The many rules of the Potsdam Normal School

Welcome to the Potsdam Normal School! The year is 1941. The SUNY system won’t exist for another seven years, and things are run a little differently from what you’re used to. But never fear. The P.N.S. handbook is here to ease you into campus life.

The first thing to know about are the Student Councils. There are two – the men’s and the women’s – and they wield quite a bit more power than SUNY Potsdam’s SGA. As the handbook says, “we’re proud of the fact that democracy functions here.” Advised by the faculty, the Councils create the rules and regulations that you’ll follow throughout your education [tenure? There’s a word].

The male Normalite is faced with about half a page of regulations, mostly laying out housing requirements and procedures. Freshmen, though, should be sure to wear their Freshman Caps “except on Sundays and on such formal occasions as will be designated by the Men’s Student Council…”

If you count yourself a member of the fairer sex, you’re in good company. Out of the 147 students in the class of ’44, fully 86% were women. The Women’s Student Council keeps just a few rules, “such that the students have a maximum of freedom consistent with their own health and the reputation of the school.”

First -- outfits. “If you would be in the swim at P.N.S., shut your eyes, hold your nose, and – go collegiate! With sweaters and skirts, and flatheeled shoes.” Also recommended are wool dresses, galoshes, boots, and a winter coat. For formals and sorority teas, pack your best dress, hat, gloves, and even high heeled shoes. For the school recreational program (“remember you HAVE to put in AT LEAST TWO HOURS in a week”), your favorite sports clothes are fine. “Also, be hereby advised that slacks and shorts are not required or even recommended for girls who aren’t built for them!”

Freshmen women are required to wear green armbands (“on the left arm **above the elbow**”), except on Sundays and for social functions. And all freshmen are required “to speak **first** to all upperclassmen and **to open doors for them**”. In the first week or two, there is a test on the P.N.S. rules, policies, and school songs. So, study up!

First-years are also subject to a stricter curfew. Freshmen women must return to their houses by 8 p.m., except on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and one other night per week, when they may stay out until 10:30 pm. A student may “borrow” an extra 10:30 by forfeiting their next weekly 10:30, or two weekend 10:30’s. Permission to borrow a 10:30 must be obtained from the Dean of Women – one Patience Haggard. Upperclassmen who maintain a C average or higher are permitted to stay out until 10:30 every night. In any case, girls have to sign out if they’re going to be out after eight o’clock, and sign back in when they return. Students are free to leave their house at any time after sunrise, if not in the company of a man.

[special permissions for:

* Library
* Study at friends
* Exercise
* Overnight stays at friends
* 20-minute business appointments
* Picnics (chaperoned)
* Concerts
* Radio concert permission (house with men) – DEAN
* Social functions
* Hockey games

Church parties use up the 10:30 ]

Speaking of men, men and women are not allowed to live in the same house, and “at no time may girls go above the first floor in houses occupied by men… unless a special permission is obtained from the Dean.” Women’s houses are closed after 10:30, and no men are allowed without permission from the Dean and the house mother. Chaperones are required whenever girls are in houses occupied by men, which is allowed only during the intermissions of school dances, or with special permission from the Dean. “… the practice of sitting on men’s porches is indeed frowned upon: the grass isn’t any greener from their porches.” Any date with a man before 8 a.m. requires, you guessed it, special permission from the Dean.

While students shouldn’t have any problems following these minor rules, [… ]

“The student who so fails to measure up to her individual responsibility is honor bound to report herself to the president of the Student Council within three days.” The Council has several ways of dealing with misbehaving students. For a minor crime, a student forfeits their 10:30 for the week. The next step up is ‘Campus’. A student hit with ‘Campus’ may only go directly to and from school and church. “Under no circumstances is she to have a date, walk with men, or be seen downtown.” The most serious punishment is Social Probation. Social Probation is employed “when it is felt that the student needs a great deal of help with her adjustment.” If such a student breaks even the most minor rule, the Student Council will recommend her to the President for suspension.

The members of the Student Council “hope that these rules do not scare you”, and highlight the year’s many social events, including the Halloween party, the Christmas medieval feast, and the Ice Carnival.