This time of year. Isn’t it nice that the feeling of the holiday season so often focuses on what we can do for others? The spirit of giving and love is usually so abundant during this time of year. I love that feeling!

Students read an article in class this past week about 4 different people who chose to do one small act of kindness and how it affected another person’s life, not just the day or week, but changed their lives. We talked about what we can each to do reach out to someone that may need it. It’s been a nice reminder to all that we can choose to be kind. We can choose to reach out to those that need it.

These discussions of kindness have also focused on the responsibility as USU student to follow the code of conduct. All USU students agree to and sign the code of conduct during orientation. We’ve discussed what this means and ultimately come to the same conclusion each time, if we are choosing to be kind we won’t have issues following the majority of the code of conduct.

So you have access to it and can continue these conversations with your students over the break, you can follow this link to read Utah State’s Code of Conduct: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode/

My favorite part of this code is when it talks about community. It says, “Utah State University aspires to maintain academic freedom and to maximize individual responsibility. To that end, the University endorses the principles of community identified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Utah State University is:

– a purposeful community where members work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus;
– a just community, a place where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued;
– an open community where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed;
– a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good; and
– a caring community where the well-being of each community member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if we lived in a world that lived by these standards completely? Where you felt caring and “where the well-being of each community member is sensitively supported”? I want to propose that I think our Aggies Elevated community can be just that. Each student can reach out and support those

Continued on page 7.
Self-determination: What It Means for Young Adults

By Bob Morgan, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

Most of us consider ourselves self-determined. We make decisions on a daily basis to do things that impact our lives. We take responsibility for those decisions. We understand that most decisions provide us with opportunities, but that we may encounter negative consequences as well. The decisions we make shape our lives and define who we are.

For students coming out of high school, the self-determination landscape changes significantly and abruptly. In high school, decisions for students are made by teachers, administrators, coaches, counselors, and parents. Students are told when to open and close their books, sit and stand, go to the next class, listen, raise their hand, speak, and turn in assignments. They receive report cards on how well they do these things. But once they reach college, students are told they can make a variety of choices. They can go to class or sleep in. They can turn in an assignment or not. They can engage in discussion about a variety of topics or they can remain silent. College students make choices most every day in which, maybe for the first time, they are on their own to make a response and deal with the consequences. They can determine for themselves the opportunities and consequences that will shape their lives. For students with disabilities, these opportunities and consequences are pivotal and vitally important.

Self-determination has been defined as “a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 115). A large volume of scholarly research shows very convincingly that students with disabilities who become more self-determined during young adulthood have higher rates of employment, achieve more college credits, and rate themselves as having a higher quality of life than those who do not become self-determined.

But how does one become self-determined? It is not a rite of passage or a benchmark of maturity. It doesn’t simply happen. Nor is it something parents or teachers can tell a youth to do. “Take the lunch count to the main office and become self-determined along the way.” “Walk down to the store, get me a loaf of bread, and pick up some self-determination for goodness sake.” No, not going to happen.

Self-determination is a complex set of skills, knowledge, and beliefs. We can usually distinguish between people who have a lot of it or very little of it. We can examine different types of people and lifestyles and see that self-determination varies across cultures. But we must look very specifically at behaviors and environments to describe the components of self-determination. Components may consist of

1. Advocating for oneself when needed by using assertive, not passive or aggressive, communications.
2. Making eye contact (at least in most Western cultures).
3. Using “I statements” to describe one’s position, beliefs, preferences, and rights.
4. Clarifying one’s values and beliefs, then learning to communicate them when necessary.
5. Making decisions given evaluation of all the pro’s and con’s, positives and negatives, advantages

Continued on page 7.
What to Expect Over Semester Break

By Jeff Sheen, MSW  
Co-Principal Investigator

By the time you read this, the Aggies Elevated students will be in the thick of finals preparation and plans to go home for the semester break. This is both an exciting and a stressful time. Exciting because many of the students are completing their very first semester of college and have much to be proud of and stressful, well, because it’s finals week and there are a lot of assignments to complete and tests to take and that can all feel pretty overwhelming. As a support for the students we have been and will continue to provide guidance and activities related to reducing and effectively coping with the stress that increases for most college students at this point in the semester. Another source of stress at this point in the semester, which can be part of both the students’ and the parents’ experience, is the anticipated arrival of your young adult back home for the longest stretch of time since they left for college. As your students have been away you may have adopted new routines and experienced a greater sense of freedom yourself in ways that are similar to what your student has experienced being at USU. Perhaps your student was the last child living at home or the first to leave home. In either case, your family dynamic has likely shifted at least a little bit since your student has been with Aggies Elevated and it will likely shift a bit as the return home.

As you prepare to welcome your young adult back home for the next several weeks we invite you to revisit the article on the “first visit home” that we sent out in the September newsletter that talks about some of the challenges you might experience as your student reintegrates with the rest of the family over the break. In general you are likely to notice a variety of changes in your student, most of them positive (e.g., greater independence and self-advocacy skills), although even the positive changes that may cause some friction. For example, your students have been used to determining how to spend their free time in ways that are meaningful to them and living on a schedule that they largely get to determine. Once they are back home they will likely need to adjust some of their activities and schedule to accommodate the needs of the family (think back to those late night, spontaneous adventures to get pizza or see a movie well after what our curfew would have been at home, that many of us embarked on in college).

As you and your student adjust to each other’s new level of independence over the break, we encourage you to engage in thoughtful and skillful conversations regarding how each of you has changed and how these changes may affect your family dynamics. If there are a few bumps in the road as your student returns home for a few weeks, recognize that this is a natural and age typical experience. And for those of you who have been through this before with other children or during the previous year, feel free to share your wisdom and advice with all of us on the Aggies Elevated Facebook page. We wish you all a happy holiday season and a merry semester break with family and friends.

Have you misplaced the previous parent newsletters?  
They are archived on the web site at www.aggieselevated.com!
What You Need to Know About Guardianship

*Courtesy of The Disability Law Center. For more information about guardianship, or other questions about the law as it relates to disability, contact the DLC at (800) 662-9080 or visit www.disabilitylawcenter.org.*

Every parent of a child approaching adulthood can relate to the excitement they feel as their child explores new experiences, opportunities and independence. Most would also admit that they harbor a few reservations about this new phase of life. By law, once a person turns 18-years-old, they’re considered competent to make decisions about their life. Parents/guardians of adult children may wonder, “Is he prepared make choices about education, employment and housing? Will she be able to manage her finances? Can he get the right medical treatment? Will she take precautions that keep her safe?”

Sometimes, parents, siblings, spouses, etc. feel that they need to help their adult family member with a disability or aging parent with education, housing, employment, medical, financial or other decisions.

In order for anyone to legally make decisions for an adult, a court must appoint them to do so. There are several options, such as, a conservatorship, power of attorney, advanced health care directives, default surrogate health care decision-makers, trusts, etc. Guardianship is a more restrictive option to consider only when necessary. Sometimes it is the best fit for someone who is more incapacitated.

Maybe you have questions about the guardianship process too. As a starting point, this article provides answers to some basic questions. For the purposes of this article, “you” refers to the person wanting to become a guardian and “family member” refers to the person who might need a guardian. Of course, it is not necessary for a guardian to be related. We’re just trying to keep it simple.

**Steps in the Guardianship Process**


2. Complete the forms and gather the medical information that needs to be submitted with the forms.

3. File a petition with the Court by submitting the completed forms and medical documentation to the Office of the Court in the county where your family member resides or is present. Pay the filing fee.

4. After filing, the Court will send notice to parties of interest identified in the law, such as, a current guardian, parents, spouse, etc. The Court will also send you and the interested parties a notice of an initial hearing date and time.

5. Attend the hearing and bring the necessary documents.

6. Each district court may proceed a little differently. Generally, at the hearing, the judge will find out if there are any objections to the guardianship. The judge may ask for limited evidence and testimony about your family member’s diagnosis and their ability to make decisions.

7. If there are no objections and sufficient documentation is provided, an order appointing you as guardian will likely be issued at the hearing, making the guardianship...Continued on next page.
Continued from previous page.

**Effective Immediately.**

**Will I Need to Hire an Attorney?**

It’s up to you whether or not you want to represent yourself or hire an attorney to file the petition and represent you at the hearing.

For your family member, the decision about whether they require legal counsel is made by a judge. The law has traditionally required that the family member you are seeking guardianship of (sometimes referred to as the “proposed ward”), be represented by counsel. However, beginning this year, judges have the authority to waive your family member’s right to counsel if (1) the proposed ward is the biological or adoptive child of the petitioner; (2) the proposed ward’s estate is not more than $20,000; (3) the proposed ward appears in court; and (4) the judge decides that representation of the proposed ward is not necessary to protect their interests.

Waiver of counsel will not likely be freely given because a guardianship takes away an individual’s important rights. Since the judge will decide at the beginning of the case whether to waive your family member’s right to counsel, it is important that you submit adequate medical/psychological information when filing your petition. The judge will likely NOT waive your family member’s right to counsel if: 1) they understand the proceedings and they want an attorney, or; 2) they object to, or don’t like all the areas where you want to make decisions for them.

There is free or low cost representation available for your family member through the Guardianship Signature Program. More information about this in “Resources”.

**How Can I Obtain Medical Documentation?**

The medical documentation that you’ll submit with your petition can be a letter—written in the past year—from your family member’s treating physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or licensed clinical social worker. It can also be a recent psychological evaluation. The documentation should identify your family member’s diagnoses, their functional limitations, and the types of decisions they are not able to make. If your family member is still in school or just graduated, there should be a recent enough psychological evaluation in their school files. Individual Education Programs (IEP’s) and other school evaluations, can also be helpful in showing what the individual can and cannot do. If your family member has received mental health treatment, there may be some evaluations or other useful reports, in their medical files. If they receive services from the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD), there should be psychological evaluations, person-centered support plans, and other useful reports in their files.

**How Much Does It Cost?**

Normally, the filing fee is $360, but if your family member is your natural or adoptive child then the fee is only $35. The court may also waive the filing fee if you or your family member is indigent.

**Are There Different Types of Guardianship?**

Yes! Guardianship should be customized to your family member’s needs. A limited guardianship, preferred by the law, specifies certain types of decisions you can make as a guardian. For example health care, residential, educational, or financial decisions.

A full (plenary) guardianship is granted only when nothing less will meet your family member’s needs. Full guardianship grants you the right to make all the decisions a parent would make for a minor child. The court should only grant a full guardianship when evidence supports the need for one.

**Are There Resources to Help?**

Guardianship Signature Program (GSP) – This program provides free or low-cost representation for the proposed ward. It’s the Court’s responsibility to ensure that your family member has appropriate legal representation. Therefore, if your petition does not say who’ll represent your family member, or your petition includes a request that the court appoint your family member an attorney, the court clerk will send an e-mail to lawyers in the district who are part of the GSP. The first lawyer to respond is appointed as your family member’s counsel.

Disability Law Center – We can provide basic information about the rights of people with disabilities and guardianship law. We’re happy to help you connect with local resources. However, we cannot represent a petitioner or a proposed ward in guardianship proceedings, nor can we offer specific legal advice about your guardianship situation. Call or visit our website where we’ll continue to provide additional information, links, and resources about guardianship.

www.aggieselevated.com
Emotional Well-Being as an Employment Skill

By Sue Reeves, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

As a rehabilitation counselor, I am concerned with an array of topics related to employment: career exploration, vocational assessments, job development, and job skills training, to name a few. I also provide counseling interventions to remove environmental and attitudinal barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

Attitudinal barriers can come from a variety of sources: society at large, reaching back to the time when people with disabilities could be fined simply for leaving their homes; to specific employers, who may have never met a person with a disability and therefore never considered hiring one; to people with disabilities themselves, who may have never been exposed to stressful situations and do not have the skills to self-regulate strong or distressing emotions.

A person’s ability to adapt to stressful situations, whether it is called resilience, emotional well-being, or emotional self-regulation, is a key predictor of student success (DiFlorio & McKenna).

Since employers are usually more concerned with an employee’s performance rather than with all the turmoil in said employee’s personal life, resilience is a beneficial characteristic for any successful employee to have.

Fortunately, resilience is a skill that can be taught. I started using a free meditation app called “Stop, Breathe, & Think” with the students to begin the Career Exploration class and study group meetings.

It took a while, but several students commented that starting class with a meditation helped them focus on the present moment, rather than being concerned with the daily drama of who was not speaking to whom. Based on the research cited earlier, and the students’ feedback, I am going to incorporate more emotional self-regulation strategies into the Career Exploration curriculum during the spring semester.

The concepts being presented in class will be discussed in further detail during my weekly meetings with each student. Role-plays—everyone’s favorite activity!—will also allow the students to practice emotional self-regulation techniques.


Parents can attend free Think College webinars

Think College, which is the national coordinating center for TPSID programs (including Aggies Elevated), sponsors webinars on a variety of topics related to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. Visit this link for a list of upcoming webinars: http://www.thinkcollege.net/training/webinars

Registration for these webinars is free. Registrants will be able to attend the session live, and will also receive a link to the webinar recording to listen to later. Participants in these webinars will need a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet, with speakers to access the audio. To hear a recording of a past webinar, click the Archived tab and select the recording of the webinar you are interested in. Many archived webinars also include related downloadable resources.
Self-Determination from page 2.

and disadvantages.
6. Assuming responsibility for the consequences of those decisions.
7. Maintaining persistence and tenacity when decisions do not yield immediate, desired results.
8. Acknowledging opinions of others that differ from one’s personal position on a matter.
9. Remaining steadfast and persistent until those needs are met.
10. Reflecting on one’s values, beliefs, decisions, responsibilities, and needs with confidence and self-awareness.

Over the last 15 years, scholars have become interested in self-determination for young adults with disabilities. Rating scales and checklists have been developed to measure one’s level of self-determination (such as the Arc Self-Determination Scale or the AIR Self-Determination Assessment). Full-fledged programs with multiple lessons have been developed and tested for teaching self-determination (such as the ME! Lessons, Whose Future Is It Anyway?, Student-Directed Transition Planning, and Take Charge). These programs have been evaluated in large scale research studies and found to be effective. Several of these materials are available at http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow.html

The Aggies Elevated program recognizes the critical nature of self-determination and the importance of systematic teaching so that students can learn component skills and become proficient in determining their own lives. Self-determination is a centerpiece of Aggies Elevated; it is a critical component of everything we do as we work with students. We begin with an assessment of self-determination when a student enters the program. We provide numerous learning opportunities related to self-determination starting in Day 1. We offer a course in Self-Determination and another in Self-Management. One of the five stars in the MY CLIMB plan for each student is self-determination. Finally, we end with a second assessment of self-determination when a student leaves the program to see if gains have been made.

At Aggies Elevated, we understand that self-determination is a lifelong learning opportunity. Students will not graduate after two years in our program with mastery of self-determination. Hopefully, they will have learned valuable lessons that serve as a foundation for future growth towards self-determination. And as they progress from “determined by others” to “self-determined”, they will likely achieve greater insight into the value of autonomy, freedom of choice, and shaping of one’s future.


Community from page 1.

around them to create this community. It will take all involved to make this work.

We will not tolerate any level of bullying or teasing. We will take action to support all students involved. Students need to know that other’s in the program have their back and will stick with them. It doesn’t mean everyone has to be best friends, it does mean that we care and are kind.

I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday break. Please take time to relax, rejuvenate, and do something kind for someone else. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Sending warm holiday wishes to all of you from all of us at Aggies Elevated.