

University Uniforms: The Standardization of Academic Dress in the United States

by Robert Armagost

Academic costume—the regalia of the educational army.

(Gardner C. Leonard)

Introduction

There are a number of scholars tracing the labyrinthian turns that the history of academic dress has taken at specific schools. In a way, this paper is about one event—the meeting of the leaders of some colleges in New York on 16 May 1895. This paper analyses the influences on that meeting, the results of that meeting, the revisions of that meeting’s outcomes and how all of this has been interpreted from then to now. Most reference material giving the history of academic dress in the United States provides a short synopsis that can basically be summed up as follows. Dissatisfied with the state of academic dress in America, a student named Gardner Cotrell Leonard designed the graduation gowns for his class at Williams College and his ideas on academic dress were published in *University Magazine* in December of 1893. A committee met, the story goes, in 1895 at Columbia College and with Leonard as a consultant adopted a non-binding Intercollegiate Costume Code. The Code was later readopted with revisions by American Council on Education. Major changes were made by committee in 1959 and only one minor change regarding PhD colour was made by committee in 1986.

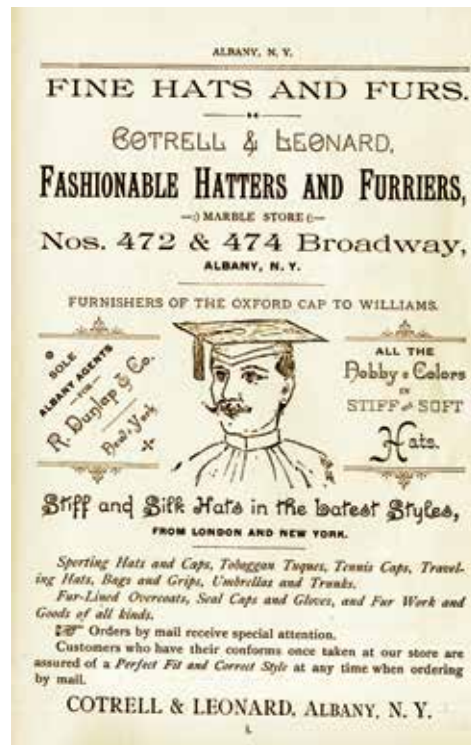
However, the development of academic dress in the United States is a lot more complicated. Until the late 1800s (and technically even up to today), a university’s academic dress was designed and enforced by the school and school dress ranged from heavily regulated to almost (or totally) permissive. By the 1880s, there was a growing movement with university students to incorporate or improve the look of their college’s graduation gowns¹ and it was in this environment that Gardner Cotrell Leonard, the son of a dry-goods store owner, matriculated at Williams College in 1883.

¹ G. C. Leonard, ‘Costume, Academic’, in *The Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: The Encyclopedia Americana Corp., 1918), Vol. VIII, pp. 48–52.

The standardization

And so it began

During the 1880s Williams College freshmen had their examinations at the same time as graduation.² So as Leonard was on campus, he saw Williams graduates wearing gowns as they had occasionally during previous graduations. Because he was disappointed with the style of the gowns, Leonard designed new ones for his graduating class in 1887 and had his father make them. Unfortunately, definitive pictures of the gowns do not exist and the best we have is a description in *The Williams Weekly* of 18 June 1887 that ‘The Senior [sic] gowns are the correct style. Those worn in previous years are said to be the garb of lower classes [i.e. younger students].’ We are tantalized by an advertisement in the 1887 Williams College yearbook by Cotrell & Leonard (the shop) showing a graduate from the shoulders up in a mortar-board and the hint of gathering; the model may be in a closed gown (Fig. 1). Since there is no reason that Cotrell & Leonard would show the older gowns in an advertisement directed to the class of 1887, one can (hopefully) conclude that he is showing us his son’s design.



Williams College Archives

Fig. 1.

First official adoption

To address the growth of student interest in academic dress during the 1880s and possibly as a reaction to the photographs of academic dress Leonard contributed to the Regents of the University of the State of New York’s exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World Fair,³ a commission was set up at the request of Princeton trustee John Mc-

² Personal communication from Linda Hall, archivist at Williams College, 8 September 2009.

³ ‘Albany Bureau of Academic Costume’, *The [Albany, N.Y.] Argus*, 27 July 1902; repr. as a leaflet (Albany N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1902), p. 5.

Cook in 1893⁴ to standardize the academic dress of American colleges and universities. The outcome of this committee was primarily the work of Columbia, Princeton, Yale, and the University of the City of New York (now New York University)⁵ and while it is mentioned that there were other schools present, there appears to be no record of which ones these were.

The committee created a convention (heavily influenced by Columbia's existing statute) whereby American academic dress would indicate

the degree earned
the department of learning the degree was in
the institution that conferred the degree.⁶

Leonard was invited as a consultant and through an addendum to his earlier article, he is our source for understanding of the resulting Academic Costume Code.⁷ We know that the work of this committee was completed before 15 March 1895⁸ and on the next day, a general conference was held at Columbia College to which were invited all interested schools.⁹ We can consider this day in May the birth date of standardized American academic dress because it was this conference that changed the work of a few colleges into a nationwide phenomenon.

Gowns

It was noted by Leonard¹⁰ that most American academic gowns in use at that time

⁴ There is considerable confusion about the dates of the commission. The year of 1893 is given by Leonard in his encyclopaedia article as the year the commission was formed and a tentative draft written up. We know from the Special Committee Report that the work was completed early in 1895 and the American Council on Education gives a very definite date of 16 May 1895 as the general meeting that gave us the first official Code, so we can conclude that work on the Code was 1893–1895.

⁵ Leonard, 'Costume, Academic'.

⁶ Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives, Special Committee on Academic Costume, Letter to the Trustees of Columbia College, 15 March 1895; G. C. Leonard, *The Cap and Gown in America: To Which is Added an Illustrated Sketch of the Intercollegiate System of Academic Costume* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1896), p. 11.

⁷ It is often mentioned that Leonard was included because he had recently written an influential article on academic dress. Confusion about whether the Commission started in 1893 or 1894 could be because Leonard's article in *University Magazine* was in the December 1893 issue. The problem is there is no clear timeline of when the commission was formed and when Leonard was hired as a consultant. It is entirely possible he was hired as consultant based on his contribution to the World's Fair exhibit and the article was published after his hire or that he was hired after the Commission had already started, possibly in 1894.

⁸ Special Committee, Letter, 1895.

⁹ American Council of Education, *American Universities and Colleges*, 3rd edn, ed. by Clarence Steven Marsh (Washington: American Council of Education, 1936).

¹⁰ *The Cap and Gown*, p. 5.

were based on the design of the Oxford Bachelor of Arts; however, in the approved Code there were two main variations: that traditional style worn open and a simpler style worn closed. Leonard specifically stated that this second style was used at Williams College. Knowing that Leonard designed at least one style of the gowns used at Williams, there is a hint that this adopted design was based on Leonard's original 1887 gown. While similar to the Oxford design, the simpler design was intended to be closed and did not have shirring as part of the yoke. The official style was a compromise in that it could be worn open or closed as long as it had the pointed sleeves common to both designs but Leonard, perhaps from a biased perspective, noted that the closed gown was distinguished for its utility and also for its being a distinctive American feature.¹¹

One feature apparent from the photographs in Leonard's book and the sketches Leonard did (page 15) is that the style he favoured (Type 10 in his nomenclature) has pointed sleeves; however, the points are considerably less pronounced than the traditional Oxford style (Type 6). Modern-day American bachelor gowns, with their subtle sleeve points and closed fronts, are a duplicate of Leonard's favoured design.

Masters and doctors

Whereas the bachelor's gown was of worsted material, the gowns for both the master's and doctor's degree were silk. The description of the master's sleeve was given as Type 2. The sleeve was closed and ended with a square front and an arc cut out of the back.¹² Since 1959, the arc has been on the opposite side of the sleeve; originally a slit just above the elbow allowed free movement of the arm. The doctoral gown has open sleeves, often referred to as bell-shaped (i.e. sleeves wider at the cuff than the shoulder), with facings on the front similar to British doctoral gowns and the American addition of three bars on each sleeve, often called (though not by the Code) chevrons. Both the facings and bars were to be velvet.

One of the major unanswered questions in American academic garb is the origin of the three bars on doctoral gowns. It is firmly established that Columbia was using them before 1895,¹³ worn by both masters and doctors according to the statutes of 1887. A drawing of a Columbia gown from 1865 shows three distinct bars with a dot on top. It could be that the bars are a holdover from Civil War (1861–65) insignia for a sergeant, which may explain why they were given to masters and doctors (the non-commissioned officers of the school, so to speak) and why they are informally

¹¹ Leonard is in error when he claims that a closed gown is American in nature (p. 9). His observation is included to show a certain jingoistic undertone in that what was being designed was specifically *American* academic dress.

¹² 'Albany Bureau', p. 8.

¹³ Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives. Minutes of the Trustees [of Columbia College], 5 December 1886, Volume IX, pp. 391–93.

referred to as chevrons. However, with the lack of any definitive prior information or a documented link between sergeant insignia and the bars, this can be at most a supposition. The Columbia gown and Columbia College's statutes of 1887 are evidence of an American college with bars representing a graduate degree before 1895 and with the influence that Columbia's academic dress had on the Code, it is safe to assume that we can blame Columbia for the mystery of the three bars.

Hoods

Terminology used in the Code when describing hoods is basic and in some cases differs from proper terminology. A hood refers to the cowl, liripipe, and cape (if it has one) together. When the Code mentions hood trim, it refers to the edging. This trim is commonly (although not within the Code) referred to as the collar. The Code uses 'binding' as a synonym for edging, which can lead to confusion considering that binding exists only around the panels of doctoral hoods. Lining is specifically the coloured silk that lines the inside of the hood. In practice today, the cowl is folded over at the lowest part of the hood hiding the trim in order to display this lining and a thin cord is used to prevent the hood from opening too much while being worn.

In the original Code, hoods were of the simple Oxford shape¹⁴ with the only distinguishing features between degrees being length (bachelors at 3 feet or less and masters at 4 feet), the width of trim, and the addition of panels for the doctoral hood. Binding was allowed on the panel to make it stand out clearly from the gown¹⁵ with the colour based on the colour(s) of the lining and not the trim of the hood.¹⁶ The length of the doctoral hoods was not given but there were two examples given by Leonard in 1896: a 'historic shape' which appears to be a Cambridge full hood [f1] and a master's hood with the panels added. Trim on all hoods was to be 6 inches or less meaning that different widths were not officially mandated for the different degrees but, as Leonard pointed out, varying widths were used in practice to denote the various degrees.

Hats

Hats were to be Oxford-style (mortar-board). Tassel colour was not indicated but an assumption can be made that it is to be black for two reasons:

¹⁴ The Code has never specified hood shapes. The shape adopted by US universities was the Oxford simple shape used in 1893, which today is [s5] and not [s1] in the Groves Classification.

¹⁵ Leonard, *The Cap and Gown*, p. 11: 'In practice the panel is edged with the lining color or colors to outline the panel against the gown.'

¹⁶ This sentence is correct using the Code's terminology whereas using more accepted hood vocabulary the last part would be read 'edging of the cowl'.

- The use of colour is indicated only for the trim of the hood.
- In 1932, the American Council on Education indicated a ‘growing custom’ among schools that the tassel reflects the courses taken and then the ACE notes that uniformity of the academic costume, though not required, is desired (p. 1067).

The doctor is distinguished by being allowed to have a gold tassel and having a velvet mortar-board.

Colour

The colour used in the trim was to denote ‘the department or faculty of learning’, according to the Code’s list of faculty colours. For most purposes, this list is enough of a guide as a Bachelor of Arts in education would wear white trim denoting the arts; however, the guide did not address what colour to use if a degree is offered by a department or faculty not listed. The facings and bars of the doctoral gowns were to be black with the option of having them the same colour as the hood trim. Originally, only eight faculty colours were given:

Arts & Letters – white
 Theology – scarlet
 Law – purple
 Philosophy – blue
 Science – gold-yellow
 Fine Arts – brown
 Music – pink
 Medicine – green

The reasons for choosing the colours are ‘historical’ according to Leonard.¹⁷ An article in *The Argus* (1902) gives the specific reasons for choosing the colours and these choices are reiterated in the pamphlet from Walters (1939).

White for Arts & Letters from the white fur trimming of Oxford’s and Cambridge’s BA hood.

Scarlet for theology as the traditional colour of the church. This interpretation is open to problems. There have been five traditional colours in the Christian Church since the time of Pope Innocent III: purple, white, red, green and black¹⁸ so no colour is the one colour representing the church. According to the *Argus* article, the usage of red derives from cardinals wearing it.

Purple for law is ascribed to being the colour of royalty and that the administration of law is done in the name of the sovereign.¹⁹

¹⁷ *The Cap and Gown*, p. 12.

¹⁸ M. Dilasser, *The Symbols of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 153.

¹⁹ Alternatively, purple may have come from an incorrect translation of an article about

Blue is the colour of wisdom and truth.

Gold for science is given as the riches science has produced.

Brown for fine arts is unknown. The colour choice is not mentioned in the *Argus* article or by Walters.

Pink for music is a reference to 'Oxford pink'. There are two errors that should be addressed when researching this colour choice. One error is that the *Argus* article refers to a pink brocade and the other is that Leonard lists the DMus Oxford hood in his 1918 encyclopedia article as white with scarlet lining. Bruce Christianson confirms that the usage of 'Oxford pink' is correct in that Oxford's DMus hoods used a cream brocade with bubble-gum pink lining.

Green for medicine is explained as representing the herbs used in medieval medications (*Argus* and Walters) in addition to the green stripe worn by the US Army Medical Corps (*Argus*).

Christianson advances the theory that the 'historical reasons' given are based on usage of faculty colours in Germany. He notes the similarity between the American use of colour and those used in Germany and questions the explanations given in the *Argus* article. He also notes that the *Argus* article was anonymous so it is possible that Leonard wrote it, considering it was published in Albany, N.Y. (the home of Cotrell & Leonard), and was later republished by the Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Costume (IBAC) through Cotrell & Leonard. In support of the theory that Leonard wrote the 1902 pamphlet are the pictures shown anonymously in the *Argus* article: they are the same that Leonard uses in his 1918 article. However, Leonard had been published before and was recognized as an authority on academic dress. One could question why he would write such an article anonymously. One can also question why, if Leonard gave the historical reasons in a 1902 journal article, he would not give them in a meticulous 1918 encyclopedia article. Whichever interpretation is chosen, it is a dangerous proposition for anyone to ascribe a tradition behind 'historical reasons' after the fact.

The colour of the lining of the hood was indicative of the university conferring the degree. It was intended to be distinctive for each school. It was noted that schools might share colours, and therefore patterns were allowed so that each school's lining was unique. Mandated patterns are not mentioned and an implication is that there may be a variety of patterns as indicated that 'from a trial of arrangements ... pleasing designs can be always obtained'.²⁰ By 1918, hood linings were predominantly a single colour with a secondary colour on a chevron although some were single colour (e.g., Yale and Vassar), two colours with the division as a chevron (e.g., Kentucky and Washington). Carnegie Institute of Technology used the Carnegie Tartan pattern. At one time the Catholic University of America used papal yellow

faculty colours at Erlangen University. See Bruce Christianson, 'Lined With Gold: London University and the Colour of Science', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 5 (2005), p. 86.

²⁰ Leonard, *The Cap and Gown*, p. 12.

with a white zone, the exact style of which was unknown.²¹

The 1932 readoption

The success of the Academic Costume Code was huge and was widely adopted by up to 95 percent of American universities.²² In 1902, the Regents of the University of the State of New York chartered the Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Costume and designated Cotrell & Leonard as the official repository. This organization has as its purpose '[t]o establish and maintain a library relating to the universities, professional, technical and advanced schools and colleges of the world, particularly as to ... their gowns, hoods, caps, robes, badges, banners, arms and other regalia' and also 'to maintain a register of statutes, codes and usages, designs and descriptions of the articles of academic costume'.²³ Through acquisition, this role of the repository moved to E. R. Moore in 1980 and then to Oak Hall (but still under the E. R. Moore name). Speaking from personal experience, I can confirm that although the IBAC and its repository exist in name researchers do not have access to their archive or even the information it may contain about the history and changes (official and unofficial) in American academic dress.

In 1932, the American Council on Education, which had taken over jurisdiction of the Code, looked into revising the academic dress statutes. With the changes, the design for gowns was indicated as black serge or worsted material for bachelor's and master's gowns and black silk for a doctor's gown. Lining was optional for all three gowns. The only other description is that the sleeves are of traditional shape, which is carried over from the 1895 adoption, thereby beginning the rule that the statutes and styles of a previous adoption remain in place unless specifically changed in a later adoption. Notably absent in the Code is whether or not the gowns should be open or closed. Also kept consistent with the 1895 adoption was the use of mortar-boards, which could be velvet for a doctor. The shape of hoods continued to be '[a]s usually followed by the colleges and universities of this country'.²⁴

The most significant changes were the standardization of the optional features in the original adoption. Hood trim, which merely had to be less than 6 inches previously (but as referred to in 1895, in practice the trim was narrower for lower degrees), was now two inches wide for the bachelor's degree, three inches wide for the master's degree and five inches wide for the doctoral degree. Also, the bachelor's hood was standardized at three feet, the master's hood shortened to three and one-half feet and the doctoral hood at four feet. One major change in the name

²¹ Leonard, 'Costume, Academic'.

²² *American Universities and Colleges*, 3rd edn; H. Walters, *The Story of Caps and Gowns* (Chicago: E. R. Moore Co., 1939).

²³ Leonard, 'Costume, Academic'.

²⁴ *American Universities and Colleges*, 3rd edn, p. 1066.

of standardization was that while in 1895 the arrangement of the university colours in the hood lining was a design of the university's choosing, after the 1932 adoption the arrangement were to use chevrons. In 1959 the lining of the hood reverted to the standard set in 1895 where chevrons were not mandatory but the 1932 mandate is the de facto standard even today.²⁵

To see how the ACE Code was used in practice, we look to the guide given by a leading gown manufacturer, E. R. Moore.²⁶ The company adds two sections regarding the manner of wearing the gown and more faculty colours but it in no way indicates that its additions are separate from the Code. In 1895, there were two options for wearing the bachelor's gown, open or closed. This point is not mentioned by the ACE in the 1932 adoption but according to E. R. Moore, the bachelor's gown is to be worn closed at the neck while open the rest of the way and master's and doctoral gowns remain open. The guide is further in error when it states, '[a]ny attempt to close the gowns completely has no foundation either in tradition or comfort'.²⁷ As we have seen, the tradition of closing the academic gown in the United States goes back at least to the original 1895 adoption fully forty-four years before the pamphlet was written and at some colleges even before that.

Significantly, the 1932 adoption keeps the standard that colour of the trim is 'distinctive of the Faculty or subject to which the degree pertains, as indicated by the wording of the diploma'.²⁸ This was interpreted as the trim denoting the degree name, so, for example, a student receiving an MA in education would wear white representing Arts & Letters while a student receiving an MEd would wear light blue representing education. As before, the facings and bars of the doctor's gowns had to be black or the colour of the hood trim. This recodification of faculty colour as opposed to discipline colour is especially significant since, as already indicated, by 1932 there was a growing trend among the schools to indicate which discipline was studied through the use of tassel colour.

Since the adoption of the Code was now so widespread, there were many more faculties represented than the eight original ones. Fully twenty-two are represented with some colours considered variations on the original eight but other faculties receiving completely new colour sets:

Agriculture – maize (science gold-yellow)
Arts & Letters – white

²⁵ According to the data available from E. R. Moore before the website was taken down, approximately 96% of American institutions use chevrons in their hood lining. Unfortunately, the spreadsheet that had the information is not publicly available any more. My calculations were performed on a copy of the sheet I downloaded when starting to research this paper.

²⁶ Walters, *The Story of Caps and Gowns*.

²⁷ Walters, pp. 17–18.

²⁸ *American Universities and Colleges*, 3rd edn, p. 1065.

Commerce & Accountancy – drab (new)
 Dentistry – lilac (new)
 Economics – copper (science gold-yellow)
 Engineering – orange (science gold-yellow)
 Fine Arts & Architecture – brown (note: architecture is added to fine-arts brown)
 Forestry – russet (new)
 Humanics (Service) – crimson (theology scarlet)
 Law – purple
 Library Science – lemon (science gold-yellow)
 Medicine – green
 Music – pink
 Oratory – silver grey (new)
 Pedagogy – light blue (philosophy blue)
 Pharmacy – olive (medicine green)
 Philosophy – dark blue
 Physical Education – sage green (medicine green)
 Public Health – salmon (new)
 Science – gold-yellow
 Theology – scarlet
 Veterinarian Science – grey (new)

However, this is the exact same list that we see written by Leonard himself back in 1918 in his *Encyclopedia Americana* entry in his official capacity as director of the IBAC!

Development of colour usage in trim

This apparent precognition raises an important question about how new faculties or disciplines receive their colours. It would be unreasonable to expect a commission to meet to codify the colour every time a new department is added at a school. As new faculties are added a colour is determined (whether by the school or the IBAC is unknown)²⁹ and then that new colour is disseminated to the other universities to be codified later. This is the system still in use today³⁰ although the official colours have not been updated since 1959.

Gown manufacturers will add to the codified list their own colours to cover new disciplines. For example, in 1939, E. R. Moore (which did not become the repository of the IBAC until 1980 when it acquired Cotrell & Leonard) gives as additional discipline colours:

²⁹ For an example of the 1961 adoption of maroon for home economics, see Stephen Wolgast, ed., ‘The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), p. 28.

³⁰ ACE, *What is the History of the Academic Costume and Ceremony?* n.d. Accessed on 19 January 2010. The web page no longer exists.

Naprapathy – cerise (new)
 Philanthropy – rose (theology scarlet)
 Chiropody – Nile green (medicine green)
 Optometry – orchid (new)
 Nursing – apricot (science gold-yellow)
 Social Science – citron (science gold-yellow)
 Humanics – codified, but E. R. Moore adds that it is ‘dark’ crimson (theology scarlet)

and some time before 1966, E. R. Moore added maroon for home economics.³¹ An extreme example today of this is seen in one gown manufacturer (academicapparel.com) which erroneously lists the following colours as official:

Architecture & Urban Planning – blue-violet (should be brown according to the Code)
 Chiropody & Podiatry – Nile green
 Naprapathy & Chiropractics – silver (cf. cerise above. Note this is the same colour as oratory)
 Foreign Affairs – aquamarine (should be peacock blue according to the code. Note this is the same colour as optometry according to this manufacturer)
 Optometry – aquamarine (cf. orchid above)
 Personnel Services – peacock blue (same as government service. An example of taking a discipline without its own colour and pigeonholing it into an existing field but one could question if business drab is more appropriate)
 Political Science – dark blue (same as philosophy. An example of taking a discipline without its own colour and pigeonholing it into an existing field)
 Psychology – metallic gold (related to gold-yellow of science)

Another gown manufacturer (simplyacademic.us) uses hunter green for medicine, which is darker than the Kelly green other gown makers use. In addition they also have urban planning as blue-violet and home economics as maroon (which is similar to other manufacturers) and add audiology as spruce green (a medicine colour) and separate physical therapy from physical education by using teal.

All of this confusion results from a tradition in the United States that if a new discipline is a variation or subdiscipline of one of the original eight, it is either included under that colour or given a shade of that colour. An entirely new discipline, however, is given its own colour.³² Because there is a limited number of basic colours there will be some overlap, thus the brown russet of forestry is not considered a fine arts colour. It is an interesting commentary on the views of certain employment fields as to which colours they were assigned. Going strictly by colour, nursing and library sciences are considered sciences while dentistry, optometry, and naprapathy (a form of chiropractics) are not considered medicine (yet physical education is) and are given their own hues of light purple.

³¹ F. C. Baxter and H. Walters, *Caps, Gowns and Commencements* (Chicago: E. R. Moore Co., 1966), p. 15.

³² Walters, p. 11.

The 1959 readoption

Major changes

The sleeve for the master's gown was described as having a square back and an arc cut away in the front rather than the reference to 'Type 2', and the opening was moved to the wrist from the elbow. This description is a reversal of the sleeve design that was in the Albany Bureau of Academic Costume pamphlet of 1902. More significantly, it was now codified how to wear the bachelor's gown (closed) and that the master's and doctor's gowns could be open or closed. Additional disciplines (not counting name changes, e.g. Pedagogy to Education and Arts & Letters to Arts, Letters, Humanities) were added to the colour chart, including two that we have already seen added by a gown manufacturer, specifically:

Journalism – crimson

Nursing – apricot

Public Administration & Foreign Service – peacock blue

Social Work - citron

Note: Humanics was removed and journalism was given its colour despite journalism's not being a theological-based discipline.

But even more significant than changing the sleeves on the masters' gowns or adding colours to the spectrum of disciplines was having the trim³³ of the hood (and also the facings and bars of the doctoral gown if not black) represent the discipline learned and not the faculty conferring the degree. Thus, a student receiving a degree in education for example would now wear light blue whether it is an MA (education), MS (education), or MEd. The significance of this change cannot be overstated. Whereas every other change was made in the name of standardization, this one fundamentally changed one of the three purposes of academic dress in the United States, *viz.* from indicating the department a degree was received in to the field of study a degree was received in. It should be noted that not every university subscribed to this change. For example, at Oklahoma State University, Masters of Arts wear white trim and Masters of Science wear gold-yellow trim regardless of the discipline studied.³⁴

In practice there were a few variations from the Code. The first is that the bachelor's gown is mandated by the Code to be closed while the master's gown and doctor's gowns may be either open or closed, but according to E. R. Moore (1966), common practice had all three gowns closed. E. R. Moore also implies that the Code

³³ Once again, according to the Code this use of 'trim' is proper while most would recognize that the feature being discussed would be called (outside of the Code) the edging.

³⁴ Oklahoma State University, *History of Academic Regalia*, n.d. Accessed on 9 September 2009. The web page no longer exists, but a similar one is at <<http://commencement.okstate.edu/history-of-academic-regalia>> (accessed 10 August 2011).

allows the school to make the choice between faculty and discipline optional; thus the example above of Oklahoma State would be correct. However, the example given by ACE of an MS in agriculture make it clear that maize is the acceptable colour and gold-yellow is not.³⁵

The 1986 readoption

In 1986, besides wording, there was only one major change.³⁶ A sentence was placed into the code:

In the case of the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, the dark blue colour 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.³⁷

It should be recognized that by saying that the dark blue does not represent philosophy, this change is *not* a reversion to pre-1959 standards as one would surmise. The standard dark blue for a PhD can perhaps be best thought of as study in the subject of research itself whereas an EdD in education or ScD in mathematics are degrees involving research as applied to the practicum of their fields and thus would wear light blue and gold-yellow respectively. A strict reading of the code would allow for non-PhD doctors to wear colours different from their degree name such as an EdD in physical education who would wear sage green for the subject matter or a DA in mathematics who would wear the gold-yellow of science, not the white of arts & humanities.

This apparent contradiction may be explained by Strickland and Fluitt's finding that despite the 1960 change of colour to represent the discipline studied, most universities still adhered to the 1932 standard where the colour of the edging represented the name of the degree.³⁸ They point out that this is especially true for the PhD academic dress and dark blue. It seems almost precognitive that the authors allude to the fact that most PhD holders never study philosophy in the light of what ACE was to say the next year (perhaps in reaction to the article) in that a PhD is not a philosophy degree (unless one had in fact studied philosophy). Yet as codified, dark blue representing all PhD holders regardless of discipline still remains a holdover from 1932.

³⁵ *American Universities and Colleges*, 8th edn, p. 1135.

³⁶ For a description of the minor changes, see Stephen Wolgast, ed., 'The Intercollegiate Code', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), pp. 31-34.

³⁷ ACE, *What is the History of the Academic Costume and Ceremony?*

³⁸ S. M. Strickland and J. L. Fluitt, 'Academic Colors ... Academic Confusion', *College & University*, 61.1 (1985), pp. 26-31.

Current issues in American academic dress

The rise of first-professional doctorates

In 1895, the United States degree system was based on the concept that there were three levels of scholarship: bachelor, master and doctor,³⁹ which was reflected in academic dress statutes. However, not everyone who has reached the highest level of scholarship is a doctor. A Master of Fine Arts is a terminal research degree but is not a doctorate. Add to this a Juris Doctor or a Medicinae Doctor, which are, for example, terminal professional degrees but are in reality studies at a master's academic level. They are called first-professional degrees and are styled doctorates to represent that there is no higher practicum (i.e. not involving independent research) degree in that field. Thus, a holder of the JD wears the same academic dress as the legal academic terminal degree SJD and honorary doctorate LLD (doctor's gown with purple trim) although academically, they are at the same level as an LLM holder who is entitled to a master's gown (e.g. University of Washington). Likewise, a holder of an MD wears a doctoral gown with green trim when as their first graduate degree it would normally be a master's gown with green trim on the hood.⁴⁰

Since 1895, the standard has been that academic dress is based on the name of the degree and not level of degree, thus the holder of an MFA wears a master's gown and hood while a Doctor of Optometry wears a doctor's gown and hood despite fewer years and a lower level of education (according to the Department of Education (see below)). Taking all of this into account, the question becomes what academic dress standard should be used for first-professional degrees. First-professional degrees are explained by the United States Department of Education as:

represent[ing] a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system because they follow prior undergraduate studies, but they are in fact first degrees in these professional subjects. Holders of first-professional degrees are considered to have an entry-level qualification and may undertake graduate study in these professional fields following the award of the first-professional degree. Several of these degrees use the term 'doctor' in the title, but these degrees do not contain an independent research component or require a dissertation (thesis) and should not be confused with Ph.D. degrees or other research doctorates.⁴¹

³⁹ T. W. Wood, *The Degrees, Gowns and Hoods of the British, Colonial, Indian and American Universities and Colleges* (London: Thomas Pratt & Co., 1882).

⁴⁰ Allowing an MD to wear a doctoral gown may be a convenient lie taking into account that the holder of an MD is unique in that he does doctoral level practicum work during his residency but receives no degree for it and thus by the end of his training has truly earned professional doctoral status.

⁴¹ International Affairs Office, US Department of Education, *Structure of the U.S. Educa-*

The Department of Education also maintains a list of degrees equivalent to the PhD (note that according to the list, the PhD is the standard doctoral degree) called research degrees. In reading this list, it is important to note that there are holders of a PhD equivalent degree that for traditional reasons still maintain the master's designation such as MFA.⁴²

This arrangement calls into question the current American usage whereby academic dress is based on the *name* of the degree rather than the *level* of the degree. Is it appropriate that one graduate can do master's level work and be entitled to a doctoral gown whereas another graduate must go beyond their master's to do true doctoral level work before being awarded a doctor's academic dress? The question raised for us Americans is that as the degree system evolves, should academic dress reflect the name of the degree (current usage) or the level of the degree (original usage)?

Variations from the Code

The bottom line is that the Academic Costume Code is, and always has been, a collection of recommendations. Although some subtle variations have already been noted, nowhere is variation more clearly seen than in the doctoral dress. Today there are two major variations in common use despite being *de jure* non-standard usage: the use of tams rather than mortar-boards for doctors and the use of school colours in the doctoral gown.

We know that it was still customary for doctors to wear mortar-boards in the mid-1960s.⁴³ Recently, six- and eight-sided tams have become commonplace, but even the head coverings that are today styled as velvet mortar-boards (four-pointed tams) are soft and are more similar to John Knox caps [h3] than the stiffness inherent in the trencher design. The American tam does have a wide brim as opposed to the John Knox shape but does not have the points seen in the mortar-board (it is rounded instead). Thus tams can be considered their own shape that is perhaps a middle-ground between the mortar-board and the John Knox. It is unfortunate that information regarding the movement to tams and the development of their design that has occurred within the past half century is apparently lost to us due to the inactivity of the repository of the IBAC.

The other common variation seen today uses school colours in doctoral dress. Within the Ivy League, this began in 1912 at Brown University when the school

tion System: Research Doctorate Degrees (2008). Accessed on 9 September 2009 but the web page no longer exists.

⁴² International Affairs Office, US Department of Education, *Structure of the U.S. Education System: First-Professional Degrees* (2008). Accessed on 9 September 2009, but the web page no longer exists.

⁴³ Baxter and Walters, pp. 14, 18.

instituted seal brown mortar-boards for the school's officials. Also within the Ivy League, Yale took the first step in implementing colour for its graduates in 1938 when the entire gown for graduating masters and doctors was blue.⁴⁴ A growing trend in robemaking is the use of piping as a way of adding a coloured border to the facings and bar, often in the secondary school colour; the University of Northern Colorado uses antique gold piping to outline the navy blue velvet on its doctoral gowns.

Today

When looking at the current usage of doctoral dress, the question that arises is: Does it satisfy the three criteria of academic dress in the United States?

1. Degree – by using the doctoral standard in terms of cut, hood, panels, facings and bars, the dress clearly shows the wearer to have a doctoral degree.
2. University – by extending school colours to the whole academic costume, it should be obvious which university the person attended. For example, anyone wearing a light purple gown with dark purple trim (including the hood) and gold piping is from the University of Washington while a black gown with dark red facings, bars and hem and gold piping but with the hood trim the colour representing the doctorate would be someone from Arizona State University.
3. Faculty/Discipline – here we get into a nebulous region and perhaps one outside the purview of this paper's focus (but why let that stop us?). After 1986, the PhD was distinguished as a degree in research itself while the other research degrees ... well, they involve independent research including a thesis. Often these non-PhD degrees are referred to as professional or practicum doctorates, but as we have seen, there is a clear distinction between the professional doctorate and a research-based doctorate. What is not so clear is the distinction between the PhD and the other true third-level (i.e. research) doctorates. Would research in pure mathematics justify a PhD while research in applied mathematics warrant an ScD?

One field that does try to make a very clear distinction is in education where there exists

Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and Doctor of Arts in a specific subject (e.g. mathematics) which combine knowledge of the discipline taught with the study of pedagogy and androgogy. This degree is geared towards those teaching in post-secondary schools;

Master of Education and Doctor of Education which focus on pedagogy for K-12 teachers without a focus on learning the subject taught;

Doctor of Philosophy which is primarily to train educational researchers.

⁴⁴ S. Wolgast, 'Academic Dress', *New York Times*, 13 April 2009. Accessed from <<http://www.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/>>.

In terms of academic dress, a holder of the DArts degree would wear gold-yellow signifying a doctorate in mathematics, the holder of the EdD would wear light blue of pedagogy and the holder of the PhD wears dark blue for her PhD. Thus of the three highest degrees in the education field, the only one with academic dress showing scholarship in its faculty is education. With the revision of PhD to dark blue, this inability to recognize the field of study is across all disciplines, meaning it is impossible to know what a person wearing PhD dress actually studied.

In closing

Through synthesizing the grassroots student movements of the 1880s of some colleges and the formalized regulations in others, academic dress in the United States has become a colourful pageant that we look forward to at graduation. A goal of the original Commission was that academic dress in the United States should have an American style of its own and they certainly got their wish. On the world stage, there is no mistaking a graduand from an American university.

From the simple bachelor's gown that had its start in 1887 at little Williams College to the panoply of cardinal, maroon, orange, blue and other colours seen in a procession of professors today, our academic dress truly marks a life accomplishment. A careful evolution has created a distinctive system that is both standardized yet open to variation. Our Code has not substantially changed in the last half-century, but as our college system expands with associates, specialists, first-professionals and who know what else in the future, it will be exciting to see how our academic dress will continue to evolve.

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