



[Student-athlete representatives from the Southeastern Conference \(SEC\) were among those arguing the case to not make financial aid to them guaranteed for all four years](#) during last week's NCAA Convention according to a *USA Today*. Their voices swayed some, but [the new measure was approved by the autonomy schools \(better known as the Power 5\)](#). It has been argued its approval, and that of the "cost of living stipend," will make fielding teams much more expensive. Kent State University is saying in order to remain competitive as an FBS school it would be spending as much as \$1.1 million based on its current athletics lineup. It is one of the reasons the

school announced a \$35,000 assessment of its athletics program on Monday, [as first reported by the Akron Beach Journal](#). It is also [the reason given by UAB when it discontinued football, bowling, and rifle in early December 2014](#).

How the Southeastern Conference plays a role

The position taken by the SEC student-athlete representatives (one also voiced by those representing the Big 12 during the convention) is of note because of its place in the history of athletic scholarships in collegiate sports. The SEC was the first collegiate conference to officially sanction athletic scholarships in 1935 - three years after [it was created here in Birmingham because of a split from the Southern Conference due to its increasing size](#). (**NOTE:** [The folks over at Saturday Down South have an excellent write-up on the early history and make-up of the conference](#) that you should check out.) An account by former *Birmingham News* sports editor Zipp Newman in his 1969 book, "The Impact of Southern Football" points out another innovation introduced to college football by the SEC. It describes an "arms race" in the late 1920s resulting from [3 out of 4 victories by Southern schools at the Rose Bowl \(between 1926-1929\)](#):

There was a lot of hypocrisy in the recruiting of players. Charges and counter charges were filed in the 1920's and early 1940's, The large schools of the East, Mid-West, and Far West could depend on wealthy alumni to take care of their players. I do not think there was anything wrong. The Deep South simply did not have the wealthy alumni.

Never has the football world been more shocked than when the Southeastern Conference in 1944 announced a grant-in-aid. An athletic scholarship that provided room, board, books, and \$15 a month for laundry. These benefits to football players were openly handled and books kept by the individual universities and colleges.

The rest of the NCAA eventually moved to adopt grant-in-aid in addition to [the letter of intent](#). Many, including Newman, argue their adoption was at least partially made possible by the election of A.B. Moore, a dean from Alabama, as NCAA president fifty years ago this month (see page 2 of [this PDF of the 1985 NCAA convention newsletter](#) along the right hand side, though the lower right hand corner of page 1 has an interesting story as well). The reasons why such a move was made has been hypothesized often in recent years, as evidenced by [this commentary penned by the Orlando Sentinel in 2013](#). There have also been several published theorizing the potential ramifications of the

approval of the new governance rules for the autonomy schools, including [this piece from 2014](#).

What happens next?

The expansion of the financial aid to include a stipend follows in conference tradition; whether or not the implementation of guaranteed four-year aid will be beneficial in the long term with need to be determined later. The autonomy schools are prepared for the changes for now though, with Missouri already announcing their placing an additional \$1 million aside in their budget to accommodate the increased costs ([as told to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch earlier today](#)). It's worth noting that [according to the data we compiled for our January 19 piece](#), they were only providing a 1.99% subsidy to their athletics budget in 2013; the Alabama Crimson Tide was receiving just over 4% despite being one of the 20+ teams in the FBS to actually turn a profit. Missouri and Alabama have seen 19% and 29% decreases respectively in the percentage their overall budgets coming from state appropriations due to significant reductions in funding.

Photo: *Bryant-Denny Stadium pre-game Alabama vs. Tennessee, 2011.* File photo.