

# Aggies Elevated to Be Subject of Documentary | CPD

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Filmmaker Ben Stamper observes during a recent Aggies Elevated class

A documentary filmmaker from New York City will be at Utah State University the week of April 20 to document the Center for Persons with Disabilities' Aggies Elevated program.

Ben Stamper visited the campus recently to learn more about the program, and spent a day with the students and program staff. Stamper learned about Aggies Elevated through Beth Foley, dean of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. Foley is also acting as associate producer of another film he's creating about an artist on the autism spectrum.

"I'm excited about this project," Stamper said. "It seems like a good fit for me to make, after seeing what you're doing out here. My goal is to create a dialogue, and ultimately to expect more from people with disabilities. Disability is only a small section of this life. It doesn't define who they are or what they're about. We need to instill respect for people by seeing their perspective ... Respect and dignity is at the heart of it."

Stamper envisions a student-centric approach to filming.

"It will really be from the students' perspective--why they've come here and what they're getting out of it, rather than the type of approach that promotes what it is from everyone else's perspective," he said.

During his recent visit, Stamper sat in on a meeting between Aggies Elevated student Jenna and her mentor, Shelby Foster, and was impressed with the amount of information that was covered.

"They talked about four or five different areas, from social strategies to schedules to homework to accountability with health habits, to life goals and planning for extracurricular activities," he said. "I was impressed with Shelby--she really had a handle on providing accountability with no judgment. She told Jenna, 'the important thing is that you're honest with yourself.' It was more the spirit of 'this is important to do for yourself.'"

Stamper's visit showed him the program's expectations for the students always push them outward.

"(Staff) provide support, but real challenge," he said. "That's how any of us learn. This is not failure. As a parent, the hardest thing to do is to stand back and watch a child fail. Aggies Elevated provides something that's very different than a parent can provide in a home environment. I imagine this transforms (the parents') view and approach of parenting as well."

For more information on Stamper and his work, view his [personal website](#).