

## University Staff Opinions on Proposed Academic Gowns for Principals, Deans, and Directors of the University for Development Studies

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### ABSTRACT

*Tertiary institutions across the globe have associated themselves with the use of academic gowns for ceremonial activities over centuries. These gowns have seen changes although not radical as seen in the general fashion cycles. This study aims to propose academic gowns to be designed and produced for selected office holders (Deans, Directors and Principals) within the University for Development Studies (UDS) fraternity to project the status and prestige relevance to their offices during ceremonial occasions. A stratified random sampling strategy was employed to collect data from 104 academic personnel at the University for Development Studies using a well-structured questionnaire. The consistency and reliability of the test items were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, charts were applied to explain the results. The results showed that the respondents generally agreed to the design and construction of academic gowns for these officers, with a mean score of 2.35. Additionally, a mean score of 2.30 indicated a positive response that all academic gowns for each official should include a logo and slogan of that official's centre/faculty/school for proper identification purposes. The respondents concurred that all gowns should adopt the British style (open-front design), as indicated by a recorded mean of 2.11. Respondents also agreed (Mean =1.82) that the panel designs of the stole and chevron should show distinctions within the design for the various officials in question. It is therefore recommended that; university management should consider adopting the concept to provide gowns for this category of leaders when approached for consideration on the matter.*

**Key words:** *Academic gowns, Ceremonial occasions, Colour schemes, Fabric types, Culture identity and philosophy.*

## INTRODUCTION

Gowns depict a variety of styles of clothing used by both men and women, although it's more commonly associated with women's clothing that includes close-fitting bodice and long flare skirts (Vocabulary.com (n.d.)). They are mainly long-flowing garments typically worn on formal occasions like weddings, graduations and on special event days. It is a distinctive robe worn by professionals or academic personals and by extension covers, robes used by churches and judges and as protective garments for surgeons (Chandler, 2024: Yourgraduation.co.uk 2023; Textileglossary.com, 2023). Fine fabrics in silk, chiffon and satin are mainly used to drape the gowns to emphasis on elegance and sophistication in designs which form an epitome of ceremonial gown styles. Gown designs can range from simple to complex based on occasions and personalities (Textileglossary.com, 2023). This study is connected with academic-related gowns which are a combination of the robe, hood and cap/tam (Academic-dress, 2023) considered a centuries-old culture and tradition in the academic world.

Gowns which are mainly used for graduation and other academic ceremonies have a global appeal of representing achievements of people using them for a long time in history. Early gowns were weighty garments designed to keep wearers warm from the cold. The early medieval dresses were sleeveless cloaks having opening in front and were usually worn over cassocks (Martin 2021; Harcourts.quora.com 2023; Yourgraduation.co.uk, 2023; Chandler, 2024). Ancient European universities did have academic dress codes with strict decrees on how these gowns were used by faculty officials and students at the time. As the gowns evolved with variations over time, from the eleventh century upward, the British Empire influenced the use of the gown in other parts of the globe as they moved to explore more opportunities and

introduced religion and education in new territories (Yourgraduation.co.uk, 2023; Howard et al, 2019). This greatly influenced the use of gowns by the clergy and within the academia as there was no clear separation between religion and educational activities at the time (Chandler, 2024; McCallum, 2022).

Academic costumes have evolved with some changes being introduced by various tertiary institutions but most styles are mainly in conformity with British Oxford and Cambridge styles and at times a blend with American styles with its extensive colour coding for various degree awarding programmes within earlier universities (Boven 2009). Academic dress tradition is of a global appeal but has seen changes in line with the cultures and philosophies of universities who want to express uniqueness in their activities (Wearden, 2015; Martin, 2021), although, academic dress is not worn by all universities in all counties. Most institutions recently sought to emphasize their difference and innovations by adapting radical elements into their traditional ceremonial dress (Plexal.com, 2023) thereby moving away from old traditions in other to exert their identity and present a more contemporary image (Wearden, 2015). Contemporary designs are now being favoured by more traditional style considerations, especially in African universities (Jackson, 2008). These are necessary to uplift African concepts and ideologies in gown design which the study seeks to achieve through the introduction of distinctive academic gowns that blend traditional and contemporary designs for these selected officials.

### **The fabric types, design styles and colour schemes of academic gowns**

Fabrics used for gown production vary with prices and quality of the fabric. This is influenced by the climate where the institution is located, so lighter materials

are to be used in tropical climates and heavier materials in temperate climates (Howard et al, 2019; Sullivan, 2021). However, some universities are heavily aligned to their colonial masters' academic costume styles while others straightly consider the culture and identity traits of their jurisdiction and institution's history. In considering fabric type to use, quality fine fabrics of poplin, cotton, wool or cashmere, broadcloth, rayon and silk among others must be considered in their design and construction (Howard et al, 2019; Harcourt.quora.com, 2023). Doctorial gowns are mainly fashioned with the finest wool, a blend of wool and satin, superfine cloth, damask or brocade fabrics and come in black, dark blue, scarlet colours or preferred institutional colours which distinguish them from lower degree gowns (University of Bath 2020; University of Southampton, 2019). Although variations in design and construction for doctorial gowns do exist, these are aligned to British Oxford or Cambridge styles. Americans do have some slight variations in their doctorial gowns as well (Boven, 2009).

Concerning the British culture of gowns, Oxford has bell-shaped sleeves and Cambridge has long open sleeves. The hood used had Cambridge's consisting of a cape, cowl and liripipe and Oxford do not have a cape but maintains the cowl and the liripipe (Martin, 2021; Yourgraduations.co.uk, 2023). Generally, colours and lining in the hood represent the rank and faculty or school of the wearer. The cap known as mortarboard or trencher cap is worn by bachelor and master graduates and it has a tassel made of a cluster of silk or nylon yarns twisted into cords and affixed to the centre of the headpiece. Doctorial holders wear bonnet/tam or mortarboard designs based on institution preferences (Masseygowns.org,2024; graduationgowns.co.uk, 2024).

There are similarities between US and UK academic gowns. The US bachelor gowns

are designed to be closed in the front while master's gowns can be open or closed in the front. Doctorial gowns have most colours black, scarlet and dark blue. The gowns have three velvet bands on the sleeves, and a velvet facing that runs down the front panel section of the gown (Groves, 2011; Harcourt Graduation Robe, 2022; Nicholls, 2021). The hood as seen with most doctorial designs usually has its shell material matching that of the gown, and the interlining usually silk, displays the colours of the institution from which the wearer received the degree. Doctorial headgears are designed mostly in velvet fabrics. The tassel has been used to honour awards where at commencement of ceremonies, graduates wear the tassel on the right side moving it to the left side after confirmation of awards (University of Pennsylvania, 2023) but faculty members' own remain on the left throughout the proceedings.

Colour and codes are of significance to some universities, especially in the US where American Council on Education in its Academic Costume Code have desired colours for various disciplines – liberal art is represented with white, science by golden yellow, medicine by green, law by purple, theology in the colour of scarlet, philosophy in dark blue among others (Honorsociety.com, 2023; University of Southampton, 2019; University of Bath, 2020; Boven, 2009). The variations within the colours and gown designs are vital in guiding the authors to consider the colour specifics and type of fabrics to be used for these gowns to reflect the ideologies and values of UDS in relation to the proposed gowns these officials.

### **Academic gowns categorisations, descriptions and usage**

#### **Categories of gown users**

Academic dresses used by various academic institutions are based on design styles, codes, philosophies and cultures of the respective institutions. Academic costumes over the years were designed and

produced to cover a wide variation of users in institutions as gowns for fellow commoners, mace bearers, pool marshals – and faculty marshals among other officials. All these gowns come with their descriptive colours, designs and trimmings where necessary (Jackson, 2008). In similar instances, there are ranking order of university officers with their specific gowns and colour codes ranging from the chancellor, through the vice chancellor, principals, deputy principals, university registrar, university bursar university librarian, public orator, campus registrar, mace bearer and graduates (Nicholls, 2021; Martin, 2021; Yourgraduation.com.uk., 2023; University of Southampton, 2019; University of Bath 2020).

### **Descriptions of gowns, hoods and caps**

Convocation dress differs depending on what type of degree or occasion the gown is being used for. According to McCallum (2022), academic dress is used by officials and students of higher institutions at the commencement or graduation ceremonies. The convocation gowns are worn like a coat and come with an academic hood or stole worn over the shoulders and a graduation cap in the mortarboard or a tam style. Depending on the degree level achieved, a graduate may wear a bachelor style gown which is simple, a master's style gown having longer closed sleeves or a PhD style gown which is mostly elaborate, fashioned in satin and velvet among other fabric types and designs (Tech, 2022; Lowery 2012). Although these gowns come with basic variations in them, a bachelor gown has arm's length sleeves that are bell-shaped and mainly pointed at the tip. A master graduation gown has full-length sleeves (oblong) that extend the length of the robe which is shaped square and closed at the ends but has an opening midway for the arms. The PhD ones have a bell-shaped sleeve or a bishop sleeve with distinctive velvet black stripes on the sleeve arms although some modern modification in some schools comes with changes in the

colour and fabric used for the stripes (Legislation.gov.au, 2018; Martin, 2021; Howard et al, 2019; Chandler, 2024). The institutional choice will determine if the gowns should be designed open following the British style or closed with fasteners in the American style (Howard et al, 2019; Christianson, 2006; Sullivan, 2021).

### **Academic hood and stoles**

In most instances, the design of hoods and stoles is specific to institutional desires, award levels and areas of study. These come with variations in design and colour. The hood is worn over the shoulders and drapes down the back. In comparison to the stole, it is also worn over the shoulder but the length and colour design drape down the front and it is usually designed to rest on either side of the chest (Lilley, 2020; Martin, 2021). Stoles are mainly used by first-degree graduates and in a few other ceremonies where they are relevant to the awardees.

With the academic hood, it is slip over the head, making sure the V-shape is in the front and pointing downwards towards the floor. The backside displays various colours and the hood should drape down the back of the wearer. However, modern designs have seen some variations in design as some institution's designs of the hood no longer have the V-shape but modernized versions like the neckband with edges in varied colours (Harcourt.com, 2023; Lilley, 2020; UG Congregation, 2023).

### **Mortarboard and tams**

The headgear to match gowns and hoods comes in caps/mortarboard for undergraduates and masters' degrees graduates while the tam/bonnet design headgears are mainly design for PhD graduates and other principal officers in the academic field with minimum qualification of PhD, although some institutions still prefer to maintain the mortarboard version. Styles might vary based on institutional design and the position of the wearer of the

headgear. The designs of the mortarboard can have the flat-hard top part in squares, 6 or 8 sides design shapes, similarly, some of the tam/bonnets are also cut into sections based on design preferences (Harcourt.com, 2023; Chandler, 2024).

### **How to wear the academic gown**

The gowns are used for official occasions and, hence must be presented smartly. Iron gown neatly to remove wrinkles. The loose outer gown should be worn with front panels matching well and not overlapping as well. In the Ghanaian context, where most gowns are designed with cultural elements of significance as woven strips adorning the front-facing such as kente strip sewn onto the panels or as stole to be hung over the neck and draped in front of the gown, it must be aligned properly on both sides (UG Congregation, 2023). In some countries, the gowns have fasteners in front with zippers to close when it is worn. The hood is worn over the head onto the shoulders, and the V-end facing the front of the hood is hooked onto a puller of the zipper and secured on the gown with Velcro (National University of Singapore, 2023).

The gown is incomplete without the headgear although not all ceremonies call for the use of the headgear. The mortarboard or tam/bonnet should complement the gown and the hood. In wearing the mortarboard headgear, the tapered-short edge of the cap should be worn towards the front of the head (Lilley, 2020; UG Congregation, 2023; National University of Singapore, 2023). The tassels should be worn on the right side but move to the left after confirmation of the degree awarded. PhD bonnets with tassels fixed around the brim of the bonnet are worn at the left side. The use of hats/caps at graduation is mainly a symbol of intellect (Harcourt.quora.com, 2023).

Clothes to be used underneath gowns must be the most appropriate outfit (decent and befitting for the occasion). Garments do

show under the gowns because most gowns are cut with a low neckline that reveals underneath garments, therefore, sleeve shirts for men should ideally come with a collar and a tie to showcase a professional tidy appearance (Harcourt.com, 2023; Lilley, 2020; Howard, et al 2019). A suit will look very appropriate if the individual considers the weather conditions and the duration of the ceremony. A shirt-top with a men's tie helps in wearing the hood correctly by securing the V-shape front design under the tie and the rest of the hood draping from the shoulders toward the back of the gown. Ladies can wear a shirt with a collar or a scoop-neck top with a pair of trousers or a skirt slightly shorter than the hemline of the gown. In Ghanaian culture, a well-sewn slit and kaba is very acceptable. The ladies can secure the hood neckband or V-shape front design in place with a safety pin (Harcourt.com, 2023; UG Congregation, 2023). To help position the hood throughout the occasion, it is appropriate to hold the hood at both shoulders with pins onto the undergarment. Users of gowns must be moderate in their footwear selection, ideally, choose close-toe shoes for comfort.

Academic gowns therefore are used by both officials and graduation students in most institutions around the world. Styles, designs, colour schemes and to some extent usage criteria are mainly based on detects of the university management (Chandler, 2024).

Principals, Deans and Directors in the structure of the University for Development Studies (UDS) play strategic roles in their duties specifically during convocations and matriculation periods which deserve unique and personalise office gowns to enhance their work and project their position in the hierarchy of the university. Some of these officials at times represent the university body at affiliate universities' ceremonies which deserve the use of gowns, hence they need gowns that project UDS and their positions on such occasions. There are

other instances where gowns for these officials were delayed and even picked from the university store in an unkempt manner, portraying the wrong image of the users. Therefore, having official gowns for them to be handy and placed in their respective offices is being considered thoughtful and needs to be deliberated on. It is upon this ground, that the researchers want to solicit views of some office holders and senior members of the university on the matter and suggest the need to provide gowns for this category of officials in UDS. This perceived problem statement helped in the formulation of the following research questions for the study.

1. What are the opinions of university staff towards the provision of distinctive Academic Gowns for Principals, Deans and Directors within the University?
2. How relevant do staff perceive suitable and effective custom-design academic gowns that reflects identity and values for these distinctive university officials?

In order to effectively address the research questions, the study considered the following theoretical framework as basic guide to help achieve the needed results.

### **Theoretical framework of the study**

Creswell (2009) theoretical framework is the underpinning factor for this study. The theory posits fashion 'as the cultural construction of the embodied culture'. It is an indication of clothing being recognised as a cultural construct in some instances, emphasising the significance of clothing to cultural identity. Our study agrees with our stance regarding the adherence to the old-age tradition of academic culture and the significance of gowns used by universities over centuries. An embodiment of cultural identity is being proffered from the inclusion of Ghanaian cultural elements of identity revealed in strips weaves and designs reflecting the culture of the institutions in question. The study

significantly acknowledges and contributes to the cultural embodiment of clothes being expressed through academic gown construction possibilities for selected officials which is revealed in the study heading as assessing the relevance of producing academic gowns for principals, deans and directors of the university (UDS).

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area**

University for Development Studies is one of the public tertiary institutions in the Northern region of Ghana. Established in 1992, the university has several schools and faculties offering certificates, diplomas, degrees, masters, and PhDs in various fields of study all of which uses academic gowns in for various programmes and ceremonies. However, focus of this study is on proposing academic gown for selected officials within the study area who do not have distinct gowns.

### **Study Design**

This study used a mixed-method approach with a descriptive design as its foundation. A descriptive survey design, which strives to describe and ascertain the state of things, was employed in the research. A scientific method known as descriptive research is used to systematically gather information about the current state of phenomenon, providing a detailed and accurate description of characteristic, opinions, behaviours, or trends within a population without manipulating variables (Chali, Eshete and Debela, 2022). The goal of this kind of research is to watch, record, and explain different facets of a situation as they naturally arise. A cross-sectional survey was carried out to gather information and draw conclusions about the population at that particular moment.

### **Sampling Techniques**

The study population comprised office-holding and non-office-holding senior members of the UDS. The office holders include Heads of Units and Sections, Faculty Examination officers, Faculty officers, Heads of Department, Hall tutors, Vice Deans, Deans, Deputy Directors, Directors and Campus Principals. These two categories of senior members were considered as two strata for sampling. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select a total of 104 respondents for questionnaire administration. The respondents were all identified and the questionnaire was given to them to respond by filling it out and returning it to the researchers.

### Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

A structured questionnaire was administered by the researchers to collect data. This was structured as follows;

1. Personal information, such as gender, age, position, rank, and office held.
2. Considering the need for Academic Gowns for Principals, Deans and Directors within the University
3. Propose design expectations of a new academic dress for elected officials in UDS
4. Suggested personal details for various units and offices (colour, logo/slogan, inscriptions)

The data was collected from respondents using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree) was used to establish the need to consider

an academic gown for specific positions and design expectations of a new academic gown.

The questionnaires also included a preamble outlining the study's rationale, as well as a declaration assuring respondents of the necessary secrecy and anonymity. To confirm the instrument's validity, both content and face validity techniques were used. To establish the instrument's reliability for the study, a Cronbach alpha was performed on the questionnaire.

Cronbach's alpha is a statistical tool used to measure the reliability of internal consistency of a set of survey items. It determines whether or not a collection of items consistently measures the same characteristic. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient uses a standardized scale of 0 to 1 to quantify the level of agreement among the items. High coefficients indicate higher agreement between items which means that response values for each participant across a set of questions are consistent. As given by Cronbach (1951), the formula for calculating the coefficient is:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left( 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_T^2} \right),$$

where,  $k$  is the number of items in the scale;  $\sigma_i^2$  is the variance of the  $i$ -th item;  $\sigma_T^2$  is the total variance of all items.

A Cronbach's alpha analysis was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the items used to assess the need for academic clothing among the major officials. Table 1 displays the findings from the Cronbach's alpha analyses.

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha analysis of the items used for the study**

| Reliability Statistics for need of academic dresses | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items |
|---|-----------------|------------------|--|
| Need of academic gowns                              | 9               | 0.537            | 0.562  |
| Design expectations of academic gowns               | 12              | 0.661            | 0.684  |

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

A two-part questionnaire was sent to 104 employees within the university community. The first part was the need for academic dress subscale which consisted of 9 items ( $\alpha = 0.562$ ) and the second part was the design expectations subscale which also consisted of 12 items ( $\alpha = 0.684$ ). On average, the results (Table 1) indicate that all the items used for the data collection were relevant to the study based on the alpha values obtained from the results.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation, were utilized in SPSS to assess the survey's quantitative data, while the qualitative data was grouped into themes and examined.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of the Respondents

Participants used for the study were all senior members employees of the university, mainly academic staff holding office positions who have worked between 2 to 29 years. Of the 104 participants, who partook in the survey, 43 were males, 25 were females and 36 did not indicate their gender. Each respondent had attained at least a Master's, an MPhil or a PhD degree, 42 of them had received postgraduate certificates, 61 had received PhD certificates and 1 received both a PhD and an additional professional certificate. In terms of positions held, 3 were professors, 15 were associate professors, 43 senior

lecturers, 31 lecturers and 12 assistant lecturers. Also, respondents in terms of their rank based on the office held at the time of the study had 27 being Heads of Departments, 5 Vice Deans, 8 Deans, 2 Hall Tutors and 1 Principal while the majority were units and sectional heads at the departmental levels with few exceptions not holding any office position.

### Proposing Academic Gowns for Principals, Deans and Directors within the University

As part of efforts to improve the university's image internally and nationally during ceremonial occasions where these officials are to represent the university within or elsewhere, the designing and production of aesthetically pleasing academic gowns for the Principals, Deans and Directors of faculties, schools and directorates was considered by the researchers as paramount, hence the motivation to undertake this study. Table 2 shows the results of how respondents reacted to the idea of producing customized academic gowns for these categories of officers. Various questions were evaluated by the respondents using a five-point rating scale with 1, being strongly agreed, 2 being agreed, 3 being neutral, 4 being disagreed and 5 being strongly disagreed. For purposes of analysis, however, the following range was considered by the researchers; 1-2.4 = agree; 2.5 -3.4 = neutral and 3.5 – 5 =disagree.

**Table 2:** Considering the need of academic dresses for the Principals, Deans and Directors within the university

| S/N | Statement  | M    | SD   |
|-----|--|------|------|
| A   | Irrelevance of gowns after Covid-19 due to virtual ceremonies  | 4.31 | 0.70 |
| B   | Do you agree that gowns should be provided for other leaders aside from the principal officers (Chancellor, VC, Pro-VC, Registrar) of the university | 1.67 | 0.93 |
| C   | These gowns hoods and bonnets must differ from what is in use at UDS   | 3.02 | 1.51 |
| D   | Gowns must reflect the philosophy and aims of the university   | 1.78 | 0.91 |



|                |   |             |             |
|----------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| E              | Principals, Deans and Directors must be identified using different gowns  | 2.11        | 1.18        |
| F              | Traditional colours of the university must be used for the design and production of gowns for these officers                                | 2.00        | 1.15        |
| G              | Known PhD colours from sister universities in Ghana should be blended with that of UDS colours in the designing and production of the gowns | 2.28        | 1.10        |
| H              | Specified colours to identify the various schools and faculties should be considered  | 2.26        | 1.14        |
| I              | Level of participant's agreement on the design and production of gowns for Principals, Deans and Directors of UDS                           | 1.60        | 0.89        |
| <b>Average</b> |   | <b>2.35</b> | <b>1.06</b> |

Statement A-I Scale, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The results in Table 1 show that, with an average mean (M=2.35), participants disagreed with the statement that academic gowns are irrelevant after the COVID-19 pandemic because most ceremonial activities are virtual in recent years, while other responses with a mean of (M=4.31), indicate that though most ceremonies are done virtual in recent times, academic gowns are still relevant to institutions for ceremonial functions especially as the pandemic period is almost over. With regards to whether or not the respondents agree to the provision of gowns for other officers in the university aside from the principal officers (Council Chairperson, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Registrar), responses were positive with a mean score of (M=1.67), revealing the support of the idea from participants. Also, respondents were asked to indicate whether there is a need for unique academic gowns for officials like the Principals, Deans and Directors within the university. The results recorded a mean (M=3.02) showing that respondents were neutral in their responses. With whether academic gowns should reflect the philosophy and aims of the university, the evaluation saw a mean

(M=1.78). This justifies that, respondents agreed with universities customising academic gowns to reflect their ideologies.

To identify major officials like the Principals, Deans and Directors with their gowns during ceremonies, respondents were asked whether it was appropriate to design a different gown for these officials to exhibit their positions. The results from the assessment (M=2.11) indicated that it would be good if these selected officers wore different academic gowns to portray their offices during ceremonies. Also, with regards to university colours being enough for the designing and production of academic gowns for these officials within the university, an average mean (2.00) was recorded, showing participants had agreed to the fact that, traditional colours of the university is appropriate and enough for the designing and construction of academic gowns for these selected officials. With regards to whether or not acceptable fabric colours used on PhD gowns production from other sister universities in Ghana should be considered and blended with UDS colours in the gowns designs and constructions for these officials,

respondents had a neutral response with a mean (M=2.28), indicating that, their reaction is not certain on the decision of blending colours that are similar to sister universities in Ghana or not.

The university as it stands now does not have any specified colours that identify various centres, schools and faculties; hence, respondents were asked whether there is a need to consider that option in designing academic dresses. The result (M=2.26) showed that there was a neutral decision, meaning respondents do not have a firm answer as to the use of different colours to facilitate designs of gowns that identify centres, schools and faculties. In all, respondents agreed (M=1.60) that, there is a need to design and produce academic dresses for major officers like the Principals, Deans and Directors of the university but varies slightly on other details to be considered.

### **Proposed design expectations of new academic dress for selected officials in UDS**

The purpose of this proposal is to determine respondent's views regarding the design style of academic dresses to be produced. Various design styles and colours were suggested by the researchers and structured into themes for the respondents to select what they consider the most appropriate design styles for these officials. A five-point rating scale with 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree was used for the evaluation. For purposes of analysis, however, the following mean range points were considered by the researchers; 1-2.4 = agree; 2.5 -3.4 = neutral and 3.5 – 5 =disagree.

**Table 3: Propose design expectations of a new academic dress for selected officials in UDS**

| <b>S/N</b> | <b>Statement</b>  | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|------------|---|----------|-----------|
| A          | Northern weave kente or a blend of both should be used to design the stole for the front panel                                    | 1.60     | 0.71      |
| B          | Academic dresses must have a specific identity of each official indicating the logo and slogan of that centre, faculty or school. | 2.30     | 0.99      |
| C          | Specific colours must be allotted to each office as in Principals, Deans and Directors  | 2.41     | 1.09      |
| D          | All gowns should follow British style (opened front type)   | 2.11     | 0.96      |
| E          | Colours should be within most of the PhD limit (black, scarlet and mauve) and traditional UDS colours (green)                     | 1.82     | 0.70      |
| F          | Panel designs of stole and chevron should show distinctions within the design for the various officials in question               | 1.82     | 0.97      |
| G          | The gown must be produced from durable fabrics and properly sewn  | 1.50     | 0.73      |
| H          | Headgear must be designed in bonnet/tam style and sewn in velvet with acceptable colours of the institution                       | 1.79     | 0.71      |
| I          | Tassels of the bonnet should reflect colours of the section if available  | 2.39     | 1.16      |

|                     |   |             |             |
|---------------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| J                   | All sleeves should follow the agreed design of the institution (mainly bell sleeves with PhDs)      | 1.81        | 0.78        |
| K                   | The sleeves of the principals' gowns should be different  | 1.91        | 0.95        |
| L                   | Hood should be designed and sewn to reflect that of PhD and colours of various sections if possible | 1.55        | 0.71        |
| <b>Average mean</b> |   | <b>1.92</b> | <b>0.87</b> |

Statement A-L Scale, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Table 3 presents results on the proposed design expectations by the respondents on new academic gowns for elected officials in UDS. From the table, respondents agreed (M=1.60) that the northern weave or kente or blend of both should be used to design the stole for the front panel of the new gown to depict Africanism and probably the northern Ghana tradition at large. Concerning academic gowns having a specific identity for each official by indicating the logo and slogan of that centre/faculty/school, an average mean of (M=2.30) was recorded, indicating a positive response that all academic gowns for each official should include a logo and slogan of that centre/faculty/school for proper identification purpose. Also, a mean score of M=2.41 was recorded when respondents were asked whether specific colours should be allotted to each centre/faculty/school as relates to the office of the Principals, Deans and Directors. The responses indicated an agreement with the introduction of specific colours for academic gowns to be designed for these officers in question. Respondents also agreed that all gowns should follow the British style (opened front type) with a mean (M=2.11) recorded.

As to whether or not gowns should be designed within the common colours associated with PhD gowns (black, scarlet and mauve) with a blend of UDS traditional colours, they have had a strong positive

response from respondents with a mean score of 1.82. They also agreed that the panel designs of the stole and chevron should show distinctions within the design for the various officials in question (M=1.82). The durability of a product is one of the utmost concerns of most clients, therefore, respondent's rating of the gown's fabric durability and sewing quality of the garment provides a positive response with a mean score (M=1.50) was not strange as it indicates their desire for a quality work. Also, headgear must be designed in bonnet/tam style and sewn in velvet with acceptable colours of the institution had a mean score (M=1.79) showing that respondents agree with such an idea.

Respondents also agreed that the tassels of the bonnet should reflect the colours of the centres/faculties/schools if available and acceptable with a score (M= 2.39). For the design style of sleeves, the results showed a mean (M=1.81), justifying respondents agreeing that, all sleeves should follow the agreed design of the institution (mainly bell sleeves for PhD gowns). Again, results from the study show that the principals of the various campuses must have their sleeves styles different from other officials with a mean record of (M=1.91). With regards to hood being designed and sewn to reflect the style of PhD hoods but with variations in colours to reflect various proposed centres/faculties/schools if possible, the results showed an agreement

with a mean score of  $M=1.55$ . The overall average mean ( $M=1.92$ ) for the proposal of the design style of the academic gowns for the principals, deans and directors was well agreed on by respondents with the rate of agreement being a mean range score of  $M=1-2.4$ .

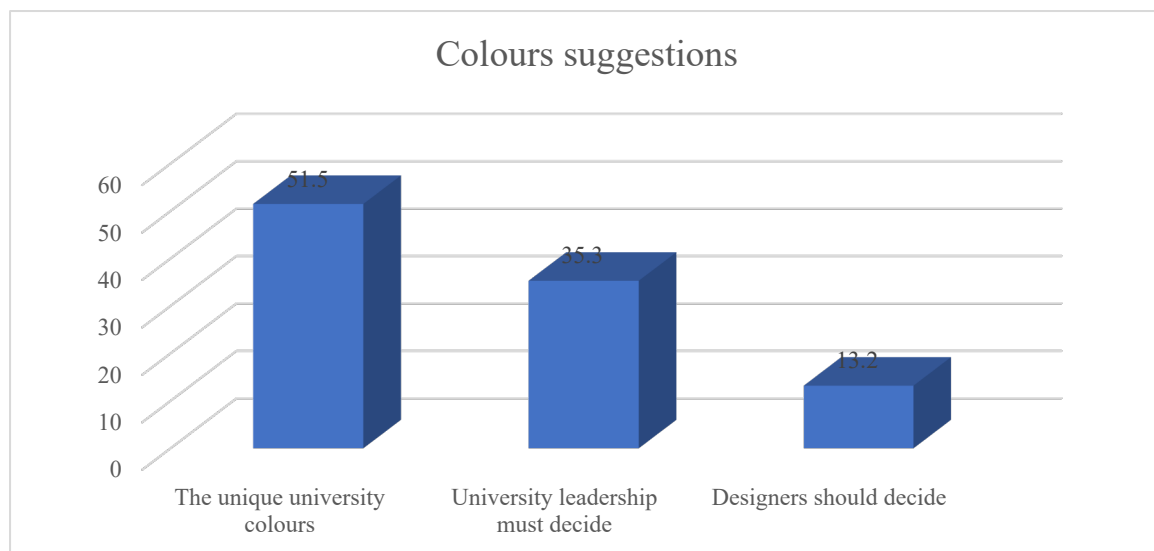
### **Suggesting detailed inputs on academic gown designs from various respondents**

The study made provisions for respondents to suggest possible personal details that are deemed appropriate from respondents to ensure that academic gowns reflect most respondents member's views to a large extent to be seen as a reflection that truly identifies the specific officials in

consideration. Suggestions included colours, logos and slogans for the various centres, schools and faculties included in the design to ensure officials dress appropriately and acceptably if these views are equally agreed upon by management.

### **Colour Suggestions for Various Officials**

Respondents were asked to suggest the possible colours for the academic gowns they have in mind if any for the designs of the various officials. The results were carefully scrutinized and structured into themes based on the data gathered from the field. Figure one below shows suggestions made by respondents.



**Figure 1: Colour suggestions for Officials by Respondents**

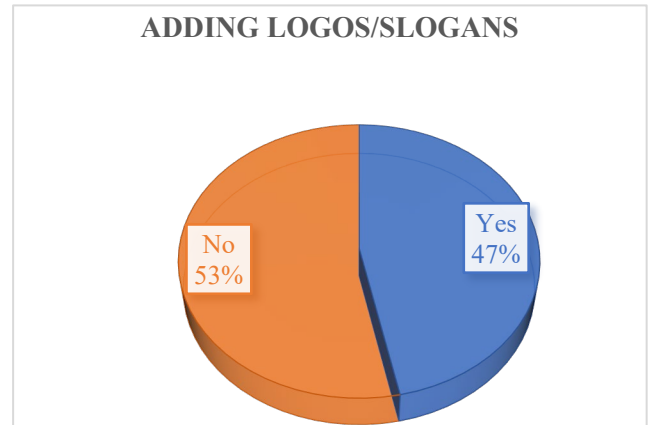
Source: fieldwork, 2022

The results in Figure 1 show how respondents replied to the choice of colours that will reflect or identify the various schools/faculties or directorates. The results show that 35 respondents representing 51.5% suggested that the design must reflect the unique university colours (shades of green and black), 24

respondents, representing 35.3% suggested that the university leadership must decide on the appropriate colours to use while 9 respondents representing 13.2% suggested the designers should decide on the colours to be used.

**Adding Centre/Faculty/School logos on the proposed gowns to be designed**

For identification and alignment with the cultures of the institution (UDS), the respondents were asked whether they agreed logos and slogans to be added to the academic gowns to be designed. Figure 2 shows the results of responses on the views of logo and slogan additions or otherwise onto the academic gowns.

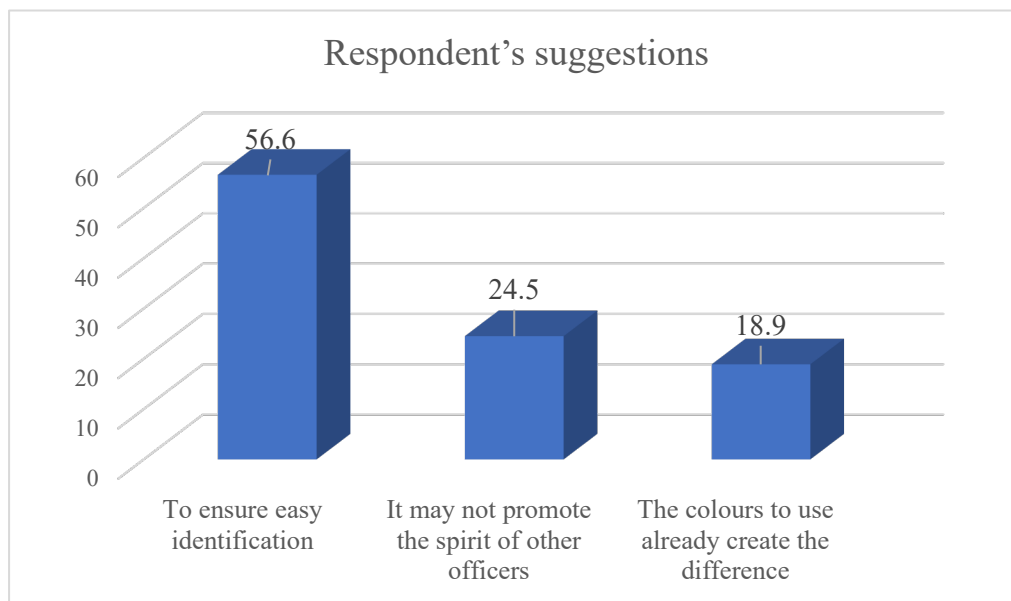


**Figure 2: Adding Faculty/School logos and slogans to academic dress**

Source: fieldwork, 2022

Figure 2 presents results on the issue of adding logos/slogans onto the academic gowns to be designed for the various directorates/faculties/schools. Out of the 75 respondents who responded to this particular question from the study, 40 representing 53% disagreed by responding “NO” meaning specific faculties/schools or directorates should not have their logos and slogans added to the academic gowns to be

designed for them. On the other hand, 35 (47%) agreed, indicating “YES” to the point that specific officials’ logos/slogan additions to the gowns are the best thing to do. However, when respondents were asked to state their suggestions to include these logos and slogans or otherwise, their responses equally varied as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Suggested reasons for the need to add logos/slogans onto academic gowns**

Source: fieldwork, 2022

From Figure 3, 53 respondents provided their answers; 30 (56.6%) of the respondents suggested that the addition of

logos/slogans would ensure easy identification of various faculties/directorates and schools, 13

(24.5%) of them were of the view that additions of logos/slogans to individual faculties/centres/directorates gowns may not promote the spirit of oneness as a university with a common goal, but will portray disunity or segregation among colleagues, especially during ceremonies

#### Figure 4: Positions on logos design for directorates, schools and faculties without logos

Some of the directorates/faculties/centres/schools already have logos specifically designed to be used alongside the main university logo

where these gowns are to be used while 10 (18.9%) of respondents indicated that, when variations in colours for each gown is applied it will ideally create the needed differences, hence, no need for specific logos/slogans on these officials gowns.

but others do not have logos. Therefore, there was an open-ended question asking respondents if logos should be designed for the remaining directorates, schools and faculties as well. Figure 4 shows the results of respondents on whether or not these categories should have logos designed for them as well.

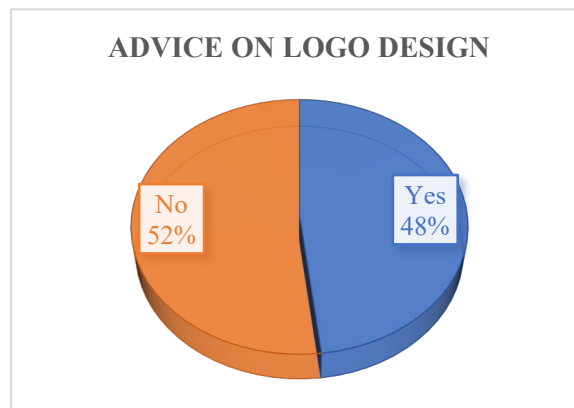


Figure 4: Positions on logo designs for those in these categories without logos

Source: fieldwork, 2022

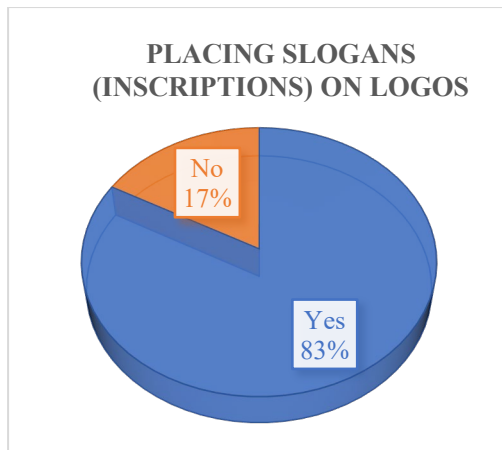
Seventy-seven (77) respondents shared their views on this logo designing question with 37 (48.1%) responding “YES” while 40 (51.9%) responded “NO” that they do not advise the designing of logos for the remaining centres, directorates, schools and faculties.

#### Suggestion on the Slogans (Inscriptions/text) to be placed on the gowns with the Logos

On the issues of whether or not slogans or taglines depicting the various sections should be written as inscription (text) alongside the logos on the panels of the gowns and if respondents can equally

propose such slogans for the offices of the principals, deans and directors. Figure 5 below presents the results of the decisions made by respondents.

From the results in Figure 5, only 83 respondents responded to the question of whether it is ideal to incorporate slogans/taglines or sectional names as inscriptions (text) alongside the logos. Among these respondents, 69 (83%) suggested “YES”, slogans should be added, while 14 (17%) replied “NO” that slogans should not be written alongside the logos.

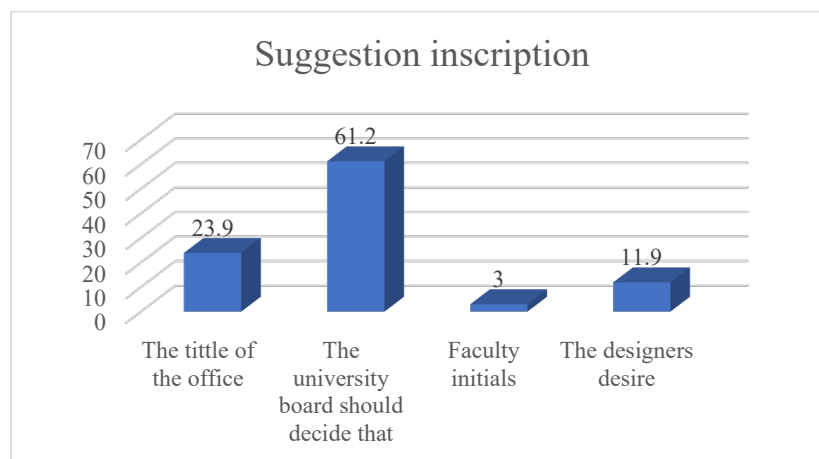


**Figure 5: Response on Slogans (Inscriptions/text) to be written with logos on gowns**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

### Suggested Slogans (inscriptions/text)

The respondents were then asked to suggest slogans/taglines to be written as text (inscriptions) that they considered appropriate to serve as an identity for the

various office holders (principals/directors/deans) being considered for the study. Suggestions were carefully studied and organised into themes for easy understanding.



**Figure 6: Suggested Slogans (Inscriptions) from respondents**  
Source: fieldwork, 2022

Based on the themes organised from respondents' remarks which were not straightly on suggested slogans only but also proposals of those they considered appropriate to take such decision. From the results, 41(61.2%) stated that the university board should decide on slogans (inscriptions/text) appropriate to use on the gowns, 16 (23.9%) stated the title of the office such as principal, dean or director should be written, 8(11.9%) also suggested

that, the designers of the gowns by their experience in related field should decide on the appropriate text or slogan to fit the purpose of the logo and office while 2 (3%) of the respondents indicated that the faculty initials such as FOAFCS standing for Faculty of Agricultural, Food and Consumer Sciences should be the slogans (inscriptions) written on the appropriate portions of the gowns.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis revealed various inputs from respondents on what they consider appropriate to enhance the outcome of the study. The study generally agreed on the need to produce a distinctive academic gown for the selected principal officers.

Respondents were mainly office holders within the university and a few other academic staff. Relevant questions were put across to determine if these office holders as principals, deans and directors, need academic gowns to reflect their office and status. The responses generally agreed that they should be considered as such for easy identification of their official roles during ceremonies. This aligned with finding that gowns are symbols of leadership and authority and helped in identifying and differentiating wears from non-users during ceremonies (Honorsociety.com, 2023; Howard, Sampson & Pedigah, 2015). The study also identifies that some minimal differentiation should occur in the design and construction of gowns between principals of deans and directors to emphasise on authority, easy identification and status of the differential roles played by all leaders. This resonate with similar practices elsewhere, where gowns are provided for various categories of officers in those institutions (Australian National University, 2018; Howard, Sampson & Pedigah, 2015) although, it is not a known practice in all academic institutions. The result also agreed that the designs should reflect the aims and philosophy of the university.

The results on the need for the production of distinctive officials' gowns to these principal officers had a neutral response, meaning members were not decisive on that request. They were equally neutral in their responses regarding the use of notable PhD colours for gown production that should

reflect and blend fabric colours of other sister universities, that of convocation and the general UDS colours. However, there was high agreement on these officials' gowns having design identity to separate them from other PhD holders and principal officers (chancel chairperson, vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor and registrar) in ceremonial activities. This is an indication that respondents want some separation in gown styles among these office holders and other PhD holders in ceremonial activities which is in line with variation in designs associated with gowns seen in other jurisdictions including some Ghanaian universities (Howard, Simpson & Pedigah, 2015; University of Southampton, 2019). However, a general question asking the level of agreement or otherwise toward the production of gowns for these selected officers had a high positive response which is an indication that respondents considered this a laudable idea to implement. A response that is in agreement with a Ghanaian publication on gowns demanding universities should produce or have their own gowns for ceremonies (Howard et al, 2019).

Some designs and styles are associated with various degree levels of gowns used for graduation. With that of the PhD, gowns overall outlook, the sleeves, the hood and headgear are usually fashioned in peculiar acceptable styles (Wearden 2015; National University of Ireland, 2021) although, in some instances, there are modifications in contemporary times based on institutional preferences (Howard, Simpson & Pedigah, 2015). On this note, the researchers want to know the design concept, styles, and colours that might be appropriate for use on gowns for these officer holders. The agreed responses were not so different from preferred standards concerning the use of stole fixed on the front panels mainly portraying a northern weave strip, a kente strip or a blend of both. This is mainly



keeping in line with the Ghanaian identity through traditional weave structures which align with some existing practices in other institutions (Howard et al, 2019). Other areas of design agreement cover fabric type and colour variations on specified positions on gowns like sleeves and hoods to differentiate each faculty, school or directorate from the other as practice elsewhere for variation in various roles and status of officials (Australian National University, 2018; University of Bath, 2020). Logos and slogans on the strips, initials of the various offices or just names of the sections to identify with or differentiate them from each other such as the inscription of Principal, Nyankpala Campus on the gown design for that office were other designs considerations identified from the study and proposed by respondents in various level for consideration. This provides some similarities to other gowns that express status and authority through logos and other elements of identity (Howard, Sampson & Pedigah, 2015; Howard et al, 2019).

Other considerations agreed on included the type of fabric to use must be durable and climate-friendly, the style especially that of the gown must follow British style with an open front, and the sleeve should also be bell-sleeve but can vary for differentiation purposes. Quality in terms of sewing and finishing of the gowns, hoods and bonnet designs must have shell fabric matching in their preparation and they must be well sewn to withstand the test of time. This is in line with well-finished, well-tailored gowns with British style having a good blend of style and colours (Howard, Sampson & Pedigah, 2015; Howard et al, 2019).

For easy identification, researchers in open questions suggested that respondents expressed their views relating to colour schemes, the use of faculty, school and directorate logos in the gowns as well as slogans or text as inscription accompanying the logos to enhance recognition of the

various sections. The results agreed on having faculty/school or directorate logos to enhance visibility and identity. This is in agreement with the general role of logos in promoting brand identity in cooperate organisations (Mukesh & Mahmoud, 2019). Although some respondents think separate officials in the categories being studied do not need logos to identify them individually as it does not promote a cooperative spirit of oneness as an institution (UDS), to them using only the university logo is enough. Others equally believed such identity recognition can be achieved through variations in colour schemes of fabrics and design to be used in the production of gowns (Howard, Sampson & Pedigah, 2015; Academic Dress, 2023; Sullivan, 2021). There was a positive agreement on the inclusion of text or slogans in the work to provide variety for each office holder in the various categories. However, views on what should be written on the panels of these gowns vary, the majority of the respondents suggested that such a decision should be taken by management. Others think the designers of the gown must suggest that, while others proposed writing initials of faculties/schools and directorate or their full names with the title of the office (for example Dean, School of Engineering). The study generates desire among faculty members for the need to own their gowns if possible and encourages other graduates to own their gowns if desire as a symbol of academic excellent and can be seen as tangible evidence of handwork back in school (Honorsociety.org, 2023) while it will create an income generation avenue for the university as well.

## CONCLUSION

The academic gown has evolved over the years but still keeps to its core traditions and styles. It remains the main garment for portraying academic excellence and achievements through its use in graduation ceremonies. This study revealed that university staff who participated in the

study have positive opinions towards the provision of a distinctive custom-designed academic gowns that reflects tradition, ideology and values of UDS. Most of the participants believe that this will enhance the status and image of the university especially whenever these officials are to represent the university in other official ceremonies that demand the use of the gowns. The study also highlights the importance of considering the colours to use, designs, fabric type, text, slogans, logo among others to ensure cultural roles and other factors that will enhance comfort and practicality of the gown. In a nutshell, the study suggests that production of a distinctive academic gown for this category of officials which will help them carryout their ceremonial duties with a sign of status and pride and equally serve as valuable tools fostering community belongingness among officials, staff and students toward the general progress of the university.

### RECOMMENDATION

1. The university management should consider adopting this proposed distinctive custom-designed academic gowns for the selected officials by considering factors identify in the study by participants.
2. Stakeholders should be consulted in the designing and construction of the gowns to ensure wider participation that truly reflect identity and values of the institution.
3. The proposed design should exhibit art of comfort in its practicality through cultural inclusivity while factoring in suggested items like, logos, colour scheme, fabric types, slogan and inscriptions that reflects views of stakeholders with the university.

### Authors Contributions

The authors contributed satisfactorily towards the outcome of the study. Bernard

Edem Dzramedo and Abdulai Y. Lansah's contributions were mainly in questionnaire preparation, data collection, literature and write-up of the study as their fields are in fashion and textiles. Peter T. Birteeb's contribution was mainly on the statistical method appropriate for the study as well as the analysis appropriate for the work as his background is mainly in statistics. The first author did the original draft writing while all authors did the proofreading.

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