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Society of Indian Psychologists

Response and Recommendations for the Displaying of Spiritual and Cultural Symbols on
Graduation Regalia for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Students.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the Society of Indian Psychologists

on April 26, 2019 by

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and Art Blume

The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States promotes freedom of religion and prohibits the restriction of religious practices, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act reconfirmed that those protections apply to Native American religious practices. Native religious practices, such as possession of sacred objects, traditions, and sacred rites are generally accepted as sufficiently religious under the first amendment freedoms. To that end most schools, colleges, and universities who have American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian (AIANNH) students allow some form of traditional attire and/or symbols, stoles, sacred feathers, beadwork attached to or on their graduation regalia. To disallow this is unlawful and disrespectful of AIANNH students.

This disrespect of AIANNH peoples reflects the time when the first immigrants arrived from European countries and who, we remind you, were welcomed. At that time the settlers began efforts to extinguish AIANNH culture and traditions. By 1879, the first formal efforts to “save the man and kill the Indian” were initiated by the educational system in both religious and non-sectarian boarding schools. These schools systematically made efforts to destroy Indian language, culture, spirituality, and family systems. Research conducted with respect to these schools provides clear and incontrovertible evidence of torture and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse which left a legacy of trauma for AIANNH to overcome. This legacy of trauma continues to trickle through our communities and do damage to our children. The National Center for Education Statistics notes American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, particularly, have the lowest high school graduation rates by race, and they lag considerably

behind for college admissions and graduation in comparison to other groups. Current research suggests that the strength of our people is uniquely tied to our strong spiritual beliefs, cultural traditions, kinship ties, and lifeways. Our communities have begun to heal by preserving our community languages, maintaining our spiritual beliefs, sustaining our kinship systems, and retaining our stories. In essence we are strengthening our societies via our unique culture.

Thus, for AIAN communities and students, graduation is a time for exceptional joy and ceremony. It is a time to give thanks and to honor the school personnel's efforts, the student's hard work, the parent's and elder's support, and more importantly to recognize the Creator's hand in the success of all. It is a time when spiritual beliefs are at the forefront of our heartfelt thanks. Schools, colleges, and universities that forbid our students from wearing their religious ceremonial and cultural symbols at graduation continue the long history of disrespect and abuse and continue to do damage to our children. And it is, in a word, unlawful.

The Society of Indian Psychologists expresses its support for AIANNH students who wish to wear their sacred feathers, tribal stoles, beaded caps and gowns. We respectfully request that all schools, colleges, and universities respect the student wishes. Just as they allow Christian students to wear crosses, people of Islamic faith to wear head cover, people of Sikh faith to wear turbans and beards, or people of Jewish faith to wear Yarmulkes, our children, our young women and men, have the right to wear their symbols of spirituality, religion, and tradition. It is our hope that schools, colleges, and universities will continue to support our young people as they earn their degrees, connect with their culture, and continue to heal historical wounds. Our young people are brave, smart, generous, thoughtful, respectful, and important to the continuation of our healing and culture. They must be supported.

Attachment: Short list of a sample of schools that allow AIANNH traditional accoutrements on their regalia.

<u>School</u>	<u>Location</u>
Arizona State University	Tempe, AZ
Ashland High School	Ashland, WI
Bemidji State University	Bemidji, MN
Bethel Regional High School	Bethel, AK
Campbell University	Buies Creek, NC
Carrington College	Albuquerque, NM
Central New Mexico Community College	Albuquerque, NM
Chinle High School	Chinle, AZ
Columbia University,	NY, NY
Cortez High School	Cortez, CO
East Carolina University	Greenville, NC
East Central University	Ada, OK
Flagstaff High School	Flagstaff, AZ
Fort Lewis College	Durango, CO
Glen Allen High School	Glen Allen, VA
Guilford College	Glen Allen, VA
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	Hollister, NC
Harvard University	Cambridge, MA
Highland High School	Albuquerque, NM
Holbrook High School	Holbrook, AZ
Hopi High School Keams	Canyon, AZ
Kirtland Central High School	Kirtland, NM
Lawrence University	Appleton, WI
Navajo Technical University	Crownpoint, NM
New Mexico Highlands University	Las Vegas, NM
New Mexico State University	Las Cruces, NM
New Mexico Technical University	Socorro, NM
Northeastern State University	Tahlequah, OK
Oklahoma State University	Stillwater, OK
Pacific Lutheran University	Tacoma, WA
Page High School	Page, AZ
Pima Community College	Page, AZ
Purnell Swett High School	Maxton, NC
Randolph Community College	Asheboro, NC
Sage College	Troy, NY
Santa Fe Indian School	Santa Fe, NM
Shiprock High School	Shiprock, NM

<u>School (continued)</u>	<u>Location</u>
Southern Vermont College	Bennington, VT
Stanford University	Palo Alto, CA
University of Alaska-Anchorage	Anchorage, AK
University of Arizona	Tucson, AZ
University of Miami	Miami, FL
University of New Mexico	Albuquerque, NM
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill	Chapel Hill, NC
University of North Carolina-Greensboro	Greensboro, NC
University of Oklahoma	Norman, OK
University of South Alabama	Mobile, AL
University of Southern California	Los Angeles, CA
University of Washington-Seattle	Seattle, WA
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Madison, WI
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Milwaukee, WI
Utah State University	Logan, UT
Wheatland Union High School	Wheatland, CA

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Ada Public School System	Ada, OK
Boone-Apache Public Schools	Boone & Apache, OK
Edmond Public Schools	Edmond, OK
Lawton Public Schools	Lawton, OK
Menominee Indian School District (Public)	Keshena, WI
Norman Public School System	Norman, OK
Shawnee Public School System	Shawnee, OK
Tulsa Public Schools	Tulsa, OK
Vian Public Schools	Vian, OK

Sample statements:

“All cultural heritage adornments and objects of cultural significance are also welcome as approved regalia for ceremonies”

“American Indian students can wear any of several pieces of traditional American Indian regalia including an eagle feather attached to their mortar board representing honesty, truth, courage and wisdom; beadwork representing their tribe; cultural designs on top of the mortar board, or traditional outfits under their gown.

Woven cloths representing traditional patterns and designs signifying a graduate’s cultural heritage may be worn during the commencement ceremony. Hawaiian and Polynesian leis made from flower, vines, or leaves may be worn by students leaving as symbols of good luck, affection and appreciation.”