

The Maverick Minute: Deborah Smith-Howell, Ph.D.

Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., and Deborah Smith-Howell, Ph.D., Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies discuss the robes, hoods, medals, new mace, and more that are used during commencement ceremonies.

Transcript:

Hello, I'm Jeff Gold and thank you so much for being with us today. It's my pleasure to introduce a special guest that probably needs very little to no introduction and that's Dr. Deb Smith-Howell. And Deb of course is our vice chancellor for academic affairs and of course the dean for graduate studies here at UNO. And today we are going to talk about all things commencement. So, Deb I understand you've got some questions that we want to talk about.

I do. This is actually one of my favorite times of the year. I became fascinated with even academia as a result of a commencement ceremony. So, I think it's really one of our most important times to celebrate our students with their families.

Dr. Gold, you and I are dressed in some kind of odd outfits that we don't see walking down the street very often. What are the meanings of some of the symbols that you are wearing? I'm noticing your green hood and I know that has a very special meaning.

Sure. Well, a couple of things to point out. First of all, these traditions go back to the twelve-hundreds in European institutions when long gowns, hoods, as these are known, caps with tassels were part of the standard dress for commencement. They were rights of passage. You know commencement itself means the next stage, to graduate means to move on. And that's what it really was about. Moving from level to another in education and moving into careers and life-long attainment. Now, you're also right the gowns and the hoods all have significance. So, I'm wearing a bright red gown and it happens to be Cornell red. The hood is the beautiful green velvet color, which is related to my final or so called terminal degree which is in medicine. And indeed, even things such as the length of the sleeves or the number of stripes on the sides of the sleeves all relate to some of the academic traditions.

Yes, sir. I think that one of the things that is really fascinating is you know I'm wearing my University of Texas robe and the blue is the doctor of philosophy, but all of our students our undergraduates with their tassels, the color of their tassel with represent the particular degree that they are receiving and our masters students will have on a very special robe and a different version of a hood. It is one of those really interesting times to be able to see all of the story of the faculty and the students as they walk across the stage. At UNO we have two somewhat unique additions, that are unique for us, are our Order of the Tower and our Chancellor's Medal. I don't know if you would like to speak about how important they are for the life of the university, the people that we recognize with those awards.

So typically, commencement ceremonies have honorary degree recipients, individuals who are given an award or recognition, a so-called honorary degree, for something they've done for the community. And we do that as well. But the Order of the Tower and the Chancellor's Medal are two unique things that we do here at UNO. The Chancellor's Medal is for a member of the Maverick family who has long term exemplary, unique service. Things that they've done to make the University of Nebraska at Omaha a very special place. And this year it's going to Professor Eesley. And the Order of the Tower is given to a community member who has done remarkable things for the community that we serve as well as remarkable things for UNO. And this year again, it is going to go to the Brown family.

Those are two very special awards and I know that the recipients of those always remember the event and that recognition in the life of the university. You are wearing a very special medal that only you will be wearing at our ceremony. Would you mind explaining the semblance of the particular medal you are wearing?

Sure. So, this is the medallion of the chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. And this was officially bestowed upon me upon the investiture. And there is sort of a magic that goes with this, and that is at some time during the commencement ceremony, I say something along the lines of by the authority invested in me by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska I hereby bestow upon you the degree of – fill in the blank or course – will all of the rights and privileges, authorities, and responsibilities thereof. Those magic words are called the conferral of the degree. And the conferral of the degree comes through the authority invested in me and symbolically it's in this medallion.

That's great. Thank you very much. I know that that's the part so many of the people are waiting for when you confer those degrees and say those magic words as a result of that. I also have with me a really beautiful, relatively new symbol for the university, the mace represents our institutional authority and is brought in by a marshal at each of the ceremonies. We have a really beautiful new mace representing the university now. We're all excited. It will be virtual, but we will be having our full commencement ceremony, recognizing our distinguished guest as well as all of our students on Friday, Dec. 18th. So, I hope it's been fun kind of talking about some of those traditions that bring us to that particular moment.

So, thank you Deb for joining us today. Please mark your calendar, Dec. 18th, where you will see all of the regalia, all of the medallions, and most importantly our 1,101 students who will be receiving their degree on that day.