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Psychology professor focused on positive mentoring relationships

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Psychology professor focused on positive mentoring relationships

Veronica Fruiht, who recently joined Dominican as an assistant professor of psychology, knows all too well the power of mentoring.

Fruiht attended a high school that was struggling to maintain academic standards in the face of a changing student body and educational climate. When it came time to apply to college, her high school counselor's advice was to aim low. Colleges, Fruiht was told, would not be interested in students from her high school.

"I was lucky enough to have mentors outside of school who told me otherwise," recalls Fruiht, who in 2014 became the first person in the U.S. to earn a PhD in Positive Developmental Psychology.

Her high school experience led to a lifelong interest in how developmental psychology and positive psychology can be used to improve the educational experience.

"I saw how devastating a lack of support for student success can be," says Fruiht, who joined [Dominican's Department of Psychology](#) in the [School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences](#) in April. "The experience made me want to better understand how influential people in the lives of adolescents effect their choices about academics."

After earning her BS in psychology from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Fruiht earned both an MA and PhD in Positive Developmental Psychology from Claremont Graduate University.

As a graduate student, Fruiht began working with community colleges in Orange County to help them develop interventions to build hope in their higher-risk student populations. This work allowed her to study how these types of programs might help students build the psychological capital (for example, things like hope and goal-setting skills) to make them more successful in school.

She saw that the students who were most successful in achieving their goals were those who knew how to find people in their lives to help them develop that capital outside of these programs.

"My interest in natural mentoring relationships grew out of talking with students about how they recruited mentors from their own social networks to help them be successful."

At Dominican, Fruiht plans to expand her research examining adolescents' mentoring relationships and how young people find supportive adults in their lives to help them to achieve their goals.

"I'm particularly interested in how first-generation college students find mentors and what impact those mentors can have on their success in school and work."

Her other main area of research is on the construct of hope.

"Positive psychologists define hope as being made up of having the "will" to achieve your goals and knowing the "ways" to achieve them," Fruiht says. "While this is really useful for success in school and in life, I'm also interested in what hope means to people outside of the field of psychology, and how mentors might help people build hope that doesn't have to do with their goals."

As someone who studies mentoring, one of Fruiht's favorite parts of research is getting to be a mentor to emerging scholars, something she looks forward to expanding at Dominican.

This semester she has two research assistants (sophomores Samantha Easley and Danielle Davis) helping analyze data for a qualitative research project about first-generation college students' mentoring relationships. In upcoming semesters, she plans to build her research lab into a team of students that help

with data collection and analyses, and have the opportunity to ask their own research questions with these data sets and present their findings at scholarly conferences.

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