COMMENCEMENT

Note: Please contact the Commencement Office (5-9541) for information on current Commencement policies.

The following information is extracted from the Faculty Handbook, 2002 edition:

Candidate for Degree Administered by Cornell (p. 15.):

In 1893, the University Faculty voted that "it is not in accordance with the policy of this Faculty to grant degrees to members of their own body." This principle, although questioned several times, has always been reaffirmed. It has been, since at least 1955, a part of the university bylaws which states that, "No member of the University Faculty may be a candidate for a degree administered by Cornell University." The bylaws also define membership in college and school faculties and add, "No voting member of a college or school faculty may be a candidate for a degree administered by Cornell University."

Commencement and Baccalaureate Ceremonies (pp. 77-78):

Members of the University Faculty are encouraged to participate in the commencement exercises, which are scheduled on the last Sunday in May. The traditional ceremony begins with an academic procession, which forms on the Arts Quadrangle and proceeds to Schoellkopf Field. In the event of severely inclement weather, the graduation ceremony is shifted to Barton Hall, and there will not be a procession. The president delivers the only address, and no honorary degrees are conferred. A recognition event is held for the doctoral candidates the evening before in Barton Hall. Faculty are encouraged to participate by processing in this formal event to support their doctoral candidates. All other degrees are given out after the ceremony on Sunday in each school or college. The university maintains a supply of gowns, caps, and hoods for faculty members to borrow for ceremonies on this campus or elsewhere [see Academic Regalia below].

A baccalaureate service is held in Bailey Hall on the morning of Commencement Day and special honor is paid not only to the graduating seniors, but also to retiring members of the faculty and staff.

Academic Regalia (p. 111):
Academic gowns may be borrowed from the Commencement Office prior to commencement. Information is mailed in April to reserve regalia, which are then distributed during the three days before the ceremony. Arrangements to purchase academic regalia may be made through the Commencement Office.

**COMMENCEMENT DATES**

*December 13, 2000, Records, pp. 9042-9045S, Appendix B*

Professor Richard Galik, Physics, and Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy, said the Committee has been looking at:

- Preservation of free time
- Evening academic activity overload
- Exception exam times
- Labor Day
- Length of the spring term

Professor Galik then introduced a resolution on Dates of Commencement, which was adopted by the body.

*WHEREAS*, the proposed dates for Cornell Commencement have been put forward by the Dean of the Faculty for academic years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, and

*WHEREAS*, it is the obligation and prerogative of the University Faculty to consider questions of educational policy which concern more than one college or school, and

*WHEREAS*, the Senate Committee on Educational Policy has reviewed the proposed academic calendars for those academic years,

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED* that the University Faculty Senate endorses the proposed dates for Cornell Commencement, namely Sundays May 26, 2002, May 25, 2003, May 30, 2004 and May 29, 2005.
HISTORY

Academic Dress

From the committee appointed to consider the questions of the adoption of academic costume, embodied in the following resolutions, namely,

Resolved, that in the opinion of the Faculty, the wearing of academic costume during Commencement Week, or on the day of the exercises, by all Professors, would add greatly to the dignity of the occasion; would as symbolism enable both Faculty and students to appreciate the corporate life of the University; would deepen the sentiment of loyalty to the Alma Mater in the hearts of the students; and encourage the graduating class to unanimity in the adoption of the gown.

Resolved, that all Professors who may desire to adopt the cap and academic robe, be permitted to do so, and the whole body of Professors be respectfully invited to initiate the custom at the next Commencement, it was reported that the committee begs leave to refer the matter back to the University Faculty, without any formal recommendation. On motion, the report was ordered to be placed on file.

Adopted by the University Faculty, May 6, 1898, Records, p. 57.

The committee on Academic dress made the following report, which was approved, and the recommendations adopted.

In view of the fact that the members of the graduate classes now as a rule come to commencement with caps and gowns, your committee are of the opinion that there would be a considerable aesthetic gain if members of the Board of Trustees and of the Faculties should also wear caps and gowns on Commencement Day. Your committee accordingly recommend that caps and gowns be worn by members of the Board of Trustees on Commencement Day. The use of such academic costume will be permissive, but Trustees who do not elect to wear caps and gowns are requested to wear silk hats and frock coats.

Your committee further recommend that a copy of this report be sent the University Faculty with the request that the Faculty consider the wisdom and expediency of having caps and gowns worn also by members of the instructing staff on Commencement Day.
Your committee further recommend that the University provide caps and gowns for the use of the members of the Board of Trustees.

Board of Trustees, April 3, 1909, p. 514.

The purchase of twenty gowns for the use of the Trustees at Commencement time was authorized, and the details referred to Assistant Treasurer and the University Secretary with power.

The President presented the following from the Secretary of the University Faculty:

In reply to the request of the committee on Academic dress forwarded by the Secretary of the Board of Trustees, the Faculty voted that it does not deem it desirable to recommend to the members of the instructing staff any official costumes for the Commencement ceremonies.

Executive Committee, Board of Trustees, April 20, 1909, p. 518

Honorary Degrees

No honorary degree may be granted by Cornell University.

Adopted by the University Faculty, June 6, 1902, Records, p. 193.

Voted by Faculty that it is unwise for the University to depart from its fixed policy of not conferring honorary degrees

Adopted by the University Faculty, June 5, 1916, Records, p. 764.

NOTE: Two exceptions to the Honorary Degree policy were made in the early days when degrees were conferred simultaneously on Andrew D. White, the University’s first President, and David Starr Jordan, a graduate of Cornell’s first four-year class, who became the first President of Stanford University.
Procession

The Faculty voted that no distinction between professors, assistant professors and instructors be made with respect to position or rank in the Commencement procession.

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Adopted by the University Faculty, May 8, 1914, Records, p. 633.

Speakers at Commencement

The President reported that the format of Commencement exercises has been undergoing a drastic change at institutions throughout the country. At Cornell, a committee appointed to review the matter has recommended Commencement be continued in the same manner as in the past with the President the only speaker and the wearing of academic costume being optional.

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Board of Trustees, April 16-17, 1971, p. 6799.