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Michigan College and University Leaders, Agency Executives Gather at WMU to Review Success of Foster Student Initiative

May 14, 2009 – Lansing, MI - More than 60 people representing 15 Michigan colleges and universities as well as officials from state, county and community human service agencies will gather at Western Michigan University from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday, May 20, for an exploration of WMU's groundbreaking effort to dramatically expand access to higher education for young people who have aged out of foster care.

WMU launched its foster youth initiative more than a year ago. Last fall, 51 former foster youth enrolled in the program that offers free tuition and provides campus housing during breaks as well as other support services. Other universities around the state and nation have been closely watching the WMU program, which is one of the largest and most extensive programs mounted on behalf of students who have aged out of foster care. The initiative has attracted funding from AT&T Foundation, Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation and Michigan Campus Compact.

In an event slated to celebrate May as National Foster Care Month, those attending will hear from WMU students who have just completed their first year at the University as Seita Scholars--students who have aged out of foster care and have qualified for a special scholarship and support program named for Dr. John Seita, a WMU alumnus and nationally known advocate for foster care youth. Seita, who spent much of his youth in foster care, will talk about centering an academic program around the needs of foster care youth, and Dr. Yvonne Unrau, a social work professor who directs the WMU initiative, will talk about the structure and the lessons learned from the first year of the WMU program.

Other highlights will include a short address by WMU President John M. Dunn and a series of discussion groups focused on how other Michigan schools can help students move from foster care to success in college.

The session is sponsored by WMU and Michigan Campus Compact, with support from the Michigan Department of Human Services. To learn more visit <http://www.micampuscompact.org/WMUFosterCare.asp>.

To arrange or confirm coverage, call Cheryl Roland in the WMU Office of University relations at (269) 387-8412.

Michigan Campus Compact promotes the education and commitment of Michigan college and university students to be civically engaged citizens, through creating and expanding academic, co-curricular and campus-wide opportunities for community service, service-learning and civic engagement. For more information, please visit www.micampuscompact.org.

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Affiliated with Michigan Nonprofit Association and Campus Compact