

## ***College, Covid, and Questions: Tips and Advice for Incoming Freshmen, Undergraduates, Transfer Students, and Parents***

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Suzy Beamer Bohnert's *College, Covid, and Questions: Tips and Advice for Incoming Freshmen, Undergraduates, Transfer Students, and Parents* is a pocket guide, answering questions incoming students frequently have about college and university life. While incoming first-year students are the primary audience for the book, some sections address parents or family members. The thematic organization allows readers to locate areas of interest quickly. While the title suggests an emphasis on COVID-19's impact on higher education, most of the text focuses on traditional aspects of college, including tutoring, essential campus resources and offices, residential life and roommates, clubs and activities, and travel.

### **Overview of Book Sections**

In Section 1, "Coronavirus and College," Bohnert details the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on institutions across the country and what students can expect to see upon arriving on campus for their first semester. Most campuses have instituted new policies or practices to enhance students' safety. To ease the transition to campus housing, for example, Bohnert lists supplies, such as hand sanitizer and extra face masks, that students should bring with them. Other changes students may encounter include virtual or hybrid course offerings, requirements for routine COVID-19 testing for all students and staff, and limitations for group gatherings at events and in dining halls.

Section 2, "Classes," deals with academic support and considerations for students, emphasizing tutoring and technology in higher education.

Bohnert describes the one-on-one tutoring process, including how to prepare for a session. The technology section begins with an overview of the devices students might bring to campus and includes the advantages and disadvantages of various computers, printers, and other tech supplies. Bohnert explains that students may not need to buy some products since many colleges and universities offer printing services and online shared drives.

Bohnert provides an overview of campus resources students can use during college in Section 3, “Administrative and Campus Resources.” For example, she explains the purpose of an Accessibility or Disability Services office and how students can seek accommodations during college. She also discusses the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and student health centers, highlighting students’ privacy rights in the college setting. While selective in her coverage about higher education resources, Bohnert includes transportation services, dining services, and the bookstore. The discussion foregrounds considerations related to meal plans and options for acquiring textbooks and school supplies. Bohnert concludes Section 3 with a discussion of the career center, where she outlines questions students should consider about what internship to pursue and strategies for finding internship opportunities.

Section 4, “Roommates and Residential Life,” contains a detailed list of items students should bring to campus during move-in. Students may want additional protection for their personal property, and Bohnert describes various forms of insurance along with general tips for staying safe on campus. This section offers advice on living with roommates, and Bohnert discusses the importance of building a relationship with one’s roommate and strategies for navigating disagreements if they arise.

Being involved on campus provides an opportunity for incoming students to build connections outside their residence halls and classrooms. Bohnert discusses the importance of student clubs and organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Section 5, “Clubs and Activities.” The section describes how students can find clubs that align with their interests, including ones associated with professional and career goals. Bohnert closes the section by explaining the differences between intramural and club sports.

The book’s final section, “Travel,” concludes with a short section of

questions that address traveling between college and permanent residences. Bohnert discusses different forms of transportation, such as university-sponsored bus programs, that students can consider using if they want to visit home for a weekend or extended break. If students have access to a car, Bohnert suggests apps they can use to find the lowest gas prices, navigate traffic or road closures, and more. Regularly traveling home is not an option for all students, including international students. Bohnert encourages these students to explore possibilities for staying in one's residence hall during extended breaks.

## **Strengths of the Text**

The primary strengths of this book include the breadth of topics offered and the generalizability of information. Bohnert provides sufficient insight into colleges and universities' ever-changing opportunities and structures while maintaining enough generality to accommodate differences among institutions. The book's question-and-answer format makes future reference convenient. As students progress through college, they are likely to find some sections of the book more helpful than at other times. The "Clubs and Activities" and "Roommates and Residence Life" sections are comprehensive, providing a detailed overview that can be particularly valuable for first-generation college students or other underrepresented groups with little familiarity with college structures. Upper-level students may find the section "Internships and the Career Center" more relevant than other sections in the book.

## **Concerns with the Text**

While this book offers an excellent general overview of many aspects of college, the author's style may not make it the best choice for all audiences. Bohnert's language and phrasing do not always meet current expectations for inclusion, and she defaults to he/him/his pronouns and masculine nouns at times (e.g., "a student needs to do what is best for him," "freshman," or "upperclassmen"). At other times, the author relies on gendered stereotypes to describe students' programs of study or career choices (e.g., "your daughter may attend a community college for a massage-therapy program"). In relying on phrasing such as "son or daughter" and "child," the author assumes a gender binary while failing to acknowledge that many college students are independent with caregiving responsibilities for children or other family members.

Additional dated language includes “dorm” when referring to on-campus housing and “special needs” when referring to students who may benefit from accommodations.

Similarly, some of the advice provided assumes access to social and financial capital that may not be the reality for all students (e.g., access to laptops and smartphones and enough frequent flier miles to qualify for a free flight). Further, the author assumes that college entry will be the first time students handle their own finances.

Finally, without warning, the book casually brings up sensitive topics, such as active-shooter situations and methamphetamine (meth) addiction. Unfortunately, the portrayal of meth addiction is highly stereotypical and may be insensitive to students who have experienced addiction personally or through friends or family members.

In addition to issues of style and tone, critical aspects of higher education are missing or underdeveloped in this text. Changing majors is briefly mentioned in the academic advising section (p. 13). Since many students experience questions about what to do if a major is not a good fit, additional discussion is warranted. While the author discusses attending professor’s office hours, further information about forming relationships with professors, including getting involved with research and asking for advice or recommendations, would be helpful. The health services section could be expanded to include mental health symptoms that may warrant a visit to the clinic, as well as suggestions of what to do if a student notices another community member displaying symptoms of mental or emotional distress. Lastly, while offerings vary widely based upon the institution, adding a subsection of multicultural centers and programming into the Campus Resources section would assist students in connecting with pivotal educational and community resources.

## **Text Use in Student Affairs Settings**

Students with limited or no knowledge about college life could benefit from this book because of the breadth of topics and details discussed throughout. This book may also be a successful addition to a first-year studies course or living-learning community for underrepresented or first-generation college students. The text’s question-and-answer format makes it a valuable supplementary resource for orientation ambassadors in a leadership course or training program as it exposes

student leaders to the various questions students and family members are likely to ask and offers model responses that could be refined with institution-specific information. Additionally, this text provides a peek into other areas of campus, providing a possible resource for training collaborations with resident assistants, peer mentors, academic tutors, and other student leaders.

Finally, this book is also a great resource to encourage students and staff to think critically about resources provided to new students and family members. For example, this text could be used to facilitate deeper conversations about assumptions made by professionals and strategies for promoting inclusive spaces on-campus. Exploring the lapses of inclusive language create space for students and others to practice critical reading skills and consider how language and student affairs practice has evolved. Many of these topics exist in other course material and college environments; therefore, engaging in a facilitated debrief of the text's language and assumptions related to students' academic and leadership roles on campus would be valuable. Potential topics for such conversations include inclusive language, gender roles and sexism, sensitivity to potential triggers, classism, accessibility, and critical perspectives of texts.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, Bohnert covers many topics incoming students might have questions about, making it a helpful pocket guide for those interested in knowing about different aspects of college life. While this book contains valuable information, student affairs practitioners should examine it carefully before adoption. In particular, they should consider the student populations with whom they work to determine whether the content would support these students during their transition. It would be impractical to assume a text of this scope could serve as a relevant guide to every student regardless of institutional context; therefore, practitioners using the book in an academic setting should supplement it with targeted resources specific to student needs. Despite some limitations, this book can serve a range of students and professionals in the orientation and transition setting.