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Eriq Davis, 16, is giving up part of his summer to take classes and live in Stuart Hall on the University of Dayton's campus, but it's not a sacrifice for the Meadowdale High School junior. It's an eye-opener.

"Living on campus gives me the feeling of what it's like to be in college," he said between classes. "My mother always told me, 'It's not where you come from. It's where you're going.'"

And Davis intends to go to college.

Welcome to Upward Bound's summer academy. The University of Dayton has converted the former bookstore in the center of campus into classrooms for high school students from Meadowdale, Dunbar and Belmont — schools with high drop-out rates and families who never went to college. The program, just in its infancy at the University of Dayton, is making a difference. During the past two years, 20 out of 24 high school graduates in the program headed to college.

The U.S. Department of Education likes those numbers. The University of Dayton just received a $1.27 million grant renewal to continue the year-round program for at-risk students for another five years.

"We're ready for the next chapter," said TyAnn Stewart, Upward Bound director. "We'll be graduating students every year and sending them to college."

Stewart and her team of teachers, tutors, program specialist and assistant are all first-generation college graduates. They speak the students' language, have walked in their shoes. Raised by an aunt and uncle, Stewart graduated from Meadowdale, one of the three local high schools served by the program. During summer vacation as a youth, she attended an academic enrichment program at Andover Philips Academy.

"This doesn't feel like work to me because it's my life's story. I'm called to do this," said Stewart, who went on to earn a degree in psychology with a minor in African-American studies from Colby College before tackling a master's degree in educational psychology at Eastern Michigan University.

"For me, it was important to come back home and take all the skills I learned and apply them."

A plaque propped in Stewart's office window aptly sums up Upward Bound's philosophy: "Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice."

On a typical summer day, some students might be prepping for the Ohio Graduation Test, while others are studying for the ACT college-entrance exam. In a chemistry lab, they're discovering the art of forensic fingerprinting. All are reading two literary classics, Animal Farm and Of Mice and Men, and learning a foreign language — Spanish — and honing their skills in English grammar. Stewart teaches them college readiness skills.

"We focus on character development and skills they will need in college to succeed and finish their degrees," she said. "We focus on a lifestyle."

During the school year, the students receive tutoring, attend workshops, take a tour of colleges and enjoy fun outings at the Schuster Center or Riverscape's ice rink.

"It's amazing all the places we've been," said Louisa Okwudibonye, a 16-year-old junior at Dunbar High School who grew up in Nigeria. "I didn't know what to expect, but it's been a good way for me to learn the culture. I've learned so much, and you get one-on-one attention. Those experiences alone are what I came here for."

For more information about Upward Bound, click on the related link above.
For media interviews, contact TyAnn Stewart, director of Upward Bound, at 937-229-4517.