



Western Michigan University Seita Scholars Program Frequently Asked Questions



OVERVIEW

Please provide an overview of the program.

The Seita Scholars program provides campus-based support to eligible students who have aged out of foster care and enrolled at Western Michigan University. The program provides students with practical support through three stages of the college experience: transitioning to WMU from foster care, continuous enrollment, and transition from graduation to career. When students stop or drop out of college, the program also offers assistance with a plan for next steps. The program provides a wide range of support services including: 24-hour campus coach support, student emergency funds, career mentors, social events and other activities to support campus engagement and career preparation. The program works collaboratively with other departments on campus and organizations in the community to best support students' needs and opportunities.

The program includes the Seita Scholarship, which is a full tuition scholarship funded by Western Michigan University (WMU). The scholarship pays for tuition of undergraduate courses at WMU. Books, fees, housing, food and other living expenses are not included in the scholarship; however, most or all of these costs may be covered by financial aid and available state support, thereby making it possible for a Seita scholar to earn an undergraduate degree with few or no student loans.

The Program goal is to increase opportunities for young people who have aged out of foster care to pursue higher education and to provide supports that promote success and well-being throughout the undergraduate experience at WMU. The program aims to create a community of scholars among this segment of WMU's student population. More than providing these students with an undergraduate education, we offer strategies--individual and systemic--to help youth from foster care transition into adulthood through the experience of higher education.

Who is Dr. John Seita?

This WMU scholarship is named to honor Dr. John Seita who is a three-time alum of WMU. Dr. Seita understands the challenges facing foster youth who are aging out of the foster care system. At the age of 8 years, he was removed from his mother's home and spent the remainder of his childhood and adolescence in multiple foster homes, detention facilities, group care settings and on the streets. He lived in 15 out-of-home placements during his journey through care. Dr. Seita has dedicated his life to teaching and training future social workers about the challenges and strengths of young people who are aging out of the foster care system.

Can you provide an overview of the youth who participate, including academic background and demographics of the youth who participate?

Yes, 75% of students in the program are beginners (or freshman) and 25% of students enter the program as transfer students. Nearly all beginners are First Time In Any College (FTIAC) students. In regards to ethnicity, 48% of our students are Black or African American, 41% are white, 3.9% are Hispanic, 3.9% are 2 or more races, and 3.1% are of other races. 60% of our students identify as female and 40% identify as male. Seita Scholars represent 43 counties and 39 academic majors. ACT/GPA All students have either earned their High School Diploma or their GED as per the requirements to be admitted into WMU. Seita Scholars must meet the admission criteria for WMU to be entered in the program. Most students come from within the state of Michigan, with a very small number of students have come from out of state over the years. There are also a small number of students that qualify for the program that are considered refugee students.

What are the eligibility criteria for the program?

To be eligible for the Seita Scholars Program, including the tuition scholarship, applicants must:

- Qualify for the Educational Training Voucher (ETV) or Refugee Education Voucher (REV) in their states:
 - In foster care after 14th birthday OR
 - Adopted from foster care after 16th birthday
 - AND:
 - Have a high school diploma or GED
 - Attending an accredited college or vocational program
 - Under the age of 21
- Be admitted to WMU as a first-time freshman or transfer student
- Seita Scholars Program Application (includes essay questions that will be considered in the selection of Seita scholars). In addition, applicant interviews may be requested.

How do youth learn about the program?

Most Seita Scholars learn about the program through their caseworkers or through their high school guidance counselors. Also, when prospective students apply to WMU, they are asked to indicate on the WMU Admissions Application if they were in foster care on or after their 14th birthday. Once this information is gathered, we reach out to those students to determine whether or not they are eligible.

Can you describe the relationship (if any) between the program and Michigan's child welfare staff?

The Seita Scholars program works closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS). Two of the five campus coaches are full-time employed by DHS, but are assigned to work on WMU's campus in the Seita Scholars office. DHS campus coaches serve a variety of roles in addition to their responsibilities as a Seita campus coach. DHS campus coaches act as primary or secondary caseworkers for some scholars as well as DHS liaisons for all Seita Scholars. As a liaison to DHS, they assist students with any questions or assistance needed with navigating the system. They may also take letters to Kalamazoo DHS, sit in on various meetings, look up information for students in DHS systems, facilitate Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) meetings, complete closed case Youth In Transition (YIT) requests, and assist with Educational Training Vouchers (ETV). MYOI in Kalamazoo County operates as a partnership between DHS and Western Michigan University. Fostering Success Michigan (FSM) operates at the statewide level to encourage connection between universities and colleges, DHS, Local College Access Networks, and other local organizations focused on helping youth in the county. The Seita Scholars Program Director and the Fostering Success Michigan (FSM) Directors meet monthly with Kalamazoo County DHS headquarters. Also, the Director of the Seita Scholars Program meets monthly with the DHS campus coaches, their DHS supervisors, and the program manager at Kalamazoo County DHS. When needed, the Seita Scholars Program Director will attend ad hoc meetings with the Kalamazoo County DHS Director. There is also a working relationship with Kalamazoo County DHS to provide internships to Seita Scholars working towards degrees in related fields wishing to gain hands-on experience.

Is the Seita program offered at other colleges or universities?

No, the Seita Scholars program is only offered to Western Michigan University students.

Do other colleges or universities in Michigan offer a similar program and if so do you work together as a consortium?

Yes, there are programs at other universities in Michigan that offer a range of support for foster youth alumni. Some of these programs include:

- The University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) – Blavin Scholars Program
- The University of Michigan (Flint) - Program Name TBD
- Michigan State University – Fostering Academics Mentoring Excellence (FAME!) Program
- Ferris State University – Ferris Youth Initiative and Mentorshape Program
- Aquinas College – Fostering Success Scholarship
- Baker College in Flint – Program Name TBD
- Wayne State University – Transitioning to Independence Program
- Eastern Michigan University – MAGIC Program
- Saginaw Valley State University - Program Name TBD

COACHING/MENTORING

What is the difference between Coaching and Mentoring?

- Campus Coaches: The 5 campus coaches are full time employees (3 of WMU, 2 of DHS). They work directly with students to achieve their educational goals at WMU while addressing challenges that surface across seven life domains (list domains in a footnote). Coaching staff are available to students 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Coaches are trained to offer skill-based solutions and support to students in “real time.”
- Career Mentors: Career mentors are community professionals who volunteer are matched with students by common career field interests. Mentors are provided #hours of training by the program and are expected to meet with their assigned student #hours per month for a minimum of one-year. Mentors are encouraged to provide the student opportunities to observe, experience and discuss professional settings and scenarios in an effort to expose students to new possibilities and begin the work of building a career network. In fall 2012, the program had # 1:1 mentor: student matches.
- Peer Mentors: Peer mentors are Seita Scholars who have been at WMU for at least a year. These students offer peer advice and share past experiences on transitioning from foster care to college and navigating the university system. Each peer mentor is assigned incoming students to reach out to and communicate with prior to their arrival on campus as well as throughout the year. In fall 2012, the program hired four peer mentors to support 44 students. Peer mentors work 8 hours per week.

What is the role of coaches if the expected ratio of coach to student is 1:25?

The role of the campus coach is to guide, support and challenge Seita Scholars with all aspects of entry, assimilation, and participation in college life, as well as transition to adulthood. Campus coaches also have a role in preparing students for college graduation and the transition to career. All Campus coaches have an understanding about the effects of childhood trauma and the foster care system on how young people from foster care perceive and engage with their world. Coaches are also informed about resources available to foster youth and assist students in receiving such benefits. Coaches engage in problem solving with scholars and monitor academic progress and perform periodic assessments/check-up as well as promote personal success, academic success, and overall well-being. They are often called upon to teach students to advocate for themselves in university processes and community services (financial aid, admissions, academics, etc.). Campus coaches also participate in the planning, implementation, and oversight of campus visits for potential Seita Scholars, orientation for admitted scholars, group meetings, and summer camp and/or housing arrangements. Also, they frequently perform assessments of needs, experience and independent living skills. Campus coaches are not caseworkers, but they provide knowledge, insight, and help facilitate students in building their skill base.

What roles, if any do the coaches or mentors have during semester breaks?

A member of the coaching staff is on-call for 24 hours a day at all times of the year. In addition to being on-call, the Seita Scholar program office is fully or partially open during all semester breaks and programming is provided to students during these times. During university closure periods, the program hires additional student employment to provide programming, and staff is available on call.

Do coaches and mentors continue with the same student every year?

Typically, students will continue with the same coach assignment every year. However, every year students are notified of a possible “campus coach switcheroo” needed to accommodate new students or a change in staffing. When this happens, students are provided the opportunity to choose if they wish to change or stay with their assigned coach. Although it rarely happens, students may also request to change their coach at any time. In these instances, the director typically steps in to assist the student in requesting the change of their assigned coach and facilitates the transition. The foster care experience is typically fraught with a great deal of change (e.g., change in caseworkers, placement, schools). In order to provide the students with consistency and the opportunity to have more experience working through the challenges of longer-term relationships, we try to avoid switching coaches and students unless absolutely necessary. Coaches are trained to provide a consistent level of support using the “coach model of support.” As such, it is possible for a student to engage with any coach in the program and receive a consistent level of support. This team concept is essential to help students to not become too dependent on the 1:1 relationship with their assigned coach, since that relationship formally ends when a student leaves the program, drops out of school or graduates.

What is the frequency of contact?

The frequency of contact depends on the student and their needs from the campus coaches. Coaches spend approximate 60-70% of their work time in direct contact with students. Direct contact includes: e-mail or voicemail, texting, phone calls, and face –to-face meetings. The coaches are required to log any contact they have with students – phone call, text message, face to face interactions, etc. This gives the coach an idea of who they communicated with each month, how much, and if there were students they did not communicate with at all. Some students come in multiple times a week and some come in much less frequently. Also, it depends on the time of year and the needs of the student.

How are assignments made?

For the most part, assignments are made based on which coaches have available spaces. Students with active foster care cases are assigned to DHS coaches when possible. Students with siblings on campus are given preference so that they may share the same coach.

What training, if any, do coaches and mentors receive?

Campus coaches are required to have some clinical knowledge in their educational background or training. WMU coaches are required to have a master's degree in social work or counseling psychology. They also must have an active working knowledge or experience with the child welfare system. The training program for coaches is currently evolving as our program grows, however each coach receives specific training on the coaching model. Career mentors are required to have a bachelor's degree in their field and attend an orientation on how to build a successful relationship with their mentee.

HOUSING

Who pays for student housing?

The Seita Scholarship covers tuition only. Students rely on funds available through their financial aid package to pay for housing, as well as other living and school expenses. During all semester breaks, the Seita Scholars program covers the cost of on-campus housing for students remaining in the residence halls during this time. This cost is approximately \$20 per day per student. WMU's Office of Residence Life pays for additional residence life staff during these periods.

Is it both on campus and off-campus housing?

No, as part of the Seita Scholars program agreement, students are required to live on campus. WMU offers traditional residence hall style living as well as apartment style living on-campus, giving our students the option to choose which type of living arrangement is most conducive to their needs. The on-campus housing requirement is part of the financial model of the program. For every one dollar paid by WMU in tuition to the student, there is a return of \$1.25 when students pay residence, dining and other fees to the university.

EXPENSES

How do students pay for their additional expenses?

As mentioned in the eligibility criteria, students receive Education Training Voucher (ETV) or Refugee Education Voucher (REV) which provides students with \$2,500 a semester (up to \$5,000 a year) that may be used to cover other expenses such as housing, food, books, transportation, and daycare expenses.

SUPPORT

What areas of remedial or academic support do you provide?

The Seita Scholars program does *not* duplicate other support services available on campus. Instead, a main function of the program is to connect students with the academic programs available on campus by helping students gain awareness of their needs, remind them of information as needed, and teaching them how to assess, participate and benefit from services available to the campus community. When needed, coaches will accompany the student to the offices that provide support, coaching along the way. The Seita Scholars Program will assist students with tutoring that goes beyond support offered by the University. Peer leaders also provide some tutoring support if there is a specific need they can fulfill. Currently in the process of establishing tutoring and academic support opportunities for refugee students whose first language is not English.

How many of your students require remedial or academic support?

Yes, approximately 34% of our students have been admitted as “conditional admits.” We also know that as a group, they score below the general population in ACT and high school GPA scores. The Seita Scholars program does not maintain data on the number of students who access academic resources on campus. However, all of our students are required to take the First Year Seminar course and we also offer an academic integration course and holistics course for students that are struggling or interested. We recommend that all of our students access academic resources regardless of their level of college readiness.

How do you address their needs for remediation or academic support?

It is important to understand that achievement gaps experienced by students from foster care have as much to do with challenges in other areas of their lives as academic preparation. Coaches use several tools to monitor academic progress, and to partner with students to review their progress. For example, each semester Academic Progress Reports are sent out to every professor that has a Seita Scholar in their class at midterms. Professors are asked to indicate the student’s academic progress in an estimated letter grade as well as whether or not a student is attending class and actively participating. Staff members also have access to pull midterm grades from the university system as well. If campus coaches receive feedback from professors that a student is struggling, he or she will reach out to the student to have a conversation on why they are not doing well and what resources they would need to help them be successful. In addition to this academic focus, coaches also pay attention to students’ progress in the other six life domains.

Your website mentions the University 101 course-what is covered? Do students earn college credits for participating in this course? Is it a required course?

This course is generically referred to as University 101 on the website, but it is the First Year Seminar (FYS) course all incoming freshman students are required to take (not only in the Seita program, but university-wide) during their first semester on campus. Incoming Seita Scholars are required to enroll in a “Seita-section” of FYS. Campus coaches are assigned

teach the Seita sections of the FYS class, and Seita Peer Mentors assist in the class. The purpose of this course is to help first-year students transition to the university. It is a two-credit hour course that gives first-year students a shared opportunity to successfully make the academic and social transition to university life. Seminar activities and programs are designed to prepare students for their first year and beyond at WMU. In this course, Seita campus coaches include information and discussions on topics that specifically pertain to the experiences of foster care such as biological families, managing money, independence, the culture of foster care, and more.

OUTCOMES

Do you have any data on retention and graduation rates?

Yes, we keep track of the number of students from each cohort that return to WMU each year as well as the number of students that graduate each semester. As of the end of the Summer II, 2012 session, there have been 15 graduates of the Seita Scholars program. Since the program initially began in the Fall 2008 semester, we have seen an increase in retention numbers as the program has expanded in terms of staff members and support offered.

Do you measure any other outcomes?

Yes, please see the chart in Appendix A which provides the performance statistics for FTIAC Seita Scholars and FTIAC Students.

FISCAL

What is the cost to run the program and how is it funded?

The Seita Scholars program is funded primarily by Western Michigan University, which pays for the tuition scholarships, the program staff with the exception of the two DHS coaches, and the physical space on campus for staff offices, student lounges, and meeting rooms. The Michigan Department of Human Services pays for the two DHS campus coaches. The program has received over one million dollars in external support for start-up operational costs from a variety of Foundations. These organizations are the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Guido and Elizabeth Binda Foundation, Harold and Grace Upjohn Foundation, Kalamazoo Community Foundation, Paul and Bonnie MacGrayne, Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Michigan Education Trust, and the State of Michigan. In addition, there are also a variety of private organizations and individuals in the community that donate funds for student emergency expenses that arise.

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