



November 6th, 2015 • [Access for Students](#), [Educational Quality](#), [Impact on California](#)

[It's Good to Be Home: An American Indian Professor's Journey](#)



Dr. Proudfit (far left) and CSUSM President Dr. Karen Haynes (far right) stand alongside graduates at the 2015 American Indian Honoring Ceremony.

By Joely Proudfit, Ph.D.

***Director, California Indian Culture & Sovereignty Center
Department Chair, American Indian Studies***

My first exposure to the CSU was in 1987, when a CSU Long Beach (CSULB) college counselor came to my

high school to speak with students who were preparing to attend college. For the sole purpose of skipping class, I accompanied my best friend to his scheduled one-on-one visit with the counselor. That same counselor ended up changing my life that day. She asked me what my plans were after graduation and I told her that I would probably be joining the military because I would need a place to live, since my aunt was only willing to house me until graduation. She then told me about dorms and recommended that I apply for college. When I became the first member of my family to graduate high school, I decided to take the counselor's advice and applied to CSULB. I was the last person to move into the campus dorms in fall 1987. From there, I was led by wonderful CSU professors who told me about the CSU Forgivable Loan, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I am so humbled today by the opportunities that the CSU has provided me – I now look to serve, mentor and educate at every occasion.

My service to CSU San Marcos (CSUSM) started in 2005, when I was invited by President Haynes to serve on the CSUSM Native Advisory Council. CSUSM needed someone to take on a leadership role that would connect the university to tribal communities. Although I was already a full-time faculty member at CSU San Bernardino at the time, I was drawn to this new opportunity because San Marcos is the traditional homeland of the Payómkowishum (aka People of the West or, more commonly, the Luiseño people). As a three-time tenured professor of the CSU (SFSU, CSUSB & CSUSM) and a Luiseño woman, I was honored to return to my Payómkowishum homeland.

Since my arrival at CSUSM, I've assisted in the development of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center (CICSC), as well as collaborate with The Office of Tribal Liaison, The Native Advisory Council and Tribal Communities, and students. Together, we have developed award winning curriculum, materials and campaigns that are culturally relevant to Native American students. We also provide community outreach to nearly 35 tribal nations in our region, and, through CICSC, we conduct research that support the maintenance of sovereignty and culture within the tribal communities.

Today, I'm proud to say that CSUSM is the premiere American Indian serving institution with more than 430 American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students. We went from a 0.3% student population to 3% – the highest in the state per capita – and we are still growing!

I know the service I provide to CSUSM benefits not only current students but future generations of American Indians. As a scholar and an activist, it is my goal to impact students' thinking, reflection, and actions amongst a community of learners while providing them with an understanding of their social, civic and political responsibilities. In fall 2016, I'm looking forward to unveiling a 21st Century American Indian Studies major that will undoubtedly be the best in the country.

I am proud of my many accomplishments here at CSUSM, but I am most proud of the impact I have had in the recruitment and retention of our AIAN students. This is extraordinary since studies show that our AIAN student population has declined dramatically in the CSU system over the last decade; but here at CSUSM, it is thriving!

It is good to be home. This Thanksgiving, while many of you may be going home and giving thanks, please remember to offer thanks to the first peoples of this great land.

Learn more about American Indians by visiting <http://www.csusm.edu/cicsc/>.

Tags: [CICSM](#), [CSUSM](#)