

Campus Life Exposed: Advice from the Inside

By Harlan Cohen

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Reviewed by

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Campus Life Exposed: Advice from the Inside offers a fresh perspective of the trials and tribulations experienced during the college journey. Cohen does an excellent job of presenting contemporary issues facing college students in an entertaining and instructive style. The inspiration for Cohen's book came from his syndicated column, "Help Me Harlan!," which began at the Indiana Daily Student, the campus newspaper at Indiana University. The column afforded college students with an opportunity to express problems or concerns via anonymously written letters so that others with similar experiences could see that they were not alone. Then, in response to the writer, Cohen offered his solution or advice. In this book, Cohen used some of the letters and advice from his column. This format allowed the readers to utilize self-reflection and prepare for certain topics. The response to "Help Me Harlan!" was such a success locally that he added a web-site (www.helpmeharlan.com) to expand the letter and solutions globally. Cohen soon discovered that people held primarily the same concerns regardless of their physical location. He then selected the most common of these and combined them with his own personal experiences to share in this book.

Cohen's insights generally deal with how-to have a successful freshman year in college; however, the information will prove just as valuable in subsequent years. The issues, challenges, and possibilities of a college experience are endless and extend well beyond the classroom. According to the author, numerous factors that play a role in students getting on a track for success versus failure during their college years. The factors include everything from meeting new friends while maintaining former relationships to avoiding becoming a victim of sexual assault.

The first chapter, "...And the Minivan Pulls Away," provides a framework for the choices and the endless limits of the college experience. The author dispels the myth that everyone will have the time of their life in college. Seizing opportunities on campus are the responsibility of the individual, not the institution. No one (not even parents) can learn and make the decisions and choices the student will encounter. Cohen stressed that college supplies more people and resources students get to know themselves than at any other time in their lives. Learning to attempt new things and meet new friends is the first and most valuable lesson learned while in college. The author closed the chapter by placing a strong emphasis on the notion that no matter the circumstances, no one is alone

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and there is probably someone just down the hall that can identify with the issue, but it is up to the student to find them.

The following chapter, “My Disgusting, Angry, Irresponsible, Alcoholic, Pot-smoking Roommate,” examined the challenges of living in a 12’ x 12’ room with someone who may be a stranger, acquaintance, or best friend. Cohen focused on several scenarios to prepare a student for this experience and includes almost every roommate nightmare story ever reported. The chapter outlined the steps to make a room change, but reminds students that before giving up on a stranger, be sure to communicate, compromise, and most importantly, show respect.

The most exciting and dangerous part of campus life is dating. Cohen addressed the myriad of dating issues in four informative chapters. He returned to his earlier theme and encouraged students to be happy with who they are before trying to find that special someone. Unfortunately, this means learning to deal with rejection, not just once, but potentially over and over again. In “Dating and Hooking Up on Campus-The Most Important Chapter,” the Cohen examined the differences between “hooking up,” “seeing someone,” and “dating” on a college campus. He advised that the key to any positive relationship is communication and taking things slowly. This chapter also provided some feedback on how to deal with breaking up.

This led to the chapter “Having Sex on Campus,” focusing on the seriousness of sexual involvement. Cohen discussed the complications involved with having sex before a strong foundation for the relationship is built. The most informative section is a list of truisms and questions to be answered before becoming sexually active. The main emphasis was on having a solid foundation for the relationship and having open, honest communication before taking up the responsibilities of becoming sexually active. Chapter six, “Having No Sex on Campus,” deals with the increasingly popular alternative, chastity or abstinence, through the letters and advice from students exploring how to deal with this decision on abstaining from sexual activity and finding support from others.

Chapter seven, “Sex Souvenirs on Campus,” defines the reality of contacting a sexually transmitted disease (STD). STDs are more common than imagined, and the information and statistics provided in this chapter identify the symptoms and consequences of careless sexual behavior. This chapter should serve as an informative eye-opener for students regardless of their choice to practice abstinence, safe sex, or be promiscuous. A later chapter, “Sexual Assault on Campus,” provides an examination of the frequency of sexual assaults on college women and importance of avoiding situations that may put one at risk. The author provided the reader with a hypothetical typical situation and tips for protection against sexual assault. Cohen concluded the chapter by relating a personal situation to remind others that anyone can be a potential victim.

Another challenge facing incoming college students is alcohol and drug use. “Drinking on Campus,” serves as a warning to college students of the risks involved with alcohol abuse. Choosing to drink is one choice, but Cohen encouraged others to be smart if they decide to drink. The main emphasis revolved around how one minute of careless fun with alcohol can turn into a tragedy that will last a lifetime. “A Sampler of Drugs on Campus,” exposes students to the various types of drugs commonly found on college

campuses. Cohen stressed the importance of not doing drugs but offers facts to consider if one should choose to experiment. The chapter described the different types of drugs with everything from their appearance to the consequences of trying the drug. Cohen places significant importance of how easily experiments with drugs can easily become a habit and examines the consequences.

The concluding chapter, “No One Ever Said College Could Suck, and Other Random Problems,” discussed other problems faced during college. Cohen shared with the reader some of his biggest mistakes he made. He also briefly outlined other issues not previously discussed, and finally, he offered some tips for success in the classroom.

Educating students on these issues before they become a problem is the crucial role of any college orientation program. As new students transition into the college environment, appropriate information and resources should be provided to help them succeed. By training the student orientation leaders and assistants on how to help others deal with these issues, they are prepared to successfully welcome new students and their families and ease some of their anxieties. If I were a college student, *College Life Exposed: Advice from the Inside* and the web-site (www.helpmeharlan.com) would be two of my best friends.