

The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume: An Introduction

compiled by Stephen L. Wolgast

The modern academic dress of American universities and of some in Canada is based on or departs from the 1895 Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume, which lives on as the Academic Costume Code. Researchers who describe a North American university's cap and gown often look into the history of the Code and review the familiar story of its beginnings; they also uncover forgotten elements of the Code's development.

Five of the authors in this volume describe the Code in their articles. The editors believe that instead of printing each history in its respective author's paper, independently of the others, a single paper that synthesizes the main points from each article into one makes a stronger whole and eliminates repetition.

This paper is largely the work of Donald Drakeman and Stephen Wolgast. Drake-man's work is taken from his paper 'Peculiar Habits'; Wolgast's work comes from his paper 'King's Crowns' and additional research. Their observations are supplemented by the work of Robert Armagost, David Boven, and John Grant. To help identify the work of each author, footnotes are preceded by his initials (unless he is otherwise identified). This article was prepared by Wolgast; as much as possible the authors' original writing remains unaltered except where transitions are necessary. Footnotes are nearly untouched except to add fuller citations.

A significant portion of the text in this article is cut from the articles that follow. Some, however, is printed both here and its original place to preserve the context and references of the authors' original work.

Because the Code's history is nuanced and not entirely logical, some details and analysis are better explained in a separate discussion. For an examination of the Code's development, including a look at the growth of faculty colours, see Armagost's paper, 'University Uniforms', p. 143ff.

Higher education in the United States grew tremendously in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1862 Congress passed the Morrill Act, which gave to each state a minimum of 140 square miles of land for it to sell; the income would pay to found a public university that offered studies in agriculture, engineering, military

science, and other practical fields in addition to the liberal arts. President Lincoln signed the bill into law that summer, and within a year the first so-called land-grant universities opened. Prominent land-grants such as Cornell and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were founded in 1865, and the University of California in 1869.

Many states also created universities without federal funds, and a spate of private universities were founded in this period, including Vassar College, for women, in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., in 1861; Johns Hopkins in 1876; Stanford in 1891; and the University of Chicago in 1892. Secondary schools were growing in number as well, graduating students who were qualified for university educations.

The influx of students created a surge of interest in the emblems of collegiate life. Cap and gown began appearing on campuses from the east to the west, including at some older universities that had let academic dress disappear after having adopted it a century earlier. The suggestion by casual observers that the Code introduced academic dress to the United States in 1895 is not supportable by the facts. The characterization of individual universities' academic dress rules as some sort of weird, incomprehensible mess does disservice to the careful consideration that went into creating the colours and shapes of gown and hood and the occasions outside commencement on which they were worn.

In 1874, for example, Princeton's trustees brought back gowns for certain public events,¹ and several commentators have described a 'widespread student movement' towards wearing gowns by the mid 1880s.² Columbia and Pennsylvania both adopted academic dress statutes in 1887, and New York University had its own by 1891. (For a list of unique gowns before the Code, see Chart 3 at the end of this article.) Each had its own set of rules regarding faculty colours, trim, and in at least

¹ DD: Quoted in Margaret Smagorinsky, *The Regalia of Princeton University: Pomp, Circumstance, and Accountrements* [sic] *of Academia* (Princeton, N.J.: Office of Communications and Publications [of Princeton University], 1994), p. 6. This rule, which referred to occasions for public speaking, appears not to have necessarily applied to the students being awarded degrees at commencement. A sketch showing a Princeton commencement ceremony likely to have taken place in the late 1870s shows the President and what appears to be the faculty in long black gowns, but the degree recipients are wearing dark suits. See the 'sketch by H. Ogden in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 1877–78' reproduced in William K. Selden, *Chapels of Princeton University: Their Historical and Religious Significance* (Princeton, N.J.: Trustees of Princeton University, 2005), p. 39. The sketch is captioned 'Commencement Day at the College of New Jersey' (ibid.).

² DD: See, for example, Helen Walters, *The Story of Caps and Gowns* (Chicago: E. R. Moore, 1939), p. 9, and the reprinted and updated version thereof, Frank C. Baxter, *Caps, Gowns and Commencements* (Chicago: E. R. Moore, 1966), p. 9; and David A. Lockmiller, *Scholars on Parade: Colleges, Universities, Costumes and Degrees* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 180.

one case, shapes: NYU adopted Edinburgh's gown and hood patterns.³ In 1892, NYU's doctoral gowns were to be trimmed in their faculty colour (see Chart 1) with three velvet bars on each sleeve and facing.⁴

Velvet sleeve bars and facings had been specified by Columbia in its statute of six years earlier, although Columbia called for them in purple for all doctors. Its gown was black, and was for ordinary use; a 'festal' gown in scarlet was also created but fell into disuse within a few years. (Both Columbia in its 1887 statute and NYU in 1892 called for masters' gowns to have similar trimming—the three sleeve stripes and facings—but in black in both cases.)

Pennsylvania's doctoral gown also used colour (see Chart 1). The sleeves and body were black but the yoke was in the faculty colour, which enabled the University to replace 'the separate and ungainly hood of English Universities'.⁵

Coloured gowns were approved on at least three other campuses. In 1871 the trustees of Sewanee, properly known as the University of the South, adopted a royal purple robe for its chancellor, which was faced with gold (no materials are specified). The vice-chancellor wore a crimson robe faced with black.⁶ The following year graduates' hoods were described (see Chart 2), and graduates' gowns were to be 'shaped after those of the University of Oxford, and that the facings, etc., [were to] correspond in color with the trimmings and linings of the hoods', referring to Sewanee's colours, not Oxford's.⁷ Although Sewanee was founded in 1857, the Civil War delayed its opening until 1868 and so it was only four years old at the time. The only earned degrees it conferred were for bachelors. While it bestowed honorary doctorates (in civil law, divinity, and literature), it is unknown at present if any colourful Oxford-cum-Sewanee doctoral gown was ever worn.

Princeton's black gown is described as having an orange stripe on the yoke between the shoulders, which may have made it the first US gown in the university's corporate colours.⁸ Finally, Hampton-Sydney, in Virginia, adopted a grey gown in 1893.⁹ Chromatically speaking, grey is not a colour, but even so it stands as one more example of gowns in America that were not black. Others may well have

³ SW: *The University of the City of New York: Catalogue and Announcements 1891–1892*, page 193. Its name later changed to New York University.

⁴ SW: 'New-York University', *New York Times*, 24 April 1892.

⁵ SW: University of Pennsylvania, Archives, Minutes, 25 April 1887. Col-lection UPA 1.1, Vol. XII, p. 311.

⁶ SW: University of the South, Minutes, Board of Trustees, 1871, p. 57.

⁷ SW: University of the South, Minutes, Board of Trustees, 1872, pp. 31–32.

⁸ SW: 'Notes from Princeton', *New York Times*, 26 September 1891.

⁹ SW: John Luster Brinkley, *On This Hill: A Narrative History of Hampden-Sydney College, 1774–1994* (Hampden-Sydney, Virginia: Hampden-Sydney College, 1994), p. 443, n. 287.

existed; finding evidence of them is a matter of luck while studying contemporary sources.¹⁰

The growing attention to gowns did not escape the notice of the son of a dry-goods retailer in Albany, New York.

Gardner Cotrell Leonard, the gownmaker widely credited with virtually single-handedly fashioning the modern American academic couture, commented near the end of the century that the practice had ‘passed the stage of student fad ... ; it had overcome the quiet national Anglophobia’, and by the mid-1890s ‘[s]cores of institutions for higher education ha[d] ... adopted gowns for ceremonial or ordinary wear’.¹¹ Because each college or university was free to adopt whatever style of academic dress seemed most appropriate to its governing body, there was ‘little regard for what was proper or what sister institutions were doing’, according to historian David A. Lockmiller, who has labelled some of the hoods then in use ‘bizarre’, and the ‘array of caps, gowns and hoods ... confusing’.¹²

This lack of organization and uniformity troubled a number of university leaders, who were living amid a burst of business organization. At the time, the second industrial revolution was transforming late-nineteenth-century America. Railroads and manufacturing required skilled workers who functioned efficiently, drawing to the cities people who had lived their lives on farms or in small towns.

¹⁰ SW: Leonard refers to two other universities, Trinity and St John’s, that had their own academic dress statutes before 1895, and reports that they kept them instead of adopting the Code (as of 1911). He provides no information about their dress (‘Costume, Academic’, s.v., *A Cyclopaedia of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), I, p. 17).

¹¹ *The Cap and Gown in America* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1896), pp. 2, 8. DD: See, for example, S. E. Plank, ‘Academic Regalia at Oberlin: the Establishment and Dissolution of a Tradition’, *Northeast Ohio Journal of History*, 1.2 (April 2003), pp. 55–74, especially pp. 56–64. Plank quotes from an editorial in the 1892 *Oberlin Review* as follows: ‘Just now a great deal of interest is attached to the subject of cap and gown, in all the larger colleges. Seniors at Yale will wear them during the entire spring term, and in most of the eastern colleges they will add to the dignity of the graduating class during commencement’ (ibid., pp. 57–58). See also ‘Commencement Notes’ from 1996 from the University of Pennsylvania, which state that the trustees of that institution had adopted a ‘Pennsylvania System of Academic Costume’ in 1887 (available online at: <<http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upg/upg7/1996progh.pdf>>) [henceforth, ‘Penn Notes’]; and an editorial in Charles Dudley Warner, ‘Editor’s Drawer’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 82 (December 1890–May 1891), pp. 646–47 (p. 646), an editorial discussing one of the ‘burning questions now in the colleges for the higher education of women’, which is ‘whether the undergraduates shall wear the cap and gown’. On that particular issue, Leonard’s 1893 article (p. 4) describes ‘a gown of wide choice, always graceful’, which ‘commends itself particularly to women’s colleges. ... It is the Wellesley gown, and is also worn at Wells [and] Mount Holyoke College,’ all of which were women’s colleges; it appears to have also been worn at some institutions for both men and women.

¹² DD: pp. 182–83. He also noted that some institutions adopted mortarboard caps but no gowns to go with them (p. 183).

The historian Robert Wiebe wrote that Americans of the time were on a search for order, manifested in ideas including ‘scientific management’, which Wiebe describes as ‘an interlocked pattern of rigid rules, laws for the world of the factory’.¹³ Referring to Wiebe’s book, the cultural historian Josh Ozersky described Americans in the late nineteenth century another way: ‘*People liked standardization for its own sake.*’¹⁴

Like businesses, universities were creating new hierarchies and divisions. In his history of higher education in America, Frederick Rudolph notes that in the 1880s and 1890s academic institutions set out to organize themselves in a variety of ways, including establishing faculty ranks, forming academic departments, founding a range of learned societies and attempting to standardize admission requirements.

The urge for standardization spilled into academic dress. As long as each university prescribed its own gowns, hoods, and colours, observers were frustrated when trying to determine what they represented. Their concern culminated in the formation of a conference to lay down rules for the appropriate design of caps, gowns, and hoods at American institutions of higher learning.¹⁵ The Intercollegiate Commission on Academic Costume, assisted by Leonard, issued its recommendations for a code of academic dress in 1895, and many universities not only immediately adopted the code but then retained it virtually indefinitely, leading one commentator to write over sixty years later that ‘the standard cap and gown are almost universally worn.’¹⁶

Helen Walters’ widely read 1939 booklet, *The Story of Caps and Gowns*, emphasizes Leonard’s catalytic role in launching the effort to organize all of the various forms of academic dress in America into ‘a uniform academic costume system’, writing that in ‘1894, as the result of an article written for *The University Magazine* by Mr. Gardner C. Leonard ... , the Intercollegiate Commission, a group of lead-

¹³ SW: *The Search for Order: 1877–1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), p. 157. Writing in the foreword, David Herbert Donald put it concisely. It was ‘a “new middle class” ... who developed the new values of “continuity and regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management” in order to cope with twentieth-century problems.’

¹⁴ SW: Emphasis in original. ‘Part of this has to do with Robert Wiebe’s “search for order,” a central energy in the American zeitgeist during the chaotic years of development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (Josh Ozersky, *The Hamburger: A History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 38).

¹⁵ DD: See Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961; repr., 1965), pp. 398–406, 436–40. In this context, Rudolph (p. 408) sees the ‘commencement ritual ... assum[ing] a new purpose: the exhibition of the new professionals, drawn up in order of rank and wearing their badges of merit’.

¹⁶ DD: Kevin Sheard, *Academic Heraldry in America* (Marquette, Mich.: Northern Michigan College Press, 1962), p. 3. Lockmiller (p. 184) puts the figure at ‘98 percent of the several hundred institutions of higher education in the United States’ as of 1969.

ing American educators, met at Columbia College to draft a code'.¹⁷ But this oft-repeated account, sometimes enhanced by the story of Leonard's collegiate efforts to outfit his Williams College classmates for their graduation in 1887,¹⁸ overlooks Princeton University's earlier call to convene such a multi-university commission. In fact, Princeton was the actual instigator of the movement that launched decades of almost universal acceptance of a common code for caps, gowns and hoods in America.

The Trustees of Princeton University, at their June 1893 board meeting—which took place six months before the publication of Leonard's article in *The University Magazine*—adopted a resolution asking a committee 'to prepare and submit to the Board of Trustees for approval, their recommendations as to the adoption of suitable gowns and hoods to be used at Commencements and upon other public occasions, to indicate the University status and the degrees held by the wearers of the same ...'.¹⁹ More importantly for the future of academic dress in America, this Princeton committee, chaired by trustee John J. McCook, was specifically authorized 'to confer with similar committees when such are appointed by the governing bodies of Harvard, Yale, Columbia and other Universities and Colleges', with the goal being 'the adoption of a uniform academic costume'.²⁰

McCook, 'one of America's foremost corporation lawyers',²¹ was a member of a family of fifteen 'fighting McCooks' who had served as Civil War officers.²² Colonel McCook's war service turned out to be helpful to the Commission, according to Walters, who notes that he 'had seen the value of devices on army uniforms in differentiating the various army corps ...'.²³ He was joined on the Commission by

¹⁷ DD: Walters, p. 9. It should be noted that Walters' booklet was published by the E. R. Moore Company of Chicago. In 1980, E. R. Moore would buy Gardner Cotrell Leonard's family firm, Cotrell & Leonard, which, from the late nineteenth century, had supplied caps and gowns to many universities. Leonard's booklet, *The Cap and Gown in America*, included a reprint of his article from *The University Magazine* (originally published in December 1893) together with 'An Illustrated Sketch of the Intercollegiate System of Academic Costume'. For more on Leonard at Williams, see Armagost, p. 138–39.

¹⁸ DD: See, for example, Eugene Sullivan, 'An Academic Costume Code and An Academic Ceremony Guide' (American Council on Education), available online at <<http://acenet.edu>>, reprinted from *American Universities and Colleges*, 15th edn (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), p. 1; Lockmiller, p. 183; and Smagorinsky, p. 6, whose historical discussion of Princeton's regalia emphasizes Leonard's role: 'Credit for having codified the design for today's doctoral gown belongs to ... Leonard, son of a well-to-do dry goods merchant ...'.

¹⁹ DD: Princeton University, Archives, Historical Subject File (HSF), Box 308, Folder 8, 'Academic Costumes, 1895–1944'.

²⁰ DD: Ibid.

²¹ DD: Thomas McCormick, 'The Wilson-McCook Scheme of 1896–1897', *The Pacific Historical Review*, 36.1 (February, 1967) pp. 47–58 (p. 48).

²² DD: *Who's Who in America* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1903), p. 944.

²³ DD: Walters, p. 9. Walters also notes here that he 'had carefully studied the traditional

Columbia's president, Seth Low (who later was elected mayor of New York); the Reverend Charles Ray Palmer, a trustee of Yale; and the Reverend Dr Henry M. MacCracken, chancellor of New York University.²⁴ At the time, Leonard was only a few years out of Williams College, but he had researched university costumes and heraldry in Europe²⁵ (or, at least, in Britain), and was thus able to serve as a 'technical advisor' to the Commission; in particular, he 'prepared colored sketches and experimental gowns and hoods' for the commissioners' review.²⁶ The Commission met multiple times at Columbia, under Low's chairmanship,²⁷ and in May 1985 issued a report, probably drafted in large part by Leonard,²⁸ containing a comprehensive Code for American academic costumes.

Although all reports of the Commission's work emphasize the influence of the traditional academic dress of the great European universities—Oxford and Cambridge, in particular—the Commission's dominant theme was quite different from the English traditions it had reviewed. The Code insisted upon a new and distinctive emphasis on uniformity, especially at the doctoral level, whereas Oxford prescribed a complex system of academic dress, with patterns and colours determined by the formality or informality of the occasion and the faculty's place in an order of precedence rather than the subject of the graduate's degree.²⁹ American academic dress,

colors as used in the older universities of Italy, France and Great Britain to mark the different faculties'.

²⁴ DD: Walters, p. 9; Lockmiller, p. 184. DD: Harvard appears not to have appointed a trustee committee to explore the issue of academic dress until 1897. See Cynthia W. Rossano, 'Reading the Regalia: A Guide to Deciphering the Academic Dress Code', *Harvard Magazine* (May 1999), p. 2, available at <<http://harvardmagazine.com/1999/05/ner.reading.html>>. *The Harvard Crimson* newspaper reported the adoption of a 'permissive scheme for academic costume' in December 1902. The scheme generally follows the design of the Intercollegiate Code, with the principal exception being the addition to the gowns of a 'double crow's-foot, to be placed on each side, in front, near the collar, and in a color distinctive of the School' ('News: Academic Costumes Defined: The Correct Forms for Each Degree Stated by the Corporation' (9 December 1902), available at <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=366079>>). For a more detailed description of the crow's-feet, see Rossano, p. 3.

²⁵ DD: Lockmiller, p. 183.

²⁶ DD: Walters, p. 9.

²⁷ SW: Sadly, Low's personal papers, maintained by the University Archives of Columbia, make no mention of the Commission.

²⁸ DD: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 10. Scobie Stringer writes that Leonard 'prepared coloured illustrations of suggested gowns and hoods; drafted a register and in due course produced the greater part of the code ...' (Frank W. Haycraft, *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges*, 4th edn, rev. and enlarged by E. W. Scobie Stringer (Cheshunt, UK: Cheshunt Press, 1948), p. 8).

²⁹ DD: See, for example, W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1963), Chapters 3 and 4, for details of gowns at Oxford and Cambridge in the eighteenth century. Hugh Smith, assisted

in contrast, appears to have taken its organizing principle as much from the military as from the Oxbridge tradition, especially to the extent that it bore specific devices for differentiating the various universities and ranks of scholarship. Rudolph later wrote about this period of American higher education, describing ‘the exhibition of professors displayed in academic robes ... paraded them like so many cadets in uniform ...’.³⁰

To create the American standard, the Commission borrowed from Columbia’s 1887 statute, which called for three velvet sleeves stripes and velvet facings for doctors, in purple, and for masters, in black.³¹ (Three sleeve stripes appeared in an 1865 illustration that decorates an invitation to Columbia’s commencement festivities; the illustration appears to be the earliest evidence of the three stripes in the US.³²)

The Code removed the trimmings from the master’s gown but retained them for the doctor. The patterns of the gown were based on those of the Oxford BA [b8] and MA [m1], and were black, as were Oxford’s. The pattern of the doctor’s gown was based on Oxford’s DD full-dress scarlet robe [d2], but in black rather than scarlet.

Leonard writes that in the United States, hoods had generally been worn only by those who received their degrees from English universities,³³ although the four universities Wood listed all had hoods,³⁴ as did Columbia by 1887 and NYU four years later, bringing the total to six. To standardize hoods, the group settled on two shapes. For bachelors and masters the shape was the same as Oxford’s BA hood, which at the time was slightly different from today’s Oxford simple shape [s1]. The simple shape of the 1890s had a split-salmon cut that helped to show more of the lining.³⁵ Today, the Oxford simple shape in the split-salmon cut of the 1890s is

by Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World*, 3 vols. (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1970) (passim) and Scobie Stringer (pp. 1–10) briefly discuss early-twentieth-century developments. George Shaw notes that at Cambridge, after ‘a more rational and systematic approach has been possible’, at least with respect to new degrees, each ‘degree ... in each faculty, in addition to having its own hood, also has its own gown’, with Oxford’s system being ‘far less logical than that of Cambridge both in hood colours and gown shapes’. (*Academical Dress of British and Irish Universities*, 2nd edn (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), pp. 35, 41). In fact, in recent years the logical system at Cambridge has broken down, with several degrees sharing the same gown and hood.

³⁰ DD: Rudolph, p. 408.

³¹ For more on the Columbia statute, see Wolgast, pp. 94–96.

³² No other references to the stripes before 1865 have been found. See Wolgast, p. 96.

³³ SW: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 6.

³⁴ SW: One of those, the General Theological Seminary, is an Episcopal institution whose graduates would have had regular use for hoods.

³⁵ SW: E. J. C[ohen], ed., *History of Academic Caps, Gowns and Hoods: The Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Wear* (Philadelphia: National Academic Cap & Gown Co., 1940), p. 25.

retained by Wales for its bachelors [s5].³⁶

The hood was worn (and still is) with the liripipe out (that is, away from the back) and the lining turned down. For bachelors it was three feet long, for masters and doctors four feet. Doctors used a full shape, but with ‘panels’ attached to the sides of the cowl instead of a cape. Americans wear their hoods backwards (with the portion intended to rest on the back facing outwards instead).³⁷

The Code’s prescriptions provided multiple levels for conveying information. While the black mortar-board would be common to all, each degree (bachelor, master, doctor) would have its own gown. Even more importantly, the hood would be the critical differentiating factor, and, to a practised eye, a quick reading of the colours of its lining and trim would permit immediate identification of both the university that had awarded the degree and the wearer’s field of study. Oxford and Cambridge may have had a several-hundred-year head start in developing academic costumes, but ‘the advance shown in an intelligible system of hoods for America,’ writes Leonard, ‘is evident to anyone who gives to this subject even a casual interest’.³⁸ It is, he opines confidently, ‘incomparably beyond the arbitrary codes of the British universities . . .’.³⁹

The ‘incomparable’ Intercollegiate Code, which continues largely unchanged to the present day,⁴⁰ was rapidly adopted by Princeton and many other universities. At Princeton, McCook’s Committee on Academic Costume made its final report at the 10 June 1895 meeting of the trustees.⁴¹ The committee reported that the boards of several other universities had ‘promptly responded to Princeton’s suggestion, and appointed representatives to attend the conferences of an Intercollegiate Commit-

³⁶ Thanks to Bruce Christianson for making this connection.

³⁷ SW: Bruce Christianson, ‘The Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape’, *The Burgon Society Annual*, 2002, pp. 30–34 (p. 34, n. 18).

³⁸ SW: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 13.

³⁹ Ibid. DD: It also made American academic costumes incomparably easier to mass produce for a dry-goods firm, like Cotrell & Leonard, intent on dominating the burgeoning higher education market. Leonard had joined the family firm in 1887, becoming a partner in 1890. ‘The following year he established a department for the manufacture of caps, gowns and hoods for colleges and universities . . .’ (Cuyler Reynolds, ed., *Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and Family Memoirs* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1911), pp. 553–57. Available online at <<http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/families/hmfgm/leonard.html>>).

⁴⁰ DD: The Code underwent review by the American Council on Education in 1932, 1959 and 1986. Smith and Sheard (I, p. 1527) describe the 1932 amendments as changing only ‘very minor . . . details’. Baxter notes (p. 13) that the ‘most notable change has been the switch to lighter, man-made fabrics. The new fabrics hold their press better, drape in a more shapely manner, and are much cooler than the heavy materials of days gone by.’

⁴¹ ‘Supplemental and Final Report of the Committee on Academic Costume to the Board of Trustees of the College of New Jersey’, 10 June 1895 (Princeton University, Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8).

tee'.⁴² That group made recommendations for a Code that resulted from 'much study and investigation of the history of academic costume of European Universities, especially those of Oxford, Cambridge and the Scotch Universities'.⁴³ The Princeton trustees then officially adopted the Code,⁴⁴ which would be followed not only by graduating students at commencement ceremonies, but also by 'the members of the Faculty on all occasions of public ceremony ...'.⁴⁵

In the years after the Code's adoption, McCook did not assert his role in its beginnings, or at least no evidence of his doing so has been discovered. Leonard's business, and its role in establishing and maintaining the nation's academic dress records, kept him in the spotlight of the American cap and gown business. As the years passed he became identified as the instigator of the Code, even though he pointed out himself that 'the commission [was] proposed by Princeton', and that McCook 'was the moving spirit at Princeton in proposing the commission'.⁴⁶

Contemporary sources underscore McCook's role. Low, Columbia's president, in his annual report to the University in 1895, wrote of the Commission's formation '[o]n the initiation of Princeton University'.⁴⁷

Another Columbia president referred specifically to McCook. In 1913 Nicholas M. Butler, Low's successor, wrote, 'As I recall the facts, the man who took the initiative in introducing the present system was the late Col. John J. McCook, who

⁴² DD: Ibid.

⁴³ DD: Ibid.

⁴⁴ DD: By-law XXI, adopted 10 June 1895 (Princeton University, Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8) [henceforth, By-law XXI].

⁴⁵ DD: Letter of Willard Humphreys, Secretary, Faculty Committee on Academic Costumes, 3 January 1896 (Princeton University, Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8) [henceforth, 'Humphreys' Letter']. The mandate that 'full Academic costume be worn by all the members' of the faculty at 'all public functions of the University at which the Trustees or the Faculty are to appear in a body' was renewed by the trustees at their 15 October 1901 meeting, and it was communicated to the faculty in one of the first presidential acts of Woodrow Wilson on 11 September 1902 (Princeton University, Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume Files, Box 308, Folder 8).

⁴⁶ Leonard, 'Academic Costume', in Monroe, *Cyclopedia*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ DD: Quoted in Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 11. It is interesting that Leonard's own description of the formation of the Intercollegiate Commission highlights Princeton's key role, but later publications from the family firm of gownmakers preferred to emphasize Leonard's personal involvement and the importance of his magazine article. Even Smagorinsky, whose carefully researched booklet includes Princeton trustee actions from as early as 1752, does not cite Princeton's initiation of the Intercollegiate Commission process and does not mention that Princeton participated in the Commission. SW: The quote can be found in the original document: Seth Low, 'President's Annual Report', p. 21: Minutes of the Trustees [of Columbia University, Vol. XVI, 7 October 1895, appended after p. 3.



Fig. 1.
Bachelor's hood



Fig. 2.
Master's hood



Fig. 3.
Oxford Scholar



Fig. 4.
Oxford MA

Leonard, *Cap and Gown*, p. 12

Walters, p. 8

was at the time a trustee of Princeton.⁴⁸

The Intercollegiate Code, as adopted by Princeton, prescribed gowns for all degrees, as follows:

1. Pattern. Those commonly worn, with pointed sleeves for the Bachelor's Degree, with long closed sleeves for the Master's Degree, and with round open sleeves for the Doctor's Degree.
2. Material. Worsted stuff for the Bachelor's Degree, silk for the Master's and Doctor's Degrees.
3. Color. Black.⁴⁹

Figures 1 and 2 show Leonard's illustrations of the bachelor's and master's gowns.⁵⁰ Walters notes that 'the American master's gown is almost exactly like the

⁴⁸ SW: Butler, letter to Hugh Birkhead; 31 March 1913 (Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives, Central Files; Box 33, Folder 2: Commencement).

⁴⁹ DD: By-law XXI. The current version of the Code has been modified to read as follows: 'Pattern. Gowns 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 shape 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. ... Color. Black is recommended.' See <<http://acenet.edu>>.

⁵⁰ DD: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 12.

Oxford MA gown, while our bachelor's gown is similar to the Oxford scholar's gown'.⁵¹ She makes these comparisons to the 1828 plates of Oxford academic costumes shown in Figures 3 and 4,⁵² and while a certain amount of squinting may be required to find anything 'exactly like' either Oxford gown, the similarities are obvious, and there is little doubt that the Commission drew from the Oxford academic costume in creating the Code.⁵³

The provisions of the Code were inexact, and they required interpretation as to the precise length, patterns, and fabrics. Photographs from turn-of-the-century Princeton events show that the gowns were usually long enough to reach the tops of the shoes.⁵⁴ They were typically worn open over a suit and tie.⁵⁵ Concerning patterns and fabrics, the Princeton faculty committee observed that 'Messrs. Cotrell & Leonard, (gown-makers approved by the Trustees)', would take care of those particular details.⁵⁶ There would be an opportunity for each faculty member to make a choice in the 'trimmings' for the doctoral degrees, however. While the bachelor's and master's gowns would be 'untrimmed',

For the Doctor's Degree the gown is to be faced down the front with black velvet, with bars of the same across the sleeves; or the facings and cross-bars may be of velvet of the same color as the edging of the hood, being distinctive of the Faculty to which the degree pertains.⁵⁷

That is, the trimmings could either be black, or they could take on the colour of

⁵¹ DD: Walters, p. 10.

⁵² DD: Walters (p. 10) credits Nathaniel Whittock, *A Typographical and Historical Description of the University and City of Oxford, to which Is Added Correct Delineations of the Costume of the Members of the University* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton, 1828).

⁵³ Walters would have found closer parallels in the near-contemporary plate by A. T. Shrimpton, *Shrimpton's Series of the Costumes of the Members of the University of Oxford*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Shrimpton, 1885), <<http://www.archive.org/details/shrimptonsseries00atshrich>>. In fact, the poses of Leonard's models in *Cap and Gown* bear striking resemblances to those in Shrimpton. DD: It also appears that Leonard's interpretation of the patterns emphasizes the Oxford influence, especially in the master's gown. The prescription of 'long closed sleeves' could be read a variety of ways, but Leonard's gown does, in fact, look inspired by the Oxford design.

⁵⁴ DD: Archives, Historical Photographs Collection, Campus Life Series, AC 112, Box SP8.

⁵⁵ DD: Ibid.

⁵⁶ DD: Humphreys' Letter. Later, the letter notes that, 'You may of course have your costumes made by any makers you like; but this committee recommends Messrs. Cotrell and Leonard, of Albany, as their patterns have been approved by the Trustees. They have had the proper shade of orange silk woven, and they will make the costumes as cheaply as any one. It is unnecessary to emphasize the desirability of having our costumes uniform in general style.'

⁵⁷ DD: By-law XXI. The current version is substantially the same, with the added specification that there be 'three bars of velvet' on the sleeves. See <<http://acenet.edu>>.

the degree (white for letters, scarlet for theology, and so on, as described below in the colours used for the hoods). In all cases, according to the faculty committee, the ‘question of colored trimming is left wholly to the taste of each individual’.⁵⁸ The committee also specified that the facings in front are ‘about three inches wide’, and that the ‘cross-bars are three in number on the outside front of each sleeve, and are about an inch wide and three inches apart’.⁵⁹

Those faculty members who owned suitable gowns would still need a new hood, as that was the Code’s crowning achievement; it would be, in Leonard’s words, ‘a plain badge of the degree ... of the department of learning ... and of the institution granting the degree ...’.⁶⁰ The basic design, based on the Oxford shape, according to Leonard,⁶¹ did not require detailed instructions. The material would be the same as the gown, the pattern would be the one ‘usually followed’,⁶² and the outside colour would be black. As to size, the

length and form of the hood will indicate the Degree as follows: For the Bachelor’s Degree, the length shall be three-fourths that of the Master’s Degree. The hood for the Master’s Degree shall be of the customary length, not exceeding four feet; and that for the Doctor’s degree shall be of the same length, but have panels at the sides.⁶³

The lining of the hood identified the graduate’s university, such as orange and black for Princeton, light blue and white for Columbia, and blue for Yale.

Faculty colours were also established by the Commission, and are followed throughout American academe with only a few exceptions. The colour is used in the edging of the hood, ‘not exceeding six inches—in actual practice varying from two to five inches ...’. Often referred to in the United States as ‘degree colors’ or ‘department colors’, the original code assigned colours to eight faculties:

Arts and Letters	White	Theology	Scarlet
Law	Purple	Philosophy	Blue
Science	Gold yellow	Fine arts	Brown
Music	Pink	Medicine	Green ⁶⁴

The material of the edging was to be in silk, satin, or velvet. Today it is usually

⁵⁸ DD: Humphreys’ letter.

⁵⁹ DD: Ibid.

⁶⁰ DD: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 11.

⁶¹ DD: Ibid.

⁶² DD: By-law XXI.

⁶³ DD: By-law XXI. The current version reads: ‘The length and linings have been updated slightly in the current version of the code, as follows: 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 ...’ See <<http://acenet.edu>>.

⁶⁴ DD: Leonard, *Cap and Gown* (1896), p. 12.

velveteen. Its width was left to the discretion of universities. Princeton chose to specify the width for each degree, and its instructions—two, three, and five inches for bachelors, masters, and doctors—were incorporated into the Code in 1932.⁶⁵

The caps prescribed by the Code required far less description than the colour-coded hoods, and needed no explanatory comments: ‘The caps shall be of the material and form generally used, and commonly called mortar board caps. The color shall be black. The Doctor’s cap may be of velvet. Each cap shall be ornamented with a long tassel attached to the middle point at the top. The tassel of the Doctor’s cap may be in whole or in part, of gold thread.’⁶⁶ Caps could have either ‘flexible or stiff skull-part’. Princeton, demonstrating its good taste, suggested the latter.⁶⁷

Bureau of Academic Costume

On 2 July 1902, the Regents of the University of the State of New York—the formal name of the State Department of Education—chartered the Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Costume⁶⁸ to maintain a list of the details of academic dress and other visual insignia of universities and other schools, as well as universities’ academic dress statutes.⁶⁹ Cotrell & Leonard received the charter and developed a repository, as the firm mentioned in its advertisements and on its stationery.⁷⁰ Through acquisition, the repository moved to E. R. Moore in 1980 and then to Oak Hall, which promotes itself as holding the repository but has not permitted its contents to be reviewed.⁷¹

Alterations

The Code has been altered significantly three times. By the 1930s the American

⁶⁵ See Drakeman, pp. 65–66.

⁶⁶ DD: By-law XXI. In the current version, black mortar-boards are ‘generally recommended’, with the material to match the gown, except ‘for the doctor’s degree only, velvet’. See <<http://acenet.edu>>. As to the 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’ (ibid.).

⁶⁷ DD: By-law XXI.

⁶⁸ DB: John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy. *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities* (Edison, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), p. 487.

⁶⁹ RA: G. C. Leonard, ‘Costume, Academic’, in *The Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: The Encyclopedia Americana Corp., 1918), Vol. VIII, pp. 48–52.

⁷⁰ DB: Monroe, *Cyclopedia*, p. ix.

⁷¹ Robert Armagost writes (p. 145): ‘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’.

Council on Education oversaw it, calling it the Academic Costume Code, and in 1932 established a committee to review it. The committee recommended changes, which the ACE approved, to the length of the master's hood and the design device used on hood lining. The master's hood shrank to three and one-half feet. The chevron was added to the Code, and was to be part of the hood lining when a second colour was used. Leonard, writing in 1911, posited that 'the hoods' linings are seen treated heraldically as inverted shields, the colors being arranged as one or more chevrons ... or divided parti-per-chevron'. Whether it was the Code's creators who saw inverted shields or only he is unknown.⁷²

When the Code was published in 1957, in the seventh edition of *American Universities and Colleges*, the description of linings no longer required a chevron when more than two colours were used. It said: '... more than one color is shown by division of the field color in a variety of ways, such as chevron or chevrons, equal division, etc.'⁷³

1959

Four key changes were made in 1959, which took effect in 1960. We are lucky to have several documents relating to them, for they provide some small insight into the way the Council went about making its changes even though they include no explanations of them.

When the Council decided to study the Code in 1959, in addition to its interest in adding colours for faculties created since 1932, it referred to unspecified changes made by universities since then. The letter, from the Council's president, Arthur S. Adams, indicates that the Council took over the Code in 1932, the same year in which the first alterations were made and in which the Council first printed it.⁷⁴ The changes Adams referred to probably included a growth in graduation ceremonies and their importance since the committee took on the task of outlining the organization of commencement processions and recessions.

The committee was chaired by Daniel L. Marsh, the chancellor of Boston University (where the chief executive is today known as the president), but the member most recognizable to us was David A. Lockmiller, whose 1969 book *Scholars on Parade* discusses academic dress in America among other topics. At the time he was president-elect of Ohio Wesleyan University. A memo mailed to the eight members

⁷² SW: Leonard, 'Academic Costume', in Monroe, *Cyclopedia*, p. 15.

⁷³ RA: Mary Irwin, ed., *American Universities and Colleges*, 7th edn (Washington: American Council on Education, 1957), p. 1151.

⁷⁴ SW: Letter to Marjorie Nicolson, Columbia, from Adams, 5 May 1959 (Hoover Institution, Collection title: ACE, Box number 468, Folders 8 & 9). Unless noted, other documents from this collection are found in the same folders and are hereafter identified simply as Hoover Institution.

indicates that only four of them would be able to attend the meeting at the Council's offices in Washington, on Friday morning, 19 June, but it does not name them, and neither do other papers in the files, which are held by the archives of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, at Stanford. (The editors leave the reader to decide if the American system of academic dress rises to the level of revolutionary, or if it has simply caused a few battles now and again.)

Three similarities to the original Intercollegiate Code meeting pop up. Cotrell & Leonard was invited to attend in an advisory capacity. Someone from Columbia was included. And Harvard may not have attended: of the entire group on the membership list, only the university marshal of Harvard, J. Hampton Robb, did not reply to indicate if he would attend. (Another document, which is undated, indicates with a handwritten tick which members have 'accepted'. Robb's name alone has no tick, but it is unknown if the tick indicated membership in the group or something else.) Despite Robb's silence, he remained on the mailing list.⁷⁵

The archives hold no notes of the meeting itself, but one of the committee's recommendations was recorded on the following Monday, when the group sent to the president of the Council a memo asking that its name be changed to the Committee on Academic Costume and Ceremonies so that it would feel it had the authority to discuss commencement procedures. The president approved it on Tuesday.⁷⁶

Also on Tuesday, a Council staff member sent a memo to committee members a memo that contained a draft of their changes to the Code.⁷⁷ In addition to new faculty colours, a discussion about the sleeves of the master's gown appears in the draft and in a later memo: should they be detachable?⁷⁸ It is difficult to imagine what they had in mind—a convertible, sleeveless gown—but luckily the idea was not approved. The draft includes a note that text of the academic ceremony guide would be circulated later.

From a second memo we learn that universities had been asking for new faculty colours, and that O. J. Hoppner of Cotrell & Leonard (who had written a booklet on US academic dress in 1948, in which he identified himself as vice-president of the Bureau⁷⁹), was happy to assist with suggestions. The memo reads, in part:

A number of queries have been received in the past, particularly concerning nursing, social work, and one or two other academic disciplines that have come into

⁷⁵ SW: The other members: Ted McCarrel, registrar, Iowa State University; Karl E. Metzger, secretary, Rutgers; Marjorie Nicolson, chairman of the department of English and comparative literature, Columbia; and Bernard M. Peebles, department of Greek and Latin, Catholic University of America (Hoover Institution, Memo to the committee from Raymond F. Howes, American Council on Education, 27 May 1959).

⁷⁶ SW: Hoover Institution, Memo to Arthur S. Adams, 22 June 1959.

⁷⁷ SW: Hoover Institution, Memo to the committee from Howes, ACE, 23 June 1959.

⁷⁸ SW: Hoover Institution, Memo to the committee from Howes, ACE, 7 July 1959.

⁷⁹ *Academic Costume in America: A Compendium* (Cotrell & Leonard, 1948).

prominence in recent years. Mr. Hoppner's list included a number of these areas with information on colors actually now in use. A list of those not included in the revised Code follows.⁸⁰

It reads:

Foreign Service	Peacock Blue	Political Science	Royal Blue
Social Work	Citron	Retailing	Turquoise
Chiropody	Nile Green	Optometry	Sea Foam
Nursing	Apricot		

The memo concludes with the writer's suggestion to add only those colours approved by a unanimous vote. No tally of the votes remains, but it led to the adoption of the colours suggested for foreign service, social science, and nursing. If there ever were actual faculties of retailing, they did not manage to get turquoise adopted even unofficially, unlike the other three faculties, who use these or similar colours today, without the Code's sanction.

Two further drafts were circulated in mid-October and late October, the latter being approved as the revised Code.⁸¹ It includes these changes:

- The introduction concludes by noting that the academic dress committee met in 1959 'and made several significant changes'. (Starting with the eleventh edition in 1987, the word 'significant' was dropped from the description of these changes.) The introduction concludes with permission to wear academic dress made before the revision even if it did not follow the revision, so long as it was in good condition.
- On the master's gown sleeves, the slit for the arm was moved lower, near or at the wrist; Sheard suggested later that fewer layers of clothing prompted the committee to move the masters' sleeve slits to the wrist. 'The gown was the despair of the wearers because no matter how hot the day a coat had to be worn under it,' Sheard writes. 'Disregard of the rules led on occasion to spectacular, if incorrect results when members of the physical education department wearing short sleeved shirts were observed with their brawny arms protruding from the slits.'⁸²
- Also on the master's gown sleeves, the arc was to be cut from the front (its location had not been specified before, but Leonard's illustrations show it in the

⁸⁰ SW: The next several paragraphs are from a memo with the title, author and date identical to the one referred to in note 78 (Hoover Institution).

⁸¹ SW: Hoover Institution, Memo to the committee from Howes, ACE, including a draft of the Code, 30 October 1959.

⁸² Sheard, p. 3.

back (see Fig. 3)).⁸³

- Gowns for the master and doctor were permitted to be worn closed at least in part because of the increasingly casual attire worn under gowns in the 1950s.
- Under ‘Hoods’, the eighth edition drops from the seventh edition (1956) a short discussion on the idea of letting faculty members wear hoods lined with the colours of the institution where they teach instead of the institution that granted the degree. ‘This proposal is counted unworthy of endorsement,’ the seventh edition reports, because of the confusion created when a viewer would no longer know where the wearer’s degree had been conferred.⁸⁴ No mention of granting degrees or even academic dress privileges *ad eundem* was made.
- Also under ‘Hoods’ in the eighth edition, in the portion on ‘Trimmings’, is the addition of an explanation of faculty colour assignment. Reprinted exactly from the draft, the Code connects the graduate’s subject to the colour: ‘For example, the trimming for the degree of Master of Science in Agriculture should be maize, representing agriculture, rather than golden yellow, representing science’.⁸⁵
- Under ‘Caps’, under ‘Form’ the dependent clause was added to this sentence: ‘Mortarboards are generally recommended, although soft square-topped caps are permissible for women’. Was this a forerunner to the tam?⁸⁶
- Also under ‘Caps’, both the draft and the eighth edition delete a helpful note that had busted the American myth that tassels on one side of the cap indicate a conferred degree and on the other side indicate candidacy for it. The seventh edition states that the tassel ‘... may lie in any direction with equal meaning, since a passing breeze will determine its position at any time’. The popular conception that a graduate’s tassel must hang over the left side of the cap ‘has no warrant in precedent or in common sense’.⁸⁷ In the eighth edition, a reference to tassel position was included in ‘An Academic Ceremony Guide’ (which first appeared in the eighth edition), and which takes a less jocular tone: ‘There is no general rule for the position of the tassel ...’ It concludes by suggesting that ‘[t]his custom [of moving the tassel from one side to another] is in some respects a substitute for individual hooding’.⁸⁸
- A new entry on ‘Other Apparel’ debuts in the eighth edition. Taken from the draft verbatim, it recommends dark clothes and shoes and recommends against

⁸³ See Armagost, p. 145.

⁸⁴ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1151.

⁸⁵ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1135.

⁸⁶ See also Hoffmann, p. 49.

⁸⁷ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1151.

⁸⁸ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1136.

‘[f]lowers and decorative jewelry’ on the gown.⁸⁹

- The portion reviewing ‘Some Permissible Exceptions’ approves of robes of office. In the seventh edition, and since at least the third, officers were described as having ‘their gowns trimmed with gold braid in amount corresponding in the rank of the position held. This usage may be permissible but appears to be losing favor.’⁹⁰ Perhaps since it had been losing favour since 1936—the text was identical from the third edition to the seventh—the description was changed for the eighth edition, which at point 2 reads:

In some colleges and universities, it is customary for the president, chancellor or chief officer to wear a costume similar to that used by the head of a foreign university. This practice should be strictly limited.⁹¹

In addition, the eighth edition adds a point, No. 3, on the chief marshal, who ‘may wear a specially designed costume approved by his institution’.⁹²

- A detail that promoted consistency was deleted in the eighth edition. All tassels were originally to be black except for doctors, who could wear gold. Up to the seventh edition, the Code acknowledges (at point 5) that tassels in faculty colours ‘may be permissible, but the weight of argument seems to be in favor of simplicity and uniformity in all the details of academic costume’.⁹³ By yielding to what was evidently becoming a popular use of faculty colour in tassels, it could be said that the Code was moving away from the simplicity and uniformity it once advocated. Indeed, the 1960s would see a tremendous growth in personal expression through clothing. Today coloured tassels are common.
- Dispensing with hoods for bachelors went from being ‘customary’ and ‘justifiable’ (to save the cost) but ‘regrettable’ in the seventh edition (at point 6) to being merely ‘customary’ in the eighth, now moved to the new guide on academic ceremony.⁹⁴
- Finally, the eighth edition’s ceremony guide reports that while candidates for degrees ‘traditionally’ do not wear their hoods until the degree has been conferred, at ceremonies where degrees are awarded *en masse*, instead of where candidates are hooded individually, the candidates may wear their hoods from the beginning of the ceremony.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1135.

⁹⁰ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1152.

⁹¹ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1136.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1152.

⁹⁴ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1152, and 8th edn, p. 1136.

⁹⁵ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1136.

In summary, the Code included several changes that took effect in 1960:

- Faculty colours were assigned to the subject studied, not the degree name.
- Soft, square caps were permitted for women.
- Dark clothes were suggested under gowns; flowers and jewellery were not to be worn on gowns.
- A university chief might wear a robe of office similar to that of a ‘foreign university’, and the chief marshal was permitted a unique gown.
- Tassels in faculty colours became explicitly permissible, though frowned upon.
- Candidates might wear hoods at the beginning of a commencement ceremony when their degrees would be conferred as a group, rather than individually.

The work of the 1959 Committee was expected to endure. A letter from the Council in March 1961, written in reply to a nomination to the Committee, states that no action will be taken on academic costume for at least three years.⁹⁶

Yet in April 1961, a new faculty colour was requested, investigated, and approved in a span of sixteen days. On 4 April, the executive secretary of the American Home Economics Association asked the Council to add a faculty colour for studies in its field, pointing out that 500 colleges and universities had granted 8,000 degrees in home economics in 1960. Within three days, a Council staff member wrote to Hoppner of Cotrell & Leonard to seek his suggestion for a colour, had contacted the Committee members by post, and on 20 April the Council informed the home economists that the Committee approved for them the colour maroon.⁹⁷ Despite the approval, home economics has never been included in a version of the Code published by the Council. Cotrell & Leonard, however, published it.⁹⁸

1973

More changes were included when the section titled ‘Additional Guidance on Costume’ was added to the eleventh edition (1973). It originated as a memo written in 1967 from the Council’s Commission on Academic Affairs. Addressed to the Council’s member universities, the statement was only lightly edited before being

⁹⁶ SW: Letter from Eleanor Quill, secretary to Adams, ACE; to Mary Ellen Piez, 6 March 1961 (Hoover Institution, Collection title: ACE, Box number 493, Folder 8).

⁹⁷ SW: Letters from Howe, ACE, to American Home Economics Association and to Cotrell & Leonard, 7 April 1959; and from Adams, ACE, to American Home Economics Association, 20 April 1959 (Hoover Institution, Collection title: ACE, Box number 493, Folder 8).

⁹⁸ See Armagost, p. 148, for a discussion of maroon and colours assigned in 1960.

included in the published Code.⁹⁹

As with tassel colours in 1960, a mere seven years later the academic dress committee indicates that alterations are not forbidden. The memo points out that ‘the general guidelines are as stated and should not be interpreted as supported by highly detailed and hard-and-fast regulations on file in some central place’. Reading between the memo’s lines may not have been the committee’s expectation, but in doing so a certain permissiveness emerges. One can speculate that the relaxed attitude may have come from the changing popular attitudes towards dress of all kinds in the mid-1960s, as well as the growing number of universities that were adopting their own academic dress at the same time.

Here are the salient changes to the Code in 1973, followed with notes about the 1967 memo.

- The first paragraph refers to the section’s start as a memorandum, and explains that it was included because of the ‘large numbers of requests for advice about academic dress’ since the publication of the Code. The note appears in the memo.
- The Associate of Arts degree was permitted to have a ‘flat shield hood’, which we would call a cape, and which had been first used by Columbia for its bachelors and doctors in 1963.¹⁰⁰ Both the Code and the memo recommend against it, suggesting instead a bachelor’s hood without edging around the cowl.
- What are referred to as six-year specialist degrees, such as the Master of Arts in Teaching, were provided a hood with four inches of velvet edging (because it is in between three inches for a master and five inches for a doctor), and at a length of three feet, nine inches (by the same reasoning: it is between a master’s three-and-a-half foot hood and a doctor’s four-foot hood).
- An alternate faculty colour for ‘Commerce, Accountancy, Business’ was included: Sapphire blue. It was a footnote to the list of faculty colours, which added a suggestion: ‘Not recommended because of the likely confusion with blues previously assigned to other subjects’.¹⁰¹ Drab was, and remains, the standard colour. There is no explanation for the colour choice, nor for its inclusion.

⁹⁹ SW: It did not appear in the 10th edition, published in 1968. Memo from Commission of Academic Affairs [of the American Council on Education], to Member Institutions, 9 November 1967 (Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives). The committee members were Joseph Shoban, of the Council and the committee chairman; Charles P. McCurdy, Jr., of the American Association of Universities; and Gustave Arlt, of the Council of Graduate Schools. Arlt would be identified in 1971 as the outgoing chairman of the committee.

¹⁰⁰ See Wolgast, ‘King’s Crowns’, pp. 117–18.

¹⁰¹ SW: Furniss, 11th edn, p. 1756.

- Both the eleventh edition and the memo that it is based on introduce a contradiction to the Code. Since at least 1936, in the third edition, the Code referred to faculty colours as determined by the name of the degree (i.e. arts or sciences) instead of the field studied. The relevant sentence in the third edition, found under hood trimmings, reads, ‘... the color [of the cowl’s edging] should be distinctive of the subject named in the diploma given in conferment of the degree’.¹⁰²

Diplomas usually state only the name of the degree, such as Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science, but perhaps some went further and named the academic specialty (or ‘major’ in American parlance), because the description was altered in the seventh edition (1956) to add ‘faculty’: ‘... the color should be distinctive of the faculty or subject to which the degree pertains, as indicated by the wording on the diploma.’¹⁰³ Did the committee have in mind a distinction between a faculty and a subject, such as Bachelor of Arts in philosophy? Or were the two terms intended to be synonyms?

Perhaps it was the former, because in the eighth edition (1960), the degree name was no longer the determining factor: ‘... the trimming for the degree of Master of Science in Agriculture should be maize, representing agriculture, rather than golden yellow, representing science.’¹⁰⁴

It is the eleventh edition (1973) that codifies a contradiction. Under ‘Additional Guidance on Costume’, point 5 reads: ‘For the hood, the border [i.e. edging of the cowl] should be white if the degree is awarded in arts (B.A. or M.A.), golden yellow if in science (B.S. or M.S.).’¹⁰⁵ The memo was the source of this variation, with the same examples cited. It appears on the page following the directive reproduced in the previous paragraph that gives the opposite direction.

What was the MFA who studied music to wear? Or the economist with a BS? Starting in 1973, the graduate could choose the colour she preferred, it seems, as long as she did not combine two faculty colours on the same garment. Only in 1987, when the thirteenth edition was published, did one of the duelling rules win. From then to the present day, colours are determined by the subject studied—agriculture, for instance—instead of by the name of the degree—Master of Science, in the Code’s example.

Doctors did not have any clearer guidance. The eleventh edition includes astonishingly vague information:

Interdisciplinary doctorates should be distinguished by the colors of the principal field under which the degree is awarded. Thus, urban affairs may be distinguished by

¹⁰² SW: Clarence Stephen Marsh, ed., *American Universities and Colleges*, 3rd edn (Washington: American Council on Education, 1936), p. 1066.

¹⁰³ SW: Irwin, 7th edn, p. 1151. For a further discussion, see Armagost, p. 146.

¹⁰⁴ SW: Irwin, 8th edn, p. 1135.

¹⁰⁵ SW: Furniss, 11th edn, p. 1758.

copper (economics), peacock blue (public administration), or another field already assigned a color above [in the standard list]. Multiplication of color assignment is impracticable.¹⁰⁶

That final sentence, if the academic dress committee had applied its reasoning to the previous sentence, would have prevented the Code from countenancing a degree of disarray that deserves to be called, at the least, illogical.

As printed, the Code delegated its decision-making to the doctors themselves, who could essentially choose their own colour.

Within this ridiculous framework, we can understand the motive to assign dark blue for everyone earning the PhD, a change the Code published in 1987 ‘to represent the mastery of the discipline of learning and scholarship in any field ...’¹⁰⁷

Concluding their memo, the group demonstrated that colours were not the only topic that confused the Committee on Academic Costume and Ceremony. The document ends by naming the members who wrote it. Above their names they typed, in all capital letters, ‘COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC COSTUME’.

The last documents in the Hoover Institution archives are two letters from 1970. The committee still existed, though reduced in number and prestige. Only three people sat on it, none of whom appears to have been on a university faculty at the time.¹⁰⁸ The first letter, from J. Boyd Page, who had been acting on behalf of the former chairman (in which position he had responded, he reports, to three recent enquiries), asks the Council to name a new chairman, which in the second letter the Council does by appointing him.¹⁰⁹ Nothing more recent is in the archives.

1987

It is commonly said that in 1986 the Council made one change, first published in 1987, to identify dark blue as the colour for the Doctor of Philosophy, an exception to the general rule for other degrees.

Several other changes were made, however, that are little noticed, probably because most are deletions.

The text of the Code in the thirteenth edition is the first attributed to Eugene

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ SW: As found in the final paragraph of the ‘trimmings’ section of ‘Hoods’ in any version of the Code since then.

¹⁰⁸ SW: In addition to the letter-writer, J. Boyd Page, president of the Council of Graduate School in the US, they were W. Todd Furniss, director of the Commission on Academic Affairs at ACE (he would be the editor of the eleventh edition (1973), and Allan W. Ostar, the executive director of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities: Membership list, July 1970 (Hoover Institution, Collection title: ACE, Box number 602, Folder 8).

¹⁰⁹ SW: Letter from Page, Council of Graduate Schools, to Logan Wilson, president, ACE, 9 July 1970; and Wilson’s letter in reply to Page, 13 July 1970 (Hoover Institution, Collection title: ACE, Box number 602, Folder 8).

Sullivan, the person listed as the author in the ACE book (and on its web site, whose version is from the fifteenth edition). He did not, of course, write the Code, but he re-wrote portions of it, generally modernizing the language, and he re-wrote the introductory overview. In previous editions the introduction was longer and more detailed, and included references to the Laudian Statutes and the Bureau of Academic Costume. Sullivan introduced Gardner Leonard to the Code by name and repeats the erroneous idea that the Code was his innovation.

The authority for the changes published in 1987 is unknown. The hierarchy of the American Council on Education included commissions and committees; the Committee on Academic Dress and Ceremonies reported to the Commission on Academic Affairs. If the structure was fully functioning in the mid-1980s then Sullivan probably made the changes that others had approved. If the structure had broken down, many other possibilities come into play.

Whoever the source was, the changes that appeared in 1987 are these:

- Gown material was no longer specified (it had been cotton, silk, or rayon). Hood material, being the same as the gown, also changed.
- Sapphire blue was no longer an option for Commerce, Accountancy, and Business, for which the faculty colour was once again only drab.
- The soft, square-topped cap for women was removed.
- Under 'Other Apparel', the reference to keeping flowers and jewellery off gowns changed to make it broader: 'Nothing else should be worn on the academic gown.'
- Under 'Some Permissible Exceptions', two items were removed. The reference to a chief marshal's unique costume is gone, and the portion that once permitted 'customary habits' to be worn by members of religious orders and similar societies, the military and those who hold civil office, now omitted the societies similar to religious orders.
- For the Associate in Arts degree 'in teacher education', the light blue gown is omitted, while light grey remains the suggestion for all associates' degrees.
- The confusing suggestion that an interdisciplinary doctorate can be one of several colours is removed.
- Finally, a suggestion for further reading is done away with. It had grown from mentioning only Lockmiller to add Smith and Sheard and two articles in the

International Encyclopedia of Higher Education: 'Academic Dress and Insignia', written by Smith, and 'Academic Dress, History of', written by Franklyn.¹¹⁰

Rules or a guide?

When readers first encounter the Code they often come away from it believing it to be a strict set of rules which are not to be departed from. It is not hard to understand why. First, the academic dress regulations of most universities (outside the US, that is) are, in fact, sets of rules, so by extension we expect all academic dress regulations to be rules. Second, the Code includes some specific details, a trait common to most sets of rules.

A closer reading, however, reveals another possibility. When one asks what the Code requires, it is fair to say that the answer is: Nothing.

The current version of the Code includes this statement:

*... 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 ..'*¹¹¹

Impossible? Great is the number of universities with academic dress codes far more complicated than the Code (with the possible exception of the Code's guidelines for determining faculty colour). The Code, however, has a few tremendous difficulties that even Chancellor Laud never had to consider: Thousands of degree-granting institutions spread across a good portion of a continent, with robemakers scattered throughout, and few if any of them conversing with the others about such matters to make sure their hoods and gowns do not vary from established patterns even a nail's breadth. When a system is voluntarily adopted by publicly funded two-year community colleges (that award associates' degrees) and the most prestigious private research universities, it must be easily followed by all, no matter the institution's degree of interest in history, detail, and tradition of academic dress.

Even the colour for the PhD reveals itself, on close reading, to be a suggestion rather than a requirement. The Code: '[T]he dark blue color is used to represent the mastery of the discipline of learning and scholarship in any field ...'. The language implies that anyone who earns a PhD should wear dark blue, but it does not prohibit a professor with a PhD in physics (for example) from wearing the bumblebee gown of black with golden yellow trim. By contrast, the Code's explanation of faculty

¹¹⁰ The encyclopaedia was published in 1977 by Jossey-Bass, of San Francisco, Washington, and London.

¹¹¹ SW: Emphases added. Eugene Sullivan, 'Academic Costume Code and Ceremony Guide', *American Colleges and Universities*, 16th edn (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), p. 1860.

colour for all other degrees is specific: ‘... the color should be indicative of the subject to which the degree pertains.’ In other words, a BA in pre-law should wear purple, not white.

These explanations come decades after the Code’s introduction. In 1895, Americans were creating a national template, so to gain broad acceptance, simplicity and permissiveness made sense and still do today. In suggesting that tradition ‘should’ be followed, the Code acknowledges that tradition may be departed from. The quote refers to a medieval tradition of dress, which was hardly uniform; we know that the model that the Code is based on is largely that of late nineteenth-century Oxford.

The Oxford tradition, like the medieval tradition it carries on, includes coloured gowns for doctors, making the Code, despite its claim, appear to be something of a departure from tradition instead of an adherent to it. Rather like Archbishop Carey’s position that using the Oxford gowns of his predecessor for Lambeth degrees, instead of those of London, where he earned his degrees, is a continuance of tradition when, as Graham Zellick points out, it is tradition that he departs from.¹¹²

In another place the Code disapprovingly mentions that some doctoral gowns use two colours to indicate two degrees. These are rare birds; somewhat more common are cowls edged in two colours to indicate two degrees of equal rank. Instead of forbidding such displays outright, the Code speaks as if taking a stance on a question of etiquette: ‘Good precedent directs that a single degree from a single institution should be indicated by a single garment.’

Where is the Laudian-style thunder over consequences of variation? If the Code cannot speak in terms harsher than ‘good precedent’, clever people will break from the Code. An alternative explanation suggests that the Code is not intended to be unbendable. In the language of the 1967 memo, the Code is a set of ‘general guidelines’, not ‘highly detailed and hard-and-fast regulations’. After all, there is no academic dress police ensuring compliance.

Reaction

Not all American institutions follow the Code and some that purport to do so have taken liberties with it. Paul Fussell, in his book *BAD; Or, The Dumbing of America* and in *Uniforms: Why We Are What We Wear*, laments the deviations from the Intercollegiate Code. He rages against coloured rather than black doctoral gowns and complains about further outrages, in the form of bragging ‘emblems, logos, and signifiers’, as an example of ‘needless deviation from an eminently successful, well-known model, and [he writes] it’s especially sad in the world of learning, where (churches aside) history and tradition are most highly honored. The very implicit

¹¹² SW: Letter from Zellick to Lambeth Palace, reprinted in Graham Zellick, ‘Lambeth Academic Dress and the University of London’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 7 (2007), p. 42.

archaism of full-dress academic uniform is one of its meanings.¹¹³

By lionizing the Code, Fussell seems to see the American scheme of 1895 as the zenith of academic dress, overlooking the far older antecedents of coloured gowns and the identification made possible over the centuries by ‘signifiers’, even if gimp, inverted-T armholes, and strings are considerably subtler than the crowns and crows’ feet that caught his eye. He also overlooks the limitations of the Code, those guidelines that prevent it from fulfilling some of its original goals, such as showing, at a glance, a graduate’s degree and alma mater.

Fussell also makes the mistake of overstating the role of his alma mater in shaping American academic dress in the twentieth century:

Here, Harvard University must assume much of the blame, for it helped originate the modern movement in academic uniform. It granted its doctors of “philosophy” and other things the right to wear pinkish (in its view, crimson) gowns with contrasting black stripes on the sleeves.

This departure from the classic black opened the floodgates. Gaudy doctoral gowns appeared all over the country.¹¹⁴

Only the last of his four sentences is not demonstrably wrong; gaudy, on the other hand, is in the eye of the critic. We have seen that the origin and development of the Code had nothing to do with Harvard (indeed, Harvard did not take part in the original meeting and may have skipped the 1959 meeting as well), and that, as Hoffmann reports in this issue, while Harvard students wore gowns in the late seventeenth century, Princeton and Columbia were the first to regulate and require them. We know that coloured gowns in America were worn at Pennsylvania and Hampton-Sydney, as well as Princeton and Columbia, sixty to eighty years before Harvard’s crimson gown appeared (not to mention the centuries of precedence in England and Europe). In the twentieth century, Brown, Yale, Rochester and Syracuse all had coloured academic dress before Harvard, and other universities may have too.

One detail, however, that is growing rapidly in the US can be attributed to Harvard. Its crows’ feet inspired numerous universities—or their robemakers—to apply insignia to the facings of their gowns.

Instead of weakening the Code, variations may provide the invigoration that keeps it alive. Without specific prohibitions against crows’ feet and coloured gowns, the Code survives as a framework within which America’s four thousand colleges and universities clothe their graduates.

¹¹³ JG: Fussell, *Uniforms* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), pp. 143–44. Also see Paul Fussell, *BAD; or, the Dumbing of America* (New York: Summit, 1991), pp. 74–75. Bruce Christianson points out that the trend to coloured doctoral gowns ‘is gathering momentum in the United States’ (personal communication, 2008).

¹¹⁴ SW: Fussell, *Bad*, p. 75.

Chart 1: Pre-Code faculty colours in the US

	Pennsylvania ¹ 1887	Columbia ² 1887	NYU ³ 1892
Arts	Marine Blue	White	Violet
Philosophy	Sapphire Blue	White	Green
Medicine	Crimson	Green	Crimson
Law	Purple	Pink	Blue
Divinity	Black ⁴	-	Purple
Science	Light Blue	Gold Yellow	Yellow
Engineering	-	-	Yellow
Pedag/Educ	-	-	White
Dentistry	Pink	-	-
Vet Med	Cardinal	-	-
Theology	-	Blue	-
Letters	-	White	-

¹ University of Pennsylvania, University Archives and Records Center, UPG 7, Commencement and Convocation Program Collection, 1887, 8 June.

² Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives, Minutes of the Trustees [of Columbia University], Vol. IX, 5 Dec. 1887, pp. 391–93.

³ ‘New-York University’, *New York Times*, 24 April 1892.

⁴ The color for divinity was suggested, but not approved. Letter from the Secretary to the Provost, 22 April 1887 (University of Pennsylvania, Archives, General Administration Records, UPA 3, Box 21, Folder title: 1887 Commencement).

Chart 2: Hood specifications of the University of the South, 1872

The statutes call for these guidelines in hood colours:

‘First. That the rank of the degree be indicated by the color of the hood. Second. That the kind of degree be indicated by the color of the linings.’

Degree	Hood	Lining	Trim
BP (i.e. BPhil)	Black	Black	Blue
BS	Black	Dark brown	Blue
BA	Black	Russet	Blue
BD	Black	Scarlet	Blue
BCL	Black	Green	‘fur or ermine’
BMus	Black	White	Blue
MA	Blue	White	Scarlet
DD	Scarlet	Black	Green
DCL	Scarlet	Green	Ermine
PhD	Scarlet	Brown	Black
MD	Scarlet	Yellow	Black
MusD	Scarlet	Blue	White

Source: Archives of the University of the South, Minutes [of the Trustees], University of the South, 1872, p. 32.

Chart 3: Unique academic dress in the US before the Code

University of the South, 1872

Doctors (honorary only, in Civil Law, Divinity, and Literature) wore gowns following the pattern of Oxford, trimmed in the colours of the University of the South (see Chart 2).

Pennsylvania, 1887

The yokes of doctors' gowns were in the faculty colour, as were the facings. No hoods were worn.

Columbia, 1887

The doctors' ordinary gown was black with three purple velvet stripes on each sleeve and purple facings; it probably resembled a modern JD gown. The doctors' festal gown was scarlet with facings in the faculty colour. The sleeves were lined (presumably in the faculty colours) and had no sleeve stripes. It was worn without a hood.

New York, 1891

The doctor's gown followed the Columbia doctor's ordinary gown, except that New York trimmed its gown in faculty colours (see Chart 1).

Hampton-Sydney, 1893

A grey gown.

Princeton, 1893

The university's gown, presumably for all graduates, was black with a thin orange stripe on the yoke between the shoulders. Orange and black are the University's corporate colours.