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Seita Fall Welcome Luncheon
John M. Dunn
Sept. 30, 2010

- Good afternoon and welcome to the third 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.
- Dr. John Seita, for whom this program was named, is not able to be with us today, but I know he's here in spirit--as he is whenever even small groups of this wonderful program gather.
- We do have with us today some special guests who are here to help us celebrate the occasion. First, I'd like to acknowledge WMU Trustee Ken Miller, who is here with his brother Jerry Miller. We're also delighted to welcome Jerry Metzger from State Farm Insurance Co., who is visiting us today.
- Next, I want to acknowledge representatives from some very generous organizations that have helped make the Seita Program a success over the past three years and are helping position the program to better serve our students as we move forward.

-**Terry Mulvihill** from the AT&T Foundation

-**Nancy Taber** from the Guido A. and Elizabeth H. Binda Foundation

-**Sharon Anderson** from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation

-**Floyd (Bud) Parks** from the Harold and Grace Upjohn Foundation

-Faculty, staff and administrators of Western Michigan University

-Most important, the 2008 and 2009 classes of Seita Scholars AND the 2010 incoming class of Seita Scholars.

- You know, it's been more than three years since three key members of our campus community--Penny Bundy, Mark Delorey and Yvonne Unrau--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 organizations whose representatives I just introduced--the AT&T Foundation, the Binda Foundation the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Upjohn Foundation. We received support from the Kellogg Foundation, the Michigan Campus Compact, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation.
- 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. That support has come from in-kind gifts and supplies and donated services. To date, that private support for this program totals more than \$1 million. And we've received generous assistance from the Michigan Department of Human Services, which has provided a full-time foster care worker to support our students.

- Why this outpouring of assistance and support? It's all about you, our students. All of us have had people who helped us in college and we know how important that support is. Someday you will be in a position to "pay it forward" and help someone else through an important period of their life, but right now, the focus is on you and your success.

- Two years ago at this time, we welcomed our very first class of Seita Scholars. There were 51 of you from 13 Michigan counties. More than half--27--of that first incoming class was back last fall, and 22 of you are still making progress toward your degree. Two Seita Scholars from that original class have earned their degrees. We could not be more proud of what you've accomplished. I could not be prouder of what we've learned--from you--and what we've achieved together. To the members of the fall 2008 class of Seita Scholars, I have to say, Welcome Back—again! You succeeded and we've got great hopes for your next steps and continued success.

- Last year, we welcomed 47 new Seita Scholars for fall 2009 and 38 of you are back this fall. That's 81 percent of you. This fall, we welcome our largest ever class of new Seita Scholars--53 students. Next fall, I hope to welcome every one of you back, because that will mean that every one of you has succeeded.

- Our Seita Scholars now number 113. You come from three states and, within Michigan, you hail from 28 counties. Your chosen majors put you in all seven of our degree-granting colleges.

- I've had a chance to get to know many of you over the past two years, and I look forward to getting to know even more of you this year. Every year at Homecoming, I run in the Campus Classic and members of Team Seita blow right past me. I

understand there are at least two Team Seitas running this year. Show some mercy, please, and sometime during the event, stop and say hello and introduce yourself.

- New Seita Scholars, I need to convey to you the same simple message I've shared with earlier classes. Work hard. Study hard and take advantage of all the opportunities you find here. But most of all, reach out for help when you need it. All of us have gotten to where we are in life because someone has been there to help us when we needed it. We're here to help you succeed.

- 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 the degree. I'll be waiting on that stage at Miller to shake your hand and hand you the diploma you've 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. We're here to offer our help. Please don't hesitate to ask. We can't wait to celebrate your success.

Thank you.