundation board.

Ten of the foundation's 22 board members work for companies with financial ties to the college, according to documents obtained under the state Freedom of Information Act. At least six of those companies have received work from the school without submitting bids, according to records.

"The foundation board doesn't have anything to do with contracts for the college," Brod said. "The foundation board, their job is to raise money for the school in a variety of ways and for student scholarships. They have no decision-making at all related to contracts."

The subpoenas mark at least the second recent law enforcement investigation at the college. Last month, DuPage County prosecutors charged a former college employee with stealing more than \$200,000 from the campus radio station over a seven-year period, although a top school official said the theft went on for twice as long as reported and cost the college twice as much.

In response to the controversies roiling the campus, Illinois lawmakers have pushed for a state-run audit, which would look into contracts, spending and Breuder's employment agreements. But under state law, the school must agree to the review and pay for it. It has done neither.

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