



FOSTER YOUTH & HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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Western Michigan University

About the Initiative

October 1, 2009

In April 2007 Western Michigan University joined more than twenty other Michigan colleges and universities at the Foster Care – Higher Education Summit, co-sponsored by the Michigan Campus Compact and the Department of Human Services. The purpose of the meeting was to share information and begin post-secondary educational planning for youth formerly in foster care in Michigan who have aged out of the system. Planning for the WMU Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative began in the months following the initial summit meeting, but accelerated during the fall, 2007 semester after the planning team received support from WMU's President, Dr. John Dunn, to move forward with planning efforts.

The overall goal of the WMU Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative 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 initiative 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 are developing strategies—individual and systemic—to help former foster youth transition into adulthood through the experience of higher education.

The Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative is a comprehensive effort that involves multiple partnerships across departments and units within our campus community, and between WMU and other community constituents, such as child welfare agencies and local colleges. The initiative has three major components that include:

1. ***Student Outreach and Recruitment:*** WMU recruitment efforts have expanded to include outreach to youth who are "aging out" or have exited the foster care system to apply to WMU as freshmen or transfer students. We want foster youth who qualify for university-level education to consider WMU as their first choice for higher education. WMU offers the John Seita Scholars Program, which includes a tuition scholarship, as well as support to promote student well-being and academic success. Students who receive the scholarship are known as Seita Scholars.
2. ***Student Retention and Well-being:*** WMU welcomes students who grew up in foster care to campus and through the John Seita Scholars program aims to promote a sense of belonging in our campus community. Financial obstacles that often prevent foster youth from continuing their higher education will be lessened by offering the John Seita Scholarship on a renewable basis for each year of undergraduate study. In addition, work-study opportunities will be available on campus. Year-round campus living will eliminate any worry of homelessness during

periods when residence halls are closed for school breaks. Several campus departments are collaborating to provide services to WMU's Seita Scholars, including supports such as mentoring, academic tutoring, student networking, counseling and other student and academic support services. In addition, the John Seita Scholars program seeks to provide additional services to meet the unique needs of this cohort of students, such as workshops on life skills (e.g., banking, budgeting, time management), advocacy and assistance with navigating multiple bureaucracies and counseling needs related to family and foster care experiences.

- 3. *Student Career Transition and Graduation:*** The WMU Foster Youth & Higher Education Initiative is not only concerned about the success of former foster youths at school but also in preparing youth to move on from school after graduation. Since these young adults do not have the opportunity to "move back home" while considering career options, efforts toward career planning will begin early in their academic careers.

For more information about:

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