

TARGETS COMPLAIN TO UNIVERSITY

On-line insults put conduct @ issue

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MU professor says other diatribes prompted his attacks

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A Marquette University professor who hurled profane insults across the Internet — including accusations of drug use and pedophilia — has been chastised by university officials, has annoyed people across the country, and has sparked a small, intense debate on etiquette in cyberspace.



McAdams

John McAdams, a political science professor who teaches a course on the Kennedy assas-

sination, and has created a home page on the World Wide Web devoted to the topic, admitted to using blue prose in computer correspondence.

But he defended himself by saying he was responding in kind to people he says are viciously critical of his views on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. "The Internet used to be a reasonable place to discuss the Kennedy assassination," McAdams said. "Now, it's a complete 'flamefest.'"

"Flaming," in Internet circles, refers to diatribes aimed at those with differing viewpoints. McAdams is a vocal opponent of academics and others who ascribe to various conspiracy theories concerning the assassination.

Last fall, participants in an

Please see INTERNET page 6

Internet/Professor's jabs raise debate about on-line etiquette

From page 1

assassination discussion group complained to the Roman Catholic university about McAdams' profane references to them on computer bulletin boards. Gary Aguilar, a San Francisco surgeon, said he contacted MU after McAdams asked him to respond to charges that he had used drugs. Aguilar vehemently denies using drugs.

"He's extremely mean-spirited," Aguilar said. "What academic purpose can be served by calling people these names? I find it peculiar in the extreme that a professor at Marquette University, a Catholic institution, would do this."

MU officials, provided copies of the messages by Aguilar and others, did not discipline McAdams but last fall told him to stop using MU computing facilities for such postings, MU spokesman John Hopkins said.

"We did receive complaints that he had been jousting with his opponents with terms that are not couched in particularly calm or scholarly ways," Hopkins said.

"If the exchanges are getting as heated as these copies seem to indicate, it's not an appropriate use of Marquette's computer resources."

McAdams said Hopkins' response betrayed a fundamental ignorance of the freewheeling debate on the Internet. "This is a Marquette flack who doesn't know what the hell is going on on the Internet," McAdams said.

McAdams said he simply had raised charges about his opponents that had been brought to his attention. He added that his opponents had leveled myriad baseless accusations at him, including that he was a spy for the Central Intelligence Agency.

"I refuse to be driven off the Internet by abuse or attacks,"

McAdams said. "If I called somebody a bimbo, it's in reaction to something. I refuse to be bound by any notion of political correctness."

Others who harbor conspiracy theories in the Kennedy assassination also have been singled out by McAdams, Aguilar said. Copies of electronic postings, which originated from an MU computer account, show that McAdams invited one critic to respond to "charges that you are a pedophile, and spent time in jail for molesting children."

Tad Pinkerton, a computer science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the informal, almost impersonal, nature of communicating by keyboard can destroy the rules of civilized discourse.

"With this type of communication, people tend to be much more candid," Pinkerton said. "There's something about the apparent anonymity involved. They don't pull punches. If you're not looking somebody in the eye, or conversing with them live on the telephone, you have a tendency to be more outspoken."

Some of the more virulent attacks and animated discussions involve esoteric, even dry academic fields, Pinkerton said. Electronic barbs fly among professors on his campus with some regularity, he said.

McAdams said the attacks on him had been so vile that he even registered under a pseudonym at a conference held last year by JFK conspiracy buffs. Using his own name, he said, would have invited harassment.

Instances of e-mail harassment are pursued vigorously, Pinkerton said. But regulating content also raises constitutional questions. So UW-Madison students and staff are mostly on their own, mindful of Pinkerton's admonition to mind their manners when on line.

DEATH NOTICES