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### What do the ropes on the graduation gowns mean?

Julimar Garcia '18

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## July 2016

### Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

What do the ropes on the graduation gowns mean?

Julimar Garcia '18

### Answer:

Dearest Julimar,

I extend my utmost gratitude to you for this timely inquiry. I'm certain you were paying attention as members of the Class of 2016 made their final preparations to walk across the stage at this year's Commencement. (I know I would, too, if my own Commencement exercises were only two years away, as are yours!)

The ceremonial garb surrounding Commencement is indeed quite significant. Considering all its intricacies, I deemed it fitting to consult with an expert on the question at hand. Our own dear Michael Rosewall, associate academic dean, assures me that there is indeed notable meaning behind not only the graduates' attire, but the academic dress donned by the faculty as well.

Dr. Rosewall explained that faculty regalia has a history that goes back centuries. Most interesting to me in their variety are the distinctive hoods worn by our faculty. These elaborate articles can actually be traced back to the cowls on robes worn by medieval monks. Over time, each variation has taken on a special meaning. The longest are doctoral hoods; these are conferred when the wearer has earned their doctorate. Colors on the inner part of the hood are the school colors of the



### Ask The Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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institution awarding the degree. (That's why the doctoral hoods given out at our Commencement show the green and gold.) The color of the velvet trim indicates the relevant academic field. For instance, theology is designated with scarlet, education with light blue, the sciences with golden yellow, and so forth.)

Students in their turn may don a number of accoutrements that indicate experiences they have had during their time at St. Norbert. Braided cords worn around the neck often indicate membership in an honorary society. An array of badges and pins serve the same purpose. Students who have studied abroad at some point during their undergraduate years often wear a long, 4-to-6-inch-wide “stole,” usually bearing the colors and iconography of the national flag from the country where they spent a semester. Other stoles, in a variety of styles and colors, indicate other important memberships on campus, such as participation in the Multicultural Student Services’ STAR program. Additional pins and badges indicate other activities and commitments.

Of course, the greatest fun is the individual treatments that the undergraduates are inclined to give to their mortarboards. This kind of embellishment bows to no rules or requirements, but still serves an important purpose for the wearer – to express creativity or originality, to evoke a special St. Norbert memory, or simply as an effective means of attracting mother’s attention from a distance!

*Responses to “Ask the Abbot” questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, O.Praem., who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.*

## St. Norbert College

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