



## OAK HALL CAP & GOWN

Oak Hall ♦ C.E. Ward ♦ Bentley & Simon  
E.R. Moore ♦ Cotrell & Leonard

From: Oak Hall Cap & Gown

To: AASHE STARS Review Board

November 21, 2014

Re: AASHE STARS Innovation Credit 1: *"Recycle a Bottle, Dress a Grad!"*

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter affirms that Columbia University has developed a cutting edge recycling program with commencement regalia that incorporates the reduction of landfill waste and the ability to keep product from ever hitting the landfill. When 100% PET recycled plastic bottle fabric became available, Columbia University advised us that they wanted their graduates walking in this sustainable regalia, called GreenWeaver.

Columbia University Environmental Stewardship partnered with the Columbia bookstore and others to put together a campaign centered on recycling at the 2014 Commencement, where 50% of all regalia was made from GreenWeaver. Columbia regalia is customized, so the university allowed us to work off existing inventory of traditional fabric. For Commencement 2015 100% of bachelor and master regalia will be manufactured from GreenWeaver fabric.

The Columbia University program also incorporates the recycling of unwanted regalia into secondary items after use. Recycling bins are located throughout campus and in the bookstore, allowing students the opportunity to recycle unwanted regalia.

The process of turning a plastic bottle into fabric is as follows:

- Recycled plastic bottles are processed to remove impurities such as labels and caps
- The bottles are then chopped into fragments called "flakes"
- Flakes are melted, then solidify into uniform pellets called "chips"
- Chips are melted again and extruded into continuous filament yarn
- That yarn is then woven, dyed, and finished

The environmental advantages are:

- Yarn is produced using 100% post consumer plastic bottles

- CO2 gas emissions are reduced by 54.6% in the process of manufacturing fabric from plastic verses virgin polyester
- Petroleum usage is reduced by over 52% by utilizing thermal recycled energy

What happens after the regalia is worn:

- Recycling boxes are set up on campus and in the bookstore for students to deposit their used regalia
- All deposited regalia is sent back to Oak Hall to be recycled with other gowns
- Those gowns, along with Oak Hall's cutting scrapes, are all sent to North Carolina to be repurposed into other fiber

The entire process, beginning to end, is done 100% in the United States. Graduates of Columbia University will be responsible for keeping over 280,000 plastic bottles out of landfills yearly. With the recycled gowns returned to Oak Hall, Columbia graduates are helping us to recycle an average of 90 tons of gown/fabric scrape yearly.

In closing, Columbia University has certainly gone above and beyond the simple use of a recycled product. With their *"recycle a bottle, dress a grad"* campaign they have created an environment to raise awareness about sustainability; not only to Columbia students and staff, but to the thousands of friends and family that attend Commencement.

Sincerely,



Donna Hodges  
Vice President  
Oak Hall Cap & Gown