



# CSUSM Is a Family Affair for the Andersons

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By Brian Hiro



***Bridget Anderson graduated from CSUSM in 2013, and now her three children -- from left, Mason, Ian and Miah -- are students at the university. Photo by Ali Hoffman***

Bridget Anderson always has bemoaned the fact that she wasn't able to participate in her Cal State San Marcos commencement.

After graduating from the university in December 2013, Anderson was scheduled to walk the following spring, but her husband's military assignment to Japan combined with the Cocos Fire to scuttle her plan.

Anderson will have not one, not two, but three chances to rectify that disappointment in the near future. All three of her children followed in her footsteps and are on track to join her as CSUSM alumni within the next 18 months.

127 Anderson, the middle child at 22, is a senior who will graduate with an electrical engineering degree in May. (<http://www.csusm.edu>)



Mason Anderson, the oldest at 23, is a second-semester junior who's set to earn a degree in management information systems in December 2024.

And Miah Anderson, the youngest at 20, is in her first semester at CSUSM after transferring from Vanguard University. A kinesiology major, she's due to graduate in May 2025.

"It feels surreal," Bridget said. "I am so incredibly proud of my kids. I can't believe that they're all going to the same university that I went to."

Bridget enrolled at CSUSM in 2009, when all three of her children were in elementary school and she finally had time to devote to her education. But the challenges were many. Soon after she started, the family moved from Camp Pendleton to Murrieta, and not only did she have to make the hour-long commute to San Marcos, but she had to squeeze all her classes into the periods between when she dropped the kids off in the morning and picked them up in the afternoon.

"It was a lot," she said. "Sometimes I was on campus every day, Monday through Friday, because I didn't have the option of taking an evening class. There were many late nights and sleepless nights."

Making the situation even more trying was that Bridget's husband, Jason, served multiple Marine deployments in the Middle East, leaving her as the sole parent and without a ready outlet to vent her frustrations and emotional struggles. If she felt overtaxed, however, she did an exemplary job of shielding it from her kids.

"She's such a strong woman," Miah said. "She put on a brave face, and I never really felt when she was stressed out. I felt just like a normal kid."

Bridget earned a degree in liberal studies with a focus on elementary education. After teaching for a few years, she decided to change her

career path during the pandemic, taking advantage of the explosion of online learning to pursue a master's in social work from Arizona State. She finished the program in August 2022, and after serving as a social work intern in the Borrego Springs school district, she accepted a job last summer as a behavioral health clinician with [Indian Health Council](#). She now does therapy for members of the nine federally recognized American Indian tribes in the North County region.



***Bridget Anderson (second from right) is half Navajo, and she has encouraged her three kids to embrace their American Indian heritage as students at CSUSM. Photo by Ali Hoffman***

It's a particularly meaningful role for Bridget, who is half Navajo and was born and raised in Flagstaff, Ariz., just southwest of the enormous Navajo Nation that encompasses parts of three states. Her mother grew up in Navajo Nation and was sent to Indian boarding school, and Bridget remembers going to powwows and visiting relatives on the reservation.

“We were always involved,” she said.

Her children had a different experience, though, as the itinerant nature of military life caused the family's ties to American Indian culture to unravel. Bridget made a concerted effort to reconnect with

her focus at CSUSM by taking several courses taught by Joely Prouditt, the chair of American Indian studies and the director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center (CICSC) at the university.



Now Bridget is encouraging her kids to tap into their heritage as well. Along with their mom, all three of the siblings this fall attended a community welcome for the CICSC, where they spoke with Prouditt and Ilianna Ramirez, the new American Indian student success coordinator. They also either have joined or shown interest in joining the American Indian Student Alliance (AISA).

“I identify as a Native American, but it’s not anything I’ve put a lot of effort into being connected to,” Ian said. “That’s something I’m trying to change.”

Said Miah: “AISA is a really good community to be aligned with because they’re so accepting. They understand that everyone comes from a different background and that being connected with your culture is important. They try to create a comfortable and safe space for students to come into.”

While they go through the process of securing their American Indian census numbers, Mason, Ian and Miah are enjoying their time as students at CSUSM. Mason is a Marine Corps reservist who aims to enter the field of cybersecurity. Ian is part of the university’s first cohort of electrical engineering students (president of the electrical engineering club, to boot), and he plans to pursue a master’s in the discipline. Miah, who transferred to CSUSM because she liked its size and sense of community, wants to become a physical therapist.

All three are commuting from the family home in Murrieta, though Bridget jokes that she wishes they would carpool more. Their divergent schedules mean that their on-campus interactions sometimes consist of little more than high-fiving each other on the way to or from the parking lot.

“But all being at CSUSM does bring us closer together,” Mason said.

([www.csusm.edu/](http://www.csusm.edu/))



“When we’re home now, we know what each other are going through, and we can see each other thrive in different ways. We’re all going to be doing our own thing soon, so it’s nice to be able to soak in our last hurrah as siblings living together and going to college together.”

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