

October brings mid-semester progress reports

By Sarah Bodily, MS
Program Director

It's hard to believe that it's October, and with this spooky month comes the middle of the semester. Students are looking forward to fall break and the upcoming holidays, but most pressing on their agenda should be mid-term progress.

In Aggies Elevated, we require that each student meet during the middle of October with myself and their mentor to discuss their progress in three areas: Academics, MyCLIMB Goals, and Miscellaneous Areas of Care and Behavior. Results are reported on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "little to no effort was given" and 5 meaning "outstanding progress."

I want to take some time to explain these areas to you so that you can support your students in the areas in which they may need the most help. To graduate with their certificate of completion, all students must have an average of 80 percent or better in their courses. Students are expected to keep a 2.0 GPA through the duration of the academic work in Aggies Elevated to stay in the program.

We will meet to discuss grades, where students can improve, and what actions the students need to take to make those improvements. If a student is falling below the expected area at mid-term we will discuss what needs to happen to successfully continue in the program. As parents, you may be invited into that conversation if your student wishes to include you.

The second area concerns their MyCLIMB plan, which is the person-centered planning model we use in Aggies Elevated. First-semester students haven't created a full plan yet, but they are learning how to set SMART goals, problem-solve, and resolve conflicts. Those who have created a plan report on their progress.

The final area to be discussed encompasses a variety of areas individual to the student we are working with. Students report on status of roommate conflicts, meetings with counselors, meetings with mentors, extra supports they are utilizing, etc.

If a student falls below the expected rating (3 or above) in overall progress they are placed on academic warning and have one semester to improve their grades, effort, and motivation before they are dismissed from the program.

The purpose of these mid-semester meetings is to help the student recognize the importance of self-monitoring and taking actions to improve if they aren't in the areas they would like to be.

The student, mentor, and myself will have a discussion about each of the areas and the student gets the opportunity to rate their own performance. Then we talk about any discrepancies between their rating and their mentor's rating.

This is a great opportunity for everyone to be on the same page before the end of a semester when it may be too late to improve grades, talk to professors, or make behavioral changes.

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Students receive Golden Key scholarships



First-year students Josh and Berkeley were two of four recipients of the Governor's Golden Key Scholarships that were awarded on Wednesday, Sept. 28 at the 42nd annual Golden Key Awards. The \$500 scholarships were funded by Walmart.

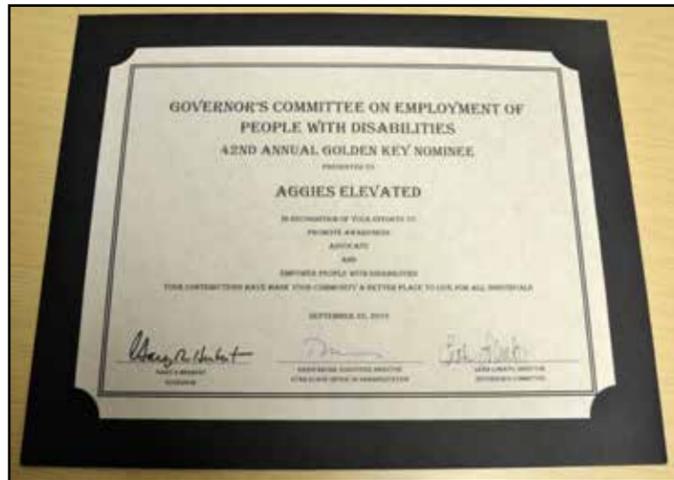
Two first-year Aggies Elevated students received \$500 scholarships during the 42nd annual Golden Key Awards on Wednesday, Sept. 28 at Zion's Bank in Salt Lake City. The Golden Key Awards are presented by the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities to businesses that employ people with disabilities.

The Aggies Elevated students were two of four students to receive scholarships to attend institutions of higher learning in Utah. Nineteen students applied for the scholarships, which were funded by Walmart. This was the first year of the scholarship competition.

"There is dignity that comes with work," said Gov. Gary Herbert during his remarks. "We all want to have that same kind of feeling."

There are 23,000 Utahns with disabilities, Herbert said. The Golden Key awards are a way to show that "Everyone is needed. Everyone is wanted. There are roles for everyone to play."

Josh and Berkeley were recognized by their classmates during the Independent Living seminar on Thursday,



Aggies Elevated was recognized as a nominee for the Ace Award at the Golden Key Awards.

Sept. 29, with congratulatory posters, a short speech given by a classmate and treats.

As a program, Aggies Elevated was nominated for an Ace Award, which recognizes Utah organizations that advocate for and promote the employment of people with disabilities.

Aggies Elevated celebrates first TPSID year

By Bob Morgan, Ph.D
Principle Investigator

College has always been a place for people to learn, grow, and consider different points of view. Since the first university was established in Salerno, Italy in about 800 A.D., societies have established "higher education" as an opportunistic sanctuary. College has become a place to extend oneself, surpass expectations, and expand horizons. Many of us associate a university with the experiences of being challenged, doubting our abilities, mustering the courage to climb the wall, overcoming the obstacle, and looking back thinking "I can do more than I thought I could."

If universities are truly places for personal enlightenment and self-determination, then *all* individuals should be given the choice to participate. While historically associated with intellectuals and pundits, an open, inclusive learning environment should be for *anyone* who chooses its challenges.

In the 1970s, a handful of universities developed courses and programs for students with developmental disabilities such as intellectual disability or autism. In 1975, legislation was passed allowing a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities in the least restrictive school environment (the Education for All Handicapped Act, later called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). But progress was slow for individuals with intellectual disability seeking a college experience. In the late 1990s, there were still only a few university programs, mostly at small private institutions.

In 2008, federal legislation called the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) provided the funding for model demonstration grant projects called Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, or TPSIDs, designed to expand the number of "high quality, inclusive, model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability" (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2013, p. 51).

Since 2010, there have been 45 TPSID programs across the U.S. serving about 1,000 students. The TPSID programs vary widely from large inclusive campus-based programs to those with only a few



students and a classroom. Some are located on community college campuses and others at four-year universities. All programs create coursework and electives leading to a recognized credential, such as a certificate. Although not an Associates degree, the credential is designed by each university to represent scholarship, achievement, and accomplishment. For more information, go to www.thinkcollege.net

The primary goal of the TPSID program initiative is to enable paid, community jobs for participating students. In 2013-14, three-quarters of students who exited a TPSID program were reported as having a paid job or career development activity (such as an internship or apprenticeship). On average, students with paid employment at exit from a TPSID program worked 18 hours per week and earned \$8.90 per hour.

Until 2015, only two TPSID programs (University of Arizona, Colorado State University) were located in the entire Mountain Time Zone. Residential living for college students with intellectual disability was available at only one of them (University of Arizona). Aggies Elevated was funded as a TPSID program in 2015 and pledged to expand to 18 students, provide residential living, and serve students interested in a college experience in an underserved part of the U.S.

Beyond TPSID programs, there are another 200+ programs for college students with developmental disabilities. Programs range from those serving certain developmental disabilities (such as the Passages Program at Utah Valley University for students with

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Dating and relationships for college freshmen

By Jeff Sheen, MSW
Co-Principle Investigator

College is a time when many young adults really begin to focus on dating and other social relationships, even more than when they were in high school. Students in the Aggies Elevated program are no different.

On a campus with roughly 20,000 other young adults, our Aggies Elevated students have more opportunities than ever before to meet new people, make friends and explore dating relationships. To support the students in developing healthy relationships, we discuss basic social skills and the components of healthy relationships in some form or another in every Aggies Elevated course they are enrolled in.

During the next several weeks in the Independent Living Seminar we will be covering aspects of healthy dating relationships including issues related to healthy sexuality. We are working with the local Center for Independent Living Youth Coordinator, Jennie Ostermiller, who has provided similar training to young adults with disabilities for the past several years, and staff from CAPSA, our local shelter for domestic violence and sexual assault victims.

Both do an excellent training on healthy dating and relationships. Below is an overview of the topics that CAPSA and Jennie will address with the Aggies Elevated students.

According to CAPSA's web site, the organization's mission is not only to help survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, but also to prevent abuse in the future by providing education to the community. CAPSA's presentations address age-appropriate topics that build assets in youth and discuss the importance of preventing abuse.

Presentation subjects include:

- **Healthy dating and relationships:** Role plays, survivor stories, and a PowerPoint presentation provide information to discuss the differences between healthy and abusive relationships.
- **Rape and sexual assault:** A PowerPoint presenta-



tion discusses facts and myths about rape, and harmful drugs people use to facilitate it.

- **Rape risk reduction/self defense:** Demonstrates basic self defense skills to help students defend themselves in a dangerous situation, and gives the students a chance to practice what they learn in a non-threatening atmosphere.
- **Sexual harassment:** PowerPoint and discussion on what is appropriate and what is considered sexual harassment in school and work settings.

In 2009, CAPSA revamped its Prevention Program to include discussion and information about masculinity, femininity, social interactions, socialization, and how these things can contribute to a societal "norm" that accepts and perpetuates violence.

The presentations are designed to appeal to a wide variety of classes and age groups. The presentations are professional, respectful, age-appropriate and flexible.

These topics often make our Aggies Elevated students uncomfortable. We believe these discussions are an essential part of any young adult's college education, even more so for students with disabilities who may have had little dating and relationship experience.

We encourage you to discuss dating, relationships and healthy sexuality with your student within the context of your family's values and belief system.

Creating a career exploration road map

By Sue Reeves, CRC,
Career Success Coordinator

Often, when we don't know what we want to be "when we grow up," it's because we don't know enough about three things: ourselves, the world of work in general, or specific occupations in particular.

During September, students completed a variety of assessments with the intention of getting more information about that first topic: themselves.

Students completed the VIA Survey of Character Strengths and a process called Articulating Strengths Together, to help them identify their own personal strengths. They also completed an interest assessment at MyNextMove.gov, which gave them a three-letter interest "code," and a personality assessment at 16Personalities.com. Lastly, we talked about work values, work skills and transferable skills.

I was so excited during the discussion about interest assessments, because they really seemed to identify with the letters that represent the six interests. There were lots of comments like, "That sounds just like my dad," or "That's my mom!" or "That is SO me."



It's important to remember that no matter how well our "code" or assessment seems to describe us, we are so much more than the results of that assessment.

Knowing that we are an introvert or an extrovert is valuable, but sometimes an introvert needs to join a team, and sometimes an extrovert needs to work alone. It doesn't mean we should ignore our traits or our strengths, but sometimes our most interesting growth comes when we nudge the edges of our comfort zones.

We can think of these surveys and assessments as a roadmap for the process of career exploration. When you want to navigate an unfamiliar city, you reach for a

map (or the GPS) to learn about the roads. You may visit a web site or read a guidebook to find out details of the attractions you want to see. But just as we don't limit our exploration of the city to only the map or guidebook, we don't limit our exploration of ourselves and our future careers to these assessments. They are a starting point to understanding what is important to us, how we interact with others, and what we want to experience.

In October, we'll begin using the results to find and explore specific careers within each student's interest area. Then they will use what they've discovered about themselves to determine if that career is worthy of further exploration.

**October is
National Disability Employment Awareness Month!**

For more information, visit <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/index.htm>

#inclusionworks

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Help your student cope with loneliness

By *The Washington Post* online

When Sarah Lanners moved to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., from her California home, she didn't know anyone. She connected with her roommates right away, and she appreciated how open everyone was in the early days, willing to talk, befriend people and hang out together. But over time, as acquaintances and dorm-mates settled into friendships, loneliness and homesickness took hold of her. "Returning to school after winter break was rough," she recalls.

Now a senior, Lanners can identify contributing factors to her loneliness as a freshman. For starters, she wasn't busy enough, and she recommends that new students pick something — a club, activity or volunteer opportunity — to devote time to.

Also, she's shy, and it wasn't easy to put herself out there to meet people. She wishes now she had been more proactive earlier, initiating study sessions and lunch dates. By the end of freshman year, things got better. The turning points included spearheading a chapter of an organization that she really cared about, and getting a part-time job.

Loneliness is part of the transition to college for just about everyone, but it's not an easy experience to weather, and many students feel uncomfortable sharing their feelings. It also can get mixed in with homesickness, anxiety, a false sense of inadequacy and depression.

To combat garden-variety loneli-



ness, campus experts agree with Lanners. They say the best solution is to get involved. Finding a club or activity that fits your interests and connects you with like-minded people is key, says David Spano, associate vice chancellor for Health Programs and Services and director of the counseling center at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Sometimes students want to get on top of academics first, he says, but getting involved right away helps them do better academically as a result of those social interactions.

Students also benefit from knowing others are having a hard time, too, no matter how happy they look on Instagram or strolling around campus. The trouble is nobody wants to show they're struggling, says Philip Burns, a licensed mental health counselor at Western Washington University in Bellingham.

"They think they'll stand out, but students who can own how lonely they are end up connecting with people," he says. "It brings you

closer to people when you can admit things aren't all good, when you can show some vulnerability."

Experts agree technology has made it more difficult for some students to adjust to college. Social media is useful for making plans when students have good connections in place, but it can amplify loneliness if they don't, says Greg Eells, director of counseling and psychological services at Cornell University. Retreating into gaming or Netflix binges further hinders attempts to connect face to face.

Rosy expectations also complicate the transition. "Every year we see students who are shocked that they feel overwhelmed by emotions. The vision they had for their college career feels different from what they're experiencing," says Rebecca MacNair-Semands, senior associate director of UNC-Charlotte's counseling center.

Colleges are prepared to help, offering services such as one-on-one therapy, group sessions, and workshop-style presentations

on mindfulness, coping skills, first-generation status and more. Group sessions help normalize students' experiences and facilitate connections with others, and may prevent emotional setbacks from worsening.

Loneliness by itself isn't a mental health condition, but other conditions, such as social anxiety, can be a contributing factor. Socially anxious students have a harder time initiating conversations or worry they don't have the skills to maintain a friendship, MacNair-Semands says. UNC-Charlotte offers a social confidence group that provides support and guidance for managing social situations.

Burns emphasizes that feeling lonely is normal and okay. Moreover, it's a sign students come from good relationships at home, he tells them, and they have the capacity to build new ones. Using mindfulness techniques, he helps them identify their emotions and "sit with," or fully experience, them. "We can bear our experience much more than we think we can. No one feels good all the time," Burns says.

Other counselors concur that sitting with emotions is important. "So much of why people struggle and why mental health concerns get worse is people try to control emotional experiences they can't

control — they push away feeling sad or anxious, for example," Eells says. Often, new students worry they shouldn't be alone, equating it with being lonely. But spending time alone can be an incredible opportunity for introspection and reflection, he says, and he encourages students to rethink their notion of being alone.

That's not to say students shouldn't reach out for help, and they don't have to be in the midst of a crisis to take advantage of services. Information around campuses abounds, and student affairs offices and residential programs also provide resources as students are moving in. New York's Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, for example, offers an orientation program, "Navigating Rensselaer and Beyond," to help students transition and get connected to other students right away, says Keith Anderson, staff psychologist and outreach coordinator at the school.

How can parents help? You may feel blue about your empty nest, but communicating excessively with your student isn't necessarily in their best interest, and it can hinder their adjustment. College experts suggest following your child's lead. If students call home because they're homesick and lonely, listen, be supportive and then direct them

back toward campus resources.

"You don't want to be the number one person they're going to at an age where they're normally connecting with peers and learning who they are through interacting with peers," MacNair-Semands says.

Barbara Greenberg, a teen clinical psychologist and author of "Teenage as a Second Language: A Parent's Guide to Becoming Bilingual," says she's noticed increasing parental separation anxiety over the past 10 years. As students are adjusting, she says, it's important and appropriate to support them, but it's equally important not to solve their problems for them.

Above all, students should know that making lasting friendships takes time. They've just left 18 years of a family cocoon, and it would be strange if they didn't feel lonely.

"You're going to have those nights where your roommates are out, you feel like you don't have anyone, and people don't know you yet," Lanners says. "But hundreds of others feel exactly the same way."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2016/09/22/how-to-help-your-college-student-cope-with-loneliness-without-hovering/>

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autism) to diverse programs for students with various disabilities (such as the Pathways Program at UCLA).

Whereas the TPSID programs are grant funded, the other college programs for students with developmental disabilities were funded by donations or braided sources of funds. Aggies Elevated, which started prior to becoming a TPSID program, will

continue beyond the end of the grant in 2020. However, the future of the program is dependent on contributions of donors. With understanding and generosity of donors, future Aggies Elevated students will say "I can do more than I thought I could."

Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Weir, C. (2011). Framing the future: A standards-based conceptual framework for research and practice in inclusive higher education. Think College Insight Brief, 10.