

**This is how I became a robemaker: by chance.**

**This is how I became an academic robe designer: by necessity.**

Mid-December 1998 I got a 'phone call: would I care to give a tender for academic robes for Växjö University (soon-to-be)? I would, so off I went to inspect the prototype.

The prototype looked, basically, like a black sack with a hole for the head, slit (and then buttoned) from chin to hem. Not even holes for the hands.

What to do? I knew nothing about academic dress, but I *did* know this model would not work. I had someone help button me into the cloak, and asked to be handed the “regalia” that I knew they were going to give the new professors. After a while, they agreed that holes for hands were necessary – and I was invited to submit a proposal. It had to have no sleeves, and had to be fashioned so that bare hands would (could?) never be seen, at any time. And it had to be BLACK.

This was a couple of days before Christmas, and the robes were to be ready by February 13<sup>th</sup>. I was in a hurry, both for design, logistics (how to get 120 metres of fabric, in this time of “just-in-time”-philosophy?), and, of course, time. On Jan 6, I presented three different models, and suggested they might want to order the robes for *next* year, instead. They choose one of the proposed models –they really wanted robes for the inauguration (and understood there was no more time for “thinking”).

To summarize: I made 15 robes just-in-time for the ceremony, in a pattern with “holes for the hands”. With no understanding of traditions of academic dress (no time for research...), and with no time for “thoughtful” design and discussion, the result is not something I am proud of.

(Except for the fact that I rescued the poor professors from a straitjacket, and that I was ready in time, even if only “just”.)

See pictures [here](#).

My next commission was as hurried – 30 robes in six weeks. I just had to make do with the pattern I had (and the customer actually liked it).

In May '99, the second batch delivered, I thought it a good idea to try to find some facts about the phenomenon – went to England, found some books (but not yet the yahoo-group). Studied the books, made some sketches, found more literature... and so was better prepared when the third University approached me, in the spring of '00. And this time the client had included some time for planning! We had about 6 months, and what a difference that made!

The result can be seen [here](#).

Some of the design considerations: this (as were the others) was a gown that was to be owned by the university, to lend to the professors to be installed. Thus it had to be a kind of “one size fits all”. Therefore the body is wide, to accomodate both thin and stout, pregnant women or body builders. The only size variation is length (usually 3 different).

The sleeve is set very high on the shoulder, to make the sleeve cap never fall in the “usual” place. The sleeve itself has no underarm seam, giving it the look of a cape, almost, to avoid problems of “too short” or “too long”.

A couple of hundred gowns later, I have developed some eight different designs. All of them have one detail in common: the sleeve inset, high on the shoulder, with pleats. Maybe I can call that my “trademark”?