

CAP AND GOWNS

Mathew Ho, one of our Council Senators and an inveterate asker of questions, had an interesting one the other day. He was at my office looking at the Council composites across the hall and noting that the Councillors back then, in the 1940's, were **mostly wearing academic gowns**, and some were wearing caps, and then he noted something interesting: only the women were wearing caps. You can see that in this one from 1947-48. And in this one from **1949-50**.

Men with gowns, women with caps and gowns. Why is that?

Of course, **at the graduation ceremonies** last month you would have seen lots of students, or former students, in caps and gowns. And once upon a time at certain universities, like Oxford, the story is that **students would wear academic gowns all the time**.

But at UBC? Well, there was an attempt or two here way back when, in the 1930's, to get students, or at least students in their graduating year, or Seniors as they were called then, to wear academic gowns. The Ubysey made fun of the idea, saying people would keep getting their gowns caught on doorknobs and this would lead to **an increase in profanity**. Anyway, the idea faded away for the students generally [**ubyssey**] but not for Student Council. **Council members wore academic robes. It was a sort of badge of office.**

But why would only the women wear mortarboards? Apparently, that is simply a reflection of another tradition: that men don't wear hats indoors. Once upon a time men were always wearing hats [**man in fedora**] – but only outdoors: once inside, **the custom was to remove your hat**. That was for men. Women in contrast would wear hats indoors. Apparently, at some universities this has led the authorities to say: mortarboards for women, but not for men. Even at UBC, according to one article I found from 1947, for the purposes of picture-taking at least, it was only the women who were getting mortarboards. And you can see the result in **our 1948 annual**: the women graduates are wearing caps, but the men are not.

But this has changed nowadays, and all graduates get caps.

Meanwhile back in the day Council got tired of gowns: in 1938 they said enough with them, and it was the Ubysey, oddly enough, that objected, saying there

would be disorder and a loss of dignity without them; so they did come back in **the 1940's** and beyond, until the **wild Sixties [F.1]** took them all away.

The robes used to be kept in the Council office. Now, where you may ask was the Council office in 1938? There was not even a student union building back then: the first student union building was still at the planning stage and the AMS hung out in the Old Auditorium building **[B.9]**. It was not till 1940 that the first student union building opened on campus, Brock Hall: **[C.13]**

But that's another story.