

The Commencement Ceremony

The University holds one commencement ceremony in May each year. Previous August and December graduates are invited to participate in the May Ceremony.

Commencement Regalia and Honor Information

BACCALAUREATE REGALIA

Graduation robes or academic regalia go back to the Middle Ages. The clergy and students in the universities wore black gowns to hide ink stains resulting from daily note-taking and copying texts using a quill pen dipped in horns filled with liquid ink.

A detachable black hood was part of the standard medieval dress as well. It hung over the shoulders and could be pulled up over the head to keep the sun or rain off, or pulled off with a little rear extension called the liripipe.

By the Renaissance, hats were in and hoods were out. Most hats were soft, flat bags like a tam. The larger ones needed a cardboard stiffener to keep them from falling down over the wearer's eyes. In the 18th century in Oxford, poor undergraduates asked tailors to use as little fabric as possible, so the cardboard was all that remained. People thought they resembled the boards masons carried on their heads when working so the term "mortarboard" came into use.

Also in the 18th century, hoods became more colorful and were often made in colors that indicated a particular college or degree. Ornamental tassels were added to the mortarboard and were generally worn after graduation, hanging off the left side to keep a clear view of the writing hand. The whole regalia — cap, hood, gown — was worn to lectures and at formal college functions until the 19th century.

At Mary Baldwin, seniors put on their caps and gowns for the first time on Founders Day in October of their senior year. Hoods, lined with Mary Baldwin's white and yellow colors, are added at Commencement. The white facings represent the liberal arts. Specialized degrees all have their own colors, but the liberal arts, like white light, are composed of all the colors. Bachelor of Science in Nursing hoods are designated with an apricot facing.

MASTER'S REGALIA

Gowns worn by all candidates for master's degrees are longer than those worn by bachelor's degree candidates and have long, bat-wing shaped sleeves. The master's hood is wider and longer than the bachelor's hood, and for all Mary Baldwin University master's degrees it is lined with yellow and white silk to show Mary Baldwin's colors. The velvet outer facing of the hood for the Master of Arts in Teaching and the Master of Letters degrees is white, representing the liberal arts. The facing of the hood for the Master of Science in Higher Education and Master of Education are both light blue, representing education. The Master of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis facing is golden yellow, representing the applied sciences. The Master of Fine Arts hood's facings are a light brown color (fawn), representing the arts. The Master of Business Administration hood facing is drab, representing business. The Master of Science in Physician Assistant hood's facings are green, representing medicine. The Master of Healthcare Administration hood is trimmed in salmon, the traditional color of public health. Graduates with dual degrees of Master of Science in Nursing and Master of Healthcare Administration will wear hoods with apricot velvet, representing nursing. Graduates with dual degrees of Master of Healthcare Administration and Master of Business Administration will wear hoods with salmon velvet, representing public health.

DOCTORAL REGALIA

Gowns worn by doctoral degree candidates are distinguished by the colored velvet panel on the front and three horizontal bars at the sleeves. The teal velvet trim on the hood is the traditional color of the Doctor of Physical Therapy degree (DPT), and the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree (OTD) is distinguished with Rhodes blue trim. The colors of the lining, yellow and white, are Mary Baldwin University's colors. A velvet tam and tassel are used instead of the undergraduate cap.

FACULTY REGALIA

Baccalaureate and master's-level gowns are usually black and are untrimmed, with the sleeves of the master's gown generally longer. Velvet panels down the front distinguish doctoral gowns, which may be black or a school color of the university granting the degree. Three horizontal velvet bars on the sleeves, usually of the color representing the wearer's degree, also mark the doctorate. Only doctoral caps may be made of velvet.

The length of a hood indicates the degree, with the bachelor's being three feet long, the master's three and one half, and the doctoral four feet. The color of the lining indicates the university at which the degree was earned and is usually the school color. The border of the hood indicates the academic discipline in which the degree was earned; for most faculty this is the dark blue of philosophy, indicating an earned PhD (doctor of philosophy, typically the highest degree in an academic discipline) or, in a few cases, the EdD (light blue for education) or MBA (drab).

Student marshals, wearing gold epaulettes on the left shoulder, are chosen from the Honors List in each class.

PRESIDENTIAL MEDALLION AND CHAIN OF OFFICE

The presidential medallion is patterned after MBU's 1992 sesquicentennial medal. Mary Baldwin's president wears the medallion of office on formal occasions such as Commencement. Designed by artist R. Daniel Booton of Gum Spring, Virginia, the medallion features the Mary Baldwin seal on one side and a profile of the Administration Building — complete with the cast-iron dogs Ham and Jam — on the other. The dates of the establishment of Augusta Female Seminary and its elevation to college status, and the university's motto, Non Pro Tempore, Sed Aeternitate ("not for time, but for eternity"), appear with the seal.

The chain was designed by Booton to depict oak leaves linked with acorns, symbols associated with the university that convey courage, truth, and strength. The medallion and necklace are gifts to the university from the faculty.

Says President Pamela Fox: "The medallion is an ongoing symbol of our strength and tradition, and it is wonderful that this representation of unity and continuity was initiated by the faculty."

THE UNIVERSITY MARSHALS, MACE, AND BATON

Two faculty members are elected by the faculty to serve as marshals, officials who ensure the orderly conduct of public ceremonies. The university marshal bears the mace, and the associate marshal the baton, both symbols of self-governance and authority of the institution. They resemble those used since colonial times in Virginia by the legislature.

The mace and baton were gifts from the Alumni Association, and their design was taken from the Baldwin family crest and the memorial stained glass window in Grafton Library. On the mace, the squirrel is a symbol of industriousness, curiosity, dignity, grace, and liveliness. On the baton, the acorn symbolizes strength, and the oak leaves stand for durability, courage, and truth. The maces are made of local walnut, a wood that represents longevity and hidden wisdom. Gold represents wisdom and honor, and the green of the oak leaves stands for life.