



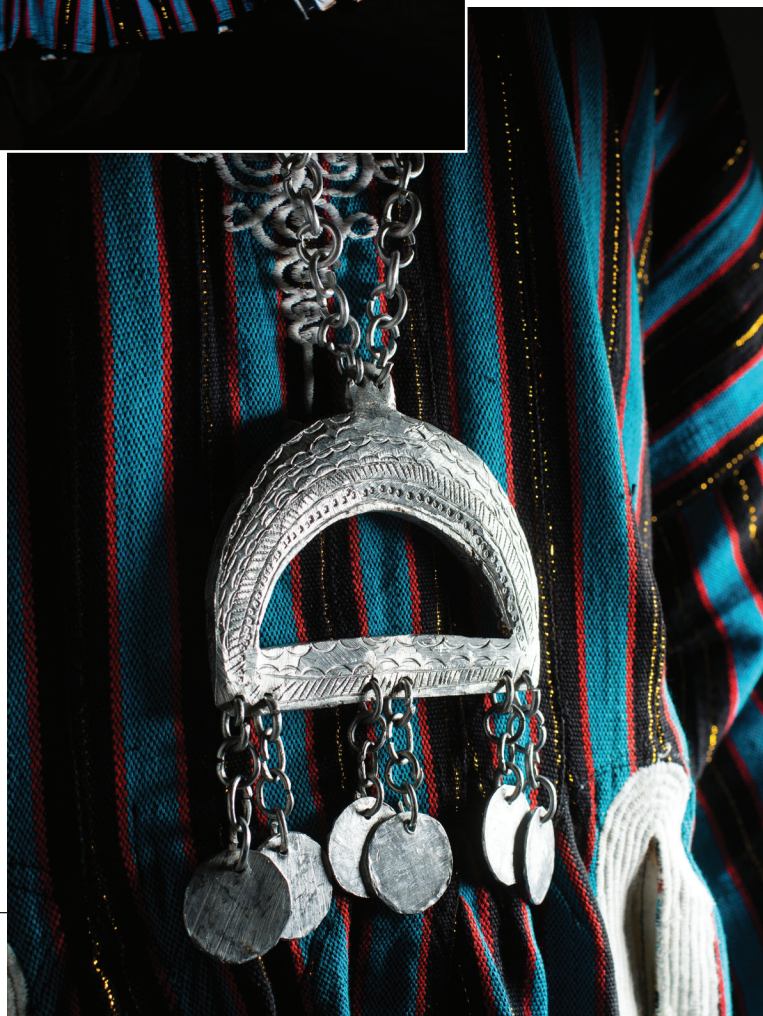
# Regale Us

We asked nine Tufts professors to tell us the personal stories behind their elaborate Commencement fashions.

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY ANNA MILLER  
PHOTO DIRECTION BY ALONSO NICHOLS

Associate Professor of Political Science Pearl Robinson is shown in the light-blue robe and gold tassels of Columbia University, where she earned her PhD. She has worn them to every Tufts graduation for the past forty years. “My gown has grown old with me,” Robinson said. “It’s seen the passage of time. Even the thread has worn out.”

A COUPLE OF MONTHS FROM NOW—on the morning of May 20, to be exact—faculty from every Tufts campus and academic discipline will gather together in front of Ballou Hall to celebrate Commencement. It will be a day of rejoicing, unity, pride, and tradition—with the occasional dash of fashion thrown into the mix. Graduation attire—the fine robes, black velvet hats, and golden tassels—may be part of a tradition that dates back to the Europe of the Middle Ages, but for some professors academic regalia tells a story, one that reflects their own academic journey, their personal identity and accomplishments. Here, nine Tufts professors share the stories behind what they will be wearing as they pass through the sea of excited graduates and proud parents on Commencement Day.



Professor of Music David Locke is photographed in his usual Commencement regalia—the zupiligu (hat), bingma (smock), kurugu (pants), zolugu (necklace), and zuli (whisks) that were given to him by his teacher in Ghana, where Locke lived for two years while studying for his PhD. “African traditions are sophisticated and beautiful,” Locke said. “Deep sources of knowledge can be found in parts of the world many Americans might overlook.”



Shomon Shamsuddin, assistant professor of urban and environmental policy and planning, is shown wearing his regalia from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “On Commencement Day, when you unzip the case that holds the regalia, it’s almost like this treasure that emerges for a brief moment and then you have to wait until next year to wear it again.”



Associate Professor of English Modhumita Roy is shown here in her mother's sari and sash, which she wears on Commencement Day. The embroidery pattern is specific to where she grew up in Kolkata, the capital city of the Indian state of West Bengal. Roy, who received her PhD from Stony Brook University, said her regalia reflects both her home country and her time in the States. "It's a nod to both customs," she said.



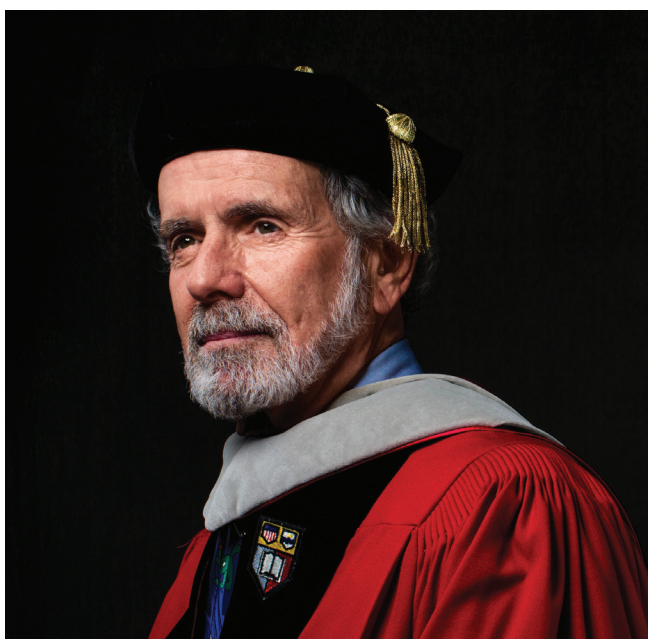
Assistant Professor of Sociology Freedon Blume Oeur, who earned his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley here wears the regalia that his parents, immigrants from Cambodia, purchased for him as a graduation gift. "I couldn't afford to buy it myself," he said. "Commencement is especially meaningful to the families of first-generation college students," said Oeur. He and his sister were the first in their family to go to university.



Professor of Mathematics Boris Hasselblatt poses here in the family heirloom he wears to every Commencement. "These are my father's robes," said Hasselblatt, whose father was a Lutheran pastor in Germany. "He passed away twenty years ago, and I've worn them ever since." Also on display here are the colorful hood from the California Institute of Technology, where Hasselblatt earned his doctorate, and the Tufts mace, a ceremonial staff that is used during the faculty procession on Commencement Day.



“The British love hats!” said Professor of Economics Lynne Pepall, who earned her own puffy hat, along with a PhD, at the University of Cambridge. The European regalia Pepall wears here was designed in the monastic tradition—“Harry Potter style,” she said. The hoods were originally created to keep people’s heads and shoulders warm in drafty buildings or bad weather. Her sleeves, meanwhile, also serve as a pocket where she can discreetly store written remarks.



Professor Emeritus Anthony “Tony” Schwartz is photographed wearing a gray hood and carnelian red robes from Cornell University, where he received his veterinary degree. Schwartz, who served as a professor of surgery and associate dean at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine until he retired in 2005, has attended nearly every graduation since 1979. “It’s a part of me,” Schwartz said of the school where he’s been since the very beginning.

Associate Professor of Psychology Ayanna Thomas is photographed here wearing the regalia of the University of Washington, where she earned her PhD. Graduation isn’t the only time that Thomas throws on her Commencement gear, however. “I like to wear it sometimes when I’m cold in my office,” she said. “The robe is really warm.”

