

An Academic Costume Code and An Ceremony Guide

Historical Overview

The origins of academic dress date back to the 12th and 13th centuries, when universities were taking form. The ordinary dress of the scholar, whether student or teacher, was the dress of a cleric. With few exceptions, the medieval scholar had taken at least minor orders, made certain vows, and perhaps been tonsured. Long gowns were worn and may have been necessary for warmth in unheated buildings. Hoods seem to have served to cover the tonsured head until superseded for that purpose by the skull cap.

A statute of the University of Coimbra in 1321 required that all "Doctors, Licentiates, and Bachelors" wear gowns. In England, in the second half of the 14th century, the statutes of certain colleges forbade "excess in apparel" and prescribed the wearing of a long gown. In the days of Henry VIII of England, Oxford and Cambridge first began prescribing a definite academic dress and made it a matter of university control even to the extent of its minor details.

The assignment of colors to signify certain faculties was to be a much later development, and one which was to be standardized only in the United States in the late 19th century. White taken from the white fur trimming of the Oxford and Cambridge B.A. hoods, was assigned to arts and letters. Red, one of the traditional colors of the church, went to theology. Green, the color of medieval herbs, was adopted for medicine, and olive, because it was so close to green, was given to pharmacy. Golden yellow, standing for the wealth which scientific research has produced, as assigned to the sciences.

European institutions have always had great diversity in their specifications of academic dress and this has been a source of confusion. In contrast, American colleges and universities opted for a definite system that all might follow. A significant contribution to the development of this system was made by Gardner Cotrell Leonard of Albany, New York. Mr. Leonard designed gowns for his class at Williams College in 1887 and had them made by Cotrell and Leonard, a firm established by his family in Albany, New York. He was greatly interested in the subject and following the publication of an article by him on academic dress in 1893, he was invited to work with an Intercollegiate Commission made up of representatives of leading institutions to establish a suitable system of academic apparel. The Commission met at Columbia University in 1895 and adopted a code of academic dress, which besides regulating the cut and style and materials of the gowns, prescribed the colors which were to represent the different fields of learning.

In 1932 the American Council on Education authorized the appointment of a committee "to determine whether revision and completion of the academic code adopted by the conference of the colleges and universities in 1895 is desirable at this time, and, if so, to draft a revised code and present a plan for submitting the code to the consideration of the institutional members of the Council." The committee reviewed the situation through correspondence and approved a code for academic costumes that has been in effect since that year.

The Academic Costume Code

A Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies, appointed by the American Council on Education in 1959, again reviewed the costume code and made several changes. In 1986, the committee updated the code and added a sentence clarifying the use of the color dark blue for the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree.

Gowns

Pattern

Gowns recommended for use in the colleges and universities of this country have the following characteristics. The gown for the bachelor's degree has pointed sleeves. It is designed to be worn closed. The gown for the master's degree has an oblong sleeve, open at the wrist, like the others. The sleeve base hangs down in the traditional manner. The rear part of its oblong shaped is square cut, and the front part has an arc cut away. The gown is so designed and supplied with fasteners that it may be worn open or closed. The gown for the doctor's degree has bell-shaped sleeves. It is so designed and supplied with fasteners that it may be worn open or closed.

Material

As a means of adaptation to climate, the material of the gowns may vary from very light to very heavy provided that the materials, color, and pattern follow the prescribed rules.

Color

Black is recommended. (For permissible exceptions, see below.)

Trimmings

Gowns for the bachelor's or master's degrees are untrimmed. For the doctor's degree, the gown is faced down the front with black velvet; three bars of velvet are used across the sleeves. These facings and crossbars may be of velvet of the color distinctive of the disciplines to which the degree pertains, thus agreeing in color with the binding or edging of the hood appropriate to the particular doctor's degree in every instance.

For all academic purposes, including trimmings of doctors' gowns, edging of hoods, and tassels of caps, the colors associated with the different disciplines are as follows:

Agriculture	Maize
Arts, Letters, Humanities	White

Commerce, Accountancy, Business	Drab
Dentistry	Lilac
Economics	Copper
Education	Light Blue
Engineering	Orange
Fine Arts, including Architecture	Brown
Forestry	Russet
Journalism	Crimson
Law	Purple
Library Science	Lemon
Medicine	Green
Music	Pink
Nursing	Apricot
Oratory (Speech)	Silver Gray
Pharmacy	Olive Green
Philosophy	Dark Blue
Physical Education	Sage Green
Public Administration, including Foreign Service	Peacock Blue
Public Health	Salmon Pink
Science	Golden Yellow
Social Work	Citron
Theology	Scarlet
Veterinary Science	Gray

In some instances American makers of academic costumes have divided the velvet trimming of the doctor's gown in such a fashion as to suggest in the same garment two or more doctor's degrees. Good precedent directs that a single degree from a single institution should be indicated by a single garment.

Pattern

As usually followed by American colleges and universities, but following the specifications listed below.

Material

In all cases the material must be the same as that of the gown.

Color

Black, in all cases.

Length

The length of the hood worn for the bachelor's degree must be three feet, for the master's degree three and one-half feet, and for the doctor's degree, four feet. The hood worn for the doctor's degree only shall have panels at the sides.

Linings

The hoods are to be lined with the official color or colors of the college or university conferring the degree; more than one color is shown by division of the field color in a variety of ways, chevron or chevrons, equal division, etc. The various academic costume companies maintain complete files on the approved colors for various institutions.

Trimmings

The binding or edging of the hood is to be velvet or velveteen, two inches, three inches, and five inches wide for the bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees, respectively; the color should be indicative of the subject to which the degree pertains (see above). For example, the trimming for the degree of Master of Science in Agriculture should be maize, representing agriculture, rather than golden yellow, representing science. No academic hood should ever have its border divided to represent more than a single degree.

In the case of the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, the dark blue color is used to represent the mastery of the discipline of learning and scholarship in any field that is attested to by the awarding of this degree and is not intended to represent the field of philosophy.

Material

Cotton poplin, broadcloth, rayon, or silk, to match gown are to be used; for the doctor's degree only, velvet.

Form. Mortarboards are generally recommended.

Color. Black.

Tassel

A long tassel is to be fastened to the middle point of the top of the cap only and to lie as it will thereon. The tassel should be black or the color appropriate to the subject, with the exception of the doctor's cap that may have a tassel of gold.

Shoes and other articles of visible apparel worn by graduates should be of dark colors that harmonize with the academic costume. Nothing else should be worn on the academic gown.

Only member of the governing body of a college or university, whatever their degrees, are entitled to wear doctor's gowns (with black velvet), but their hoods may be only those of degrees actually held by the wearers or those especially prescribed for them by the institution.

The chief marshal may wear a specially designed costume approved by the institution.

It is customary in many large institutions for the hood to be dispensed with by those receiving bachelor's degrees.

Persons who hold degrees from foreign universities may wear the entire appropriate academic costume, including cap, gown, and hood.

Members of religious orders may suitably wear their customary habits. The same principle applies to persons wearing military uniforms or clad in special attire required by a civil office.

It is recommended that collegiate institutions that award degrees, diplomas, or certificates below the baccalaureate level use caps and gowns of a light color, e.g., light gray.

In light of large numbers of requests for advice about academic dress, the Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies offers the following observations and recommendations for the guidance of colleges and universities in making decisions about regalia for ceremonial occasions.

First

It should be noted that it is impossible (and probably undesirable) to lay down enforceable rules with respect to academic costume. The governing force is tradition and the continuity of academic symbols from the Middle Ages. The tradition should be departed from as little as possible, not only to preserve the symbolism of pattern and color, but for practicality as well (when radical changes are adopted manufacturing problems and scarcity of inventory may ensue).

Second

The fundamental guidelines of the academic costume code may be adapted to local conditions. Such adaptations are entirely acceptable as long as they are reasonable and faithful to the spirit of the traditions which give rise to the code. They are not acceptable when they further subdivide the recognized disciplines and designate new colors for such subdivisions. The spectrum of colors which manufacturers can utilize and which can be clearly identified as distinct from other colors is, for all practical purposes, exhausted. Problems may arise with emerging broad interdisciplinary areas; it is recommended that these be resolved by using the color of the discipline most nearly indicative of the new area. New disciplinary designations for colors traditionally assigned would not be readily recognizable or useful.

Third

In response to a number of questions about gowns and hoods appropriate to the associate degree, the committee's recommendation is

That the gown be of the same type as worn by recipients of the bachelor's degree,

That the color of the gown be light gray, and

That the hood be of the same shape as the one worn by Bachelor of Arts except that it have no velvet border, that the institutional colors be on the lining, and that the outside be black.

Fourth

Six-year specialist degrees (Ed.S., etc.) and other degrees that are intermediate between the master's and the doctor's degree may have hood specially designed

Intermediate in length between the master's and doctor's hood,

With a four-inch velvet border (also intermediate between the widths of the borders of master's and doctor's hoods), and

With color distributed in the usual fashion and according to the usual rules. Cap tassels should be uniformly black.

Fifth

As a particular courtesy to guests who are expected to wear academic costume, institutions should provide robes and mortarboards of an appropriate type, even if hoods cannot be supplied.

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An Academic Ceremony Guide

In response to numerous requests from institutions, the Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies in 1959 prepared the following academic ceremony guide:

Many factors, such as the nature of the institution, the size of the graduating class, the weather, and the place of the ceremony (indoors or outdoors), affect the details of the various kinds of academic ceremonies. Institutions have wide latitude in meeting these conditions. It is therefore recognized that the following suggestions do not answer all pertinent questions concerning any specific ceremony.

Caps

Those wearing academic costumes always wear their caps in academic processions and during the ceremony of conferring degrees. Men may remove caps during prayer, the playing of the national anthem and the alma mater, and at other specified times, e.g., during the baccalaureate sermon or the commencement address. It is traditional that all such actions be done in unison. Hence, the plan for each ceremony should be carefully prepared in advance. The participants should be notified beforehand and someone (usually the presiding officer) should be designated to give the cues for removing and replacing the caps.

There is no general rule for the position of the tassel on a mortarboard. However, numerous institutions have adopted the practice, during commencement exercises, of requiring candidates for degrees to wear the tassels on the right front side before degrees are conferred and to shift them to the left at the moment when degrees are awarded to them. This custom is, in some respects, a substitute for individual hooding.

Gowns

At ceremonies where degrees are conferred, it is proper for a candidate to wear the gown in keeping with the degree to be received.

Hoods

If a person holds more than one academic degree, he or she may wear only one hood at a time. The hood worn should be appropriate to the gown.

The traditional rule is that a candidate for a degree should not wear the hood of that degree until it is actually conferred. This rule still applies to those who are to be individually hooded during the commencement ceremony; they should not wear the hoods in the preliminary academic procession. However, when degrees are to be conferred en masse, without individual hooding, the groups involved, e.g., master's degree candidates at large universities, may wear their hoods in the preliminary procession and throughout the ceremony.

Many institutions have dispensed entirely with bachelors' hoods. It is quite appropriate for the bachelor's gown to be worn without a hood.

There is a wide variation in customs concerning academic processions. In some institutions, the procession is led by a mace bearer, in others by the chief marshal. Either may be followed by a color guard. (On some occasions the colors are displayed on the stage and are not moved during the ceremony.) At some institutions there are more divisions in the procession than are indicated below, e.g., church dignitaries. Such groups have traditional places in the procession, determined by the individual institution.

The Preliminary Procession. The commencement procession is usually composed of the following divisions:

- The speakers, trustees, administrative officers, and other members of the platform party
- The faculty
- Candidates for degrees, with candidates for advanced degrees in the lead and others in groups according to the degrees for which they are candidates

The divisions may march in the above order, or in reverse order. If the latter procedure is chosen, the candidates for degrees after reaching their seats, face toward the center aisle as a mark of respect while the faculty and trustees proceed to their places.

The Commencement Ceremony. The essential elements of the ceremony are the conferring of degrees and the commencement address. Earned degrees are usually conferred in ascending order, with baccalaureate degrees first and doctorates last. Honorary degrees are conferred, with

individual citations, after the earned degrees. (At some institutions, this order is reversed, with baccalaureate degrees conferred last.)

The Subsequent Procession. The platform party and faculty leave the hall in that order. Recipients of degrees may be required to join the procession or may be permitted to disperse from their seats when the first two divisions have left the hall.

The preliminary procession for the baccalaureate service differs from that for commencement exercises in the following main respects:

- The platform party, faculty, and degree candidates most frequently march in that order
- Candidates for degrees are not required to march in a special order determined by degrees to be conferred

The Preliminary Procession. When a president or chancellor of a college or university is to be inaugurated, it is traditional for the academic procession to include at least the following divisions in the following order:

1. Delegates of colleges and universities arranged according to the dates when the respective institutions were founded
2. Delegates of learned societies and associations
3. The faculty
4. The trustees
5. The speakers and other dignitaries in the president's party, with the person to be inaugurated marching alone at the very end of the procession

The Ceremony. The essential components of the ceremony are the installations, usually by the chair of the board of trustees, and the inaugural address by the new head of the institution. Additional addresses preceding the inaugural address may be made by representatives of governments, churches, other institutions, alumni, etc., as appropriate.

The Subsequent Procession. The newly inaugurated president or chancellor leads the procession from the hall, followed by the five divisions listed above, in reverse order.

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