Academic Regalia, Pomp and Circumstance

THE REGALIA — Regalia worn in procession today trace origins to medieval universities, when all faculty were in religious orders and obliged to be properly gowned. Beyond ecclesiastical functions, robes marked clerics from the lay populace and also served well in unheated buildings of the day.

American academic dress in the colonial era derived directly from regalia of the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. However, in 1894, a commission of American educators created a code eventually accepted by most universities and colleges in the United States and many in Canada. While much of American academic regalia is well systematized, European universities feature a wide range of gowns, caps and other accoutrements, some to be seen here today.

THE GOWN — The academic robe today symbolizes the democracy of scholarship, as it covers any dress of social standing. American doctoral gowns are typically black, closed front, with bell-shaped sleeves four feet in length and three velvet chevrons on the upper arm in the color of the discipline or, for PhDs of all disciplines, blue.

THE CAP — Roman slaves, when freed, won the privilege of wearing a cap. Today the academic cap is a sign of freedom and responsibility in scholarship. Mortarboards in black with black tassels are traditional, but increasingly doctoral graduates don tam s, often with gold tassels.

THE HOOD — American hoods are usually lined with the colors of the University and folded in back to display. The velvet border indicates the academic discipline but for PhDs, which all are blue.

THE COLORS — In America academic colors are: Medicine, Kelly Green; Physician Assistant, Kelly Green; Pharmacy, Olive Green; Physical Therapy, Sage Green; Podiatry, Nile Green; Nursing, Apricot; Dentistry, Lilac; Optometry, Aquamarine; Science, Yellow Gold; Veterinary Medicine, Gray.

THE AIGUILLETES (or CORDS) — These ornamental braided cords with decorative tips derive from military uniforms dating to the Romans. Indeed, cords may still reflect military service — Gold for Army, Blue for Navy, Red for Marine Corps, Royal Blue for Air Force — or other honors such as academic achievement or election to honor societies. At WesternU, Highest Honors (the top 3%) are symbolized by Purple & Green and University Honors (the top 4-10%) are Green & Gold (n.b.: all honorees earned a grade point average of at least 3.75). Signifiers of national honor societies are: Osteopathic Medicine Sigma Sigma Phi Burgundy/Gold, Gold Humanism Honor Society Black and Gold, Allied Health Alpha Eta Green & White, Pharmacy Rho Chi Purple & White, Nursing Sigma Theta Tau Lavender & White, Veterinary Medicine Phi Zeta Gold & Silver, Optometry Beta Sigma Kappa Gold (and, if all four years, mixed with black), Podiatric Medicine Pi Delta Navy & Silver, and Dentistry Omicron Kappa Upsilon Lilac. A further recent trend, not regularly adopted in America, is for some graduands to wear cords or stoles to denote affinities that are not inherently academic but reflect social themes of achievement.
THE PRESIDENTIAL REGALIA — Presidents have ever been central figures in university life and ceremony, notably convocations and commencements. Thus, Presidents often have distinct regalia that uniquely reflect the office, institution, and individual rather than the university, degree, and discipline of personal attainment.

THE PRESIDENTIAL GOWN — The cut reflects dual American and British elements based on the Festal robe, or Chimere, of Cambridge Doctors, but the closed front is in the American manner. Long Cambridge soutache sleeves feature four Presidential Chevrons bounded by gold braid, again in the American mode, but of ermine, with which British and European regalia are often embellished. The main fabric is tropical wool in University colors and accents that symbolize Spirituality (Burgundy), Science (Gold), and Humanities (White).

THE PRESIDENTIAL HOOD — The Hood is in the American doctoral form with the body of burgundy wool lined in white crepe with a small turnover and all edged with old gold satin. Like the gown, the hood reflects the office and institution rather than a degree and discipline.

THE PRESIDENTIAL GORGET — The Gorget, or Collar, is a device unique to the University. This second Gorget closely follows the design of Founding President Pumerantz, based on ancient military armor. It is black velvet with gold trim but, rather than minted Plaquettes, it features embroidered Bullion Rondels of gold and silver. These depict Science (Newton’s prismatic light) and Humanism (Galileo’s Vitruvius) as well as the State Flowers of California (California Poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*) and Oregon (Holly Leaf Barberry Grape, *Mahonia aquifolium*). The lower point of the Gorget features motifs of a Torch, Serpent, and the San Gabriel Mountains from the University Seal. From this point hangs the Presidential Medallion.

THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDALLION — Medallic chains have served as badges of office at least since the Middle Ages. Most universities have necklaces to be worn by the president in academic ceremonies. That of WesternU is a large pendant made of solid sterling silver heavily overlain with 22-karat gold. The medallion is cast with motifs after the fashion of the Rod of Aesculapius with the Torch of Knowledge encoiled by a Serpent, and all set before the San Gabriel Mountains that represent the pinnacles of academic achievement.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAP — The President’s head cover is a Tudor Bonnet in the Cambridge style but in burgundy (or black) velvet with a bullion button and tassel in old gold *Soutache*.

THE TRUSTEE REGALIA — Trustees guide institutional life at the highest level. In recent years more universities have adopted special regalia by which the body of Trustees are recognized not as students, faculty, or administrators, but for their rarified role in governance. Thus Trustee regalia, like that of Presidents, reflects stewardship of our University rather than the university, degree, and discipline of personal attainment.

THE TRUSTEE GOWN & CAP — The WesternU Trustee Gowns follow the style of American Doctors in maroon tropical wool, a closed front bounded by double black velvet panels piped by gold braid and with the University seal embroidered in old gold. The sleeves are long, open, and fitted with black velvet gauntlet cuffs piped in gold braid. The cap is a black velvet six-corner tam with a bullion button and tassel in old gold *Soutache*.
THE UNIVERSITY MACE — Maces date from at least 1200 as heavy weapons borne by Sergeants-at-Arms meant to protect the King’s person. By the 14th century maces had become purely ceremonial, and increasingly decorative, symbols of royal or other institutional authority. The University Mace is a symbol of the Office of the President. The University Marshal has, in all official academic processions, the honor to serve as Mace Bearer. The University Mace was first used at the graduation of the charter class in 1982. The Mace depicts the University Seal and its crowning ornament is a large brass orb. Engraved upon a brass band encircling the mace pillar are the words: “Educating Health Care Professionals in the Osteopathic Tradition.” The founding year of the University, 1977, is engraved on another band in Roman numerals, “MCMLXXVII.” When not in use, the mace is on permanent display in the President’s Office.

THE GONFALONS — The gonfalon is a banner derived from the ancient Roman vexillum, or military standard carried by Gonfaloniers. Gonfalons feature heraldic flags – commonly pointed, swallow-tailed, or with streamers – suspended from a crossbar. In the Middle Ages, they were adopted by Italian communes and then lay religious orders, guilds, and universities. The WesternU Gonfalons feature pointed burgundy banners with the University Seal above pointed tails with chevrons and back facings in the academic color of each college.

THE GUILD OF MARSHALS — Decorum, tradition, processions of candidates, faculty and the platform party and the ceremony are managed by the Guild of Marshals. The legacy of the Guild of Marshals goes back to medieval courts in Europe where trusted members were appointed as Marshals of the court. WesternU Head Marshals can be identified by the gold Aiguillettes worn at the shoulder. The University Marshal is a faculty member appointed by the President.

THE PROCESSIONAL & RECESSIONAL — This is a tradition at formal proceedings of a university such as Convocation and Commencement. Such exercises begin with university dignitaries, students, and special guests who all process garbed in academic attire. Upon completion of academic exercises the platform party departs in a formal recessional.

THE HONORARY DEGREES — Universities, especially at Commencement, confer honorary degrees upon persons of special distinction in humanities, science, arts, or other fields. Though not a specific credential, such degrees are a valued investiture rarely granted by a Board of Trustees upon the recommendation of the President and senior faculty.

THE FLAGS — The 15 flags on stage represent the Western states that the institution was originally established to serve. Since then, WesternU has grown to provide health care education worldwide.