

# Transactions of the Burgon Society

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Volume 9

Article 4

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1-1-2009

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### Recommended Citation

Drakeman, Donald L. (2009) "Peculiar Habits: Academic Costumes at Princeton University," *Transactions of the Burgon Society*. Vol. 9. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2475-7799.1072>

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## **‘Peculiar Habits’: Academic Costumes at Princeton University**

*by Donald L. Drakeman*

### **Daily wear**

Six years after its founding as colonial America’s fourth college in 1746,<sup>1</sup> Princeton prescribed a design for ‘robes’ to be worn by the president and ‘as many of [the students] as shall see fit ... .’<sup>2</sup> Perhaps not many students actually saw fit to wear them, for, in 1755, the trustees voted to require that ‘all students except freshmen be obliged to appear in Habits’.<sup>3</sup> They recanted just three years later, and revoked the requirement that the students ‘wear peculiar Habits’,<sup>4</sup> thus beginning the University’s own peculiar, nearly 300-year habit of continually revising its approach to academic garb.

The gowns came back after a decade, with the trustees announcing that henceforth ‘all the officers and students ... shall appear uniformly habited, in a proper collegiate black gown and square cap, to be made in the manner and form ... now used in some of our neighboring colleges ... ’.<sup>5</sup> This regulation provides us with what

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<sup>1</sup> Princeton University’s original name was the College of New Jersey, and it only formally adopted the name Princeton University at its sesquicentennial in 1896. See Thomas Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896*, 2nd edn (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Don Oberdorfer, *Princeton University: The First 250 Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Trustees of Princeton University, 1995). Herein, it will be referred to as Princeton University during all time periods except where direct quotations require otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Margaret Smagorinsky, *The Regalia of Princeton University: Pomp, Circumstance, and Accountrements [sic] of Academia* (Princeton, N.J.: Trustees of Princeton University, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. The resolution was adopted in 1768. Faculty were entitled to have ‘proper distinctions’ to distinguish them from the students. In the 1760s, there were not many ‘neighboring colleges’ to provide guidance. Smagorinsky cites similar requirements at New York’s Columbia to the north (then known as King’s College) and the University of Pennsylvania (then the College of Philadelphia) to the south. In 1768, there were only nine institutions of higher education in British North America, and only three—Pennsylvania, King’s and Queen’s (later known as Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey)—could reasonably be called ‘neighboring’. See Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A*

may be ‘the only known 18th-century portrait of an American collegian wearing the robes of an undergraduate’<sup>6</sup> in Figure 1. This painting is a portrait of sixteen-year-old James H. McCulloch, one of about thirty members of the class of 1773,<sup>7</sup> and it shows an open, full-length, black gown with long sleeves and a flap collar.<sup>8</sup>

Daily gown wear at Princeton died out some time in the nineteenth century,<sup>9</sup> and never returned except at the Graduate College where the founding dean, Andrew Fleming West, a classicist and confirmed anglophile, self-consciously modelled both the edifice and its daily habits on Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>10</sup> At the Graduate College, the standard American bachelor’s gown (discussed more fully below) was mandatory at dinner from its founding in 1900 until about 1970, except for a few years during the post-World War II era when the Dean deemed the cost too high. The gowns seemed popular at the outset, with a graduate student-written early history (probably c. 1915) noting, ‘I could never understand the amazement ... that this custom caused our friends on the campus. What could be more appropriate for students than the student gown, consecrated by centuries of custom.’<sup>11</sup> After the post-war hiatus, however, when the University sought to reimpose the daily gown requirement in the face of ‘sadly deteriorating sartorial standards’, the students of-

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*History* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Oberdorfer, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 is from Oberdorfer, p. 19. For information about McCulloch, see Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians, 1769-1775: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 261, 320–24. Harrison notes, ‘His parents commissioned the fashionable Philadelphia artist Matthew Pratt to paint a portrait of their son in academic gown ...’ (p. 320). McCulloch went on to become a successful merchant. For more on the painter Pratt and his ‘rather feeble career’, see Susan Rather, ‘A Painter’s Progress: Matthew Pratt and The American School’, *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 28 (1993) pp. 169–83 (p. 169).

<sup>8</sup> W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley defines a ‘flap collar’ as a ‘square collar falling below the neck on “lay” gowns’, calls it ‘a sixteenth-century fashion’, and provides and illustration of one (*A History of Academic Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 193, 191).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Shippen’s fascinating memoir of his years at Princeton in the 1840s describes a range of student apparel, from ‘Waistcoats of cut velvet’ to ‘Common gaudy dressing gowns’, but does not talk about regular academic gown wear. He does, however, mention a practice that sounds somewhat similar. He writes that the students adopted the fashion of wearing a ‘full circular’ Spanish cloak that was ‘slung over the left shoulder, and which covered a multitude of sins in the way of apparel ... . Many students went to the roll call with ... little on but that blessed cloak’ (‘Some Notes about Princeton’, ed. by J. Jefferson Looney, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 59.1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 15–58 (pp. 50–51)).

<sup>10</sup> Willard Thorp et al., *The Princeton Graduate School: A History*, 2nd edn, ed. by Patricia Marks (Princeton, N.J.: Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni, 2000), pp. 69–196.

<sup>11</sup> ‘History of Merwick’ (Princeton University Library (Archives), University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Graduate School Records (GSR) Dean’s Subject File), p. 88.



**Trustees of Princeton University**

**Fig. 1.**

ferred some resistance, including a proposed resolution

That ... the Graduate College objects to being ruled as a Crown Colony and insists upon the normal democratic government accorded to 7th grade Public School children. No robes without representation.<sup>12</sup>

Other students, no longer captivated by 'centuries of custom', called for the gowns to be joined by a panoply of other medieval accoutrements, including torches, 'mastiffs and wolfhounds', and a moat.<sup>13</sup> The gowns returned (sans wolfhounds) in 1958, but disappeared a dozen years later along with the Latin grace, the remain-

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<sup>12</sup> Archives, Dean's Subject Files, GSR, p. 257.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

ing two vestiges of ‘anachronistic anglophilia and privilege’, according to the most recent historians of the Graduate School.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Ceremonial occasions***

#### ***Princeton and the Intercollegiate Code***

At Princeton, and at many other American colleges and universities, the wearing of caps and gowns at academic ceremonies became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century, especially at graduation ceremonies typically called ‘commencements’, when degrees would be awarded upon the completion of the academic year. The usual version of the story that explains the beginning of the standardization of American academic dress overlooks Princeton University’s call to convene a multi-university commission, making Princeton the actual instigator of the movement that launched decades of almost universal acceptance of a common code for caps, gowns and hoods in America.<sup>15</sup>

The trustees of Princeton University, at their June 1893 board meeting—which took place six months before the publication of Gardner Cotrell 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 ...’.<sup>16</sup> 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’,

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<sup>14</sup> Thorp et al., p. 356. These authors had their own European preferences. After criticizing Dean West for spending most of his graduate school planning visits at Oxford and Cambridge, they surmised that his brief ‘visit to the École Normale Supérieure [where the ‘intellectual life ... was comradely as well as intense’] could have been, and possibly was, the most profitable of all his investigations’ (ibid., pp. 75–76). Any French influences on the design of the Graduate College were certainly not emphasized by the dean. West, in fact, spent a full six weeks at Oxford, visiting ‘each of the twenty-one colleges . . . , seven or eight of them with some thoroughness’, and he wrote that ‘[n]ext after Oxford, in length of time given to the visit, were Cambridge, Berlin, and Paris’ (ibid., p. 75, quoting West’s report of January 1903, which was published in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*). While at Oxford, he received an honorary DLitt degree (ibid., p. 76). A letter from a former Princeton graduate student recalled Dean West, ‘garbed in [his] Oxford gown’, being escorted from his house to dinner at the Graduate College on Wednesdays, his ‘way lighted by the large candles carried by the men’ (ibid., p. 379, n. 33).

<sup>15</sup> For details, see the author’s findings in Stephen Wolgast, ed., ‘The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Archives, Historical Subject File (HSF), Box 308, Folder 8, ‘Academic Costumes, 1895–1944.’

with the goal being ‘the adoption of a uniform academic costume’.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, after such a code was adopted by an Intercollegiate Commission that had been composed of representatives from Princeton, Columbia, Yale and New York University,<sup>18</sup> the 1895 annual report of Columbia University’s president spoke of the group’s formation ‘[o]n the initiation of Princeton University’.<sup>19</sup>

The Princeton trustees officially adopted the Code, which would be worn not only by graduating students at commencement ceremonies, but also by ‘the members of the Faculty on all occasions of public ceremony ...’.

A very important ‘public occasion’ was indeed on the horizon: in the next year, Princeton would celebrate its sesquicentennial anniversary, marking the occasion with three full days of ceremonial events featuring prominent university leaders from around the world.<sup>20</sup> Not only would there be grand processions of the president, faculty, and distinguished guests, all fully dressed in academic dress, but the institution then known as the College of New Jersey would officially declare itself to be Princeton University. By the time of this event, which would take place in October 1896, the faculty members would need to outfit themselves in the proper caps, gowns and hoods prescribed by the Code. This task required a faculty committee to interpret and apply the newly codified rules for academic dress in light of Princeton’s historic association with the colours orange and black, a colour scheme

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. For more on McCook’s role, see ‘The Intercollegiate Code’, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>18</sup> 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 colour distinctive of the School’ (‘News: Academic Costumes Defined: The Correct Forms for Each Degree Stated by the Corporation’ (December 9, 1902), available at <<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=366079>>). For a more detailed description of the crows’-feet, see Nicholas Hoffmann, ‘Crow’s Feet and Crimson: Academic Dress at Harvard,’ *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), pp. 47–49.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Gardner Cotrell Leonard, *The Cap and Gown in America* (Albany, N.Y.: Cotrell & Leonard, 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 gown-makers 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.

<sup>20</sup> *Memorial Book of the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Founding of the College of New Jersey and of the Ceremonies Inaugurating Princeton University* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898) [henceforth, *Memorial Book*].

derived, at least in part, from the colours of the Dutch House of Orange-Nassau.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, Princeton would fix the design of its bachelors' and masters' dress for the indefinite (and still continuing) future; the appearance of the doctoral regalia, however, would be subject to periodic revision.

While the Code indicated that the gowns would generally adopt 'commonly worn' patterns, the faculty committee's letter indicates that individuals' existing gowns may need modifications, saying that if 'you already have a gown of suitable material, you can perhaps have it altered to meet [these] requirements'.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, '[t]his committee will ... make arrangements with some local clothier for taking your measurements, and will take your order and forward it to Messrs. Cotrell and Leonard.'<sup>23</sup> Leonard's firm had already provided Princeton with a 'full line of samples', which could be reviewed in the university registrar's office.<sup>24</sup> Leonard must have been pressed to keep up with all of the new Code-enhanced business opportunities; a University of Pennsylvania history reports that, in late 1895 and early 1896, Leonard experienced 'a "rushing business at Columbia" and frequent travel to Princeton and Yale'.<sup>25</sup> And it must have been good business: the cost for the doctoral

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<sup>21</sup> The university's main building was originally intended to be named after New Jersey's governor, Jonathan Belcher; he graciously declined bestowing such a dyspeptic name on what would be colonial America's largest building, and he proposed the more euphonious Nassau Hall in memory of King William III, of the House of Orange-Nassau. See, for example, Oberdorfer, pp. 22–23.

<sup>22</sup> Willard Humphreys, Secretary, Faculty Committee on Academic Costumes, letter dated 3 January 1896 (Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8) [henceforth, 'Humphreys' letter']. It is unclear how common the 'commonly worn' patterns were if the faculty members' existing gowns might not meet the new requirements of the Code. Since Leonard's pre-Code article was the principal source of information about academic costumes in America, the Code put Cotrell & Leonard in an excellent position to establish the new standards based on its gowns. That position would be further enhanced with the chartering of the Intercollegiate Bureau of Academic Costume by the Regents of the State of New York. The Bureau, directed by Leonard himself, was chartered to 'maintain a library relating to the universities ... and colleges [as to] their caps, robes ... and other regalia ... ; to maintain a register of statutes, codes and usages, designs and descriptions ... with their correct colors, materials, qualities, sizes, proportions and arrangements thereof ... .' Quoted in Mary Taylor, 'The Registrar as Recorder: Commencement Procedure', *American Association of Collegiate Registrars*, 10, pp. 310–18 (pp. 311–12). The Bureau was chartered in 1902 (Lockmiller, p. 184).

<sup>23</sup> Humphreys' letter.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> University of Pennsylvania, *Commencement Notes*, 1996, available online at: <<http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upg/upg7/1996progh.pdf>> [henceforth, 'Penn Notes'], p. 7. Ultimately, in April 1896, after some comparison shopping, 'Penn placed its order with Cotrell & Leonard ... .' Ibid. By 1897, Cotrell & Leonard would describe themselves in an advertisement as 'Makers of the Caps, Gown and Hoods to Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, John [sic] Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago,

cap, gown, and hood recommended by the faculty committee would have exceeded a week's pay, even for Princeton's unusually well compensated faculty.<sup>26</sup>

The inside of the hood, which was freighted with meaning, would require even more detailed instructions. Most importantly for the faculty committee, the 'hoods shall be lined with the official colors of Princeton—orange and black ...'.<sup>27</sup> The side panels and the length of the hood would thus mark the wearer as the holder of a doctorate, and the orange and black would signify Princeton. The remaining piece of information to be conveyed was the field of study, which would be shown by the trimming, as follows:

The binding or edging not more than six inches in width, to be of silk, satin, or velvet (according to individual taste), the color to be distinctive of the Faculty to which the Degree pertains, thus: Faculty of Arts and Letters, (B. A., B. L., M. A., Litt. D., L. H. D.), white. Faculty of Theology, (D. D., S. T. D.), scarlet. Faculty of Law, (LL. B., LL. D., J. U. D.), purple. Faculty of Medicine, (M. B., M. D.), green. Faculty of Philosophy, (Ph. B., Ph. D.), dark blue. Faculty of Science, (B. L., C. E., E. M., M. E., E. E., B. Sc., M. Sc., D. Sc.), gold yellow. Faculty of Fine Arts, brown. Faculty of Music, pink.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the degree of detail, the instructions for trimmings left some areas free for interpretation, and the committee exercised its discretion as follows: 'No official width of edging has been prescribed, but it is very desirable that some uniform width be adopted in practice. This committee suggests as the best widths: 2 inches for Bachelors, 3 inches for Masters, 5 inches for Doctors; which are in proportion

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University of Michigan, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Wells, and many others ...' (*The Nassau Herald of the Class of '97 of Princeton University*, 33 (14 June 1897), unnumbered page).

<sup>26</sup> This calculation is based on the faculty committee's list of prices—a silk doctor's gown for \$40, a hood in the same silk for \$16, and a velvet cap for \$4, totalling \$60 (Humphreys' letter). At the time, a well paid Princeton faculty member received an annual salary of \$3000; at nearby liberal arts colleges, such as Swarthmore and Bucknell, the salaries were more in the range of \$1500–\$2000, pushing the cost of a new set of regalia to about two weeks' pay. For information about faculty salaries, see W. Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: Colleges and Community in the 'Age of the University'* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), pp. 166–67.

<sup>27</sup> By-law XXI. The current version of the Code reads as follows: 'Linings. The hoods are to be lined with the official color or colors of the college or university conferring the degree; more than one color is shown by division of the field color in a variety of ways, chevron or chevrons, equal division, etc. The various academic costume companies maintain complete files on the approved colors for various institutions' <<http://acenet.edu>>.

<sup>28</sup> Humphreys' letter. The lists of the degrees were inserted in the faculty committee's letter, and do not appear in By-law XXI. Some of the degrees must have been awarded solely on an honorary basis. The University catalogue for that year lists only AB, BS, CE, EE, AM, MS, PhD, DSc and BD degrees (*Catalogue of the College of New Jersey at Princeton, 1895-96* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Press, n.d.), pp. 113–19).



to size and plan of hoods. The material of the edging (silk, satin, or velvet), may properly be left to individual taste, though velvet is preferred.<sup>29</sup>

The remaining question addressed by the Code was what hood a faculty member should wear, Princeton's or the one prescribed by his own alma mater. The answer was that the faculty member had the choice of declaring his academic allegiance either to his current employer or to the university that awarded his degree. The complicated language of the Code states: 'Members of the Faculties ... who have been recipients of academic honors from other universities or colleges in good standing, may assume the academic costume corresponding to their Degree, as described in the foregoing section [regarding Princeton's hoods], provided that such right shall terminate if such person shall cease to be connected with the College.'<sup>30</sup> These instructions were fairly opaque, prompting the committee to expand further on the topic:

If you have received a Degree from some other College you may wear the Princeton hood corresponding to that Degree ... ; or you may wear the hood of the College from which you received your Degree, (that is, a blue-lined hood for Yale, blue and white-lined for Columbia, etc.).<sup>31</sup>

Although faculty members were permitted such freedom of choice, the committee 'earnestly recommend[ed]' wearing the non-Princeton hood where possible, 'as a variety in costume will produce a much more pleasing effect'.<sup>32</sup>

In practice, at Princeton (and at many other universities) in the late nineteenth century, this choice of hoods for faculty members did not create much of a quandary. Relatively few professors at the time held earned doctorates, and leading universities would routinely grant their own faculty members honorary doctorates because doctoral degrees were becoming, in one historian's description, 'valuable commodities for institutional reputations'.<sup>33</sup> And so, a number of members of the Princeton faculty held Princeton doctorates, even if they had completed little or no graduate work or if their postgraduate educations had actually taken place elsewhere. This penchant for awarding honorary doctorates, together with the fact that few students were pursuing doctoral studies at Princeton before the formal founding of the graduate school in 1900, meant that most wearers of Princeton's new black and orange PhD hoods would not actually have earned a Princeton PhD; rather, they would either be faculty members opting to wear Princeton's colours, as provided by the Code, or honorary degree recipients, or both.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Humphreys' letter. These issues have been clarified in the current version of the Code.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Humphreys' letter.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Leslie, p. 161. See also, Thorp et al., p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> The predominance of honorary degrees can be seen, for example, in 1894, when Prince-

One way or the other, Princeton's colours were prominently displayed at its ceremonial occasions. At the sesquicentennial celebration in 1896, just months after the committee urged all faculty members to obtain appropriate academic costumes, there was a grand procession across the campus, with the usual double file line of fully costumed academics extending for hundreds of yards.<sup>35</sup> The parade of dignitaries was led by the president and distinguished delegates from foreign universities. Then came the faculty of the neighbouring Princeton Theological Seminary (a number of whom were educated at Princeton or had received its honorary degrees), the University's trustees (many of whom were Princeton alumni and the rest were entitled, like the faculty, to wear Princeton's costume, pursuant to the Code, irrespective of where they had earned their degrees), representatives of other American universities, the faculty of the University, and 'finally, a number of men who have won higher degrees from Princeton'.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, when the official Memorial Book of the Sesquicentennial recorded the event, it observed 'a mass of brilliant color, [with] the orange and black hoods of Princeton of course predominating'.<sup>37</sup>

### *Princeton's defection from the Code*

From sesqui- to bi-centennial, Princeton's academic parades and processions would continue to feature the Code-prescribed academic uniforms. Shortly after mid-century, however, Princeton decided to design a new and distinctive PhD costume. This time, Princeton was not the first to spark a regalia revolution, but it was, once again, in the vanguard, with Kevin Sheard commenting in 1962 that the only 'outstanding deviations' from the Code's standard cap and gown are Harvard, Princeton and

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ton awarded ten honorary doctorates, but only four earned ones (*The Princeton Bric-a-Brac*, 20 (Princeton, N.J.: Published by the Junior Class, 1896)). At its sesquicentennial celebration two years later, Princeton would bestow honorary doctorates on fifty-seven distinguished guests. See Archives, Historical Photographs Collection (HPC), Campus Life Series (CLS), AC112, Box MPO62. Yale had awarded America's first earned PhD in 1863, and, by the turn of the century, Yale, Harvard and a handful of other universities reached the point where they were conferring 'two hundred or more Ph.D.'s each in little more than a decade'; Princeton, by contrast, had in the nineteenth century 'strenuously avoided moving into doctoral studies, preferring to have its Ph.D. be an honorary ... degree' (John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 89, 131–32). Even after launching the Graduate College in 1900, Princeton's graduate programmes remained fairly small compared with those at Harvard and Yale (Thorp et al., *passim*).

<sup>35</sup> Archives, HPC, Campus Life Series, AC112, Boxes MP062 and SP8. Historian James Axtell calls this event 'the most impressive academic celebration in American history ...' ('The Dilettante Dean and the Origins of the Princeton Graduate School', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 62.2 (Winter 2001), pp. 239–61 (p. 25).

<sup>36</sup> *Memorial Book*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Yale.<sup>38</sup> These changes came at a time when enrolments in American graduate degree programmes began to skyrocket, and more and more universities started awarding doctorates, including many that were far less academically distinguished than the older, mostly Eastern, Ivy-covered institutions that had previously dominated doctoral education.<sup>39</sup> There is not enough evidence to say that the proliferation of doctoral degree-granting institutions was the sole motivation that caused places like Princeton to look for ways to ‘stand out in the crowd’, but it is certainly the case that just as many younger universities were figuring out what their Code-prescribed doctoral regalia would look like for the first time, the older universities began to defect from the Code’s mandated uniformity in favour of new and distinctive costumes, especially for their PhD recipients.<sup>40</sup>

Yale debuted its blue gown in 1938, Harvard’s crimson gown came in 1955,<sup>41</sup> and, in October 1959, Princeton’s president, Robert Goheen, asked the trustees to review the efforts that he had initiated ‘to add color and distinctiveness to academic robes worn by Princeton Ph.D.s.’<sup>42</sup> Earlier that year, as an interim measure, Goheen had declared that ‘two small Princeton shields ... for the lapels of the academic robe are now an authorized part of the formal regalia for holders of Princeton Ph.Ds ...’.<sup>43</sup> These cloth patches could be sewn (or pinned) on the standard gown. But, Goheen, a classicist with a Princeton PhD, was looking for something more distinctive—and something more appropriate for wear in the hot sun of Princeton’s June commencements—than just a couple of badges on the front of the long and heavy

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<sup>38</sup> *Academic Heraldry in America* (Marquette, Mich.: Northern Michigan College Press, 1962), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> See William G. Bowen and Neil L. Rudenstine, *In Pursuit of the Ph.D.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 58, who note, for example, that the number of doctoral programmes in six major fields (English, History, Political Science, Economics, Mathematics and Physics) increased by an average of over 100% between 1958 and 1972. The total number of doctorates awarded in all fields increased from 6,420 in 1949–50 to close to 30,000 in 1969–70 (Thelin, p. 282). See also, Hugh Davis Graham and Nancy Diamond, *The Rise of American Research Universities: Elites and Challengers in the Post-war Era* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Hugh Smith and Kevin Sheard, writing in 1970, said that ‘[b]y far the most interesting feature ... of [American] academic costume ... from 1960 to date, has been the deliberate attempt of certain of the best-known and most influential Universities to break away from the uniformity of the Intercollegiate Code’ (*Academic Dress and Insignia of the World*, 3 vols (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1970), II, pp. 1527–28).

<sup>41</sup> Rossano, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8 [henceforth, ‘October 1959 Minutes’].

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum of Robert F. Goheen to Dean Donald R. Hamilton (25 May 1959), Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8. These shields would be placed in approximately the same position as the distinctive crow’s feet on Harvard’s gowns. See Rossano, p. 3.

standard gowns.

At the trustees' meeting, Goheen displayed the standard gown next to a prototype of 'an entirely new design worked out by the marshals at the President's request to provide a distinctive Princeton attire that would be gayer, lighter and more comfortable, and at the same time, less expensive'.<sup>44</sup> The new gown, which would be optional, since the standard one would still be permitted, would be black, 'with orange bars, orange panels down the front, and orange lining in the sleeves ...'.<sup>45</sup> After the trustees reviewed the proposed new design, a discussion ensued in which some trustees thought that Princeton should make an even stronger statement and consider 'an all orange gown with black bars similar to Harvard's crimson and Yale's blue gowns ...'.<sup>46</sup>



Princeton University Office of Communications

Fig. 2.

The marshals went back to the drawing board, and at the April 1960 meeting, the president and the marshals presented both possibilities: orange with black trim, and black with orange trim. The president had firm views on the subject, arguing that 'the orange gown was probably too bold to adopt as optional regalia for Princeton Ph.D.s', and his recommendation of the black gown with orange panels and bars was unanimously approved by the board.<sup>47</sup> He was quite taken with the orange gown, however, and he suggested that it become 'the official regalia for University marshals ...'.<sup>48</sup> Such a gown, he thought, 'would do a great deal to liven up the University's Academic Processions'.<sup>49</sup> The trustees agreed, and the orange marshal's gown shown on the two men leading the procession shown in Fig. 2 is still in use today.

The orange and black colours of the new PhD gown, as described briefly in the trustees' minutes, would address President Goheen's goal of distinctiveness, but he

<sup>44</sup> October 1959 Minutes.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Princeton University (8 April 1960), Archives, HSF, Graduate School: Commencement/Academic Costume File, Box 308, Folder 8 [henceforth, 'April 1960 Minutes']. As discussed below, the mortar-board was originally prescribed for use with this gown, but that rule was subsequently modified.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

was also seeking something ‘gayer, lighter and more comfortable’, and possibly less expensive.<sup>50</sup> To achieve these goals, the marshals took pruning shears to the standard gown and hood, lopping off the ends of the sleeves, shearing the panels from the hood altogether, fashioning the gown to be worn open (with no zipper or fasteners) and replacing the velvet on the gown with faille orange panels and bars. Since the new three-quarter length sleeves would show the inside of the sleeves far more than the long, bell-shaped sleeves of the standard gown, the special Princeton sleeves would add another splash of distinctiveness by having a lining in the university’s primary colour.

Princeton’s most radical departure from the Code’s prescriptions—one not shared by Yale’s earlier deviation—was in stripping the faculty-coloured edging from the hood and replacing it with an orange stripe running around the outside of the cowl. The gown, while shorter in the sleeve and decorated in orange, still bore the essential hallmarks of a doctoral gown, even if it substituted ‘gayer and lighter’ for the Code’s original vision of long, flowing dignity. But, with edging always in orange, the hood had lost one of the three central communicative elements of the Code’s design strategy. Under the Code, the hood would specify the degree through the length and shape, the university via the lining, and the field of study (arts, philosophy, theology, etc.) through the edging. Princeton’s new hood would convey no information at all concerning the field of study. It is unclear whether this abrupt a departure from the standard hood design was intentional or whether it was simply a desire to eliminate the heavier, more expensive velvet.

Princeton’s optional costume of the black and orange gown with a modified hood (the standard mortar-board cap was still prescribed) was not an unqualified success. Some graduates would continue to opt for the standard gown, while others unsuccessfully lobbied for permission to wear the more distinctive and arguably more attractive marshal’s gown.<sup>51</sup> An opinion piece by a graduate student in the campus newspaper in the 1980s lamented the ‘Oxford-inspired open gown design’ (‘Just because an idea is 700 years old doesn’t mean it’s a good one.’), and complained about the high school-like short sleeves.<sup>52</sup> While this version of Princeton’s PhD gown continues to be officially authorized for wear up to the present day, there is now a ‘more recent and more popular style of special Princeton Doctor regalia’, according to the website to which Princeton’s Graduate School directs its newly minted PhDs.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> October 1959 Minutes.

<sup>51</sup> Princeton University Associate Graduate Dean Joy Montero, telephone interview (June 27, 2008) [henceforth, ‘Montero Interview’].

<sup>52</sup> Donald L. Drakeman, ‘Cap and Frown: Comments on Graduation garb’, *Daily Princetonian* (October 1988). It is not clear how representative these opinions were of graduate student views generally, but they are evidence of the author’s enduring interest in the subject matter.

<sup>53</sup> <<http://www.capandgownorder.com/Princeton>>. The Princeton website that links to

### *Gown design becomes habit-forming*

Today Princeton stands as the only major American university with three different officially authorized PhD costumes.<sup>54</sup> The standard Code-prescribed costume has been in use since 1895, the gayer-and-lighter black-and-orange gown with the orange-edged hood (currently designated as ‘Princeton Doctor #1’) made its debut in 1960, and, more recently, a new, heavier, and longer black-and-orange version called ‘Princeton Doctor #2’,<sup>55</sup> which is shown in Fig. 4, has appeared.

Doctor #2 returns to the basic design of the doctoral gown currently prescribed by the Code. As described by the University’s authorized provider of PhD gowns,

The gown has a zipper closure.

The gown has velvet front panels and sleeve bars.

The sleeves are full bell sleeves.

The style of the gown is consistent with Doctor gowns across the country.<sup>56</sup>

The only difference between Doctor #2 and the Code’s doctoral gown is that the velvet panels on the front and the velvet bars on the sleeves are orange rather than either black or the colour of the wearer’s field of study.

Meanwhile, the Doctor #2 hood features the dark blue velvet trim that had been absent from Doctor #1. The Doctor #2 hood and the standard hood are, therefore, now identical. As to headwear, while the mortar-board cap was originally worn with Doctor #1 when it was launched in 1960, a ‘four corner black velvet tam’ with a ‘gold metallic tassel’ is now designated for both Doctor #1 and Doctor #2 costumes.<sup>57</sup> As per the Code, the mortar-board cap is still recommended to be worn with the standard doctoral gown.

When President Goheen first proposed Doctor #1, one of his goals was to make the new regalia less expensive than the standard version. Eliminating the velvet and shortening the sleeves were likely to have been the primary efforts in that direction. It is, therefore, interesting that Princeton’s two special doctoral costumes currently cost exactly the same amount: \$792 for cap, gown and hood in 2008.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear whether the costs of production are actually quite similar, or whether the equal pricing approach is designed to encourage the purchase of Doctor #2, especially since

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this website is <[http://gradschool.princeton.edu/studentlife/hooding/academic\\_regalia](http://gradschool.princeton.edu/studentlife/hooding/academic_regalia)> [henceforth, Princeton Website].

<sup>54</sup> According to the now discontinued website of the E. R. Moore Company, the Intercollegiate Code’s officially designated repository, only Princeton and the Union Institute had two different ‘special’ regalia that could be worn in addition to the standard costume. The Union Institute emphasizes non-residential, distance education. See <<http://www.tui.edu>>.

<sup>55</sup> <<http://www.capandgownorder.com>>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

the official order form emphasizes the fact that Doctor #2 is ‘more popular’ and that ‘[m]ost all current graduates are wearing this design’.<sup>59</sup>

The goal of an inexpensive doctoral costume continues, and the manufacturer has achieved it by creating ‘[s]tandard regalia ... manufactured for one-time use ...’.<sup>60</sup> These costumes, which include a black gown with black trim, are called ‘retainable’ as opposed to Doctors #1 and #2, which are referred to as ‘custom’ outfits. This inexpensive standard design cap, gown and hood were available in 2008 for \$49.20, shipping and handling included.<sup>61</sup>

By returning to the Code’s basic doctoral gown design for Doctor #2 while retaining Doctor #1’s pioneering concept of having orange panels and bars, Princeton has introduced the potential for confusion or misidentification in a costume that was undoubtedly created with the primary goal of being distinctive. Almost certainly inadvertently, Princeton has fashioned its Doctor #2 gown to be identical to a gown authorized by the Code for the recipient of a Doctor of Engineering (DEng) degree from any American university (although it is not a degree awarded by Princeton). The Code provides that the standard doctoral gown can have trim in the colour of the wearer’s field of study—which is orange in the case of engineering—in lieu of the standard black trim. And so, in seeing an orange and black gown in the form of Doctor #2, a thoughtful observer will only be able to figure out whether the wearer has a Princeton PhD or, instead, has been awarded some other university’s DEng. degree by looking carefully at the colours of the hood, and in particular at the colour of the velvet edging—the part that Princeton had thought completely unnecessary in crafting the hood for Doctor #1. In the Doctor #2 costume, dark blue appears, whereas an engineering doctorate would call for orange trim.

Any such confusion is probably irrelevant in a modern era in which the Code’s military-like system, with a commitment to uniformity combined with clearly observable insignia of rank and allegiance, has become increasingly replaced throughout America’s elite universities by a rainbow of specially designed gowns ensuring

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. According to Ann Halliday, Associate Secretary of Princeton University, the Doctor #2 regalia ‘was approved for use in fall of 1993’ after a request from an ‘alumna of the Graduate School who ... suggested that an option for doctoral gowns for Princeton using velvet trim be “authorized” ...’ (e-mail communication, 22 August 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Princeton Website. Although designated for ‘one-time use’, these inexpensive costumes usually need to do double duty. Since 1994, Princeton graduate degree recipients have been officially ‘hooded’ by the University’s marshals in a special ceremony on the day before commencement, which is when the degrees are officially awarded. See James Axtell, ‘Rounding Out a Century: The Princeton Graduate School, 1969-2000’, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 61.2 (Winter 2000), pp. 171-216 (p. 216).

<sup>61</sup> A gown, hood and cap package for bachelor’s and master’s degree recipients are priced slightly lower (<<http://www.capandgownorder.com>>). The ‘retainable’ nomenclature may be used to emphasize the fact that the standard costume is not being rented, as had occurred in the past (Montero interview).



Princeton University Office of Communications  
Fig. 3.

that each university's PhDs are outfitted in the well known colours of its football team. Whether on the field or at the podium, Princeton's Tigers are black and orange, Brown University's Bears are, not surprisingly, brown, and Harvard's Crimson are, well, crimson.<sup>62</sup>

### *The president*

From the time Princeton adopted the Inter-Collegiate Code until the 1950s, the university's president would wear the standard doctoral gown, making him indistinguishable from the rest of the faculty, as can be seen in the photograph of Princeton President Woodrow Wilson.<sup>63</sup> At the June 1954 commencement, then-president Harold Dodds first donned a specially designed presidential gown. It is an open

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<sup>62</sup> Compare the special academic dress described at <<http://academicregalia.herffjones.com/School/index>> with the athletics sites at <<http://www.princeton.edu>>, <[www.brown.edu](http://www.brown.edu)> and <<http://www.harvard.edu>>. This pattern appears to be consistent throughout the Ivy League, including Dartmouth (the 'Big Green'), despite the fact that Dartmouth still calls itself a 'college' and grants a fairly small number of graduate degrees.

<sup>63</sup> The photo shows Wilson in 1910 on his way to his last commencement ceremony as president of Princeton. James Axtell, *The Making of Princeton University: From Woodrow Wilson to the Present* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. xvi-xvii. See also Thorp et al. (p. 115), who show Wilson in 1910 sitting for a photograph in his black doctoral gown.



black gown, ‘rimmed with gold, and faced with the orange of Princeton and of the House of Nassau’.<sup>64</sup> At that time, there were ‘sixteen bands of gold lacing in the sleeves of the gown represent[ing] the sixteen Presidents who [had] guided Princeton since its foundation’.<sup>65</sup> With each new president, an extra gold band is added, and the current president, Shirley Tilghman, is shown in Fig. 3 wearing a gown with 19 bands (ten on one sleeve and nine on the other).<sup>66</sup> As Smagorinsky has observed, the Princeton president’s distinctive ‘robe is reminiscent of a scaled-down version of the gown worn by the Chancellor of Oxford or Cambridge’,<sup>67</sup> much as many of the architectural features of the University’s campus reverently invoke (or, in some cases, baldly imitate) their Oxbridge forebears.<sup>68</sup> The Princeton president’s

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<sup>64</sup> Princeton University announcement, Archives, Historical Subject Files: Academic Costumes, 1895-1994, Box 308, Folder 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> See also, ‘A Commentary on Commencement’ in the 2002 Commencement Program, which lists Dr Tilghman’s predecessors. Fig. 3 (Princeton University Office of Communications) shows President Tilghman participating in the awarding of an honorary doctorate. This ceremony consists, in part, of bestowing a Princeton doctoral hood in the appropriate field (arts in this case) on the recipient, who is already wearing a doctoral gown. Honorary degree recipients who have an earned doctorate typically wear their own gowns, leading to a circumstance apparently not envisaged by the Code: the honorary degree recipient will be wearing an orange-and-black Princeton hood with a crimson Harvard gown or a blue Yale gown, and so on. Photographs of recent commencement ceremonies suggest that honorary degree recipients not holding an earned doctorate (the boxer Muhammed Ali, for example) wear the standard black doctoral gown with black trim. See the commencement photographs at <<http://www.Princeton.edu/PAW>>.

<sup>67</sup> Smagorinsky, p. 16. She notes that it was designed by an architecture professor and the former supervising architect of the university, Stephen Voorhees (ibid.). Voorhees had an abiding interest in academic dress at Princeton. When Princeton’s new PhD gown was being designed five years later, he contacted the Dutch consulate for ‘some bunting used during the visit of Queen Juliana, who is a member of the House of Orange-Nassau’, which he then modified ‘to get what he thought was a beautiful orange’ (April 1960 Minutes).

<sup>68</sup> For example, the Graduate College’s architect began his design efforts by ‘studying the architecture of Oxford and Cambridge’ (Thorp et al., p. 119), and the famous Turnbull Sundial at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, is duplicated in a courtyard at Princeton (Laurel M. Cantor, *The Spires of Princeton University* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, n.d.), unnumbered pages). See also Robert Gambee, *Princeton* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), pp. 230–31. Cantor also notes that the University Chapel was ‘modeled after the chapel at King’s College, Cambridge’, by the same architect who designed the Graduate College, Ralph Adams Cram. Princeton’s Firestone Library does not look very much like the Bodleian, but perhaps to compensate for that fact, a stone block taken from that Oxford edifice is embedded in Firestone’s walls, following the precedent of the garden walls of the dean of the Graduate School’s house, which ‘incorporate pieces of original stonework from Oxford and Cambridge’. Even post-modern Wu Hall, built in 1984, incorporates a ‘geometric pattern over the main doorway’ that is ‘symbolic of a gate pattern at Oxford and Cambridge’. See also Alex Duke, *Importing Oxbridge: English Residential Colleges and American Universities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 78–90.



Princeton University Office of Communications

Fig. 4.

gown is thus just one manifestation of the fact that, time and again, Princeton has turned for inspiration to Oxford and Cambridge when designing both bricks and mortar-boards.

### *Current Habits*

If Princeton stays on its now-habitual schedule for doctoral gown design, the next iteration of the PhD costume is likely to appear around the time of the University's tricentennial in 2046. In the meantime, today's designs for Princeton's academic costumes are likely to persist, led by the (appropriately) ever-changing president's gown, which acquires a new gold lacing with every change in office. (Judging by the current length of the lace-bearing sleeves of the president's gown, it may become necessary, as the decades pass, either to re-design the gown or to take height into account in the appointment of future presidents.)

The bachelor's and master's gowns are—and have consistently been since 1895—the ones prescribed by the Code. Since Princeton grants only two bachelor's degrees, a Bachelor of Arts (AB) and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering (BSE), the Code's black bachelor's gown and mortar-board cap are accompanied by hoods lined with a field of orange in which there is a black chevron; the hoods have a trim of either white (for arts) or golden yellow (for science).

Princeton currently grants eleven master's degrees, but they fall into overlapping categories for the hood trim colours specified by the Code. The degrees and the cor-

responding colours for the edging of the hoods are as follows:

<i>White</i>	Master of Arts Master of Arts in Near Eastern Studies Master of Fine Arts <sup>69</sup>
<i>Brown</i>	Master of Architecture
<i>Peacock Blue</i>	Master in Public Affairs Master in Public Policy Master in Public Affairs and Urban Regional Planning
<i>Golden Yellow</i>	Master of Science Master of Science in Engineering Master of Engineering <sup>70</sup>
<i>Tan</i>	Master of Finance <sup>71</sup>

And, then, of course, there are the three PhD gowns. In the light of the facts that the two special gowns (Doctors #1 and #2) are priced the same, that the official website urges purchasers to opt for Doctor #2, and that photographs of recent commencements show that degree recipients seem to be taking that advice,<sup>72</sup> it appears that when Princeton PhDs take part in full-dress ceremonial occasions in the

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<sup>69</sup> Information about the colour of the hood trim for masters' degrees is from Associate Dean of the Graduate School Joy Montero via e-mail communication (14 August 2008) [hereafter, Montero e-mail]. Under the Code, the colour for fine arts is brown: The category is titled 'Fine Arts, including Architecture' <<http://www.acenet.edu>>. At Princeton, fine arts graduates wear a hood with white trim (for which the Code category is 'Arts, Letters, Humanities'), whereas architecture graduates wear a brown-trimmed hood.

<sup>70</sup> The Code's colour for engineering is orange, but all of Princeton's engineering master's degree recipients wear a golden-yellow trimmed hood. The Code specifies that the trim should be 'indicative of the subject to which the degree pertains ...'. If Princeton were to apply the Code strictly, it appears that the Master of Engineering and Master of Science in Engineering graduates would have orange trim on their hoods, which would distinguish them from the recipients of the Master of Science degree. A similar point could be made about the undergraduates receiving a Bachelor of Science in Engineering degree, since they now have yellow rather than orange trimmed hoods. Yet the hoods are already lined with Princeton's distinctive orange colour, and, while a visitor to Princeton's ceremonial events would easily conclude that the university's affection for the colour orange knew no bounds, the trustees could have reasonably concluded that hoods with orange for both trim and linings would be less attractive than ones juxtaposing the golden yellow of science with the orange of Princeton.

<sup>71</sup> There could be a question as to whether the Master in Finance degree falls into the Code's category of 'Economics' (Copper) or 'Commerce, Accountancy, Business' (Drab). Princeton Dean Joy Montero describes the hood colour as 'tan (light brown),' which more closely resembles the Code's 'Drab' for business than the darker 'copper' for Economics (Montero e-mail).

<sup>72</sup> *The Princeton Alumni Weekly* publishes photos of recent commencements: <<http://www.Princeton.edu/PAW>>.

future, the Doctor #2 regalia will predominate. Princeton's own commencements, however, tell a more complicated story.

At Princeton's typically outdoor graduation ceremonies, all three sets of doctoral outfits are likely to be on display. Some faculty members who earned Princeton PhDs a number of years ago can be seen wearing Doctor #1, as shown in Fig. 5. Meanwhile, the \$49.20 standard black one-time-use gown remains a popular choice for new graduates alongside Doctor #2. See Fig. 4 for a picture of several PhD recipients wearing either the 'retainable' or the 'custom' Doctor #2 gown. This decision by some students to choose the standard black academic dress



Princeton University Office of Communications

Fig. 5.

is probably driven less by a philosophical commitment to the Intercollegiate Code's 1895 breakthrough in academic costuming as to the generally impoverished state of graduate students and a weak job market for entry-level faculty positions. Whatever the reason, the trinitarian array of Princeton's doctoral gown choices visible at each June commencement ceremony provides a fitting optical allusion to the University's historic role in the development of academic dress in America.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The author would like to thank Joy Montero and Ann Halliday for their very helpful insights into Princeton's current and historical approaches to academic regalia, the archivists at the Princeton University Archives for their patient guidance and assistance in locating all manner of university arcana, and Bruce Christianson for his thoughtful comments on a draft of this paper.

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## Interview

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