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## A Two Way Street Mentoring at Beloit is a beautiful thing to see

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### Body

Beloit, WI : Beloit College has issued the following news release: Experts posit that the best mentors focus mainly on building the character of the individuals they invest time in, not only developing skill sets. "The best leaders go beyond competency, focusing on helping to shape other people's character, values, self-awareness, empathy, and capacity for respect," writes Anthony Tjan, CEO of the Boston venture capital firm Cue Ball Group, and author of Good People. This is the kind of mentoring that routinely happens at Beloit. In fact, decades of alumni can rattle off the names of faculty members and staff who have influenced everything from their academic careers and professions to their values and their personal lives—even their first-born's name. Likewise, faculty and staff can list countless lessons they've learned from those they've mentored.

You could say that this tendency to support and provide guidance is so embedded in Beloit's culture, it almost goes unsaid. As Professor of Religious Studies Debra Majeed said, "It's just what you do." The give and take and the care and attention invested in these relationships is also a beautiful thing to witness. We selected just five of the many faculty and staff at Beloit who are expert teachers, scholars, coaches, and sometimes unsung mentors. Jennifer Esperanza Associate Professor of Anthropology Jennifer Esperanza and Dan Weyl;10 Jennifer Esperanza has mentored many students, including Dan Weyl;10, who pursued a less conventional path in anthropology. Photos by: Jill Fager and Greg Anderson. Dan Weyl;10 recalls that as an undergraduate anthropology major, he was nervous about not going into academia. It's what most of his peers were doing, yet his passion was in advancing human rights. His relationship with Associate Professor of Anthropology Jennifer Esperanza, whom he crossed paths with during his junior year, helped support his decision to do things his way. Weyl, who now works as the regional grants officer for Rotary International, an organization that promotes goodwill and humanitarian services worldwide through a multidisciplinary approach, says that she was the spark. "She validated my career path and choices, and that was really special and important for me to know that just because I'm not pursuing a career in academia, it doesn't make me less of a student in anthropology," says Weyl. "What I loved about Jenn, and what I continue to love about her, is that she supports students in their passions and appreciates how anthropology can be applied to help facilitate social change." Esperanza describes her approach to mentoring as a simple one. She finds a point of entry or a connection like a favorite television show or shared interest to help build the relationship. "I like mentoring because it mimics what we do in anthropology. When you conduct interviews with informants during your research, you don't have a set of ideals of who you think they are, you meet them where they are," says Esperanza. Ted Liu;13, an anthropology and economics major, says he and Esperanza bonded culturally first, discussing the culture of being Asian in the Midwest. (Liu is of Chinese descent, while Esperanza is of Filipino descent.) "We had this dialogue about race, about Asian culture, and about travel," says Liu. "She understood the expectations that my parents had of me to succeed and the pressure that put on me." Liu, who is now studying economics in a Ph.D. program at the University of California-Santa Cruz, says it was Esperanza who pushed him to go into economics. Even though it was outside of her own field, she recognized it as a better fit for him. "Jenn told me after my sophomore year [at Beloit] not to do a Ph.D. in anthropology," says Liu. "She knew I had interests beyond anthropology. She understood me better

than I understood myself." Charles Westerberg<sup>94</sup> Professor of Sociology and Brannon-Ballard Chair in Sociology Sidra Montgomery<sup>09</sup> and Charles Westerberg<sup>94</sup> Sidra Montgomery<sup>09</sup> and Professor of Sociology Charles Westerberg<sup>94</sup> are shown beaming with pride at her 2009 graduation from Beloit. Montgomery has pursued a career in military sociology and Westerberg has been with her every step of the way. Sidra Montgomery<sup>09</sup> walked into the office of Sociology Professor Charles Westerberg<sup>94</sup> with a secret. Then a sophomore at Beloit, she was just beginning to explore the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, which aims to help academically astute first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented minority students enroll in doctoral programs. "I'm thinking about doing McNair, but I don't want to get my Ph.D.," she confided to Westerberg. "Let's just see what happens," he recalls saying. "I'll keep your secret." Westerberg, who studies social deviance, says that interaction piqued his interest. "I like that sort of thing," he says. "Especially if it comes from a place of honesty at a gut level." But Montgomery did obtain her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Maryland-College Park in December 2017. Her dissertation, *Coming Home as 'Wounded Warriors': Identity, Stigma, and Status among Post-9/11 Wounded Veterans*, examined the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan wounded veterans in the context of their identity as "wounded warriors." And she had Westerberg's support all the way through. "I feel like a mentor is there to illuminate choices or decisions you're making," says Montgomery. "Charles is very good about telling me what he thinks and offering his advice or wisdom. He's never trying to sway me in one way or another. It's up to me to make the decision." Both Montgomery and Westerberg agree, the mentor-mentee relationship can't just be about checking boxes of attributes. There needs to be a commonality of kinship as people and a certain chemistry. To get to know each other during their first summer of research, Westerberg suggested they play tennis since Montgomery was on Beloit's team. "That was really a moment when we began to feel comfortable with each other," says Westerberg. "I try to find what's important to students outside of school. What makes them a person? What are they into?" Making their connection more personal helped propel the relationship forward and allowed them to be vulnerable with each other in times of need. Montgomery says it was particularly helpful to have Westerberg in her corner during some struggles in graduate school. "If I'm doubting myself or my abilities, he's good at cutting through that noise," says Montgomery. "It was so helpful to have someone I knew I could talk to about things going on in my department. It was nice to have someone who knows the way that I work and knows me." Westerberg says mentors must make mentees feel as though they are on the journey together, because they are. He recalls a moment when Montgomery was in graduate school and wasn't feeling up to the task after receiving feedback on a submission to a sociology journal. "I told her, 'It doesn't matter for our relationship whether you're a shooting star or not.' You share each other's successes, and you rally together when there's failure. This is about growing. I'm trying to grow and she's trying to grow," says Westerberg. In other words, real mentoring is reciprocal. For instance, Westerberg says that Montgomery pushed him to think about sociology in a new way by pursuing a career outside of academia—admittedly a path that most of Westerberg's mentees pursue. "She expanded my knowledge of military sociology. The way she's organized her career has expanded how I advise other people, and now I can say, 'Look, this is possible,'" says Westerberg.

**The Chief:** Hank Woodard Professor Emeritus of Geology Hank Woodard Photo from: Beloit College Archives. Some mentors inspire students through their conversations and advice. For others, it's a way of being, as is the case with Professor Emeritus Hank Woodard, affectionately known by his "leaky-booter" geology students as "The Chief." When Woodard began his career at Beloit in the fall of 1953, little did he know that he'd soon become an inspiration and a living legend to many of his students. But for Woodard, mentoring was just par for the course. "In order to be a good teacher, you have to be a good mentor," says Woodard. "You have to learn how young people think and why they operate the way they do." Bruce Bartleson<sup>56</sup> modeled his long and successful career as a geology professor after Woodard and was among the first to graduate under the tutelage of The Chief. "He stressed creative thinking," says Bartleson. "Instead of asking you to list five minerals in granite, he would give you a sample of granite and ask, 'What's in this?'" After initially struggling in Woodard's class and actually failing his first physical geology exam, Bartleson grasped Woodard's flare for creative questions and overcame the "language barrier" of Woodard's east-coast accent, eventually excelling in the courses. But it was Woodard's work ethic, which had him holding office hours most week nights, that made an impression on Bartleson, even forging his career path early on. "He was an ideal role model," says Bartleson. "He's the reason I became a college professor." Bartleson says he tried to mimic Woodard's enthusiasm and integrity during his more than three-decade-long career at Western Colorado University, which he retired from in 1998. Students bonded with Woodard, and with one another, during geology department field trips to the ancient coastal deposits of the St. Peter Sandstone in Minnesota and to New England. Sometimes the groups camped in the backyard of Woodard's parents when they were in New England. "Those field activities led to close relationships with students," says Woodard. "We were living in the same tents and cooking the same meals." Nancy Banta<sup>74</sup> says the trips were integral to making the geology department feel like a family. "Instead of just learning about the rocky outcrop, we learned about each other," says Banta. Banta, who spent her career in geology and retired in 1989 from the **Bureau of Economic Geology** at the University of Texas-Austin, says those field trips helped prepare her for the male-dominated field of geology. "In the real world at that time, women were .06 percent of the population in petroleum geology," she says. "He didn't treat the women majors any different. You got the experience of working with your colleagues [on those trips]." Despite retiring from Beloit in 1992, Woodard is still "teaching" his former students, often answering their questions through email. "That's what keeps me going," says Woodard.

**Dave DeGeorge:** Head Baseball Coach Dave DeGeorge Photo by: Greg Anderson. You won't find the name Andy Boryczka<sup>98</sup> in the baseball history books at Beloit, nor will you see his jersey hanging from a Sports Center wall, but his impact can still be found—through his recruitment of baseball players and an annual cookout he hosts for the team. For that, he credits a two decades-long relationship with Baseball Coach Dave DeGeorge<sup>89</sup> that began with a simple phone call. Boryczka, a first-generation college student, wasn't sure how to navigate the college process and hadn't even heard of Beloit, despite living 45 minutes away in Harvard, Ill. But he says an early phone call with DeGeorge helped keep him on track with getting into college. "I remember getting that call and telling my folks that I could play college baseball," says Boryczka. "They were just excited that I was going to college." An average student, Boryczka says baseball made sense to him, and that's where his focus was—academics came second. It was DeGeorge who encouraged him to take his schoolwork more seriously, and Boryczka admits his grades were always better during baseball season, even if he wasn't the best player. "He really should have cut me after my freshman year," Boryczka admits. "I managed to hang around long enough to start to improve." Boryczka worked his way into

the lineup, until the team's annual spring break trip to Florida during his senior year, when Coach DeGeorge replaced him with a first-year player. Still, 20 years later, the values DeGeorge instilled live within Boryczka, who's now the director of employee and volunteer engagement at Agrace HospiceCare in Madison, Wis. Boryczka still remembers a drill that DeGeorge called "night and day," which was often used to break up the long Wisconsin winters by getting the players back outside. At the end of the drill, DeGeorge would have players stare up at the sky and take in the moment. Now, Boryczka takes his staff outside to walk or grab coffee and have a similar moment of reflection. "What I was able to learn turned me into the human I am today. I am really conscious of my legacy and my goal of living a life of consequence. I credit a lot of that perspective to what I learned from Dave," says Boryczka. Boryczka has the unique honor of being the only former Beloit College baseball player to have met every member of every team that followed him. He inserts himself as an anchor for students, whether they play baseball or not. Phonathon student workers who happen to get Boryczka on the phone find themselves being interviewed about their interests and connected to other on-campus resources before he makes a gift. "He's not just giving money, he's helping students on the phone advance in what they want to do with their career and their life," says DeGeorge. "He is the most generous and giving person I've ever met in my life." Boryczka is an example of what the word "coachable" means to DeGeorge. Often, the term is associated with statistics, but at Beloit it's code for the ability to develop meaningful relationships starting at recruitment and continuing throughout four years at Beloit and beyond. "Without a doubt, strong, meaningful relationships are the best thing we do here," says DeGeorge. Boryczka, with his voice breaking up, recounts how he received a card from the baseball team after his mother passed away. It contained a personal message from each player. "What this speaks to is Dave as a mentor, a teacher, and a leader—having them understand why it's important to sign this card, to be sincere. That's the secret stuff that gets taught through baseball. He prepares good kids to be good people," says Boryczka. Debra Majeed Professor of Religious Studies and mentor of future mentors Debra Majeed Photo by: Greg Anderson. Tell me how you have fun. Tell me how you get rest. How do you deal with stress? These are just a few of the questions Professor of Religious Studies Debra Majeed asks new faculty members in a soothing voice while meeting with them either in her Morse-Ingersoll office, at a Snappers baseball game, or during a walk in the park. "I try to get a sense of what they will need, what attracted them to Beloit, and what will make them feel empowered or at home here," says Majeed. "Before we talk about work life or survival, we try to get to know each other as people." Majeed's reputation at Beloit College has weight—she's the first African-American woman and the first Muslim to have received tenure in college history. And while that alone would have earned her respect from colleagues and admiration from students, it is her mentoring of other faculty and students that has perhaps the most impactful legacy. Beloit's official faculty-to-faculty mentorship program, organized by Associate Professor of Anthropology and Dean of the College Lisa Anderson-Levy, only has a few absolute requirements for tenure-track faculty: They must make a minimum two-year commitment, the faculty pairs must be cross-departmental, and they must meet at least twice a semester. Non-tenure track faculty also have the option of being mentored by a fellow faculty member if they'll be spending more than a semester at Beloit. Over more than 19 years at the college, Majeed has been both an official and an unofficial mentor for new faculty. "It's just what you do," says Majeed. For Kate Johnston, a tenure-track assistant professor of history who joined the faculty in the fall of 2016, Majeed has been a welcomed resource. The two professors began their mentorship unofficially, and then Johnston selected Majeed as her official mentor through the college's program. "I hadn't had a lot of mentoring as a student. But as a first-year faculty member, everything was new to me—Beloit, liberal arts colleges, the Midwest," says Johnston, who previously taught at Loyola University Maryland. Majeed helped Johnston navigate the ins and outs of co-governmental leadership between faculty and college administration, provided guidance about managing her workload, and advised her to write things down so she'd have notes handy for her second-year review. Majeed did this while getting a sense of Johnston's interests so she could act as a bridge between her and other faculty or staff who could help her complete her goals. "You get a sense of where their interests are intellectually, how they want to pursue classes," Majeed says of new faculty. "Then we begin to talk about strategies, people to get to know." But Johnston isn't the only one getting something from the mentorship. The two professors share strategies for classroom activities, and Johnston introduced Majeed to her student-designed exams, which consist of crowdsourced essay questions for finals. Overall, it's been the sense that someone is looking out for her that's helped Johnston fit in and feel more at ease in her new home. "She helped me feel accepted in a place where I wasn't sure I'd feel that way," says Johnston. In case of any query regarding this article or other content needs please contact: [editorial@plusmediasolutions.com](mailto:editorial@plusmediasolutions.com)

## Classification

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