

**The 2011 Workshop and Essay Competition for Utah High School Students:  
A Personal View from Keith Snedegar\***

January 14, 2011

Today we held a preliminary meeting of the organizing committee. Ambassador Abdrisaev, Cholpon Akmatolieva, Connie Lamb (BYU Library) and I met with about twenty UVU students who expressed an interest in reaching out to Utah high schools on the theme of the upcoming International Women of the Mountains Conference. We decided to hold an essay competition leading to the presentation of papers by the finalists at Orem Public Library on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Ideally, some of the international dignitaries attending the conference would be available to give encouraging remarks to the finalists. At all events, I was happily surprised by the enthusiasm of the UVU students, who began contacting high school teachers and principals almost immediately – in some cases even before our meeting was over! Many thanks especially to Chris Valverde, who has contacts at several schools.

February 25, 2011

We had no idea what sort of response the call for papers would get. As it is, I am quite pleased that fifty-four submissions have come in from students representing six schools along the Wasatch Front. My first observation is that a cluster of submissions comes from Copper Hills High School in West Jordan. That's a little unexpected, but very much welcomed. A teacher must have mobilized his or her entire class to write on the women of the mountains theme! The other papers appear to have been more individual efforts.

February 28, 2011

Our eight readers (Jaree Gaskin, Alec McCullough, David Banks, Brandon Merrill, Josh Harding, Chris Heaton, Victoria Carlton, and Chris Fee) are going over the papers this afternoon in order to identify the top ten or twelve. Having quickly scanned the submissions, I'd say they have their work cut out for them. Although some papers display the earmarks of average high-school composition, the overall level of maturity in dealing with a challenging topic is rather high.

March 1, 2011

The readers have done their job. Time is short to contact the twelve finalists and confirm that they can attend the workshop next week. In any case I'm satisfied with the distribution of the finalists, representing Copper Hills, Orem, Paradigm, UCAS (Utah County Academy of Sciences), and Juab High.

March 7, 2011



*From left to right, UVU student Kyle Vanderniet, Ambassador of Macedonia to the USA Zoran Jolevski, member of the organizing committee of the workshop Carol Greer, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the U.N. Gyan Chandra Acharya and member of the organizing committee of the workshop Joel Greer at Orem Public Library on March 7, 2011.*

All but one of the finalists were able to attend the workshop at Orem Public Library this afternoon. (Sadly, Layson Heugly has the flu.) Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Rusty Butler the ambassadors from Nepal and Macedonia, Gyan Chandra Acharya and Zoran Jolevski, honored us with their presence. Jerry Washburn, the mayor of Orem, was also here to welcome everyone. After the high-school student presentations Douglas McGuire of the Mountain Partnership Secretariat gave an engaging talk on mountain communities around the globe. It's fabulous that the finalists have had a chance to interact with these dignitaries.

During the presentations the Copper Hills contingent was especially demonstrative. Five papers from Copper Hills were accepted for the workshop and a busload of students arrived to cheer on their classmates. I enjoyed the expression of school spirit! With or without a cheering section, the finalists all spoke well and supported their remarks with PowerPoint slideshows. Shelby Jorgenson of UCAS gave most arresting presentation of the afternoon. To illustrate her topic – women's empowerment through education – she divided the audience into sections according to the living conditions for women in different parts of the world; she then proceeded to identify audience members with rural women in those regions. Shelby pulled this off so naturally that it didn't seem like a mere rhetorical device.



*Shelby Jorgensen, a junior at the Utah County Academy of Sciences (left), who won first prize (\$500) for her essay “Women’s Education in Mountainous Regions” with Dr. Keith Snedegar, Utah Valley University, Chair of the Organizing Committee of the workshop*

As the judges, Connie Lamb and I agreed immediately that Shelby deserved first place. We had to deliberate for while to conclude that Katie Pontsler from Copper Hills merited second place, and Ivan Delgadillo from UCAS third. Through the agency of Jolene Arnoff and Veronica Caballero of the UVU College of Humanities and Social Sciences pizza was delivered just before we announced the awards. Ambassadors Acharya and Jolevski congratulated all the finalists on their work. This afternoon’s anxiety and excitement turned into a satisfying evening.

March 8, 2011

We have just concluded a session of the Women of the Mountains Conference recognizing the participants in the high school essay competition and workshop. Fred White, Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Richard Portwood, UVU Student Body President, presented the awards. For me the high point was when Robin Bucaria received special recognition – she is the English teacher at Copper Hills who saw the essay competition as an opportunity for her class to work on their writing and presentation skills while engaging issues confronting women in mountain communities. Congratulations Robin!



*Certificate of Achievement (left) for Shelby Jorgensen, the winner of Utah High-School students workshop on Gender Issues and Certificate of Excellence (right) for Robin Bucaria, teacher from Copper Hills High School in Salt Lake City*

There were many others who contributed to the successful workshop: Rusty Butler, Baktybek Abdrisaev and Connie Lamb of course; also Jaree Gaskin, Alec McCullough, David Banks, Josh Harding, Victoria Carlton, Matt Joseph and Carlos Alarco. I must add that Chris Heaton and Brandon Merrill performed remarkably in designing and printing certificates of participation; they have also made sure that everyone involved in the essay competition, winner or not, receives a certificate. Lori Stevens of the Orem Public Library deserves a special shout-out: You and your team provided a wonderful venue for the workshop. The library poster beautifully advertised the event. And on the day all the technology worked. Many, many thanks.

March 14, 2011

University Marketing & Communications has put out a press release on the essay competition and Shelby Jorgensen, the recipient of first prize. The notice is now up on the UVU homepage. Nice publicity! I hope we're able to repeat this performance in 2012...

***\*Dr. Keith Snedegar, Professor, History and Political Science Department, Utah Valley Department, was a Chair of the Organizing Committee of the workshop***