

Sour revenge for students

by Dan Mihalopoulos
Chicago Tribune

Before registering for classes, students at the University of Wisconsin campus here soon will be able to use the Internet to see just how tough it would be to ace courses.

Many students say they are eager to log on to pickaprof.com as they decide which classes to enroll in - or which professors to avoid. Bar charts on the Web site show what percentage of each instructor's students received As, Bs, Cs, Ds or Fs during past semesters.

"I'll be strongly tempted to look like a bear with a honey jar," said Thomas McKinney, 27, a graphic design major. "You could always hear this kind of stuff through the grapevine. Now you can just punch it up."

The University of Wisconsin student association recently decided to pay \$10,000 to Pick-A-Prof, joining more than 50 public universities nationwide that subscribe to the three-year-old service based in Texas. And student leaders at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and Wright College are debating whether to bring it to their campuses next year.

In an age when students can order term papers over the Internet, the spread of Pick-A-Prof has triggered a fresh debate about the effects of rapid technological change on education.

Many students relish having easy access to grading histories, but college instructors here and across the country are complaining that Pick-A-Prof is the worst blow to the integrity of higher education since Cliffs Notes.

"There is no relation between an easy A and the quality of learning," UW sociology professor Carrie Yang Costello said.

Critics say publishing grading histories on the Internet will make it simple for students to choose professors who are most likely to grade gently. Students inevitably will try to play the odds to give themselves the best chance of posting high grade-point averages and attracting

job offers, said George Davida, a computer science professor and faculty senate member.

"It's a no-brainer," Davida said. "This will turn the university into a casino."

Professors warned that Pick-A-Prof will result in grade inflation.

"There will be an influence on professors to bring students into their classes by not grading too hard," said Jennifer Maher,

knew they had the right to view professors' grading history. But they noticed that few students went to the trouble of asking university administrators for the fat binders that contained the paper records.

"We recognized the opportunity to put it online, where there would be more access," Chilek said in a telephone interview from the Pick-A-Prof office in Austin.

Professors who criticize the service underestimate their students, Chilek said.

"The students know that if they go for the easy A, then they won't have the background they will need to succeed in a higher-level course," he said.

Some college students defend the site as a valuable tool for increasing accountability among professors and giving students more information as they choose expensive courses.

"You pay for a class and you want to get something out of it," said Kory Kozloski, the UW student association president.

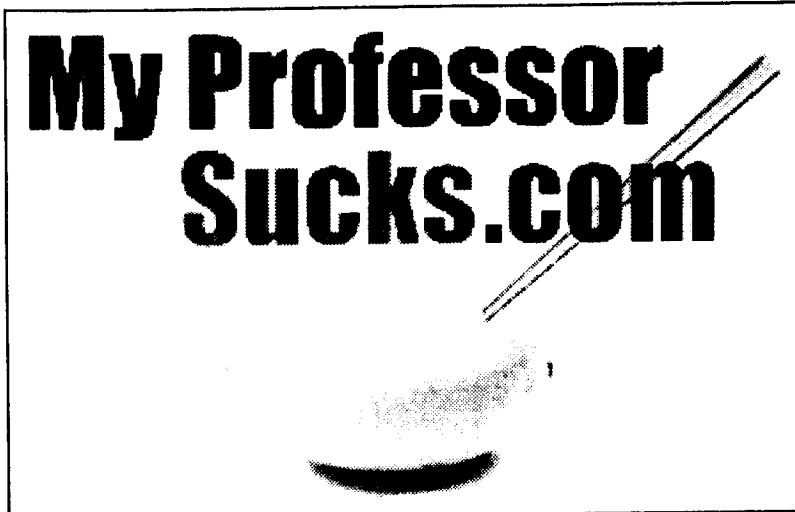
UIC student government President Angel Alvarez has proposed subscribing to Pick-A-Prof. The company chose the campus as a trial site, meaning some data are already available to UIC students on a test basis.

"Now I don't have to rely on how accurate my friends are when I ask them about a class," Alvarez said, who expects student representatives at UIC to decide on taking the service soon after the holiday break.

May Ming Lam, a junior majoring in movement science at UIC, has logged on to the test version and said it is easy to use. "Of course, everyone is looking for a professor who hasn't failed too many people," she said.

But some students said the main attraction of Pick-A-Prof is the opportunity to learn more about the demands of a class and the teaching style of professors before signing up. Course catalogs customarily give no more than a terse description of the material a class will cover.

"There will be a lot of people trying to get an easy A, but those people have always been there," said Susan Howell, a marketing major at UW. "I just want to know which classes are good and which classes are not."



Many college students have a few professors who are more sour than lemons.

Photo courtesy of www.myprofessorsucks.com

an associate professor of women's studies.

Pick-A-Prof is a simple, if novel, concept. Data on the grading histories of professors at public universities are open to the public. Pick-A-Prof requests the information from universities and places it on its password-protected Web site.

At most universities where Pick-A-Prof is used, the student associations pay the company to construct and maintain the site.

Pick-A-Prof also runs message boards featuring anonymous reviews of professors, which the company screens for profanity and personal attacks. Company officials say the screening process makes Pick-A-Prof's reviews more useful than the feedback that students post on other Internet sites, such as myprofessorsucks.com.

Pick-A-Prof is in operation at some of the nation's largest universities, including the University of Texas, University of Massachusetts, University of Maryland, University of Kentucky and Indiana University.

Pick-A-Prof founders Chris Chilek and John Cunningham began the company while students at Texas A&M University, where they graduated in 1999.

Cunningham, a marketing major, and Chilek, who studied computer science,

Through the looking glass

by Mike Pingree, KRT Campus

HELLO THERE, DIRTBAG, REMEMBER ME?

Four years ago, a Salem, Ore., police officer arrested a man for leaving a diner without paying. But the guy smashed through the rear window of the police cruiser and escaped, still in handcuffs. Then he fled to California. The policeman didn't forget. He went to the home of the man's parents at Christmas figuring he would return for the holidays, and, sure enough, there he was.

BUT BABY, BE REASONABLE

The women of Sudan's Loo and Jekani tribes have begun a movement to end the East African nation's 19-year-long civil war by denying their men sex until the fighting stops.

WWW.THIS-IS-SO-EMBARRASSING.COM

Seven Florida high school girls, engaging in a bit of teen frivolity, took topless photos of each other with a digital camera and then emailed them to a few friends. The friends emailed them to a few others. And so on, and so forth. The girls were shocked to discover that someone they knew finally created a Web site featuring the pictures for everybody in the world to see.

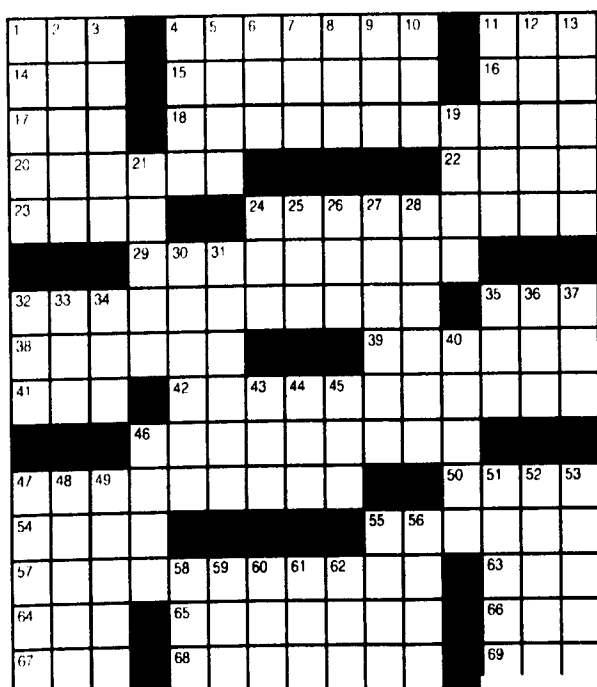


DITHERED TWITS by Stan Waling



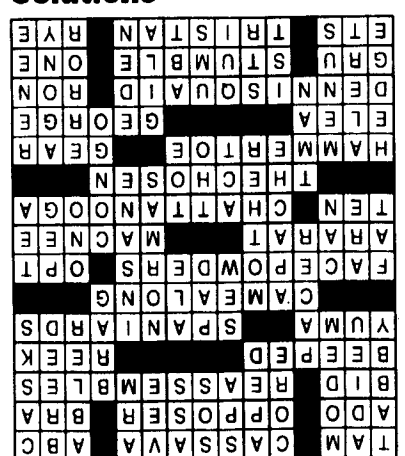
Crossword

- ACROSS
- 1 "O'Shanter"
 - 4 Kind of melon
 - 11 2 on the phone
 - 14 Brouhaha
 - 15 Adversary
 - 16 Half a bikini
 - 17 Auction call
 - 18 Puts back together
 - 20 Honked
 - 22 Stink to high heaven
 - 23 Arizona city
 - 24 Cadiz populace
 - 29 Happened by
 - 32 Compact contents
 - 35 Make a choice
 - 38 Noah's peak
 - 39 "The Avengers" star Patrick
 - 41 Decimal base
 - 42 Choo-choo of song
 - 46 Potok novel
 - 47 Clawlike foot problem
 - 50 Paraphernalia
 - 54 Zeno of
 - 55 One Gershwin
 - 57 "The Big Easy" star
 - 63 Ely or Gant
 - 64 Soviet mil. intelligence
 - 65 Trip
 - 66 United
 - 67 UFO crew
 - 68 Isolde's lover
 - 69 Bread for a Reuben



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Solutions

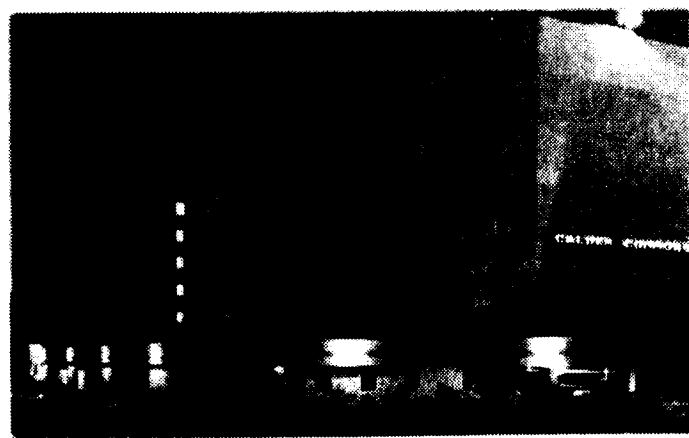


- DOWN
- 1 Pet cat
 - 2 Ta-ta, Therese
 - 3 Computer communicator
 - 4 MacIntosh center
 - 5 Mimicked
 - 6 Mineral spring
 - 7 Call for help
 - 8 Pack animal
 - 9 Two-finger sign
 - 10 Equip with weapons
 - 11 More fit

- 12 Produce offspring
- 13 Barrels
- 19 Promote oneself
- 21 Expectant dad, e.g.
- 24 Stitch
- 25 Launch area
- 26 Beer choice
- 27 Shearer and Zimmer
- 28 Mad
- 30 Cochine or Geronimo
- 31 May honoree
- 32 Overweight
- 33 Exist
- 34 Is qualified to
- 35 Lennon's lover
- 36 Cribbage marker
- 37 Herbal quail
- 40 African river
- 43 False front
- 44 However, for short
- 45 Little piggy
- 46 Fed
- 47 Border bush

- 48 All ears
- 49 Program choices
- 51 Slip-up
- 52 Extreme discomfort
- 53 Taylor or Adoree
- 55 ___ monster
- 58 Idyllic place
- 59 Adherent's suffix
- 59 Orch. section
- 60 On the ___ vive
- 61 Hesitation sounds
- 62 U.S. dance grp.

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