

Con Man Speaker Under Fire, Now Leaving College Circuit

By John Dagley
Staff Writer

Frank W. Abagnale Jr. could have picked up an easy \$2,000 Wednesday by speaking to students at Georgia Southwestern College in Americus about his past as a con man.

Yet, the high-school dropout who apparently had no qualms about cashing \$2.5 million worth of bogus checks, or posing as an airline pilot, doctor, lawyer, college professor and FBI agent, is now drawing the line at collecting money for speaking about these exploits at colleges.

Abagnale, 34, of Houston, wrote college officials a few days ahead of the scheduled speaking engagement and canceled. It was wrong, he wrote, to profit from his criminal past by speaking about it at colleges.

Although he has appeared on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson several times in the past few years and discussed his life as a con man,



Abagnale With Carson on 'Tonight Show'

and although a somewhat boastful book of his exploits ("Catch Me if You Can") was published in 1980, Abagnale wrote in his letter that he is canceling all his college speaking engagements because his cons are "not something to which young impressionable minds should be exposed."

Perhaps more tellingly, he also noted in his letter to Georgia Southwestern College, that "a presenta-

tion at a college opens me to a great deal of unnecessary controversy."

Indeed, a controversy has developed in recent months over whether Abagnale has told the truth in previous college speeches. Doubts have also been cast on the veracity of incidents he related in "Catch Me If You Can."

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