

## Preface

The first year of college is an exhilarating experience for Jewish students. It is a year when the rush of adrenaline alone is enough to carry a student forward on most days. Time moves in the extreme, as the excitement of much greater freedom and independence, stimulating courses, and new friends makes everything speed by.

Most students arrive at college without having given thought to their personal and educational goals or how to best take advantage of the rich resources that their college offers. There is so much attention on the business of “getting into college” that too few students and their families take the time necessary to consider how to make the most of the college experience itself. It saddens me to hear students in their junior or senior years of college first begin to realize the opportunity that college holds for them and how they wished they had spent their first years differently. I hope this book will provide more students and their families with the resources and incentive to take the time prior to the start of college and during the first year of college to reflect on the college experience.

Higher education has served as an intellectual and social haven for Jews. Even so, for each individual Jewish student who enters college, it is critical that he or she come intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually prepared for the academic and social experiences that await. College is a qualitatively different experience than high school, and students’

expectations need to be set appropriately. The transition from high school to college is so significant that it can be difficult for most without some preparation. The most successful college students I have known have modeled the advice that follows in this book.

I encourage Jewish students reading this book who will be entering college or who are already in their first year of college to carry these ideas with you to help insure that your transition goes well. Read the tips, digest them, and keep them close by for the many moments when you may need some direction and support. Then brace yourself for the ride of a lifetime—the first year of college.

Every tip and vignette in this book has for me brought up memories of the many wonderful Jewish students I have taught and counseled throughout my career. Each tip and vignette reflects a composite of enlightening experiences and conversations with multiple Jewish students with whom I have worked. It has made the writing of this book very special in a way that is quite different from other books I have authored and edited.

As I have written this book, I have made every attempt to consider the experiences at all types of post-secondary institutions. Given my scholarly work in the higher education field and my travels to small liberal arts colleges, large research universities, and everything in-between, I am confident that the tips presented here apply across institutional types. However, because I have been a faculty member at the University of Michigan for many years, I recognize that I may necessarily be influenced a bit by college life at the large public research university and therefore advise the reader that, on occasion, some tips and vignettes may seem a closer fit for some settings than others.

I feel so fortunate, particularly as a first-generation Jewish college student, to have had the schooling and subsequent scholarly profession that have allowed me to learn, study, and teach throughout my life. I have written and taught about Jewish identity, the American Jewish community, Jewish education, and relations between the American

Jewish community and other racial, religious, and ethnic groups. My University of Michigan sociology courses on Jewish Identity and the Sociology of the American Jewish Community have been among my favorites. I remain in touch with many of my students from those classes, including those who met their Jewish partner in class and subsequently married. All the while I have had the opportunity to put theory into practice, working directly with thousands of intellectually creative, dynamic, and caring college students.

I have been in one or another teaching role since I led Junior Congregation services and tutored Bar/Bat Mitzvah students as a teenager in Philadelphia at Har Zion Temple where my father served for many years as executive director. For many summers I was a camper and then counselor at Camp Ramah; taught in an afternoon Hebrew School; worked as a day-care, nursery school, and elementary school teacher's assistant at alternative and traditional schools both here in the United States and in the British Infant Schools; and earned a secondary school teaching certificate. I fondly recall my daily dinners as a student at the kosher kitchen table at Hillel at the University of Michigan and the opportunity to take a year of independent study in Israel during college. My Ph.D. dissertation, a study of how the Jewish community passes on its culture and traditions in pluralistic America by examining Jewish afternoon schools of various denominations, was named the most outstanding dissertation on Jewish Education, 1970-80, from the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and later revised and published as a book, entitled *Ethnic Survival in America: An Ethnography of a Jewish Afternoon School*.

I am also a scholar, professor, and administrator in higher education and of intergroup relations, focusing on social scientific theory and practice about undergraduate education, K-12 education, social identity, diversity and intergroup dialogue, civic engagement, community, deliberative democracy, and social change. This book, while clearly written for an educated but non-academic audience, is carefully

grounded in the broad scholarship of higher education research and my own extensive practice in the field.

I have spent most of my career working in the area of undergraduate education at the University of Michigan, and I have also given talks, led seminars, and offered consultations and workshops for faculty at more than fifty small and large, private and public, urban and rural, regional and elite colleges and universities. Subsequent to my own education at the University of Michigan, Harvard University, and the University of California at Berkeley, I have been a professor, dean, and vice president for academic affairs and student affairs. I am currently director of the Michigan Community Scholars Program and a member of the faculty of the Sociology and Judaic Studies Departments. In these various roles, I have been involved in almost all aspects of undergraduate education at one time or another, from curriculum committees to diversity and undergraduate initiatives to advisory boards on student life, admissions, wellness, etc. I have both written about and developed initiatives on learning communities, first-year seminars, and intergroup dialogues, among many other topics. I have written extensively about many aspects of higher education and worked closely with inspiring colleagues at colleges and national higher education organizations across the nation who have dedicated their lives to improving undergraduate education in the United States.

Much of my time, commitment, and effort, however, have gone to working directly with undergraduate students, as their teacher, advisor, program director, mentor, and friend. I have benefited enormously from my relationships with my students, growing and learning from each outstanding individual I have met. I hope this book in some small way expresses my gratitude for all that they have given to me.