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## Support system helps student-athlete become doctor

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When Dr. Marcus Williams '05 came to Dominican, he wanted to run fast and jump high on the basketball court, but he desired a more methodical, structured pace in the classroom.

Dominican's smaller class sizes, supportive faculty and fellow students helped create the ideal learning experience.

"It was totally perfect for me," says Marcus, currently doing his medical residency at Alameda County Medical Center. "I was able to get to know the professors better."

Marcus was able to formulate a game plan. He originally was recruited to play basketball at UC Davis until the roster became full. It was then suggested he enroll at Dominican where he continued his athletic career (leading the Penguins to a stunning upset of UC Davis in 2002) and changed his academic plans. He was encouraged by faculty to join a biology class in the [School of Health and Natural Sciences](#) that took him down a pre-med road where he met another pre-med student, Amanda Shepherd.

"Marcus and I shared most of our classes during our four years at Dominican as the small class size lent itself to congruency of schedule. We identified our equal goals early on. This was a path better discovered together," says Amanda, now a hospitalist (internal medicine) at Duke University Hospital in North Carolina. "We worked hard together on various projects throughout our time at Dominican. We also faced many of the same challenges: allocating adequate amounts of time to our studies, while similarly devoting time to our passion -- in Marcus' case, basketball. We fed off each other and provided each other the needed support and enthusiasm."

Amanda, who played softball for the Penguins, graduated from Dominican and attended medical school at the University of Washington. She stayed there to serve as Chief Resident.

Marcus credits Amanda for passing on her experience and expertise to help guide and reassure him.

"My advice to a Dominican student is to get in touch with somebody who has already done it," Marcus says. "The biggest thing at that moment is the question marks. Am I doing this right? Is there a better way to go about it? It's just so competitive that those questions keep you up at night."

Marcus spent most of his waking hours focusing on basketball. But when his mother was hospitalized during his junior year, his vision for the future became clearer. He was inspired by the doctors who cared for his mom in and out of the hospital.

Becoming a doctor seemed like the natural thing to do.

"Over a time frame I realized this was something that was very achievable for me," Marcus says. "I was already in the pre-med track. I figured I might potentially get into medical school. It kind of fell into my lap actually."

After graduating from medical school at UC Irvine, Marcus returned to his hometown of Oakland and applied for residency in the [Highland Emergency training program](#). Through that program he works with peers from Harvard, Yale, Columbia, George Washington, Stanford, and UC-Berkeley. One of the six hospitals he works in is Kaiser Oakland where he was born. Another one is Children's Hospital in Oakland where last May he went above and beyond the call of duty. As chronicled by [KTVU-TV Channel 2 in Oakland](#), the hospital staged a high school prom for one of its teenage patients, Kimberlee Brendt, and Marcus asked to be her date, with the permission of Kimberlee's parents.

“It was totally fun,” Marcus says.

At Highland, Marcus’ duties range from cardiology to radiology. He is learning to read MRI and CT scans. After finishing his residency, he aims to continue practicing emergency medicine in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“You get to see a certain population, especially at Highland,” Marcus says. “That makes you feel good about what you’re doing. You deal with a lot of the underserved population. It’s satisfying seeing people come in, and you send them out feeling better.”

That is sort of how it worked with Marcus at Dominican. He came to Dominican focused on basketball and left with the tools to focus on a career in medicine.

“Marcus is where he is now by sheer perseverance and hard work. His dedication and drive is topped by no one in our class,” Amanda says. “Marcus, all the while, was able to find balance and excel in his sport and other activities. Marcus also held close the notion of ‘no man left behind.’ When studying together, once he fully grasped a topic, he was quick to move from learner to teacher to ensure that everyone in the group had the same understanding. This kind of camaraderie is innate to Marcus.”

It’s common at Dominican.

“What they have on that campus in that area is unique. I don’t think you can get that type of experience and education at many places in California,” Marcus says. “The things Dominican has done with upgrading facilities and creating new academic opportunities the last few years has put it on the map. The programs and the degrees Dominican offers have a very high yield. [Business](#). Health care. Dominican is really great at it, and it’s what students are going into. It’s what people want to do.”