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All Set... To Go Where?

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by Jean Hartsell, H.Jl., 4

This is a true story. It wasn’t meant to be, but it is. The girl’s name is Dottie Hansen. She’s a senior at Iowa State. She could be any senior at any college or university. Her major happens to be Home Economics journalism, but it could be anything.

Dottie is graduating in just two months, and she’s begun to have doubts. . . . What is she really prepared to do?

Are you wondering why Dottie is having doubts so close to graduation, the goal she’s been working toward for so long? This is what has happened to her in the four years she’s been in college.

Dottie Hansen wasn’t always a senior. Three and one-half years ago she was a new freshman. In September her parents brought her to the University and left her—a strange city, among thousands of strange people—to go to college, which she’d only read about.

During registration she was handed a yellow carboned copy of a schedule that had been made out for her months before by a group of people who knew a great deal about the University, but very little about Dottie Hansen, except that she was a new freshman, had no previous college experience, and had stated she wanted to enroll in the College of Home Economics.

Dottie looked at the schedule handed to her. It was barely legible, so many copies had been made at one time. She eventually distinguished the writing, but the abbreviations baffled her.

C-h-e-m.; A. A.; F&N; H.-E-q.; and H.-E-c. Let’s see; she recognized the c-h-e-m. as chemistry. (She’d had that in high school.) And the E-n-g-l. as English. But what does A. A. stand for, and F&N, and H.-E-q.? H.-E-c. is home economics, but can they teach it all in one course?

And Dottie didn’t find the answers to these questions until she got a chance to talk to her sophomore adviser that night because her freshman friends hadn’t known either. Their schedules had the same funny marks on them, and others even more strange. Yes, Dottie learned that A. A. meant applied art, H.-E-q., household equipment, F&N, food and nutrition, and H.-E-c. stood for an orientation course in Home Economics.

At 9 o’clock that same evening she went to the first house meeting in her dormitory. As the girls wandered downstairs and found seats in the strange new parlors she looked at the faces of the girls around her. She recognized a few of them. Many of the faces she hadn’t seen in the few days she’d been there and she felt terribly alone.

The president of the dorm introduced herself and the other dormitory officers. All of them were sophomores or juniors. They looked so sure of themselves. Then the president was urging that “winter quarter each of you will apply for a dormitory office before elections.” Or apply to be a freshman adviser here next year. Activities are important, they show future employers what you’re really doing in college, and your residence is the most important activity. May

we have nominations for liaison to Cardinal Guild? You probably don’t know what this position is, but we’ll tell you a little about it and may we have nominations please? Nominations for floor representative to sit in on house council meetings to represent you! May we have nominations, nominations! VOLUNTEERS! NOMINATIONS! That’s all—good night.”

The next day Dottie had an appointment with her faculty adviser along with 15 other freshman girls.

“My name is . . . I’ll read the roll. Please indicate your presence—choose your activities carefully—better to have too few than too many—study hard—get good grades—don’t get into too many activities—learn to say no—study—get good grades. He sure you participate actively in your departmental club—it’s the most important activity—future employers want you to be active in your departmental club. Be thinking about your major so you can declare it spring quarter . . . That’s all.”

And so Dottie’s first quarter started. She carried the yellow carboned schedule everywhere she went for the first two weeks. She went to class when the yellow carboned schedule said she should go to classes, where she was told to go by the pink sheets on the bulletin boards in the different buildings. And when the first final week rolled around, she answered the questions her instructors asked her as best she could.

The second quarter, Dottie didn’t find registration quite as baffling, and she wasn’t as much alone. A few of her friends had come with her because they too were still frightened. She was given another yellow carboned schedule that had been made out months before by the same people who know a great deal about the college, but who still didn’t know much about Dottie Hansen. Dottie was a second quarter freshman now. Slowly she was progressing through the machine that is called education. She knew now what the abbreviations
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for the names of courses meant, and she knew through helpful upperclassmen what instructors to hope she wouldn't get.

Dottie was amazed at the number of familiar faces in her classes second quarter. Then she realized the yellow carboned schedules had been made out first, and the names written in later. But still she progressed. The knowledge was poured out in books and lectures. The tests were handed out, and Dottie and the others squirted the answers back to the instructors on the exams like the proverbial sponge. And those who didn't squirt so well disappeared.

Spring quarter came with another yellow carboned schedule and new and different courses, but by now Dottie was getting used to the routine. Then the cards started coming in the mail. "Declare your major; come make out your own schedule for next year; I'm your new adviser and I'll help you. Fill in what's missing in your record—what are your activities? What is your grade point? Make out your schedule—take your time—hurry up—don't make snap decisions! My time is limited."

Now Dottie's a senior. She's almost completed a course of study at Iowa State University. She's grown accustomed to hearing instructors tell her at the beginning of the quarter that they want to make the course meet her individual needs. She's taken copies of the mimeographed assignment sheets as they are passed around to the class each quarter, each one just exactly like all the others. She's taken the exams given periodically—each examination just like the other examinations the other students are taking. She's become a part of the system.

When a well-meaning instructor does try to make assignments that will benefit individual interests, the students kill it with their own system. They collect as many of the same assignments done in other quarters by other students as they can, and although the subject matter of their papers is not the same, they all boil down to the same pattern in a short time. Students who may have new and fresh ideas are afraid to use them for fear they may be too different and for that reason unacceptable.

But the exams are just the same. Everyone learns the same things and learns them well, at least for a time, or they're out looking for a job much sooner than they expected, without the benefit of a college degree. Soak it up, Dottie—squirt it back. Soak it up—squirt it back. Soak it up—squirt it back. The quarter is over, Dottie, forget that, there's more ahead. Soak it up—squirt—soak—squirt!

Learn to think for yourself, take time to think for yourself, but don't forget the paper that's due next week. Study for your exams—think—study—write papers—but think, Dottie. Think!

Can you answer these questions Dottie, and do these things? Surely you can, you've done them all before. When was movable type invented? What is the consumer's role in price-setting? Who founded the New York Herald? What type face is this? How many people will this pancake recipe serve? What's wrong with this lay-out? What printing process was used on this illustration? Choose a dress in a magazine and make your own pattern from studying the picture. What's the difference in the function of shortening in a pie crust and in a cake? Shall I stop, Dottie? Can't you remember, Dottie? You've answered all these questions before, Dottie. You've done all these things before. Try Dottie—try! Name and explain as many symbols as you can remember from Faulkner's works, Dottie, quickly Dottie, we've only so much time. Are you confused? Why can't you remember the test for determining if a cotton fabric has been treated with a resin finish?

Where are you going to get a job, Dottie? Are your grades high enough? Are they too high? Have you been in enough activities? Too many? Too few? But most important of all, Dottie, can you get along with people Well enough? Too well?

Did you work your way through school, Dottie? Why not? Tsk! Tsk! Bad risk! Is your personality well-rounded, Dottie? Do you have a creative mind? What do you mean you don't know? You've been to college, Dottie, you've almost got a degree now.