Seita Scholars Program Highlights

From the very beginning, the Seita Scholars Program has been a bustling program—and this year has been no exception! From a new cohort of students, to a new director, to new and exciting outreach opportunities, it has been a big year for the Program! Here are just a few of the highlights!

Welcoming New Students
Students are the focus of the Seita Scholars Program—with out the amazing scholars that fill this program, it simply would not exist! In August 2011, the Seita Scholars Program was pleased to welcome back 84 returning students and welcome an additional 57 new students, bringing the program to 141 students for the year.

While the numbers are not complete for the 2012-13 school year, the Program estimates that we will serve a total of 160 students for the coming school year, including approximately 40 new students!

Student Graduation
The 2011-12 school year saw an exciting milestone for the Program—the first four-year graduate! Including our Fall, Spring and Summer graduates the Seita Scholars Program now has a total of 15 WMU graduates!

Staffing Changes
In January 2012, the Seita Scholars Program came under the leadership of a new director, Chris Harris, who replaced the founding director, Dr. Yvonne Unrau.

In addition to the new program director, the Program was pleased to add a second DHS Campus Coach, Holly Barra, to the full-time staff in February 2012.

Spreading the Word
This year has marked an increase in the outreach opportunities for the Program. Some of the highlights of our increased outreach include:

- January 2012:
  Seita Scholars Program mentioned in the Governor’s State of the State Address.

- February 2012:
  Seita Scholar appointed to the Michigan Foster Care Review Board.

- May 2012:
  Seita Scholar invited to Washington, D.C., to speak with politicians about the state of the foster care system.

- June 2012:
  The Seita Scholars Program joined the social networking revolution and created its very own Facebook and Twitter accounts to stay connected to students and supporters alike!

- June 2012:
  The state of Michigan approves a $750,000 allocation to the Seita Scholars Program.

- July 2012:
  Four Seita scholars and program staff invited to speak with the Congressional Caucus on Foster Care.

  With your continued assistance and dedication, we hope to carry this amazing momentum over into the new school year! Thank you for your support of the Seita Scholars Program!
Welcome Pack Thank-you

This August, the Seita Scholars Program welcomed its fifth cohort of students! As the Seita Scholars Program celebrated the arrival of this fifth cohort of students, the tradition of collecting items to fill Welcome Packs also celebrated its fifth year.

The tradition of distributing Welcome Packs, which are laundry baskets full of items a college student needs to settle into their Residence Hall, began during the very first year of the Program. From that first year, the program has continued to be overwhelmed by the generosity of the Kalamazoo and WMU communities, who have continued to support this initiative with kind words and donations.

This initiative is about more than providing Seita Scholars with items to fill their room—it is about helping them start college off on the right foot. As one Scholar noted, “Getting the Welcome Packs, to me, felt like Christmas in August. It was great to come and have everything I needed waiting for me.”

Another Scholar stated that, “To me the Welcome Pack was important because the contents in them were very helpful. Some of the items we got I would never have thought I would need. The packs make sure you don’t have to be stressed about having things to start off college, and anything that can reduce stress in college is always helpful."

This year, the Program distributed nearly fifty Welcome Packs to the incoming cohort of students, and provided the returning students with the opportunity to grab supplies for their apartments and residence halls as needed. As we celebrate the closing of another successful start to the school year, we want to take a moment and thank the Kalamazoo and WMU communities for their continued support!

Thank you for your support!

Seeking Career Mentors!

Throughout the summer, the Seita Scholars Program has been actively seeking new mentors for the Volunteer Career Mentor Program. This program, which matches current Seita Scholars with professionals in the student’s field of interest, provides Scholars with the opportunity to engage in their chosen profession prior to graduation.

The summer-long recruitment effort is fueled by some recent, exciting changes to the Career Mentor Program! In the past, as students neared their junior or senior year at WMU, they were encouraged to participate in the Career Mentoring Program. Beginning with the 2012-13 cohort of students, all incoming freshmen will be encouraged to begin their career in higher education with a career mentor.

By targeting students immediately as they arrive at Western Michigan University, the program hopes to provide them with a lasting connection to the career world that they can utilize throughout their time here at WMU.

To help facilitate the success of these matches, the program identified some important changes:

- Reduce the number of “cold” matches where mentor and mentee do not meet prior to being matched
- Increase the number of career mentors available
- Allow mentors to pair with more than one student at a time, as their comfort level allows

Many of these changes have already begun to take place! Over the summer, the Seita Scholars Program hosted its first ever Career Mentor Dinner, where incoming scholars and career mentors gathered to meet prior to being matched. It was a great success—with another dinner planned for early fall!

The Program has also managed to attract over 20 new career mentors in a variety of fields! New mentor applications are still being accepted for mentors in all fields, with the program specifically seeking mentors in fields like:

- The arts (specifically theater)
- Law or criminal justice (lawyers or judges)
- Social work or education

If you or anyone you know might be interested, please visit our website at [www.wmich.edu/fyit/Giving/volunteering.php](http://www.wmich.edu/fyit/Giving/volunteering.php) for more information.
Communication is the key to a good mentoring relationship! Take a moment and ask yourself if you are practicing the following communication skills in your mentoring relationship—or in your other personal relationships:

**Active Listening**
This does not involve thinking, speaking, problem solving or any other response on your behalf! Active listening involves focusing all of your attention on the other person so you can pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues. Really hear what they are saying!

**Paraphrase**
This is a great skill to pair with active listening, as it allows you to really check and see if you heard the other person correctly. Simply listen, and focus on what the person said and how he or she seemed to feel about it, then repeat back to them what you heard to check for accuracy. Remember, this is not an opportunity to offer advice, give opinions or question.

**Open-Ended Questions**
Once you have listened to what the other person has said, and had the opportunity to check-in that you heard accurately, try some open-ended questions to get more information and truly understand the situation.

**“I” Messages**
Utilize “I” messages to explain your feelings, which avoids sounding like you are placing blame. “I” messages also help keep communication open, and allow you to work together to problem solve effectively if you have run into a snag in your relationship.

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**Service Requests**

As the first month of the fall semester comes to a close, the Seita Scholars Program is looking forward to December and the University's Winter Closure. Winter Closure is a 3 week period during which Western Michigan University is closed following the 16 week fall academic term. Preparing for Winter Closure for the Seita Scholars Program is extensive and comprehensive to provide adequate and pleasurable accommodations for those staying on campus during this time. This year, as in years past, we are requesting volunteer assistance with the following:

**Winter Closure Moving Assistance**
Students who stay on campus during this time receive assistance moving out of their residence halls, and into the only hall that remains open during the closure. While move-out and move-in times are still to be determined, assistance will be needed on December 15 for move-out and on January 6 for move-in.

**Winter Closure Meals**
During Winter Closure, the University's dining halls close, meaning that those student staying on campus are responsible to provide their own meals. The Seita Scholars Program, with support from our volunteers, provides our Scholars with one hot meal per day. Prepared meals should be freezable and able to feed 15-20 Scholars.

For more information on volunteering for these activities, please email fyit-info@wmich.edu.

If you are not a currently registered program volunteer, volunteer applications are available online at [www.wmich.edu/fyit/Giving/volunteering.php](http://www.wmich.edu/fyit/Giving/volunteering.php) or you can email info-fyit@wmich.edu for more information!

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**Donor’s Corner**

Throughout the school-year, scholars have access to donated supplies for their residence halls and on-campus apartments. Items that the Program is regularly in need of include:

- Paper products (toilet paper, paper towels, paper plates, napkins, etc.)
- Laundry detergent and other cleaning products
- Non-perishable snack items (residence hall friendly) to stock our food pantry

Thank you so much for your support of the Seita Scholars Program!

For more information on dropping off items, or to inquire about current donation needs, please email [fyit-info@wmich.edu](mailto:fyit-info@wmich.edu).
Important Dates

**September 2012**
Monday, Sept. 3–Labor day recess (no class)
Tuesday, Sept. 4–Classes begin at 8am
Friday, Sept. 7–Bronco Bash
Friday, Sept. 21–Seita Scholars Town Hall Meeting**

**October 2012**
Saturday, Oct. 6–Homecoming**
Monday, Oct. 15–Spring 2013 registration begins
Thursday, Oct. 25–President’s Welcome**

**November 2012**
TBD (tentative)–New Mentor Orientation
TBD–Career Mentor Dinner**
Monday, Nov. 5–Last day to withdraw from classes
Tuesday, Nov. 20–Seita Scholars Town Hall Meeting**
Wednesday, Nov. 21–Thanksgiving recess begins at noon
Monday, Nov. 26–Classes resume

**December 2012**
Saturday, Dec. 1–Deadline to apply for April graduation
*TBD–Finals Week Celebration Events**
*Dec. 10-14: Final Exam Week
Saturday, Dec. 15: Semester Ends (Commencement)
*Dec. 15–January 6: Winter Closure and Events**

* Indicates a time when volunteer support is utilized for events.
** Indicates an event that would be a good event for mentors/mentees to attend together.