

University tosses mortarboard throwing at graduation as an 'unacceptable risk'

BY NICOLE LYN PESCE

Put a lid on it, spoilsports!

The Brits are known for being stiff, but they need to loosen up at graduation.

The University of East Anglia is tossing the beloved commencement tradition of throwing your cap in the air because the plummeting mortarboards pose an “unacceptable risk,” according to the school.

Instead, grads at the July 21 ceremony have been told to mime letting their hats fly, and they can pay an extra \$12 to have the fluttering caps Photoshopped into their keepsake photos later.

“The decision to not have the traditional ‘hat throwing’ photo opportunity for all students this year follows a number of injuries over recent years to graduates hurt by falling mortarboards,” the school told The Daily News in a statement.

The university said coeds have suffered facial injuries from flying caps the last two years, including a U.S. exchange student who needed emergency medical treatment after last year’s graduation ceremony.

“This is an unacceptable risk, and we want to ensure no student’s graduation day is ruined by the potential for avoidable injury,” the spokesperson added.

Plus, the anti mortarboarding practice ensures that the robe makers who rent out the commencement attire won’t receive busted caps.

“This has been agreed by our academic dress suppliers who often receive back damaged mortarboards, and our photographers,” the university spokesperson explained.

The Penguin Photography agency willing to fake the academic milestone with digital touchups argued that keeping graduation caps grounded will make for better photos. “As well as being safer, this will have the added advantage that even more of the students’ faces will be seen in this photograph,” read an email from the company that was reprinted on The Tab, the school’s student news site.

Students and faculty quickly lashed back on what The Tab has dubbed “Gradugate,” with the school’s Law Society President Louise Baldwin stating, “If I’ve paid £45 [\$66] to hire a bit of cloth and card for the day, I should be able to chuck my hat in the air!”

Student Alice Cachia told the site, “This is health and safety gone mad.”

Two other U.K. universities, including Aglia Ruskin in Cambridge and the University of Birmingham, also urged students to hold onto their hats this year for safety reasons.

But New York schools aren't buying the mortarboarding ban.

New York University's spokesman John Beckman, who was overseeing his 20th graduation with the school on Wednesday, said the Village campus doesn't really have a tradition of throwing mortarboards in the air. Yet, “I can't recall an instance of an individual being hurt by a flying mortarboard at our commencement,” he told The Daily News.

And it will be hats off as usual at Staten Island's Wagner College for its graduation ceremony on Friday.

“Wagner College is not asking its graduating class not to throw their caps in the air at graduation this year, nor have we considered such a policy in previous years,” spokesman Lee Manchester told The Daily News, who added, “I am not personally aware of any students or faculty ever being injured by a flying mortarboard cap, nor have I heard any stories of such, at Wagner or anywhere else.”

A mortarboard ban won't fly in the Bronx, either. “The issue hasn't arisen here, so to speak,” cracked Fordham University spokesman Bob Howe.