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PRESS RELEASE

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Geoffrey Demke

Cal State San Bernardino's Palm Desert Campus names 2023-24 outstanding graduate

PALM DESERT, Calif. - Cal State San Bernardino's Palm Desert Campus has named Geoffrey Demke as its Outstanding Graduate for 2024.

Demke, who lives in Indio, will receive a bachelor of arts degree in history at this year's CSUSB College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Commencement ceremony, taking place at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 17, at the Toyota Arena in Ontario.

In the fall, Demke will enter the multiple subject credential program at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus to become an elementary school teacher.

The road to college graduation hasn't been easy for Demke, whose parents took him (and his siblings) out of school when he was in the fifth grade to be homeschooled.

Demke said that education wasn't much of a focus at home during that time and ended up working with his father most of the time doing tile and stonework. He was finally allowed to go back to school in his junior year of high school, but it was extremely difficult.

When he graduated from high school, he said he was scared to go to college because of how difficult high school was for him.

"I had many nightmares about being in school and not understanding what was being taught," he said.

"The accomplishment that I am most proud of is that I will be graduating from CSUSB this week with a 4.0 GPA. That is something I never thought possible."

During his time at the Palm Desert Campus, Demke regularly volunteered in the community, attended on- and off-campus events, and served as a [College Corps](#) Fellow.

He was very involved in many aspects of student life at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus. While serving as the vice president of the History Club at PDC and playing soccer with the PDC Soccer Club, he attended every Career Pathways event this academic year – a collaboration between PDC and the World Affairs Council of the Desert to introduce students to a variety of post-graduation career opportunities. He also volunteered at the Coachella Valley History Museum and completed an internship with their Jr. Historians after school program.

Many people have inspired and encouraged Demke throughout his life and educational journey.

"I have been inspired by so many people," he said. "My wife Niccole, who got her degree while we were together, inspires and pushes me. My daughter Allison, who is now 10, continues to inspire me."

There are also many others at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus who have made a positive impact on Demke and have served as his mentors.

"Dr. Priscilla Porter who has worked with me on the Jr. Historians program and professors like Dr. Michael Karp have also truly inspired me. Other students that attend the university also inspire me. They have seen something in me that I have a hard time seeing in myself sometimes. They encourage me when I am feeling overwhelmed and are all great examples to me. Dr. Karp has always listened to my questions or concerns. He has never made me feel inadequate and has been a true guiding light. He has always been willing to help. He has shown me the impact a great teacher can make. Dr. Porter has helped me unlock my potential working with young students and has also pushed me to become better. I look up to these two so much."

With all of the support Demke has received from family, friends and campus mentors, he says that he still struggles with issues of anxiety.

“I’ve had to overcome the feeling that I am not too old to be in college and figuring out how to best balance my time. I have taken six classes each semester my senior year, while working part-time, and getting my service hours in for College Corps. This while making time for my family at home and getting everything that I need to do to get into a credential program. Also deciding to quit my job of 18 years to be able to attend college full-time instead of part time. My original plan was to work my way up in that company and retire there, but I know the decision to continue my education was 100% the right choice,” he said.

CSUSB Palm Desert Campus history professor, Michael Karp, can’t help but sing Demke’s praises.

“Since first meeting Geoffrey as a new transfer student at orientation, he has done everything to make the most of his time here as a student,” said Karp. “He is not only an outstanding student –always coming prepared, engaging with readings, contributing to class discussions and completing outstanding work in all respects – he has also strived to contribute to PDC and the larger community. In all my time at PDC, I have never had the opportunity to work with a student who works as hard as Geoffrey and earnestly engages with campus and community events and volunteer opportunities.”

Demke is a proud CSUSB Coyote.

“CSUSB has molded me into the person I am today,” he said.

“I had wanted to become an elementary school teacher when I transferred here but felt grossly underqualified. I didn't really have any experience working with elementary school children, besides my daughter. The professors at CSUSB really helped guide me to where I needed to go. I was able to do an internship for an after-school program, and this not only gave me experience, but it also helped reaffirm to me that it was what I wanted to do. I have also made some close relationships with students and faculty who have helped guide me and taught me lessons that I will take with me for the rest of my life. I have loved everything about this school. It has changed my life. I am happier. I am more positive. I feel like I belong here. I am a Coyote.”

About PDC: The CSUSB Palm Desert Campus offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees, teaching credentials and certificates, and plays a vital role in educating the region’s growing population.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Strategic Communication at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.