Indigenous Education, Inc, Home of the Cobell Scholarship Program, along with NSPA members, American Indian College Fund, American Indian Graduate Center, American Indian Science and Engineering Society and other National leading organizations have joined together to create a Virtual Indigenous Commencement for Indigenous students everywhere to share photos and announcements with family near and far during this time of social and physical distancing. Inspired by another Native group, the Social Distance Powwow, the teams will hold a semblance of commencement on May 1, 2020 on Facebook with invitations and links to it on all other social media platforms. We invite you to share with your Indigenous students and families. We are aware of a similar event for the LGBTQ community coordinated in part by the HRC. If you know of others, please share with us as we think celebrating is vital at this time.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Elder and Scholar, Dr. Henrietta Mann will provide an invocations, the Mandaree Singers will provide an honor song for the graduates, Mr. John Herrington of the Chikasaw Nation, the first Native American Astronaut, will provide a commencement address. Organizers will be providing 3-5 minute congratulatory videos throughout the ceremony while Native artists will provide music and additional words to graduates. The event will end with a lengthy scrolling video of all registered graduates rather than announcements of names.

Additionally, we understand that many schools may not hold commencement exercises for the Summer; therefore, we will keep the group lively with active posts from Native professionals, leaders, and family members throughout the summer. In addition to the celebration, collaborating organizations continue to gather and disseminate information to students and families about financial aid changes, admissions practices, leniencies, grading, visiting campuses, virtual orientations and more. We do this because we know our student population responds to us in higher numbers than they do to university communications. In general, it’s about trusting someone who looks like them and shares a common experience, not unlike other groups. Following the original commencement, these resources will be shared in the group as well. Feel free to join the group to offer your congratulatory message.

The group is moderated and all posts must be approved by administrators, anyone can invite friends and family or anyone can request to join so long as they review the “rules of engagement” and agree to them. We created the following announcement, an invitation that was formatted for each social media platform contains the relevant information and anyone can share it all:

“Indigenous Commencement is a digital platform created to celebrate Indigenous students around the world who graduate from programs, high school, college, vocational programs, graduate programs, and beyond. While it may not be physically possible to celebrate together, Indigenous graduates should know just how proud the Indigenous community is of them and all their hard work.

Please use this space to help celebrate and congratulate Indigenous graduates by sharing photos or videos of graduate(s).
Stay tuned to this Virtual Indigenous Commencement (VIC) group for additional exciting celebratory events and posts over the coming months.

VIC is coordinated by: Indigenous Education, Inc. (IEI – Home of the Cobell Scholarship) and in collaborative spirit with College Horizons, Harvard University Native American Program, Arizona State University, Yale University, and Indigenous Educators United. American Indian Graduate Center, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, American Indian College Fund, National Education Association, National Indian Education Association, Dream Warriors, The Indian University of North America and the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at Cornell University.

This commencement is part of the Class of 2020 Native Graduates virtual campaign in hopes of sparking encouragement, guidance, and gratitude to the beauty and brilliance of our Class of 2020 Native graduates. Use the hashtags #2020NativeGrad #dearNativeGraduates #Class2020IndigenousStrong to spread the love for our graduates.”

Inquiries about the event can be sent do Melvin.monette@cobellscholar.org.