

Part I

LESSONS LEARNED AT COLLEGE

Since we are about to embark on a journey together, it may be helpful for me to map out the course for you. Part I of our story focuses on the lessons I've learned as a student and a professor. It consists of five chapters.

In the first chapter, you'll learn what I learned with my students: how and why the answer is always false, how "stupid Jim stories" are a useful tool for making deposits in emotional bank accounts, and that Break Stuff Day is the best day of the year.

In chapter 2, the focus shifts to lessons learned with colleagues. I'll introduce you to Dean Shepard (a master storyteller), Professor Canard Quidnunc (his name says it all), and Professor Johnny "Just Tell me the Rules" Dawkins, as well as President Art Heyman and Professor Lindsay Harding (both rare examples of very effective academic leaders).

Chapter 3 addresses lessons learned while serving on academic committees. We'll consider the differences between equity and equality, the challenges of recruiting an academically talented and diverse student body (by buying the students you want), and

the role, if any, of athletics and Greek life on a college campus. You may be a bit surprised when you learn how the sausage is made.

The lessons I learned with students one-on-one as part of my mentoring duties are explored in chapter 4. Once again, my focus is on working with students, the best part of my time in academia.

Finally, in chapter 5, we'll discuss the importance of well-established core values when one is called upon to make difficult decisions. You'll learn that my professional core value was simply *Do what is best for students*. Implementing it, however, was rarely simple.

Batten down the hatches—our journey is about to begin.⁴

4 An intro to part I should only describe the content of the first part of the book. I feel the need, however, to place part I in context with parts II and III, so I'll do that in this footnote (since I've decided that I can do whatever I want in footnotes). Take a moment to look up Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Marriage*. Now imagine Jan sketching a draft of his painting in three stages. First, he pencils in the two main characters. They are the defining features of the image—it simply doesn't earn its title without them. But he's not done. Next, he gets the idea to insert the convex mirror. That's my favorite part of his painting. For me, it ties the whole thing together, converting a fairly standard portrait into a masterpiece. Finally, he adds several interesting details, including the dog, the single burning candle in the chandelier, and the light from the window illuminating the back half of the portrait. It is the sum of these parts that results in van Eyck's masterpiece (in my eyes).

So what's the analogy? Part I of my non-masterpiece defines the central themes of the book. Without this first part, there is no story about lessons learned in academia. In part II, I change tack and investigate how the lessons I learned with my family, friends, and pub pals are inextricably linked to my collegiate lessons. Like Jan's mirror, they complement the main theme and add richness to the work. Finally, in part III, I explain how my wife and I prepared to transition into retirement. You'll learn about the summary lessons I shared with my students and colleagues during my last year on campus, culminating in my Last Lecture. Like van Eyck's dog, candle, and lighting, those details round out the story.