

Dorm Warning

Judith B. Greiman

The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into In College, Harlan Cohen, Sourcebooks Inc., 2005, \$14.95

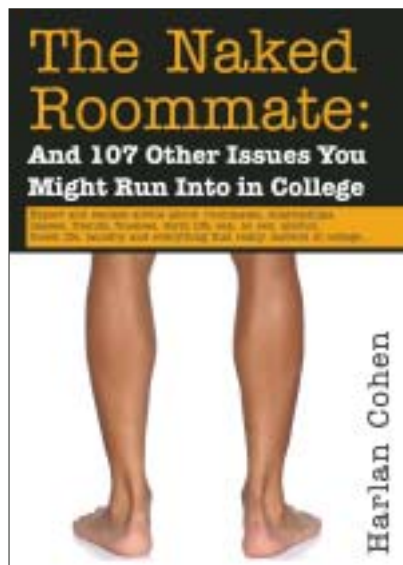
Trekking from campus to campus with 16-year-olds in tow has become the spring and summer activity for many American families. Vacations are planned with proximity to colleges in mind, charts are produced outlining sports offerings, academic standings and geographic settings, and tensions are heightened as parents and teens worry about making the right college choices and completing applications effectively.

In March, a version of this ritual began in my own home. As I wrote this review, I was also checking websites for flight information and juggling college visit schedules for campuses located in cities across the Northeast. At each information session, earnest students and admissions staff tell potential applicants about courses, extracurricular activities, international experiences, food service, facilities and the application process. What they don't cover is how to get through college once you get in.

The Naked Roommate by Harlan Cohen picks up where the admissions tour ends. The book offers practical advice on almost every issue a student might confront when attending college. Written in a lighthearted fashion, the book is structured around 107 tips that are paired with real-life stories, factoids, statistics, advice and practical messages all geared to helping students have an academically and socially successful and healthy college experience.

The author is a syndicated advice columnist for people in their teens and twenties. His *Help Me Harlan!* column is known as much for its humor as its practical advice. The book grew out of Cohen's own difficult transition to college, which necessitated a transfer and the experience of "being a freshman twice." Cohen noted that he never expected to have a problem but struggled to find his place and to get into

the rhythm of college life. He wished that he had had a clearer understanding of the expectations of college.



Based on a 10-year odyssey that included visits to 250 colleges, interviews with 1,000 college students, information sent to his www.helpme-harlan.com website and research culled from various higher education associations and professionals, Cohen's book is filled with real-life examples of the issues and obstacles that students face. As noted in the orientation that begins the book, it is "based on what today's college students are honestly thinking, feeling and doing on today's college campuses."

While geared to students, the book has separate introductory sections for students, parents and educators. Although some of Cohen's introductory comments and asides are a bit too cutesy (he notes in the "Welcome Parents" section that it is a pleasure to meet us) the book is a must read for college administrators who can learn much from the stories reported by students. In fact, Cohen encourages administrators to use the book as a text for "first-year experience" programs and through his website offers a facilitator's guide for such programs.

The Naked Roommate is a fount of good advice ranging from ways to handle difficult roommate issues to dealing with drug and alcohol use, Greek life, technology, campus safety, food,

day-to-day finances, laundry, studying and connecting with campus resources. Students and parents should read the book all at once to get the general sense of things to come and then over the course of the college experience as they confront specific events and issues. The book's format makes it easy to check in on a particular topic when the need arises. Simple chapters are organized around particular themes that are fleshed out with useful tips, each of which is followed by a story, a bottom line and occasional research data. The book's clearheaded and straightforward advice will be useful throughout a college journey. If stranded on a desert island called College, this is the one book that would provide a student with the wherewithal to manage money, bloom socially, soar academically and understand the consequences of behavioral choices.

The common academic theme that runs through the book is that students need to stay focused. Cohen explains in a number of ways that the best things to do to ensure success in college revolve around doing the work, connecting with professors and learning to study in groups. He encourages students to determine early on the grades and experiences that they seek in college and to develop routines that will help them achieve these goals. He does not mince words when outlining what can happen when the wrong choices are made. In discussing studying, Cohen notes, "Minimal work + minimal attendance + minimal effort = minimal grades."

The common social themes of the book are that students need to get out of their rooms to try new things and that the choices they make in the areas of sex and drug and alcohol use can significantly impact their future options. Students will appreciate his lack of proselytizing against drinking and drug use but will understand his clear message that students who cannot drink or use drugs responsibly will need to choose between going to school and using their substance of choice. Students will also warm to his clear understanding of the difficulties

suffered by those used to socializing through instant messaging when faced with real social situations.

The Naked Roommate succeeds as a key source of advice for students and a peek at college life from the student perspective for campus administrators and parents. While most topics and tips are not new, they are organized and reported on in a way that is useful and compelling to the reader. Cohen's fresh contribution to the genre will likely be the first in a series as he continues to seek stories and tips through his website and campus travels.

I might not yet know which institution I think best for my daughter, but I now know which book I will pack in her suitcase as she begins her college journey.

Judith B. Greiman is president of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges.

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- n Number of New England institutions that rank among the top 10 liberal arts colleges nationally in professors' pay: **4**
- n Number of New England institutions that rank among the top 10 public universities nationally in professors' pay: **0**
- n Number of New England institutions among 81 nationwide identified as having a "conscience," meaning their administrators are socially responsible and their students are dedicated to serving society: **20**
- n Number of those that are private colleges: **16**
- n Average salary for New England school superintendents in 2004-05: **\$118,424**
- n Average salary for New England school teachers in 2004-05: **\$51,837**
- n Percentage of Americans who support higher pay for teachers in fields where there are shortages of qualified teachers: **72%**
- n Percentage of teachers who do: **52%**
- n Approximate number of percentage points by which a \$100 increase in per-capita state taxes reduces jobs growth: **0.5**
- n Approximate number of percentage points by which one additional federal misconduct conviction per 100 elected officials in a state reduces jobs growth: **1.1**
- n National ranks of New Hampshire and Vermont, respectively, in federal misconduct convictions per 100 elected officials, 1986-95: **49th, 50th**
- n Number of U.S. eco-villages, residential land trusts, communes, student co-ops, urban housing cooperatives and other "intentional communities" listed with the Missouri-based Fellowship for Intentional Community: **938**
- n Number located in Connecticut: **1**
- n Number located in Vermont: **16**
- n Share of Vermont farms that participate in "agritourism" such as cheese tours, hay rides or overnight stays: **1 in 3**
- n National rank of Maine in percentage of dwelling units that are second homes: **1st**
- n National rank of Vermont: **2nd**
- n Projected median age of Maine residents in 2030: **47**
- n Projected median age of Colorado residents in 2030: **36**
- n Percentage of Maine adults age 25 or over who have bachelor's degrees: **24%**
- n Percentage of Colorado adults age 25 or over who have bachelor's degrees: **36%**
- n Percentage of U.S. college undergraduates who have credit cards: **76%**
- n Of those who have credit cards, percentage who have at least four: **43%**
- n Average credit card interest rate as of May 2005: **13%**
- n Percentage of U.S. and Canadian white-collar workers who have shopped online at work: **72%**
- n Percentage of those who attribute this to faster computer connection speeds at work: **19%**
- n Percentage who attribute it to lack of time outside work: **14%**

Sources: 1,2 CONNECTION analysis of *Chronicle of Higher Education*/American Association of University Professors data; 3,4 CONNECTION analysis of *Colleges with a Conscience* findings, *The Princeton Review* and *Campus Compact*; 5,6 Educational Research Service; 7,8 The Teaching Commission; 9,10,11 *The Connecticut Economy*; 12,13,14 Fellowship for Intentional Community; 15 Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; 16,17 New England Economic Partnership (Maine, 20 percent; Vermont, 12 percent); 18,19 Charles Colgan, *New England Economic Partnership*; 20,21 *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*; 22,23 Nellie Mae; 24 Bankrate.com; 25,26,27 Bentley College and Burke Inc.