The many, 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 bit differently from how you might be used to. But never fear. The 1941 P.N.S. handbook is here to ease new students into campus life.

The first thing an incoming Normalite needs to know about is the Student Council. Actually, there are two – the men’s and the women’s – and they wield quite some power on campus. In the words of the P.N.S. handbook, “we’re proud of the fact that democracy functions here,” and the Normal School’s elected representatives enact the laws its students will obey.

The male collegiate is faced with about a half page of regulations. It’s mostly housing procedures, but Freshmen must be sure to wear their Freshmen 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 entering in 1941, fully 86% were women. The Student Council does have a few rules for girls, “such that the students have a maximum of freedom consistent with their own health and the reputation of the school.”

First – the 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 your winter coat. For formals and sorority teas, students should wear their best dresses, hats, gloves, and even their high heeled shoes. When it comes to the school recreational program (“remember you HAVE to put in AT LEAST TWO HOURS in a week”), some normal 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 two weeks of school, there will be a test on the P.N.S. rules, policies, and school songs. So -- study up collegiate!

First-years are also subject to a stricter curfew. Freshmen girls have to be home by 8 p.m., except on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and one other night per week, when they may stay out until 10:30 pm. Students may “borrow” an extra 10:30 by forfeiting their next weekly 10:30, or two weekend 10:30’s. Permission to borrow must be obtained from the Dean of Women – one Patience Haggard. Upperclassmen who maintain a C average or higher are allowed to stay out until 10:30 every night. In either case, (female) students 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.

For certain activities, special permission may be obtained to stay out, without using up the week’s 10:30. Excused activities include: studying at the library, overnight stays with friends, 20-minute business appointments, picnics (chaperoned), exercise, school social functions, and hockey games. Church parties are not excused activities, and will use up the weekly 10:30. With special permission from the Dean, women may also attend radio broadcasts of concerts in houses occupied by men.

On that subject, “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 there may be no male visitors without special permission the Dean and the house mother. Chaperones are required whenever girls are in houses occupied by men, which can only happen only during the intermissions of school dances, or with special permission from the Dean. Also, “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. obviously requires special permission from the Dean.

The Student Council recognizes that some students may find it difficult to adjust to the college environment. For those situations, the P.N.S. handbook includes a section of standard penalties. In the case of any infraction, “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.” For a minor misdemeanor, a student forfeits her weekly 10:30. A more serious incident might result in ‘Campus’. A student subject to ‘Campus’ is restricted to attending 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, employed “when it is felt that the student needs a great deal of help with her adjustment.” If such a student violates even the most minor rule, she will be recommended to the Principal for immediate suspension.

The Student Council wishes to remind students that “the reputation of students is only as good as that of the school they attend,” and to highlight this year’s many social events, including the Halloween party, the Christmas feast, and the Ice Carnival.

Style notes:  
The weird capitalization comes from the handbook

Emphasis in quotes is the handbook’s