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Fall Welcome for Seita Scholars

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• Good afternoon. This is the fifth time we have held a formal fall welcome for students in the Seita Scholars Program. It's an event that holds special meaning to me, because each year it is a celebration of student success--and each year there is more and more evidence of success to celebrate.

• The basic idea for the Seita Program is a simple one. It is this: Western Michigan University can be the support system for a group of students who do not already have one. We have developed an academic home and haven and a campus network for students who have aged out of foster care and who have the desire to attend and succeed in college. We want to level the playing field.

• 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, the AT&T Foundation, the Binda Foundation, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Upjohn Foundation. We received support from the Michigan Campus Compact, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation of Ann Arbor. We have with us this afternoon Gerald and Marueen Knight from the Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation.

• The idea is so powerful because every one of us--all the professors, administrators, staff members you work with--all of us succeeded only because we had the help of someone along the way. This idea is powerful because it reminds us to look back and be cognizant of how we've been helped and to look forward and find a way to help a new generation of students. 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.

• Four years ago at this time--fall 2008--we welcomed our very first class of Seita Scholars. There were 51 from 13 Michigan counties. As we welcome you all here this fall--new and returning students--your numbers have reached more than 160. Each fall, I look forward to welcoming every single one of you back, because that means you have succeeded.

• A few Seita Scholars--15--have earned their degrees. Many more are on a solid track to graduation. We could not be more proud of what they and you have accomplished. I am amazed at what we've learned--from you--and what we've achieved together. To the members of those previous fall classes 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.

• I always like to close my welcome to new Seita Scholars with this reminder 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. As I said earlier, 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 reach your academic goals.

• 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 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 accomplish this important milestone in your life. We're here to offer our help. Please don't hesitate to ask. We can't wait to celebrate your success.

Thank you.