

College graduation: Four ways things have changed

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In this May 20, 2013 file photo, graduates pose for photographs during commencement at Yale University in New Haven, Conn. There's still plenty of pomp and circumstance, inspiring words from lofty speakers and tossing tassels, but today's college graduation ceremonies include many a contemporary twist. In 1984, according to some estimates, only half of graduates had debt from college loans, averaging about \$2,000. Now, two-thirds of recent bachelor's degree recipients have outstanding student loans, with an average debt of about \$27,000, according to a Pew Research Center report. (AP Photo/Jessica Hill, File)

There's still plenty of pomp and circumstance, inspiring words from lofty speakers and tossing tassels, but graduating from college today is very different from a generation or so ago.

Here are four things today's college graduates may experience that have changed from 30 years ago, when the parents of some of today's students were picking up their diplomas.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

In 1984, according to some estimates, only half of graduates had debt from college loans, averaging about \$2,000. Now, two-thirds of recent bachelor's degree recipients have outstanding student loans, with an average debt of about \$27,000, according to a Pew Research Center report.

"Back in 1984, I was a fairly recent college grad. I had a \$10,000 student loan and payments were \$63.50 per month," said financial planner Judy McNary in Broomfield, Colorado. Rent on her apartment was \$600, "so that loan payment was about 10 percent of the cost of our housing. Fast forward to 2014, and I have met many recent graduates whose loan payments are anywhere from \$900 to \$2,000 per month—easily matching or exceeding their housing costs."

SELFIES

Several schools are urging 2014 graduates to resist the selfie when they walk across the stage during commencement to get their diploma and shake hands with the college president or dean of students. But selfies are OK at other points in commencements at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island, and the University of South Florida in Tampa, two schools that banned selfies on stage in the interest of time.

How painful is the ban? "Nobody cares that we can't take selfies," said 22-year-old Ali Luthman, a Bryant senior graduating with a double major in sociology and marketing. "There's a time and a place when selfies are appropriate and that's not when you're crossing the stage."



This Dec. 13, 2013 photo released by Georgia institute of Technology shows Shimi robots built by students at the PhD and Master's Fall 2013 Commencement held at the McCamish Pavilion in Atlanta. Shimi was developed at the school's Center for Music Technology in conjunction with a media lab in Israel. Controlled by Android smartphone technology, Shimi's dance moves match whatever it music it senses, whether a selected playlist or a drumbeat. Three Shimis performed to "Pomp and Circumstance" from white pedestals during Georgia Tech's commencement ceremonies last December and will be front and center again this commencement season. (AP Photo/Georgia institute of Technology, Rob Felt)

Three decades ago, the analog version of selfies was to have someone

else take your picture with a film camera, then head to the drug store and pay to have the film developed, hoping for at least one non-blurry shot to freeze the moment.

Interestingly, prices haven't changed that much for those who still use old-fashioned film cameras. A roll of 24 exposures cost about \$3 to \$5 in 1984, and developing 4-by-6 prints ran \$8 to \$15, estimated Matthew Schmidt, a spokesman for FujiFilm America. Today, a four-pack of 24-exposure FujiColor Superia X-Tra lists for \$17.95—less than \$5 a roll—and Walgreens processes 24 color exposures of 35mm film for \$11.99.

PET DIPLOMAS

It used to be a tearful farewell to Fido or Fluffy when you went away to school. But rules have loosened on some campuses, though dorm policies vary on type of pets, according to a 2011 survey of admissions officials by Kaplan Test Prep. Some schools allow pets in tanks, some have cat-designated floors and others have whole dorms dedicated to pet cohabiters.

Eckerd College has taken pet-friendly to a whole new level, holding its first "graduation" ceremony for the critters themselves last year, complete with treats, special diplomas and tiny mortarboards decorated with the initials EC.

Dean of students James J. Annarelli, who officiated at the school's commencement in St. Petersburg, Florida, said there were a few surprises. "Pet the snake. Watch the bird," said one student who showed up with a slithery buddy wrapped around one wrist and a sharp-beaked feathered friend perched on the other.

And a dog trained to high-five accidentally scratched Annarelli; he had

to triage with a handkerchief for the rest of the ceremony.

But Annarelli, who has a dog and cat, is a fan of pets helping students acclimate to campus life, especially those living far from home. About 20 students in last year's graduating class of 500 participated in the pet commencement. "What's so heartwarming is that students with pets who are graduating had friends join them, just as though their children were graduating," he said.

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

The traditional march prevails, with some renditions harkening to the past and others looking to the future.

At Eckerd, for instance, graduating students walk from the center of the waterfront campus to a tent in a field, led by five professional bagpipers playing traditional Scottish music. They switch to huffing and puffing on "Pomp" as [students](#) enter the tent.

"The use of bagpipers goes to the earliest days of the college and reflects what a number of church-related colleges do," Annarelli said.

On the Atlanta campus of the Georgia Institute of Technology, by contrast, a band of dancing robots called Shimis perform at commencement. Shimi was developed at the school's Center for Music Technology in conjunction with a media lab in Israel. Controlled by Android smartphone technology, Shimi's dance moves match whatever music it senses, whether a selected playlist or a drumbeat. Three Shimis performed to "Pomp and Circumstance" from white pedestals during Georgia Tech's commencement ceremonies last December and will be front and center again this commencement season.

Developer Gil Weinberg explained the name Shimi is an ode to shimon,

the Hebrew for "to hear," along with nice word play on "shimmy" to laud the robot's dance skills.

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