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American Universities' Departure from the Academic Costume Code

by David T. Boven

Abstract

Academic dress in the United States of America began after the foundation of the colonial colleges. A gradual decline in its use continued from independence until the decades after the Civil War. It was halted by the creation of the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume in 1895. Within a generation, though, the Intercollegiate Code was being abandoned in favour of distinctive academic dress. This paper looks more closely at some of the universities that have chosen not to follow the Code for their own academic costume, a practice seen especially in doctoral gowns. A notable example is the doctoral gown of Stanford University in California. The institutions that have departed from the Code highlight the need for its revision to make academic dress more appealing to and practical for American colleges and universities.

For more than a hundred years, academic dress in the United States has been dominated by the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume. This systematic code of regulations details the accepted use of academic costume. It was promulgated in 1895 as interest in academic dress was increasing. In Britain, a vibrant and flexible system had developed from the existing practices of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In the United States a very structured system was established that limited the diversity of academic dress across the country.

Less than a generation after the implementation of the Code, institutions in the United States slowly began to chip away at it. As the desire for individuality among colleges and universities has grown, it has led to new forms of academic dress that do not fit within the framework of the Code.¹ The group that has deviated from

¹ Eugene Sullivan, 'Academic Costume Code & Ceremony Guide', 1997, <<http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=10625>> (accessed 24 March 2009). The Intercollegiate Code has been merged into the regulations of the Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies, which is a body of the American Council on Education. This is the version of the Code in current use and with which most readers will be familiar.

it includes some of the most prestigious research universities in the country, and these deviations are the focus of this paper. Understanding the current practice of universities—especially with regard to doctoral dress—makes more apparent the shortcomings of the Intercollegiate Code and the need for change, as exhibited by the doctoral gown of Stanford University in California.

1. A short history of academic dress in the United States

The use of academic dress in Europe has been well documented in several papers, and it need not be recounted here. The European or, more specifically, British usage of distinctive costume in academic institutions was carried over the Atlantic owing to the strong ties between England and its colonies. Some schools, such as Princeton University in New Jersey, Brown University in Rhode Island, and Columbia University in New York, dressed their scholars in academic gowns from the 1700s.² Princeton mandated that all students except freshmen wear academic dress in 1755.³ Brown University—also founded during the American colonial period—first used an academic costume shortly after the colonies gained independence. On 13 March 1786, the Corporation of the University decreed that ‘in future, the Candidates for Bachelors degrees, being Alumni of the College should be clad at Commencement in black flowing robes & caps similar to those used at other Universities. Resolved, that an exclusive right of furnishing such robes ... be granted and confirmed to an Undertaker for the space of fifteen years’.⁴

During the period immediately after the Civil War, however, the uses of academic dress in the United States were in sharp decline. In the opinion of Gardner Cotrell Leonard, writing thirty years later, the cause was an Anglophobic distaste for all things British, which would surely have included academic dress.⁵ Thomas Wood notes that while there were a great many degree-granting institutions in the country, relatively few of them actually made use of academic dress at all. In fact, he states that most of those that did use caps and gowns in their ceremonies were

² Helen Walters, *The Story of Caps and Gowns* (New York: E. R. Moore Company, 1939), p. 9; Stephen Wolgast, ‘King’s Crowns: The History of Academic Dress at King’s College and Columbia University’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), p. 80.

³ Margaret Smagorinsky, *The Regalia of Princeton University: Pomp, Circumstance, and Accountrements [sic] of Academia* (Princeton, N.J.: Trustees of Princeton University, 1994), p. 4.

⁴ Quoted in Martha Mitchell, ‘Encyclopedia Brunoniana, Academic costume’, 1993, <http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=A0010> (accessed 24 March 2009).

⁵ *The Cap and Gown in America* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1896), p. 2. Some of Leonard’s writings portray him as figuring very prominently in the return of academic dress to the United States.

affiliated to the Episcopal Church and, thus, had a tendency to follow British custom on matters such as this.⁶ In 1883, Wood knew of only five institutions that conferred academic dress on their students along with their degrees. These were Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut; the General Theological Seminary in New York; the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee; Racine College in Racine, Wisconsin; and Hobart College in Geneva, New York.⁷ Wood does not mention Brown University, which used academic dress at the time, and it is possible that there are other schools of which he was not aware.⁸ It is clear that in these formative stages, some of the oldest and most prestigious universities seem to have abandoned the use of academic dress, or not made use of it at all.⁹

The impetus for change seems to have come from students. Even as the official use of academic attire declined in American colleges and universities, some students appropriated different aspects of it. For example, in 1881 students at Oberlin College in Ohio adopted the traditional square cap, or mortar-board, as their official headgear for commencements. Tassels of different colours were used to represent different classes.¹⁰ This was not something unique to Oberlin; the student newspaper, the *Oberlin Review*, noted that ‘Oberlin is the last College on the long list that has adopted the “mortar-board” and at the beginning of next term that venerable covering of scholarly youth, will be seen for the first time in our College precincts’.¹¹

2. Survey of universities deviating from the Intercollegiate Code

Because compliance with the Code was completely voluntary in 1895, this paper will look more closely at some of the schools that have chosen not to follow it. Some institutions, such as the Claremont Colleges in California, have chosen distinctive academic dress for all levels.¹² The majority of universities that have modi-

⁶ *The Degrees, Gowns and Hoods of the British, Colonial, Indian and American Universities and Colleges* (London: Thomas Pratt & Sons, 1883; reissued with a supplement, 1889), p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–37.

⁸ Martha Mitchell, ‘Encyclopedia Brunoniana, Academic costume’, 1993.

⁹ United States Library of Congress, ‘Today in History: October 9’, 10 October 2007 <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/oct09.html>> (accessed 24 March 2009). Yale had awarded the first PhD degrees earned in the United States twenty-two years before Wood wrote, but did not make use of academic dress at the time. Wood’s research was based on written replies to his letters of enquiry, so it is possible that some institutions simply did not reply and were not included in his list.

¹⁰ Steven E. Plank, ‘Academic Regalia at Oberlin: The Establishment and Dissolution of a Tradition’, *Northeast Ohio Journal of History* (2003), pp. 55–74 (p. 58).

¹¹ 24 December 1881. Quoted in Plank, p. 58.

¹² Images of graduates from the various Claremont Colleges can be seen in their digital

fied the Code have done so at the doctoral level, and it is these deviations that will be discussed here.

According to the United States Department of Education, there are more than 400 institutions awarding doctoral degrees in the United States.¹³ Of these, more than 125 have chosen to alter the rules and recommendations of the Code for use in doctoral dress. Though the shape of the gown is not very clearly specified, the Code is clear in its description of the sleeves of the doctoral gown. It states that 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’.¹⁴ In practice, American academic gowns are only rarely worn open, though two institutions, Stanford University and the College of William and Mary, have distinctive gowns which are still worn this way. The prescribed gown has traditionally been made of silk, but now less expensive materials are used, such as rayon, Dacron, or other synthetic materials.¹⁵ The most important distinguishing characteristics of the doctoral robes in the United States are the velvet bars on the sleeves and the velvet facing down the front of the gown.¹⁶

The move from the Code began within a generation of its adoption as schools sought to assert their independence. Naturally, many of the more prestigious universities in the country have adopted different academic apparel for their graduates. Brown University modified its adherence to the Code in 1912 when it prescribed seal brown velvet mortar-boards for its officers. In 1938, Yale University introduced master and doctor mortar-boards and gowns in its traditional blue. In the mid-1950s, Harvard adopted the crimson gowns that are still used today by most doctoral graduates. Outside of the Ivy League the Code was completely replaced by at least one school. This was Syracuse University, which began to use orange gowns for its officers and commencement marshals in 1950. These changes did not include the gowns of graduates, which were altered later.¹⁷

To these examples can be added more recent changes such as the University of

archives at ‘CCDL Claremont Libraries Digital CollectionsCdm Collections’ by searching for ‘academic costume’, 1999, <<http://ccdlib.claremont.edu/collection.php?alias=/ccp>> (accessed 24 March 2009).

¹³ US Department of Education. ‘Institutions & Programs’, 2008, <<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-institutions-us.html>> (accessed 28 September 2009).

¹⁴ Eugene Sullivan, ‘Academic Costume Code & Ceremony Guide’, 1997.

¹⁵ David A. Lockmiller, *Scholars on Parade: Colleges, Universities, Costumes and Degrees* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 187–88.

¹⁶ Sullivan, 1997. According to the Code, for ‘the doctor’s degree, the gown is faced down the front with black velvet; three bars of velvet are used across the sleeves’. The Code goes on to explain that the discipline colour may be substituted for black in the facings and bars.

¹⁷ Strictly speaking, the Code deals only briefly with the costume worn by university officers at academic functions.

Chicago and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. They have both chosen to design their own gowns, though still based on the codified shape.¹⁸ Recent innovators include the University of Findlay, in Ohio, which has adopted distinctive gowns for both master's degree and bachelor's degree candidates.



Fig. 1.

The bachelor's gown has one orange stripe around the cuff and the master's gown has two (Fig. 1).¹⁹ Interestingly, the doctoral gowns used by graduates of Findlay's pharmacy school follow the Code. Large state universities continue a trend of adding stoles and cords to the gowns of bachelors.²⁰

Generally speaking, deviations from the Code fall into five categories. Some schools make use of the standard black gown adding only colourful piping around the velvet facings and bars, which is always in one of the school colours. The second method is to change the colour of the velvet facings themselves to match the school colours. The Code makes clear that the 'facings and crossbars may be of velvet of the color distinctive of the disciplines to which the degree pertains, thus agreeing in color with the binding or edging of the hood appropriate to the particular doctor's degree in every instance'.²¹ There is, however, no provision for changing the facing colour to represent the institution itself. A third method—and by far the most popular—has been to change the colour of the gown while keeping the facings and bars of black velvet. Fourth, some schools change both the colour of the gown and the colour of the trimmings. Finally, a very small minority of schools has taken full advantage of the non-compulsory nature of the Code by adopting unique academic dress. The entirely new gowns that come about offer much-needed variety.

The first group of different gowns—those that are black but add colourful piping around the black velvet trim—represents only a very small portion of institutions. Of the 127 that do not follow the Code whose academic dress was studied, only 6

¹⁸ Noel Cox, 'Academical Dress in the United States of America', a chapter in *Academical Dress in New Zealand*, <http://www.neocities.com/noelcox/Academical_Dress_in_the_United_States_of_America.htm> (accessed 12 September 2011). Cox states incorrectly that American 'doctor's gowns are of the Oxford type, and have full round open bell-shaped sleeves, faced with velvet'. The sleeves are not actually faced with velvet, but only with three velvet bars. The sleeves are also a different shape from the Oxford style, being bell-shaped but not open. The American sleeves turn under and are brought together in a cuff whereas the Oxford sleeve is fully open at the wrist.

¹⁹ University of Findlay, 'The University of Findlay—Regalia Information', March 2009, a web page that is no longer active (accessed 25 May 2009). The image shows a master's graduate on the left and a bachelor's graduate on the right. Both are wearing stoles that are variations to the Intercollegiate Code, which states that 'nothing else should be worn on the academic gown'.

²⁰ Jeremy K. Hammond, e-mail message to author, 27 May 2009.

²¹ Sullivan, 1997.

percent utilized this method. For example, at the University of Alabama, in Tuscaloosa, crimson piping surrounds the velvet facings and bars. In the case of Purdue University, the piping is gold. Both of these schools also place their seals on the facings to distinguish their gowns further from those of other institutions.

The second group of gowns is as small as the first. These schools change the colour of the velvet facings and bars on the gown, usually in reference to the school's traditional colours. Only eight of the institutions surveyed follow this pattern. Grambling State University, for example, uses a black gown with gold facings and bars. This is accented by white piping around the trim. Here, again, the school seal is shown at the top of the velvet facings. One of the oldest and most prestigious schools in the country is Princeton University, whose traditional colours are orange and black. The orange was derived from King 'William III of the House of Nassau, in whose honor the first building [on campus] had been named, [who] was also Prince of Orange'.²² These traditional colours are echoed in Princeton's traditional black doctoral robes with plain orange trimming and sleeve lining. This style of robe was adopted in 1959 'in preference to the reverse version, an all-orange gown with black trim similar to Harvard's crimson and Yale's blue'.²³

The third method is the most common. About 60 percent of those institutions that deviate from the Code choose a coloured gown of the correct form and retain the black facings and bars of velvet. Some also make use of the alternatively coloured trimmings to represent the academic disciplines as suggested by the Code. The oldest corporate body in the country, Harvard, opted out of the 1894 meeting to draft the Code and adopted most of it in 1902.²⁴ Harvard chose to use a version of the Edinburgh shape [s4] for its hoods. The facings and bars on the doctoral gown are always of black velvet. The academic discipline of the graduate is denoted by a crow's-foot pattern in the faculty colour at the top of each facing.²⁵ This style—coloured fabric with traditional black velvet trim—seems to be the most popular style among the Ivy League, being used by Yale, Cornell, Brown, Dartmouth, and Columbia, in addition to Harvard. It is also favoured by many other highly ranked schools such as the University of Chicago, Case Western Reserve University, Duke University, and Northwestern University.

The fourth style is the most colourful. More than 25 percent of the schools that have chosen to modify the Code use coloured gowns and colour the facings and bars

²² Jan Kubik, 'Princetoniana—School Colors', 3 May 2001, a web page that is no longer active (accessed 24 March 2009).

²³ Smagorinsky, p. 17.

²⁴ E. B. Boatner, 'Pumps and Circumstance: A Fashion Guide to Academic Garb', *Harvard University Gazette*, 4 June 1998, pp. 1–3 (p. 2).

²⁵ The Harvard Crimson, 'The Harvard Crimson: News: Academic Costumes Defined', 9 December 1902, <<http://www.theharvardcrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=366079>> (accessed 12 September 2011).

that adorn the gowns. As in previous cases, the colours used are invariably the school's established colours—usually borrowed from sports team uniforms.²⁶ It is this style of dress that makes academic processions in the United States so colourful. One example is American University, in Washington, D.C. As a school in the nation's capital with the name American, the university has adopted the national colours as its own. Its academic dress for doctoral graduates, adopted in 1988, is a blue gown with red trim surrounded by white piping. The facing also has an image of the school's logo over the left breast.²⁷ The doctoral gown of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa manages to incorporate four colours (Fig. 2).²⁸ The gown itself is green with black facings in the front. The three velvet bars on the sleeves are white with gold piping.



Fig. 2.

According to the University website, the gowns of all degree levels were changed in 2005 from the traditional black to the current green as seen in the doctoral gowns.²⁹ A brochure from Cotrell & Leonard asserts that the change in doctoral academic dress was actually made in February 1967.³⁰ Along the same lines, the Savannah College of Art and Design has adopted different colours to represent each of its academic disciplines.³¹ This too

²⁶ The schools' institutional colours are not always the same as those used to line the hood. For example, Auburn University used navy blue and orange for all athletic and branding purposes but, until 2009, used a hood lining of powder blue and salmon.

²⁷ Diana Gross, 'Graduation Plans Finalized', *The American University Eagle*, March 28, 1988, p. 9. At the same time that the current doctoral academic regalia were implemented, new blue gowns were put in place at the other degree levels, as well.

²⁸ University of Hawai'i, 'September 2005 Campus News from the University of Hawaii 10-campus System', September 2005, <<http://www.hawaii.edu/malamalama/2005/09/campusnews.html>> (accessed 12 September 2011).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Special Doctoral Regalia Authorized for the Holder of Doctoral Degree from the University of Hawaii* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 1979), p. 2.

³¹ For example, the school binds its hoods in velvet of white, gold, red, green, and lilac. The white velvet corresponds to the arts as specified in the code, but the other colours do not bear a resemblance to their ICC counterparts of science, theology, medicine, and dentistry—degrees which are not awarded by Savannah.

adds colour and confusion to academic processions while still retaining the form of the Code.

Two interesting additions to this category are the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Texas at Dallas. Both have gowns that incorporate two colours. At the University of Texas the gown is black with green cuffs, reminiscent of the sleeves on the Oxford doctor's full-dress robe. The shape is still consistent with the Code, but the green cuffs provide contrast to the orange velvet on the gown. Pennsylvania makes use of a similar gown. Again, the shape conforms to the Code, but the gowns are 'cardinal red taffeta with ... blue embellishments [on the cuffs]'.³² The Board of Trustees requested a new gown in 1963 and made the following statement later that year:

It has long been an academic custom to prescribe a distinctive costume to be worn not necessarily while teaching as in Europe but on high days and holiday ceremonials. By and large these costumes have been uniform among United States universities, but among several of the older institutions particularly in the Ivy League, there has been an inventive tendency to produce something sartorially distinctive. It is particularly appropriate for the University of Pennsylvania to prescribe a gown for its Ph.D.s combining the University colours red and blue and marked with the blue Ph.D. bars on each of the sleeves. This gown, representing the highest academic achievement, will also serve most appropriately as the one to be worn by the President of the University and his administrative associates at Convocations here and elsewhere.³³

In all the previous examples, the Code was followed in the form and shape. The final category contains designs that stray from the Code. These examples change either the shape of the gown or the way in which it is worn to achieve a different look. The first is the College of William and Mary, in Virginia. This, the second-oldest university in the country, deviates from standard practice in a small way: all of its doctoral gowns are designed to be worn open. The Code allows for gowns of masters and doctors to be worn open, so this example could be included in the previous category. Since open gowns are seen so rarely in the American context, it is being placed in this final category. William and Mary uses a green gown with black trim and blue piping. On the facings is the royal cipher of William and Mary that has come to be used as the logo of the institution. William and Mary is one of only two in America known to the author at which doctoral graduates wear their gowns open.

The other remarkable example of an open gown is Stanford University's. This was the first case in American academic regalia of a doctoral gown based on the

³² University of Pennsylvania, 'Trustees' Resolutions on Red and Blue PhD Gown, University of Pennsylvania Archives', 10 May 1963, <<http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upg/upg7/phdgown.html>> (accessed 12 September 2011).

³³ Ibid.

Cambridge doctor's gown [d1] instead of the Oxford-shape gown of the Code.³⁴ Its origin and evolution bear further examination.

Leland Stanford Junior University was a relative latecomer to the use of academic dress in its ceremonies and processions. The school's first commencement took place in 1892 and was a low-key affair.³⁵ The founders of the school, Leland Stanford, Sr., and his wife, Jane, did not attend the ceremony and students did not adopt any academic dress for the occasion. In fact, in 1897 there is mention of a graduate who accepted 'her diploma attired in her street clothes and thought nothing odd in that'.³⁶ The lack of academic dress at Stanford seems to have been a conscious decision of its first president, David Starr Jordan. Though Jordan had used academic dress at other institutions,³⁷ a future president of the university, Ray Lyman Wilbur, credited Jordan with forgoing academic costume for students and faculty at Stanford.³⁸ Wilbur had earned a bachelor's degree in 1896 and a master's degree in 1897 without any use of academic regalia. The belief that Stanford should avoid academic dress was expressed in an editorial printed in the *Daily Palo Alto* in 1896:

More and more we have gravitated towards freedom and simplicity and away from customs and observances that clustered about the training of a century ago. The mortar board is one of those pagan institutions; a relic of the cloisters when education meant a life of penance, privation and prayer. We of the West need no such follies to mark us in our University career.³⁹

It is interesting that the author of this editorial describes remnants of the religious origins of education as pagan institutions. It would seem that the lack of academic costume at early Stanford ceremonies was the result of a community-wide effort to allow Stanford to stand apart from schools further east that it felt were based on models of conformity and exclusivity.

This informal attitude toward commencement and academic dress continued until a student from the class of 1899 convinced her female classmates to wear caps and gowns at the graduation ceremony that year. Faculty still did not wear robes at that time. In 1901, university president David Jordan noted that 'gowns have never been worn by any members of our faculty in connection with any ceremonial affairs'. He went on to say that 'while the use of gowns ... adds impressiveness to

³⁴ Vanderbilt introduced a Cambridge-pattern doctoral gown as an alternative in 2005.

³⁵ Orrin L. Elliot, *Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years, 1891–1925* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1937), p. 206.

³⁶ Patricia White, 'Commencement at Stanford: A Century of Non-Traditional Tradition', *Sandstone & Tile*, 15.3 (1991), pp. 7–14 (p. 7).

³⁷ Elliot, p. 207.

³⁸ *Memoirs of Ray Lyman Wilbur, 1875–1949*, edited by Edgar E. Robinson and Paul C. Edwards (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 201.

³⁹ Quoted in White, p. 9.

academic functions, it often opens the door to ridicule'.⁴⁰ In spite of Jordan's efforts to avoid ridicule, the *San Francisco Chronicle* called Stanford's commencement 'the most unimpressive event of any kind in the world'.⁴¹ Female students remained the only people who donned academic dress until 1903, when the eight law graduates adopted it.⁴² Not until commencement in 1907 did the entire student body wear academic dress.⁴³ By 1909 most of the faculty also wore it.⁴⁴

Academic dress was not favoured by the majority of the faculty at Stanford, however. In 1915, Ray Lyman Wilbur was appointed the third president of the University. In his memoirs, published after his death, he explained that he flatly refused to wear academic dress at his inauguration.⁴⁵ Wilbur wrote:

In a University that grants no honorary degrees, that has many connected with it who cannot wear gowns, the new President feels that he cannot as a courteous gentlemen wear anything that will make a guest of the University or a friend feel out of place. I told the Committee so and asked them to make it easy for my old alumni friends and everyone else who wanted to do so to come to the exercises... I am going dressed as a man, not as a priest, scholar or doorkeeper.⁴⁶

It is interesting to note that when academic dress was formalized by the major universities in the eastern United States, one of the stated reasons for the standardization was to create an equal fraternity of scholars.⁴⁷ A generation later, the chief executive officer of the premier university in the western United States refused to make use of academic dress because it created inequality.

The conflicts over academic dress at Stanford did not end with the inauguration of Wilbur in January of 1916. In 1918, the school surveyed the faculty and found that they were split nearly in half regarding their approval of academic dress. One member 'thought the custom a relic of by-gone ages' that did not belong in such a progressive institution. Another expressed his disapproval of the custom, but 'would not forbid any colleague this innocent vanity'. By the mid-1930s the faculty was being instructed to wear full academic dress at baccalaureate ceremonies and commencements.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Quoted in Elliot, p. 207.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Catherine C. Peck, '1899–1999', *Sandstone & Tile*, 23.2/3 (1999), pp. 8–9 (p. 8).

⁴³ White, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Elliot, p. 209.

⁴⁵ Wilbur, p. 201. In a photograph in the book, Stanford president Wilbur forgoes academic dress at his installation while Chancellor David Jordan dons a doctor's gown according to the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Dress.

⁴⁶ Wilbur, p. 202.

⁴⁷ Gardner C. Leonard, 'Academic Costume', in *A Cyclopaedia of Education*, edited by Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 14–18 (p. 17).

⁴⁸ White, p. 10.

Having been founded as the Intercollegiate Code was developing, Stanford did not have its own system of academic dress in place when caps and gowns were first worn by all students in 1907. This being the case, the students used academic costume that followed the system laid out in the Code in 1895. The linings of the University's hoods were cardinal red.⁴⁹ Beginning in the 1950s, Stanford placed a section in its commencement programmes that described the academic dress of the graduates. In 1951, the programme notes that 'approximately fifty years ago colleges and universities in the United States adopted a uniform code for academic dress, and this code is followed today'.⁵⁰

The description of academic dress at Stanford continued almost unchanged from year to year in commencement programmes with only slight additions and expansions. By 1976, the programmes had been changed to reflect the growing trend of altering doctoral gowns. This programme stated that 'several American universities [used] the university color for the Doctoral gown, e.g., Harvard, crimson; Yale, blue'.⁵¹ This was the final year that Stanford followed the Intercollegiate Code in its doctoral gowns. The university took advantage of the services of Eric Hutchinson to design its distinctive academic costume. Hutchinson was a professor of chemistry who had earned a doctorate from Cambridge and had taught in England before coming to Stanford. In 1967, he was involved in an effort to brighten up the commencement ceremonies with the addition of heraldic banners representing each of the University's constituent schools.⁵² With his experience in academic ceremony, Hutchinson was the perfect choice to design the new academic robes for Stanford.⁵³

Stanford officially introduced its new academic dress in 1977. Ninety years after Leonard designed his graduating class's academic dress, Stanford began its unique deviation from the Intercollegiate Code. According to the commencement programme that year, 'a number of American universities now have doctoral robes, which are invariably of some color other than black'.⁵⁴ This new gown was a modified version of the Cambridge doctor's gown [d1] (Fig. 3).⁵⁵ The side panels of the

⁴⁹ Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World: Gowns, Hats, Chains of Office, Hoods, Rings, Medals and Other Degree Insignia of Universities and Other Institutions of Learning* (Cape Town : A. A. Balkema, 1970), Vol. II, p. 1584.

⁵⁰ Stanford University, *Sixtieth Annual Commencement* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, 1951), p. 5.

⁵¹ Stanford University, *Eighty-fifth Annual Commencement at Stanford University* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, 1976), p. 4.

⁵² Andy Doty, 'Hutchinson's Heraldry: Bringing Color to Commencement', *Sandstone & Tile*, 20.2/3 (1996), pp. 3–9 (p. 4).

⁵³ Doty, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Stanford University, *Eighty-sixth Annual Commencement at Stanford University* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, 1977), p. 4.

⁵⁵ Barbara Palmer, 'Cardinal Chronicle/weekly campus column', 11 June 2003, a web page that no longer exists (accessed 24 March 2009). This image has been cropped to show only

gown are cardinal red with black facings and a black yoke. The sleeves are black, with the cuffs covered in red and lined with satin of a colour indicating the scholarly discipline of the wearer—following the standard colourings of the Code. The web site of the E. R. Moore Company stated: ‘This is a uniquely styled open front gown and does not have any velvet front panels nor velvet sleeve chevrons [*sic*].’⁵⁶ At the top of the facings is a coat of arms that can be blazoned *Or a Saltire Gules a Chief Argent*.⁵⁷

Hutchinson also created a specially designed hood and velvet academic bonnet with



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

which the gown was worn (Fig. 4).⁵⁸ Much like the gown, the hood was similar to those used at the University of Cambridge, not surprising for someone who earned a doctorate at that university. The hood that he created was very similar to the Cambridge full shape [f1] in black, lined with cardinal red. The cape is bound two inches with dark blue velvet, while the cowl is bordered inside with two inches of satin in the degree colour.⁵⁹

The principal difference between the shape of the Stanford gown and the shape of a true Cambridge doctor’s gown is that the sleeves are narrower and they reach

the Stanford University doctoral gown. The gown is lined dark blue to represent philosophy.

⁵⁶ E. R. Moore Company, ‘E. R. Moore Company : Stanford University’, 13 June 2004, a web page that is no longer active (accessed May 24, 2009; E. R. Moore’s website no longer exists; the company was bought by Oak Hall in 2005). Whether the website was referring to the fact that the gown is worn open as being unique is difficult to say. This is, of course, unique only in the American context.

⁵⁷ These are not the arms of the University, which are blazoned *Argent a triple redwood Frond slipped Gules*. No known sources at Stanford or elsewhere can give information about these arms, but they are very close to the arms of many individuals of Scottish descent with the surname of Bruce.

⁵⁸ Albert Maghbouch, e-mail message to the author, 1 June 2009. This photograph from Ceremonial Attire shows a hood and gown lined yellow-gold for science.

⁵⁹ E. R. Moore Company, ‘E. R. Moore Company : Stanford University’, 13 June 2004.

to the wrist in front; the front of the Cambridge sleeves reaches only to the elbow.⁶⁰ The use of this academic costume continues more than thirty years after it was introduced.

3. Evaluation of the Intercollegiate Code and its use today

Before any evaluation can be made of the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume, one must first consider the arguments for and against the use of academic dress in the United States.

The two reasons in favour given most often are the seemingly opposite democratic ideals preached by Gardner Leonard and the ability to identify the achievements of others on sight, as Columbia president Seth Low stated in 1895.⁶¹ On the other side of the debate are those who contend that academic dress is an anachronism, and some who see hoods and gowns as tools of elitism that needlessly divide people along lines of academic achievement. In addition, there is an argument specifically for the Code as used today. This holds that having a structured and codified system allows for mass production and lower prices, a model that may harm the fortunes of academic dress rather than help them.

As mentioned, one of the reasons used to support the adoption of a standard system of academic dress was to provide an outward equality among scholars.⁶² The wealthy trust-fund students graduating from an American university would dress the same as a scholarship student with only one suit. Because they were equals in academic terms, they would also be equal in their vesture. The opposing view was that held by Stanford University president David Jordan in 1901 that medieval ceremonies should not be artificially revived.⁶³ These opponents would hold that in a democratic society there is no need for such an anachronism. There is a long history of the use of academic dress in the United States. In its codified form, academic dress has been used here for more than a hundred years. As a continually evolving practice that has been adapted readily since the Code was written, wearing academic dress hardly seems as anachronistic as Jordan contended. If it were a static system that never changed, the argument might have some validity, but this is not the case.

Based on the general acceptance of the Code and the almost universal use of academic dress in secondary and tertiary institutions in the United States, it would

⁶⁰ Special thanks are due to Nicholas Groves for assistance in the analysis of the academic dress used at Stanford University.

⁶¹ Seth Low, 'President's Annual Report', p. 21. Minutes of the Trustees of Columbia College, Vol. XVI, 7 October 1895, appended after p. 3.

⁶² Leonard, 'Academic Costume', p. 17. In his writings, Leonard made it seem as though this was the primary reason that the Intercollegiate Code was adopted, but this is disputed by other contemporary writers.

⁶³ Elliot, p. 209.

seem that arguments in its favour have been validated. It is clear that there must be a desire among American academics to retain academic dress, perhaps for the reasons espoused by Leonard or because of an American ethos that desires everyone to be equal. Individuals with any degree are immediately recognizable if they are dressed in the standard gowns. Thanks to the Code, those who wish can easily ascertain the discipline in which a degree was awarded.⁶⁴

This ability to recognize achievements then leads to another potential problem with academic dress. The accusation of elitism, however, is not very strong. According to a 2009 estimate from the United States Census Bureau, 31 percent of all Americans over the age of eighteen have graduated from high school and 26 percent have at least earned an associate's degree.⁶⁵ These percentages have been increasing over the last ten years and with these people likely to have worn academic dress at some point, the standard case for elitism is tenuous at best.⁶⁶ In any case, if there were broad public aversion to academic dress in the United States, colleges and universities would cease requiring its use at convocations, commencements, and other events.

Perhaps the uniformity that allows mass production is the most important benefit of the American system, in which many students complete their studies heavily in debt. Hundreds of gowns can be made cheaply using inexpensive materials.

Mass production, of course, can be detrimental: the quality of the garments suffers. There is often little economic sense in graduates purchasing their academic dress because it is worn so seldom after commencement, particularly if it is made poorly as a 'souvenir' by one of the major American robe makers. If graduates see that their choices in academic dress are of poor quality, they will be very unlikely to purchase it and use it in the future.

There is definitely room for improvement in the state of academic dress in the United States. Some simple changes to the Code would make it much more workable. One is the inclusion of different gown shapes for each level from which universities could choose, allowing for standardization of design within the university

⁶⁴ It is, of course, much more difficult to discern which institution awarded the degree because so many universities use the same colour schemes to line their hoods.

⁶⁵ United States Census Bureau, 'Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2009', April 2009, <<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/cps2009/Table1-01.xls>> (accessed 30 July 2010).

⁶⁶ United States Census Bureau, 'Educational Attainment of the Population 15 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: March 1999', 15 September 2000, <<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/p20-528/tab01.pdf>> (accessed 12 September 2009). The increase in educational attainment is more modest in the secondary school than tertiary institutions. The percentage of Americans graduating from high school increased from 30% in 1999 to 31% in 2008, but the percentage with at least an associate's degree 20% to 27% during the same period. Regardless of the rate, there has been a measurable increase over the last decade.

and still providing for easy identification of graduates.

For example, if there were three different gown templates for the bachelor's degree, institutions could choose which to employ and there would be variety among the gowns used. This would not simply represent variety for its own sake, but would give flexibility to schools in the designs that they choose while still allowing for identification of achievements for those wearing American academic dress. Since this dress is derived from the British tradition, it makes sense that such a system would employ the three most common shapes of bachelor gown used in the United Kingdom. The first of these is the Oxford BA [b1], which is the basis of the current American gown. The second is the Cambridge BA [b2] with a forearm slit. The final gown is the London BA [b4] with cords and buttons looping the sleeve up. Graduates wearing any of these could instantly be recognized as holders of a bachelor's degree. Flexibility would also be given in the colour of the gowns used. Each university or college would decide whether to employ the school's colours or the standard black.

For master's degrees, it also seems sensible to follow the British system and make use of the three most common gown shapes for the degree. The master's gown of the Code is based on the Oxford MA [m1]. It would be more appealing in the opinion of the author if the slit through which the hand is extended were moved back above the elbow to its position before 1960.⁶⁷ Current American regulations place the slit at the wrist instead. In order to provide more options the Cambridge MA [m2] should be added. The third most common master's gown used in the United Kingdom currently is the basic master with a square sleeve-end, with no cut-out [m10]. These three could be implemented in the same way as the three bachelor gowns and manufacturers would be encouraged to produce gowns that could be worn either open or closed.⁶⁸

At the doctoral level, an even more flexible system could be used. Given the success of Stanford's distinctive academic dress, schools could be encouraged to design their own gowns. This would still allow identification of a student's degree because the gown would obviously be that of a doctor if it did not fit the six descriptions for the other degrees. Even if such changes were implemented in the Code, it would be the responsibility of academic dress enthusiasts to promote use of academic dress at their own institutions, because the Code is entirely voluntary.

Any changes to the Code will do little to increase the use of academic dress in

⁶⁷ In 1959, the American Council on Education's Committee on Academic Costumes and Ceremonies entertained a proposal to add detachable sleeve to the master's gowns it prescribed. This was, presumably, to be a method of covering bare arms when the slit was still near the elbow. In 1960, the regulations were changed to move the slit down to the wrist with the same result of covering the arms.

⁶⁸ Special thanks are due again to Nicholas Groves for assistance in developing the proposed system of multiple gowns at each level.

the United States if it is considered an elite costume that has no functional purpose. If academic dress were used more regularly there would be a greater understanding of it and graduates would demand improvements to the Code. If academic dress continues to be used at rare convocations and commencements, then students will see little value in it. It may be difficult to convince many faculty members to do so, but they could wear academic dress to teach their courses and address conferences on campus. Such a movement by students and faculties to increase the occasions of wearing academic dress in America seems unlikely to happen, but the state of academic dress in the United States would be much improved if more colleges and universities adopted distinctive academic costumes that were tasteful and traditional without being identical.

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