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High spirits, light clothing open Smith College year

By CATHERINE BAUM
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NORTHAMPTON - While many university students celebrate the opening of an academic year in their school colors, uniforms or graduation garments, Smith College students sport a different look.

"For those of you who did, I'd like to thank you for wearing clothes to convocation," English professor Patricia L. Skarda said in her welcome address Monday at convocation. "In some speeches, they tell you to imagine your audience naked. In this case, I imagine them clothed."

Scantly clad in bunny ears, bikinis and boots, nearly 2,000 young women cheered and chanted their way into the John M. Greene Hall Monday for the convocation welcoming them to a new school year.

Many wore bows, tutus and lingerie. Some wore witch hats, top hats and church hats. Their faces were painted with clown makeup and glitter, their arms expanded with water wings and their legs flaunted an array of panty-hose styles. They carried magic sticks, swords and Barbie.

And they did it with spirit. They raised their voices, clapped their hands and stomped their feet so hard it seemed as though the 100-year-old balcony would come crashing down.

In fact, the glee club acknowledged student rowdiness at convocation in song: "Within our ancient tiny walls, Smith women show they've got some ____ (pause)." The crowd roared with laughter.

The event may have seemed like Halloween on steroids, but there was method to the madness. Each house, or dormitory, differentiated itself with a theme tied to its house name. Housemates decorated their bodies as well as sheets symbolic of their houses that they draped over the balcony of John M. Greene.

Banners included Ziskind Zodiac, Comstock Casino, Hannah Lamont-ana, Albright Alice in Wonderland, Baldwin Brainiacs, Capen(K)nights and Tyler House Go Green, an environmental sustainability theme.

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JERREY ROBERTS

Smith College students walk toward John M. Greene Hall for the college's convocation Monday.



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Students seemed proud to be part of their houses and proud to be part of Smith College.

"My favorite part of this is watching everybody in costume and hearing their cheers," said Cynthia Franqui, a senior from Brooklyn who joined in the screaming, howling and camera flashing.

The Smith convocation evolved from a chapel-like meeting to more of a spirit rally in 1975, when the college greeted its first woman president, Jill Ker Conway. Today, it is a celebration of the strength, potential and common purpose of the community of women students who are Smith College, according to Smith President Carol T. Christ.

On Monday, Christ congratulated new students on being accepted at Smith. She noted the college had the highest number of applications in its history this year. She also mentioned Smith's recent Hollywood recognition in the movies "Mrs. Washington Goes to Smith" and "Julie and Julia."

"Smith has gotten good press this summer," Christ said.

Christ emphasized the school's environmental stewardship, saying students will conduct energy audits this year and the school will continue to look into ways it can change its practices to meet President Obama's climate-change initiatives. Every bit counts, she said, including the school's decision to project rather than print the convocation program Monday evening.

Meanwhile, Skarda shared advice given by alumnae, affectionately known as "Smithies." She told students to finish their work 36 hours before it is due just in case new ideas beg admittance, to schedule time with friends to watch a TV series once a week and to get a faculty member invested in their progress.

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