Annual Report

2016-2017

Seita Scholars Program

Western Michigan University
In 2007 the Seita Scholars Program was a seed planted by a small group of passionate people with the hope of transforming the lives of youth who have experienced foster care. Over the last nine years, the Seita Scholars Program has grown to be an internationally recognized program that is the largest and most comprehensive support program for college students who have experienced foster care. With our ten year anniversary approaching, the Seita Scholars Program remains committed to transforming the lives both within our own Kalamazoo and Western Michigan University communities, as well as across the country.

The goal for each and every Seita Scholar is not only to earn a bachelor’s degree from Western Michigan University, but also to be career and life-ready by the time they earn their degree. In line with this goal, the Seita Scholars Program encourages scholars to participate in opportunities, such as internships and study abroad, that help them build the skills they need to successfully transition into careers after college graduation. This past academic year, twelve Seita Scholars participated in an internship, seven studied abroad—visiting six different countries, and twenty-two graduated!

We also celebrated community-wide successes such as the second annual Foster Care Awareness Walk that drew attention to the needs of youth who experience foster care. Over 100 participants within the Kalamazoo community engaged in the Foster Care Awareness Walk, which was held on May 20, 2017. In addition to raising awareness, we raised funds to support our student emergency fund.

As we reflect upon the past year and prepare for a new one, we want to recognize and thank our donors, mentors, volunteers, and campus and community partners for their immeasurable support that makes our success possible. I look forward to another year of exciting new accomplishments to round out a decade of astounding growth towards achieving our goals in our program, community, state, and across the nation!

In service,

Ronicka D. Hamilton
Director
**PURPOSE**

WMU’s goal is to increase opportunities for youth who experienced foster care to pursue higher education and to provide support that promotes success and well-being throughout their undergraduate experience.

**OBJECTIVE**

The primary objectives of the Seita Scholars Program are to promote academic success toward college graduation that leads to professional employment while maintaining personal well-being, developing career aspirations, and building leadership capabilities.

**GOALS**

The program has four main goals:

- Create **transitions** that lead to success in college and career for WMU students from foster care ages 18 to 25.
- Develop a **community** of scholars among WMU students who experienced foster care, and create a safe community to deconstruct and reconstruct identity.
- **Educate** WMU students from foster care and their support network to enhance professional skill set.
- **Transform** WMU students from foster care by integrating experiences of one’s past to build opportunities for the future.
OVERVIEW

To increase successful outcomes among youth who experienced foster care in the state of Michigan, the Seita Scholars Program:

- Provides **cost of attendance scholarships** to undergraduate students who experienced foster care and are attending Western Michigan University.
- Supports students in accessing additional financial resources and scholarships specific to youth who have experienced foster care, allowing students to maximize their **potential to graduate from college with little to no debt**.
- Supports students in need of **year-round housing** on campus to ensure a stable living environment.

GROWTH

Since its inception in 2008, the Seita Scholars Program has seen a growing number of students from foster care who attend Western Michigan University but are not enrolled in the Seita Scholars Program. While these students do not receive financial support from the program, beginning this academic year the Seita Scholars Program is proud to announce a formalized support service for WMU students who experienced foster care but are not in the Seita Scholars Program.

The Seita Scholars Extended Support Services (ESS) will provide necessary support to students who experienced foster care but are not eligible for the full financial support of the Seita Scholars Program. Support provided through ESS will be led by our Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Liaison and include support with applying for scholarships, DHHS paperwork assistance, and more.

Like the coaching that Seita Scholars receive, students participating in ESS will receive support based on their individual need. To date, the Seita Scholars Program has touched the lives of close to 450 Western Michigan University students. Through ESS, we expect that number to soar even higher!
BRIANA D.

WMU Graduation Date: Spring 2020
Major: Occupational Therapy
Minor: Addiction Studies

Career Goals: I want to become an occupational therapist and study abroad.

WMU Favorites: My favorite things to do at WMU is going to the Rec Center and rock climbing.

The Seita Scholars Program Means: This program gives me the opportunity to create a future for myself and be successful.

To Program Supporters:
I wouldn’t be in college without the Seita Scholars Program which means I wouldn’t be in college without you.

Recent Accomplishments:

July 2016
- Summer Early Transition (SET) Week took place from July 10-15, welcoming new Seita Scholars to campus.
- Welcome Pack Drop Off

August 2016
- Welcome Week kicked off the start of the 2015-16 academic year.
- The Seita Scholars Program celebrated 4 summer graduates.

September 2016
- President and Mrs. Dunn welcomed the Seita Scholars to campus with a pool party and barbecue at their home.
- The Seita Scholars Program presented to youth from Macomb County DHHS.
- The Parents’ Futures group launched a new initiative, providing children of Seita Scholars with a new book each month of the academic year.

October 2016
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on preparing to transition upon graduation.
- The Seita Scholars Program co-hosted a Design Studio, sharing programming information with professionals from 8 states.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Financial Preparation.
- Seita Scholars SAFE attended a Lyceum Lecture on the prevention of lesbian, gay, and trans suicides.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a mentor/mentee bowling event at Pinz Bowling Alley.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted the annual President’s Welcome.
- The Seita Scholars Program co-hosted a Design Studio, sharing programming information with professionals from 8 states.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Job Search.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a mentor/mentee bowling event at Pinz Bowling Alley.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted the annual President’s Welcome.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Town Hall meeting with students.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Transportation.
- Seita Scholars SAFE attended a Lyceum Lecture on the prevention of lesbian, gay, and trans suicides.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a mentor/mentee bowling event at Pinz Bowling Alley.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted the annual President’s Welcome.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Town Hall meeting with students.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Transportation.
- The Parents’ Futures identity group hosted their second annual Halloween Party for the children of students and staff.

November 2016
- Seita Scholars Ambassadors organized a trip for students and staff to visit Gull Meadow Farms.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation on Professional Environment and New Job.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation on Job Search.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a mentor/mentee bowling event.
- The Seita Scholars Program presented to potential volunteers and donors of the Westside Kiwanis.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Thanksgiving Lunch for students and staff.
IN REVIEW

December 2016

- Final exam week kicked off with the annual Finals Week Celebration, supported by volunteers.
- 27 Seita Scholars made the Dean’s List at the conclusion of the fall semester.
- 6 Seita Scholars graduated during the December commencement ceremony.
- AFSCME cooked a holiday meal for students and staff to enjoy together.
- The Seita Scholars Program, with the support of donors, held a White Elephant Gift Exchange for students.

January 2017

- Seita Scholars Program partnered with Outreach and Training to present on the Fostering Success Coach Model for the WMU Department of History.
- Seita Scholars Program held the spring Town Hall Meeting.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Seeking Employment, Professional Attire, and the Professional Environment.

February 2017

- Seita Scholars Program presented to the Ladies Library Association
- The Resilience Project kicked off in partnership with the Kalamazoo Promise, Friendship Village and Foundation Scholars Initiative.

March 2017

- Seita Scholars Program Director, Ronicka Hamilton, attended NASPA, a national student affairs conference.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Transportation.

April 2017

- Lady Butterflies and Engaging Men presented Talent and International Fashion Show.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a Graduation Preparation Seminar on Financial Preparation.
- The Seita Scholars Program held a Finals Week Potluck for students.

May 2017

- The inaugural Foster Care Awareness Walk, sponsored by the Seita Scholars Program, was held in honor of Foster Care Awareness Month.
- With the support of the Center for Fostering Success graduate student team, the Seita Scholars Program presented data collected from students about the impact of the program.
- The Seita Scholars Program hosted a 100 Seita Scholars Graduation Celebration.
- The Seita Scholars Program celebrated 9 Spring graduates.

June 2017

- The Seita Scholars celebrated 2 summer graduates.
- The Seita Scholars Program held a Summer Graduation Celebration Breakfast.

REALITE P.

WMU Start Date: Fall 2016
Major: Behavioral Science
Minor: Social Work

Career Goals: I plan to continue at Western in the behavioral analysis Master’s program, as well as the counseling psychology doctoral program. After my education I plan to work in an educational setting as a BCBA and counseling psychologist. I truly appreciate education and the opportunities for success that it brings to everyone.

WMU Favorites: My favorite things about WMU are attending Psi Chi meetings, projects like the Resilience Project, and working for the Martin Luther King Jr. Academy.

The Seita Scholars Program Means:
Being in the Seita Scholars Program means having support and encouragement from a team while trying to achieve your goals. The program has taught me to be more comfortable and confident around individuals who I am not familiar with. My campus coach, Peter has done a great job in influencing my goals of wanting to educate others.

To Program Supporters:
Thank you so much, to those who support the Seita Scholars Program., because of your support I know that I will have security and support from the amazing people that work with Seita. Without your support, Seita Would not exist, and without Seita I would not be in college.

Recent Accomplishments:
Psi Chi member, Teaching Assistant for psychology courses, Academy Leader for Martin Luther King Jr. Academy, Resilience Project member.
**SEITA SCHOLARS PERFORMANCE**

Research has shown that foster youth are not only less likely to enroll in college but they are also less likely to graduate with a college degree in 6 years. Only 2-4 percent of foster youth are expected to graduate college, compared to 24% of their non-foster care peers in the general population. The table below compares Seita Scholars who are First Time in Any College (FTIAC) to other FTIAC freshman at WMU in the same semester. The table shows that Seita Scholars are less academically prepared for college, and this academic achievement gap persists in the first semester of college, as evidenced by lower Fall GPAs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2014 (Cohort= 41)</th>
<th>Fall 2015 (Cohort= 44)</th>
<th>Fall 2016 (Cohort= 52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average ACT</td>
<td>33 - 18.58 2,970 22.29</td>
<td>33 - 19.52 2,815 22.36</td>
<td>35 - 18.17 2,789 22.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA</td>
<td>30 - 3.08 2,936 3.35</td>
<td>33 - 3.06 2,931 3.35</td>
<td>36 - 3.05 2,872 3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Semester Fall</td>
<td>33 - 2.49 2,912 2.96</td>
<td>32 - 2.04 2,912 2.96</td>
<td>37 - 2.57 2,860 2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**By Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2014 (Cohort= 41)</th>
<th>Fall 2015 (Cohort= 44)</th>
<th>Fall 2016 (Cohort= 52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12 - 2.61 2,070 3.10</td>
<td>9 - 2.17 2,072 3.09</td>
<td>16 - 2.56 1,894 3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>14 - 2.04 436 2.50</td>
<td>12 - 2.58 431 2.53</td>
<td>12 - 2.71 530 2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 - 3.07 430 2.83</td>
<td>11 - 1.34 454 2.83</td>
<td>9 - 2.39 436 2.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROGRAM SUPPORTS**

The Seita Scholars Program is designed to address the academic gaps that many youth who experienced foster care encounter, which lead to the initial achievement gaps demonstrated in the data above. Among these program supports are:

- Scholarships to undergraduate students who experienced foster care and are attending Western Michigan University
- 7 Campus Coaches (24 hour on call support, meeting student needs at locations and times that are convenient to the student)
- Access to additional financial supports for youth who experienced foster care (e.g. the Education and Training Voucher, Michigan Education Trust Fostering Futures scholarships, Youth in Transition funds, and more)
- Support with other systems (e.g., courts, human services, Medicaid, public assistance)
- Student care packages (Welcome Week, Exam Week, Campus Breaks)
- Graduation preparation assistance (Graduation Preparation Seminars)
- Year-round campus housing
- Financial aid and financial planning assistance
- Work study, employee skill development
- Academic assessment, support and monitoring
- Campus engagement and social connections
- Cultural and personal identity development
- Leadership development
- Career mentoring
- Emergency funding support
**Program Highlights**

The Seita Scholars program is a learner-centered program that encourages students to achieve academically, while also taking advantage of all the opportunities that Western Michigan University has to offer, such as internships and study abroad experiences. Below are some of the academic and professional highlights of the Seita Scholars program in the 2016-2017 school year:

- The Seita Scholars Program reached their 100th graduate
- One Seita Scholar was named a Presidential Scholar—the highest honor a WMU student can receive
- 54 students made the Dean’s List
- 15 students increased their GPA by at least 1 point
- 12 students participated in an internship
- 7 students studied abroad
- Students visited 6 different countries including Spain, China, Italy, South Korea, South Africa, and the Netherlands

**Persistence to Graduation**

At the conclusion of summer I 2017, the Seita Scholars Program has 111 graduates of Western Michigan University, with 1 additional Seita Scholar graduating from another institution. This brings the graduation rate of Seita Scholars far above the national average for youth who experienced foster care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seita Scholar Cohort</th>
<th>Number (#) in Cohort</th>
<th>Number (#) of WMU Graduates</th>
<th>Percent (%) Graduated from WMU</th>
<th>Number (#) Currently Enrolled at WMU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LESLY F.**

**WMU Start Date:** September 2014  
**Expected Graduation:** April 2017  
**Major:** Criminal Justice and Spanish  
**Career Goals:** I would like to help people in the field of criminal justice, as a probation officer. It is important to me to always show empathy to others.

**WMU Favorites:** My WMU favorites are playing soccer and volleyball at the student rec center, visiting the Seita Scholars office, and studying in Sangren Hall (4th floor).

**The Seita Scholars Program Means:** The Seita Scholarship program has changed the perspective of my life. I really value the campus coach support. I feel like I wouldn’t be where I am now without the program. The program is like family to me.

**To Program Supporters:** The program make our lives easier and helps to create a smooth transition to campus. Thank you for helping us to reach our educational goals.

**Recent Accomplishments:**  
Dean’s List (multiple semesters), Phi Sigma PI Honors Fraternity, Completed semester-long study abroad trip in Spain. (fall 2016), WMU “Who’s Who” award recipient. (spring 2017)

The 2016-17 Cohort of Seita Scholars are pursuing over 25 different majors in the sciences, arts, aviation, education and professional degree programs at WMU

[Image: Photograph of a person]
Community Partners
- Arcadia Ales
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care of Southwest Michigan
- Second Reformed Church
- St. Catherine of Sienna

2017-17 Major Support
- Julie Falconer (in memory of Bruce Falconer)
- Lynn & Dean Fiegel
- Michigan Education Trust (MET)
- Paul & Bonnie MacGrayne
- Pete & Libby Seaver
- PNC Bank
- Speckard-Knight Charitable Foundation