The academic attire, which makes an inaugural procession colorful, is as old as universities. The attire represents eight centuries of a continuous tradition; it is not a modern revival of medieval customs. It goes back to the days when students were “clerks” – that is, members of the minor clergy – and wore monkish gowns and hoods. In those days of unheated study halls and garret sleeping quarters, the hood served a very practical purpose. When the hood was pulled over the head, the “tippet,” a sort of hollow tail, served as a convenient pocket. Today, the hood is only an adornment.

The mortarboard, which seems to have evolved from the square biretta of Renaissance churchmen, came into use after the hood had ceased to be worn on the head. The tassel on the mortarboard may be either black or the “color of the faculty” – as described below; or for the holder of a doctorate degree, it may be of gold. Many universities replace the mortarboard with their own distinctive headgear.

Both the gown and the hood indicate the degree held by the wearer. The gown for the bachelor’s degree has pointed sleeves. Bachelor’s hoods have only recently become a part of the attire in the United States. In the master’s gown, the wearer’s arm projects from the sleeve at the elbow, or, in the more modern gowns, at the wrist, and the lower part of the sleeve, ending in another tippet, dangles below the arm. The doctor’s gown has bell-shaped sleeves. Bachelor’s and master’s gowns have no trimmings, but the doctor’s gown is faced down the front with velvet and has tree velvet cross-bars on each sleeve. This velvet may be either black or the color of the faculty members’ discipline.

Graduates of some institutions, on all continents, may wear gowns in the color of the university that awarded their degree, for instance, orange and green for Florida A&M University. In the United States, the hood is edged with velvet in the color of the faculty and lined with the colors of the university conferring the degree. For all academic purposes, trimmings of the doctor’s gowns, edgings of hoods and tassels of caps, adhere to the colors for the different subjects as indicated:

School of Allied Health – Olive; 
School of Architecture – Lilac; 
College of Arts and Sciences – White; 
College of Education – Light Blue; 
FAMU/FSU College of Engineering – Orange; 
College of Engineering Sciences, Technology and Agriculture – Gold; 
School of Business and Industry – Drab; 
School of Journalism and Graphic Communication – Crimson; 
School of Nursing – Apricot; 
Environmental Science Institute – Light Gold; 
Philosophy – Royal Blue; 
College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences – Forest Green; 
School of Public Health – Salmon; and 
College of Law – Purple.