

Contributing to International Mountain Day through Student Engaged Learning



On December 2nd, 2019, Utah Valley University (UVU) students gathered to celebrate the United Nations International Mountain Day. The event was hosted by Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of clubs on campus. One of UIMF's main goals is to advocate for women and girls in mountain communities. As the theme for this year's International Mountain Day is "Mountains Matter for Youth," it was fitting to hear from representatives of the clubs discussing their contributions to the conversation surrounding these neglected areas and groups of people.

The first speaker was Lacey Meyer, a UVU student and UIMF member. Ms. Meyer advocated for rural communities here in Utah. As a native of Price, Utah, Ms. Meyer has seen firsthand how the education and economy are struggling for rural mountain communities. In many areas of Utah, coal-mining or farming are the main sources of jobs. But as technology advances, those towns suffer. I have never been to any rural areas in Utah, so it was eye-opening to hear about such issues. As I began to wonder what could be done by someone like me, a 20-year-old college student, Ms. Meyer answered the question.

In her presentation, she focused on four ways to help stimulate the growth and success in such areas. Through "economy, education, partnering, and empowerment." She mentioned that the amount of job opportunities available in Utah in the STEM fields are growing. Companies involved with software development and computer technology jobs could move down to those areas, opening up a whole new field for people who need the boost to their local economy, and need opportunities to become more educated in technological ways. As residents of Utah, we can actively seek opportunities to partner with rural areas. We have a responsibility to become educated about the issues plaguing those communities as well. When discussing rural areas of Utah, we can change the dialogue we use involving those groups of people. Through events such

as “Rural Utah Roundtable,” where leaders of Price and other areas gathered to discuss issues and solutions to problems in their communities, we can be educated. I was impressed to hear Ms. Meyers had set up that event. It was a great example of student engaged learning at UVU.

The second speaker, UVU student and UIMF Vice President Michael Hinatsu, discussed UVU’s participation at the United Nations conference on the Status of Women in March 2019, as well as their contribution to the UN Civil Society Conference, held for the first time in Salt Lake City. He shared UIMF’s goal to advocate for women and children and mountain communities. UVU students were able to present at the conference and were recognized by the UN for their advocacy. Again, I was impressed at the model of student engaged learning implemented by UIMF as they participate on a global level regarding current social and political issues.

As a fellow member of UIMF, it was helpful to see concrete ways in which participation in a larger conversation concerning struggling members of our community is possible. As Vice President of UVU Rotaract, I was able to present briefly to Political Science classes at UVU to explain the event and encourage student engaged learning on campus by inviting students’ attendance and participation in the event. I was impressed by how UIMF’s and Rotary International’s goals coincide. Members of Utah Rotary and Utah Rotaracts were in attendance at the event as well. We were able to meet and discuss opportunities to work together in the future with UIMF.



Members of UVU Rotaract and Orem and Utah Rotary with the FAO-UN certificates of appreciation

Through UVU's student engaged learning model, we are able to contribute to and learn in more than just a classroom. We participate in real world situations, make connections and solve problems facing our communities. For me, the phrase "Mountains Matter for Youth" represent that. UVU's International Mountain Day was a successful event in inspiring student engagement to prosper mountain communities throughout the world.

Yana Andersen, UVU Rotaract Vice President