

My Experiences Hosting a Foreign Dignitary



(L to R) William Gum, UIMF member, Michael Hinatsu, UIMF VP, Ms. Julie Kofoed, UN Global Compact and Kurmanbek Dyikanbaev, official from the Kyrgyz Republic during the 68th UN Civil Society Conference

I was sitting down at the opening ceremony at the Model United Nations Far West Conference (MUNFW) in San Francisco, CA from April 13th to the 16th 2019. At one moment, Ms. Julie Kofoed, one of the foreign diplomats, who provide oversight for the event, took the stage to discuss her prior experience working with at the UN. Ms. Kofoed was the Senior Human Rights Policy Adviser and the Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN. She had worked on the rights of indigenous populations and women's equality through advocacy and negotiation. I realized that Ms. Kofoed's experience would provide my colleagues and me, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University, with valuable insights. We came back from the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) in March 2019 after trying to add a language about mountain communities to the final document of CSW63 through the ECOSOC's Second and Third committees. After Ms. Kofoed finished with her speech, I knew that I had to invite her to our university for the purpose of sharing with our coalition of club members her valuable knowledge. I never imagined that I would host a foreign dignitary, but when I noticed the opportunity, I took it.

I had informed Dr. Baktybek Abdrysaev, UIMF advisor, and Michael Hinatsu, Vice President of UIMF about my intentions to host Ms. Kofoed and they have been supportive of my efforts and in particular how to follow certain steps when attempting to host a foreign dignitary. As a result, Michael and I wrote a letter to Ms. Kofoed, inviting to visit UVU during the fall semester of 2019 or as an alternative during the 63rd UN Civil Society Conference (68UNCSC) in Salt Lake City during August 26-28, 2019. She agreed to come for the 68UNCSC.

Then, it was important for me to learn as much as I can about a guest. Drafting a brief biography of the accomplishments of Ms. Kofoed helped me to understand the reasons what experience she could share with my fellow students at UIMF. This helped me to draft the purpose of what guest's visit and engagement will be on campus, with co-students, and at public events. In its turn, this helped me to fill out applications for grants that I was in need to prepare and then show to Michael to check content before its submission.

This process also required our communication with Dr. Jay DeSart, Chair of the Department of History and Political Science about co-sponsoring the visit of Ms. Kofoed and having advices from faculty before, during, and after her visit. Administrative contacts are vital to the organization, timing, and fulfillment of hosting the guest on campus. At the time of hosting Ms. Kofoed, Ms. Kimberly Williamson was the Administrative Support at the department and our contact person. Ms. Williamson is an amazing person who assisted Michael and me immensely with logistics, accommodations and other issues for the visit of Ms. Kofoed.

In addition, I communicated my intentions to host Ms. Kofoed with the Associate Dean for the UVU College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), Dr. Janet Colvin, and Assistant to the Dean for the CHSS, Ms. Jolene Arnoff. I provided each of these individuals with the information about the purpose of the visit, the value that a visit would provide to students, and the general operational procedure, such as which hotel/flights and what dates would be the most appropriate. Additionally, Michael and I submitted to the office of the Dean with copies of the grants for Engaged Learning in the Liberal Arts (ELLA) to fund logistics of the visit of Ms. Kofoed.

The ELLA grant has three main sections. The "Outline of Speaker Agenda" section allowed us to introduce Ms. Kofoed's in new position as a Senior Manager for Social Sustainability with the UN Global Compact, her previous experiences stated above, and the value of her visit.

The "Speaker Assessment and Relevance to Student Learning in College of History and Political Science" is broken into two sections. The first section asks explanations how our guest will contribute and enhance Student Engaged Learning (SEL). SEL is an educational model when students teach each other as a group how to accomplish tasks with teachers serving them as mentors. Filling out this application, hosting an academic guest, and working with guest to provide students with a learning experience was in essence a process of our student engaged learning. Ms. Kofoed could provide my fellow students and me with networking opportunities as well as valuable insight into the operations of UN Committees. It would help then the UIMF members achieve their goals to include women living in isolated mountainous region in the final UN documents as an emphasized demographic in need of protections by ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly. The second section asks how the outcome of student engaged learning will be measured. In this case,

our team, which initially included Michael Hinatsu and then expanded, described our plans to schedule, coordinate, and accommodate the guest. Additionally, it was important for us to provide detailed records as well as submit essays for posting at UIMF website after the visit about future outcomes and UIMF advocacy efforts at UN of women living in mountain areas and the creation of new networks.

The last section of the ELLA Grant is “Budget Information”. The budget included expenses for the air travel from New York to Utah and back and accommodation of the guest in Salt Lake City and possible expenses during the potential events that are being planned. In this section, it was important to state that UIMF had previously applied for funds, and whether we had financial commitments from other institutions, including our own financial contribution and all other money we were expecting.



Members of UIMF with Ms. Julie Kofoed before the workshop at the 63rd UN Civil Society Conference

After receiving the grant, it was important to coordinate air travel as soon as possible: ticket prices increased weekly, if not daily. This provided a difficult task, to be solved with help of Kimberly Williamson, but we learned as a lesson for the future that it is necessary to be very clear about confirmation of travel dates and clarify any accommodation requirements or restrictions with guest as soon as possible.

While arranging the hotel accommodations for our guest, we worked with the UVU Office of Global Engagement (GE). Through the assistance of Dr. Baldomero Lago, Chief Officer, we reserved rooms for accommodations at the Alta Club in Salt Lake City, which is an exclusive hotel for members only. Our contact point at GE office was Ms. Amy Barnett, Program Director of Global Events and Hosting: she helped us to ensure in addition to hotel reservation, that our guest could meet with other VIP guests, like with Mr. Miles Hansen, the President and CEO of the Utah World Trade Center, and included in VIP lunches. Ms. Barnett taught us many valuable lessons with hosting our guest which we are grateful for.

Thanks to SEL model, I have learned that I can accomplish complex and important tasks even at the international levels. I believe that this experience will help me in further advocating for the mountain and indigenous communities or any other important cause elsewhere and help me to better integrate myself in the standard operating procedures of any organization, including the UN.

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