

Academic Regalia

The colors and style of graduation attire has specific meaning. Traditionally, this garb was worn by all faculty when teaching. Today, the academic regalia is rarely worn outside of commencement exercises including the investiture ceremony. Each institution and each degree has unique colors and attributes to the attire. The faculty of the institution may choose to wear the regalia of the institution from which they received their doctoral degree or from the institution for which they work.

The master's gown has more elaborate sleeves than the gown worn for the bachelor's degree. The doctoral gown has even more elaborate sleeves and has three bands of velvet on each sleeve as well as velvet trim on the front. At West Virginia University, our current gown for the MS and PhD degrees is dark blue and the PhD gown is trimmed with dark blue velvet. Gowns can be black with black velvet. Other institutions may choose gown colors that reflect their school's colors and some can be quite bright.

The hood is the scarf-like piece that hangs down the individual's back. It is three and half feet long for the MS degree and four feet long for the PhD degree. The colors of the hood are highly prescribed. The shell material must match the gown. The hood is trimmed in velvet in a color specific to the major. The interior lining displays the colors of the institution; for West Virginia University this is blue and gold.

The final piece to the regalia is the headwear. This can be a 4-sided mortarboard in material to match the gown or it can be a tam of 6 or 8 sides. The velvet tam is reserved for the doctoral degree. Headwear also has a tassel and its color is chosen by the institution. Tassels typically hang on the left. The practice of moving the tassel during graduation is a modern invention and not uniformly performed at graduation exercises.

Differences in velvet color by degree:

Academic degree:

Dark blue – Doctor of Philosophy (PhD, all fields)

Science gold or green – Master of Science (biomedical sciences, health sciences, and clinical & translational science)

Professional degrees awarded at the Health Sciences Center:

Lilac – Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS)

Kelly Green – Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Apricot – Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)

Olive – Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD)