

Coaching Steers Students to On-Time Graduation

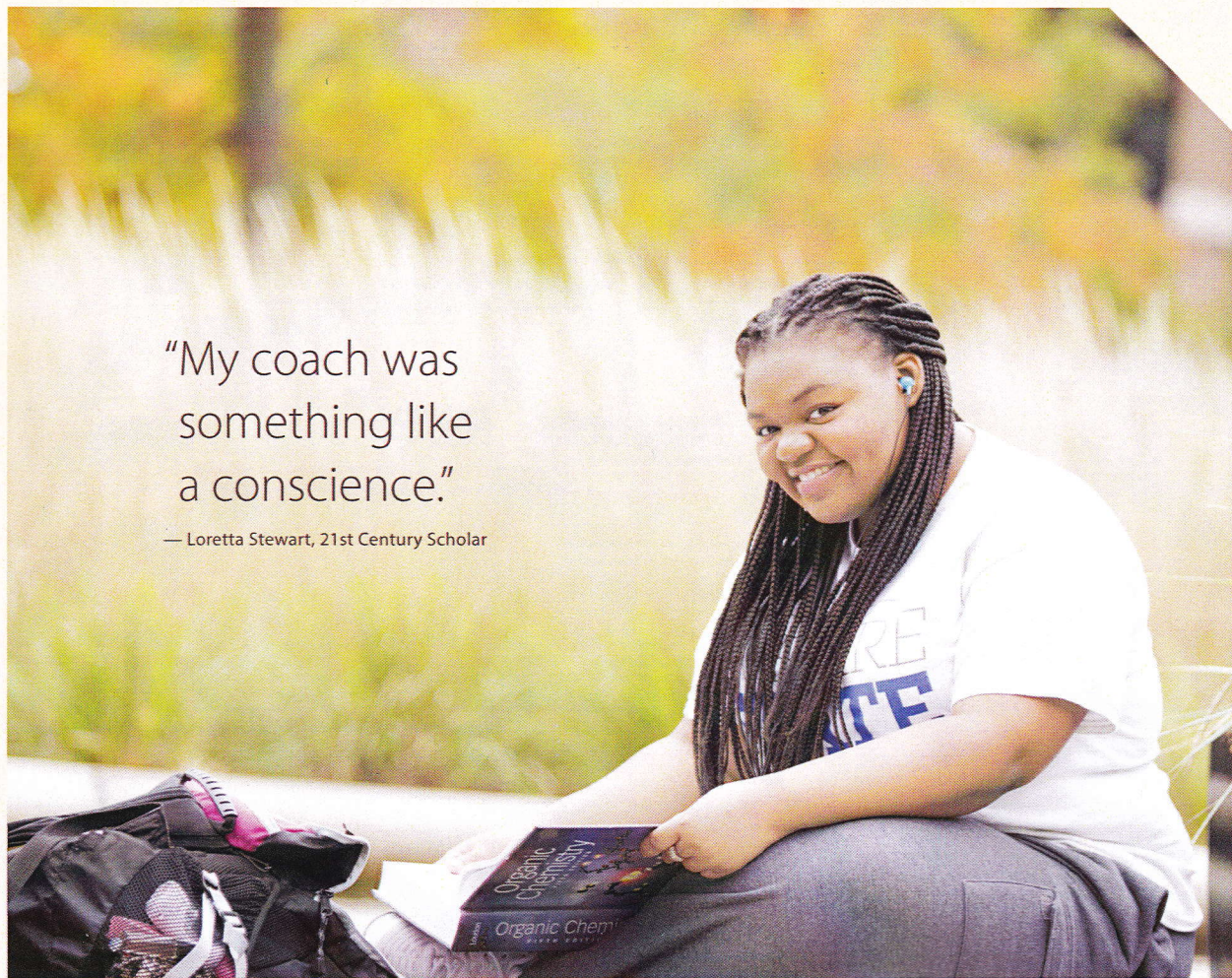
Loretta Stewart can imagine it now.

She's walking across the stage, grabbing that college degree she'll be the first in her family to receive, ready to take the next steps toward a career as a pharmacist.

Now a sophomore majoring in chemistry, Stewart received individual coaching as a first-year student at Indiana State. That same type of coaching currently is in place in the state of Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program at three colleges.

"My coach was something like a conscience."

— Loretta Stewart, 21st Century Scholar



"I will be so proud of myself," she says.

But first Stewart has to stay on track in her bachelor's degree work at Indiana State University. A one-on-one coaching program has helped her get the right start.

As part of its support for innovation in college and career preparation, in 2014 USA Funds provided a \$2.4 million grant to support coaching for 2,500 first-year students through the 21st Century Scholars Program at three schools: Indiana State, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and Ivy Tech Community College. The 21st Century Scholars Program



Linda Maule of Indiana State University says coaching helps students navigate the challenges of college.

Indiana State University's Joshua Powers expects an increase in the retention of 21st Century Scholars next year.



enlisted San Francisco-based InsideTrack to provide coaching to bolster the on-time college completion rates of students in Indiana's early promise scholarship program.

The coaching is part of a larger redesign of 21st Century Scholars, which provides income-eligible students the opportunity to earn up to four years of paid tuition at an Indiana college.

While the 25-year-old program says its students have outpaced their peers in accessing college, they lag behind Indiana's overall full-time college population in earning a two- or four-year degree on time. About 15 percent of 21st Century Scholars receive an associate degree in two years or a bachelor's degree in four.

"Going to college without fulfilling the dream of completing college is a hollow victory," says Teresa Lubbers, Indiana commissioner for higher education. "Leaving school with no credential — and often with debt — is a very unfavorable situation. We need these students to succeed."

Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Ind., piloted InsideTrack coaching for first-year students during the 2013-2014 academic year. Among the students who received coaching were 21st Century Scholars.

"The coaching has helped students to increase self-efficacy, to work against that sense of not belonging, of being an imposter," says Linda Maule, dean of Indiana State's University College program for first-year students. "InsideTrack coaching

helps students develop cognitive and emotional skills to navigate a complex system on their own."

Stewart, the Indiana State student, is a 21st Century Scholar who believes that coaching is the reason she remains on pace to graduate on time. Without it, she says, she'd still be prone to procrastinate, unsure where to go for on-campus help, and unaware of some of the steps to receive financial aid.

"If not for the coaching, I'd be trying to retake the classes I failed my freshman year," says Stewart, a 20-year-old Indianapolis native.

InsideTrack reports that the retention rate for 21st Century Scholars who received coaching last school year was 5.9 percent higher than the retention rate for 21st Century Scholars who did not receive coaching.

Through the 21st Century Scholars coaching initiative, Indiana State wants to build on the early successes of its coaching efforts, continue to evaluate the impact of the work, and adapt the school's student support services as needed. InsideTrack projects an increase of 10 to 15 percent in the college completion rates of 21st Century Scholars served through the coaching program.



Maule, Powers and other Indiana State University officials are building on the early success of student coaching at their school.

Instead, she passed those classes, earning 34 credit hours her freshman year. She continues to abide by the lessons her InsideTrack coach taught her during her first year on campus.

That willingness to continue with the behaviors learned during phone and in-person coaching sessions — even after the coaching ends — is the goal, says Felicia Wetzel, an InsideTrack coach who assisted Stewart.

During one-on-one meetings, coaches and students talk about academic, social and other concerns and establish plans for addressing any issues that arise. The coaches then follow up with students regarding any actions those students were to take.

"My coach was something like a conscience," Stewart says. "I learned that no one else was going to do this for me. I was going to have to stay focused and committed."

The three schools involved this year will continue next academic year using the additional tuition revenue and state funding that would result from the anticipated improvement in student retention.

"The anticipation is that we will see a noticeable bump in retention next year," says Joshua Powers, Indiana State associate vice president for student success. "The resources of USA Funds are extraordinarily important in making that happen. They are jump-starting a process that should pay dividends for years to come." ▽