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Grateful alumna achieves milestone at medical school in Chicago

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Grateful alumna achieves milestone at medical school in Chicago

The journey of Elizabeth Castellanos '13 has taken her to Chicago where this fall she received her "white coat" at the Loyola Stritch School of Medicine, a ceremony that emphasizes the privilege of being able to care for patients and the responsibility that comes with wearing the coat.

Yet Elizabeth hasn't forgotten where her journey started, in the [Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at Dominican](#) and her connection to professors such as Dr. Maggie Louie and Dr. Kenneth Frost.

"I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for all the continuous support they provided me throughout my years at Dominican and even after," Elizabeth says. "I definitely would not be where I am today if it wasn't for professors like them who pushed me beyond my limit to be the best version of myself."

It was a postcard with a picture of [Meadowlands Hall](#) that led Elizabeth to Dominican in 2009. The postcard arrived toward the end of Elizabeth's junior year at an all-girls' high school just outside Los Angeles.

The little card made a big impact.

"I jokingly told my mom 'this is the school I am going to go to,'" Elizabeth recalls.

A year later, when deciding between colleges closer to home and Dominican, Elizabeth toured campus, met with faculty in the [School of Health and Natural Sciences](#), and came to an immediate decision.

"I automatically fell in love with the place. I knew that this is where I was meant to be," says Elizabeth, who graduated as Dominican's Outstanding Student in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in biology and minors in mathematics and chemistry. "There was a line on the card from Dominican that said 'This Place Changes People.' I can honestly say that I changed because of Dominican. This place made me such a better person, a more independent person, and a person who was willing to step outside the box."

Her freshman year, the honors student began working with Dr. Douglas Cooper in the lab on studies focused on antibody AC133 and its specificity to recognize stem cells. The following summer, Elizabeth started a three-year internship at the University of California San Francisco, where she joined a clinical research team studying asthma in Latin Americans and African Americans to determine if the asthma was a result of genetic, social, or environmental factors.

This study eventually formed the focus of her senior thesis, and her work as an intern helped land her a full-time job at UCSF, which began in the summer of 2013. During her time off, while applying to medical school, Elizabeth authored two medical manuscripts and was published in *Chest* and the *Journal of Asthma*.

Elizabeth's goal now is working as a primary care physician in underserved areas. Her decision to focus on pediatrics was formed during her sophomore year, when she participated in the [Dominican/Kaiser Permanente Mentoring Program](#) and spent the year shadowing Carol Ekelund, a pediatrician in Kaiser's Petaluma medical facility.

"She was a great mentor and I will never forget all the things she told me. I will always remember the Kaiser program as one of the highlights of my work at Dominican."

Other highlights included presenting research at the Tri Beta national conference in Puerto Rico. Elizabeth's presentation focused on the success of the Dominican's Intergenerational Conversation Program. The program fosters communication and understanding between generations by connecting

Dominican science majors and older adults in Marin County.

Service was a major focus of Elizabeth's four years at Dominican. She tutored school-aged children, many of whom were from families in which English is not the first language, with community partner Canal Alliance through the [University's Service-Learning program](#). She also spent many hours volunteering at Children's Hospital Oakland, both in the Pediatric Oncology unit and during the hospital's annual asthma camp for children.

She particularly valued the time she spent serving as a mentor with the Hispanic Youth Institute. She has spent many summers working with high school students in the San Jose area.

"I enjoyed getting to know the students and showing them that there are alternatives to gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy, and violence," Elizabeth says. "As a first-generation student myself, I am really able to connect with students and share my story with them. As an educated Latina I am in a great position to deliver a very powerful message: If I can do it they can do it too."

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