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Seita Fall Welcome Luncheon

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• Good afternoon and welcome to the second Fall Seita Scholars Program Fall Luncheon. I always like to say how pleased I am to welcome attendees to our events. This event, though, holds special meaning to all of us here. I truly could not be happier to see each and every one of you and be part of this celebration of student success.

• First, I'd like to acknowledge our special guests:

  - **James McHale**--senior vice president for programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

  - **John Seita**--three-time Western Michigan University alumnus and the namesake to this program he has helped build.

  - **Colleagues** from the Michigan Dept. of Human Services and Kalamazoo Valley Community College

  - **Faculty, staff** and administrators of Western Michigan University and a colleague from KVCC

  - Most important, the 2008 and 2009 incoming classes of **Seita Scholars**.

• You know, it's been more than two years since three key members of our campus community--Penny Bundy, Mark Delorey and Yvonne Unrau (they're all supposed to be at the lunch)--met John Seita and brainstormed their way into an idea that literally captured the hearts of our campus community as well as those we have shared it with around the country.
• It's a simple idea really. We decided Western Michigan University could become the support system for a group of students who did not have one. We would develop an academic home and haven and a campus network for students who had aged out of foster care and who had the desire to attend and succeed in college. We could start to level the playing field for them.

• It's an idea that has resonated as we've shared it. We asked for assistance and received generous support from organizations like the Kellogg Foundation, who Mr. McHale represents. We've also received assistance from individuals on our campus and in the broader community--people who want nothing more than to help students succeed.

• Last year at this time, we welcomed our first class of Seita Scholars. There were 51 of you from 13 Michigan counties. Twenty-seven of you are back with us this semester. We could not be more proud of what you've accomplished. I could not be prouder of what we've learned and what we've achieved together. To the fall 2008 class of Seita Scholars, I have to say, Welcome Back! You succeeded and we've got great hopes for your next steps and continued success.

• I've had a chance to get to know many of you over the past year. Last year at about this time, I think a few of the Team Seita members blew past me in the annual Campus Classic Homecoming Run. I remember thinking then that I'd better find out more about who you are.

• This year, there are 47 new Seita Scholars--12 transfer students and 35 freshmen--who come from 19 Michigan counties. Welcome.
• New Seita Scholars, I need to convey to you the same simple message I gave to last year's group. (This is a reminder to them as well.) Work hard. Study hard. Reach out for help when you need it and take advantage of all the opportunities you find here.

• There's a stage in Miller Auditorium across which our graduates walk when they've earned their degrees. Each graduate's name is announced, and he or she comes forward to receive their degree. I'll be waiting on that stage at Miller to shake your hand and present you with the diploma you will have earned. There are people in this room today who will move heaven and earth to help you make that happen. We know you have what it takes to succeed.

Thank you.