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Designing a College Trustee Gown

by John K. Lundy

In 2000 I decided to look into the possibility of designing a custom gown for the Board of Trustees of Clark College. Clark is a small public college in the northwestern community of Vancouver, Washington, USA, with approximately 9,000 students. The Board of Trustees are appointed to four-year terms by the State Governor and are responsible for setting policy and direction for the College, and appointing the College President. As political appointees, they may or may not hold an academic degree.

Trustees attend graduation ceremonies and the Chair of the Board addresses the congregation. Traditionally, they have worn the academic dress of the degree they hold or if no degree is held, a black bachelor's gown and a square. In my view, this certainly did not distinguish them from other officers of the College, nor even student speakers or other guests on the podium. A custom gown would distinguish them as high ranking officers of the College.

In the United States, academic dress is prescribed by the Intercollegiate Code, and the majority of colleges and universities follow its guidelines. Bachelors', masters' and doctors' degrees are distinguished by gown shape (and trim in the case of doctors), and hood trim and length. The Trustee gown would not denote a degree, but status within the College, and as such, I wanted it to be distinctive in style and colour.

I researched some of the Trustee gowns illustrated on robemaker web sites and found them often to be a doctorate gown with additional trim, i.e. four velvet bars on the sleeves as opposed to the three of the doctoral gown. Many of the Trustee outfits have hoods, which to me are not warranted since the dress denotes status not the holding of a degree. After looking at several variations and finding them unsuitable, I started sketching possibilities.



In the end, I decided on a doctoral style gown with open bell sleeves to denote that while the dress does not denote a degree, it does indicate a status above most doctors of the College. I chose the school's colour, blue, for the gown and trim. The body of the gown is of light blue cloth, and the facings and lower half of the sleeves are of royal blue velvet. The outer edge of the facings and the upper edge of the sleeve trim is bordered with a thin gold band. With this is worn a soft tam, of light blue velvet, trimmed in gold with a gold tassel.

As you can see from the illustration, it is distinctive but not overdone. In 2001 the College President approved of the idea and design and submitted them to the Board of Trustees for approval. The Board approved the gown, but delayed actually having the gowns made owing to serious budget shortfalls that still plague the publicly funded colleges and universities in Washington State. It is hoped that in the near future circumstances will allow the purchasing of these gowns for the Trustees, adding a measure of colour and distinction to graduation ceremonies.