

Occupational Therapist focuses on student health and well-being

While studying for her doctorate in occupational therapy at the University of Southern California (USC), Karen McCarthy created a lifestyle coaching program for college students to explore lifestyle and occupational interventions to promote wellness and resilience.

McCarthy, who joined Dominican this fall as an assistant professor in the [Department of Occupational Therapy](#), now hopes to involve OT students in lifestyle coaching for all Dominican students, with the goal of helping students balance school/ life and maintain a healthy lifestyle. She also is expanding her research inspired by Occupational Science, the study of human beings engaged in occupations or meaningful activities, and how these occupations impact their health and well-being.

“I am interested in forming a community practice lab where students can pair with other students on campus to provide lifestyle coaching,” McCarthy says. “I am passionate about mental health and emotional well-being, focusing most of my practice, program development, and research on college student well-being.”

McCarthy completed her clinical doctorate in OT at USC in 2008, focusing on the development of the program Lifestyle Redesign® for the college student. She moved from Los Angeles to Ireland to teach Mental Health Occupational Therapy at University College Cork (UCC), while at the same time earning her master’s in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education from UCC.

In [Dominican's School of Health and Natural Sciences](#), McCarthy's research is focused on help seeking behaviors for college students, as well as examining emotional well-being measures for first-year students. She also is continuing work she began while working in Ireland, studying the occupation of dating for young straight women in urban areas of Ireland by examining the form, function, and meaning of dating for these women.

Dating, she notes, is not commonly addressed by occupational therapists.

“I wanted to explore more about this occupation and illuminate it’s meaning for persons who are seeking to find a partner,” McCarthy says.

At Dominican, McCarthy teaches Psychosocial Aspects of Occupation – a course her identical twin sister teaches in San Diego.

McCarthy’s work has been published in Psychiatry Research and the Irish Journal of Occupational Therapy. Her clinical experience is in the areas of mental health, Lifestyle Redesign®, life coaching, dating coaching, older adults, multiple sclerosis, college student wellness, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

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