

The Colors of Commencement

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Academic Traditions

Current-day academic gowns are based on the clothing of medieval monks, and each gown helps reveal the wearer's education and ranking.

The gowns worn today in commencement and inauguration ceremonies were everyday dress in the 12th century. By the 17th century, however, gowns were worn by only clerics, those in the law professions, and academics. Many institutions in Europe still wear regalia on a daily basis, unlike in the United States where it is worn primarily for major university events like commencement.

There is an [Inter-Collegiate Code](#) which sets out a detailed uniform scheme of academic regalia that is voluntarily followed by many, though not all institutions entirely adhere to it. This code covers the gowns and hoods but does not include the cords which are a UNH-based tradition.

University Symbols



University Mace

The University's mace, a symbol of authority, traditionally is carried at the head of academic processions by the chief faculty marshal or senior faculty member.

Used to represent power and authority, the mace is commonly seen in paintings in the late Middle Ages as an ornate, decorative symbol of the authority of the monarch. As educational institutions were organized, the ruling monarchs granted some of their authority to each institution. To symbolize the authority, the institution was allowed to

have a mace. This tradition has evolved to symbolize the authority an academic institution has to grant degrees and maintain high educational standards.

The traditions of the academic mace and medallion at the University of New Hampshire date to 1983, when President Evelyn Handler instituted these ceremonial artifacts. The academic mace and medallion are housed in Special Collections and Archives at the Dimond Library.

The University of New Hampshire's mace is sterling silver with a hammered texture. Its torch-like, tapered body features three silver seals including that of the State of New Hampshire, the Town of Durham, and the University. As a University symbol of the "Granite State," the mace is embellished with chips of granite, and the handle has two bands of New Hampshire wood.

The Medallion

The academic medallion is worn by the president of an institution of higher learning at important ceremonies such as Commencement as a symbol of office. UNH's academic medallion is made of silver and features the University seal.

Hoods

The hood is descended from cowls once worn by monks. The length, lining, and trim of the hood reveal the wearer's alma mater, area of study, and degree.

The hood is worn draped over the shoulders with the lining exposed. At the University of New Hampshire, the lining of the hood is blue and white, the official university colors. The color of the hood's trim reflects the wearer's field of study, and the length of the hood reveals the level of degree earned. For example, a master's degree is indicated by a three and one half foot hood, while a doctoral degree is signified by a four foot hood.

The Intercollegiate Code prescribes the following faculty colors for the binding of the hood:

Agriculture	Maize
Arts, Letters, Humanities	White
Business Administration, Commerce	Drab
City and Regional Planning	Brown
Communication and Information Studies	Gray
Economics	Copper
Education:	Light Blue
Engineering	Orange
Fine Arts, Architecture	Brown
Human Resources	Management Dusk
Journalism	Dark Crimson
Labor and Employment Relations	Peacock Blue
Law	Purple

Library Service	Lemon
Medicine	Green
Music	Pink
Nursing	Apricot
Oratory-Speech	Silver Gray
Pharmacy	Olive Green
Philosophy	Blue
Physical Education	Sage Green
Public Administration	Peacock Blue
Science Golden	Yellow
Social Service	Citron
Theology and Divinity	Scarlet

UNH Commencement Cords and Sashes



Presidential Scholars	Gold Cord
McNair Fellows	Blue Cord
University Scholar	White Cord
Golden Key	Blue & Gold Sash (blue side out)
Honors Program	Blue Stole with White UNH Seal
SHHS – Alpha Epsilon Delta	Purple & Red Cord
OT Phi Theta Epsilon	Navy & Gold Cord
Phi Beta Kappa	Pink & Blue Cord
Pi Sigma Alpha	Red, White & Black
Sigma Alpha Lambda	Navy, Black & Gold Cord
Kappa Delta	Green & White Cord
Student Senate	Blue & Silver Cord

Military Veterans	Red, White & Blue Cord
Lambda Pi Eta	Red & White Cord
UNH Society of Women Engineers	Green & Yellow Stoles
Residential Advisors	Green
International Affairs Dual Major	Multicolor

Caps

Academic caps are derived from the pileus, a close-fitting cap originally worn by the ancient Romans and adopted by the church in 1311. There are two primary styles of caps: the Oxford, which is the familiar mortarboard, and the Cambridge, which is a beret-like soft cap.

In a 1998 article in the Harvard University Gazette, E.B. Boatner offered this insight into the history of academic caps, “One anonymous legend cites a wise old Greek who decked his students out in mason’s sackcloth robes with mortarboards because ‘their destiny is to build. Some will build cities, some will build lives; perhaps one of them will build an empire. But all will be builders on the foundation of knowledge.’”

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