

Learning about sustainable mountain development



Dr. Rusty Butler speaks before UVU faculty and students during International Mountain Day.

On December 2nd, 2019, I attended the International Mountain Day Celebration at Utah Valley University (UVU). It was hosted by Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) a coalition of student clubs at UVU. I went into the presentation kind of knowing what the celebration was going to be about but what I didn't expect is to hear the stories of how the forum has changed the lives most closely involved.

I remember the talk that Dr. Butler, main representative at the UN for Russian Academy of Natural sciences, gave, he told a story of a woman who he met in Kabul, Afghanistan. Her husband was killed by the Taliban. She experienced hardships through the lack of being educated by just being a woman. In many Islamic countries where there are isolated or hard to access communities because of the mountains, gender inequality issues often arise. All while experiencing extreme poverty and hunger. This story made me realize when we in the U.S. think we have it bad, we really have no idea just how lucky we are to live in a country where I at the

bear minimum have a roof over my head, a shoulder to cry on, and food on the table. Many and I mean many would love to have the things that we have in the states that majority of the time we simply don't appreciate. After hearing Dr. Butlers story, I thought to myself, if we are hearing this women's story, there must be thousands more that go unheard and undocumented.



Samul Elzinga (L) presents certificate of appreciation to Lee Kanyon

Even though mountains around the world are beautiful and create amazing ecosystems. When humans are involved the mountains create isolated communities. Which terrorist groups use to their full advantage. By being far away and isolated these communities are often the victims of being held hostage by terrorist groups. This is why we need to have good infrastructure in mountainous states and countries in order to keep communities safe.

I really enjoyed Ms. Wendy Jyang's PowerPoint slides, seeing her experiences and seeing the faces of people who she has personally changed for the better further strengthens my opinion of doing humanitarian work with my political science degree.

Through Mr. Uday Teki's talk I learned how many mountainous communities have become homeless mainly due to how climate change has affected their agricultural way of life. I am very glad that I had not one, but three classes with Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev. By encouraging his students to attend extracurricular activities. From learning about polio, hearing real life stories of growing up in the soviet era Kyrgyzstan, and learning about the importance of being involved, showing his students that your job doesn't end when the class is dismissed.

This semester was one for the books. I have learned so much not just in the class room, but more outside of it. It really encourages me to do better at UVU by seeing how literally all the support staff for this coalition students are. And by doing this they are getting real world application of how to use their varying degrees when they graduate. All of this is possible through engaged learning. School doesn't mean that you need to sit in a desk or be on your computer all the time.

At the end of everyone's talks, it was a humbling experience to be welcomed and recognized for my help in preparing the speakers and the room for these varying conferences, being granted a certificate really made my day. Because usually when you pass a class all you get is a check mark on your wolverine track. But by being pushed to be involved in these experiences largely by Dr. Abdrisaev, I walked away with a sense of accomplishment, much more than passing any other class.

Lee Kanyon, UVU student