The Press OF ATLANTIC CITY
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A Real College Textbook: How to Avoid Jail and Other Legal Woes

August 24, 2005

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Odds are good you won't find it on any syllabus, but *The College Student's Guide to the Law* may just be the most popular book on campus this fall.

Hey, the subhead alone is enough to make it an undergrad bestseller: "Get a Grade Changed, Keep Your Stuff Private, Throw a Police-Free Party, and MORE!"

For student bodies everywhere, 15 words have never held such promise. You'd think the book's author, C.L. Lindsay III, was a reformed bad boy imparting harsh lessons learned the hard way. Instead he was a resident advisor, a guy who'd have used his book to learn the boundaries of search and seizure law and how it might impact the university.

"I knew," he says, "lots of people in college who could have used this book, though."

In 341 pages, Lindsay uses a relaxed, humorous tone to discuss such weighty topics as grade changes, cyber issues and harassment. The former labor and employment attorney is now better known as the "keg party lawyer" (see Chapter 14, Alcohol & Parties) still had quite the battle on his hands when writing.

After all, how many 18-year-olds do you know who, when searching for recreational reading, will think to themselves, "Hmmm, the law book looks like a fun read."

"That's the No. 1 challenge, to make it palatable," says Lindsay, founder of the Coalition for Student & Academic Rights. "What we'd like to communicate more than anything is that just because it's law, that doesn't have to make it deadly boring."

At Rowan University, assistant dean of students Joe Mulligan was sufficiently intrigued by an online description of the book to order a few copies. In charge of student discipline at the school, Mulligan says the guide could be a worthwhile tool, though at first glance it appears to be equal parts preventive and conspiratorial.

"Students educate themselves more when their attention is drawn to something," he says. "From that perspective, (this) could be a very positive influence for students."

Despite outward appearances, Lindsay's guide doesn't preach anarchy so much as self-education. He hasn't fielded much static from critics yet, but assumes it will come. He addresses positive behaviors such as responsibly handling cash and campus activism but doesn't shy away from the negative - hello chapters on drinking and cheating.

"I don't make kids drink liquor underage. They're doing it, and these are just the laws they are going to be governed by," he says. "Everybody has a right to know what the laws are, how they're adjudicated and how people are caught if they disobey them. It's not secret information, it's just packaged a little differently."

Still, he's continually surprised by how many students don't know the law, even as he admits to being the same way as an undergraduate.

It's understandable. College may be the first time many students have an opportunity to get into jams requiring a little legal know-how. In Mulligan's experience, they don't bother with boning up on the rules and regs until they've violated them.

"I'm not surprised by it anymore. There's a degree of apathy among students, a degree of invincibility," Mulligan says. "Some students don't intend to go out there and break a rule, break a law, so their not necessarily looking into it beforehand."

But the law is a tool every student has at their disposal. If they pick up the guide, Lindsay hopes that is what they will learn.

"I hope they embrace the concept that they need to know the rules, that's the first step for everything. You need to understand rights and rules in order to really function as a person today," he says. "And secondly, the law isn't boring. It doesn't have to be."