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Former UC prof links his beatings, FBI letter

By Bob Schenel

A former University of Chicago activist professor, who the FBI tried to discredit in 1968 with an anonymous letter to university officials, said Friday he never suspected there was a concerted effort to get him off campus.

However, after learning of the FBI's efforts, Richard L. Flacks said a severe beating he suffered in his office a year later may have been a result of a "climate created by the FBI, in targeting me for action."

THE FBI attempt to discredit Flacks — now living in California — was disclosed in documents released Thursday by the Senate intelligence committee.

The documents included a memo dated July 26, 1968, from the special agent in charge of the Chicago FBI office suggesting the letter be sent to university trustees and the Chicago Tribune.

An answering memo from J. Edgar Hoover dated Aug. 2, 1968, gave approval and said the letter "may discourage Flacks or even result in his ultimate removal."

The two-page letter, unsigned but with "A concerned alumnus (sic)" typed at the



Richard L. Flacks

end, said the letter writer was "concerned only with the welfare of the University of Chicago, its faculty and students."

REFERRING to Flacks' political activities as a "betrayal of trust," the letter said, "I wonder if Mr. Flacks is as conscientious in his professional duties as he is in promoting student rebellions. . . . Will Mr. Flacks be responsible for students who may be injured during a 'rebellion' or for property damage on the

University of Chicago campus?"

On May 5, 1969, Flacks was seriously beaten in his office by a man who posed as a newspaper reporter. He suffered a skull fracture and his right hand was nearly severed. No one has ever been arrested for the attack.

Flacks was a target of the FBI because of his antiwar activities, his involvement with Students for a Democratic Society and his role in student demonstrations.

The memo approving sending the anonymous letter said Flacks was listed on the "Security Index" and "Agitator Index" in the Chicago FBI office.

"IT'S A VERY serious thing that the FBI was systematically trying to get people removed from their jobs, not charging them with anything illegal," Flacks said in a telephone interview from his Santa Barbara (Calif.) home.

"And the manner, using poison pen letters, all under the direct approval of the director of the FBI.

"On the other hand, the letter is absurd. There is a great deal of absurdity and illiteracy in the letter, which is supposed to be from a graduate of the University of Chicago," Flacks said.