

Just a Small Town Girl from Hawai'i Speaking at the United Nations in Support for Mountain Women and Girls.

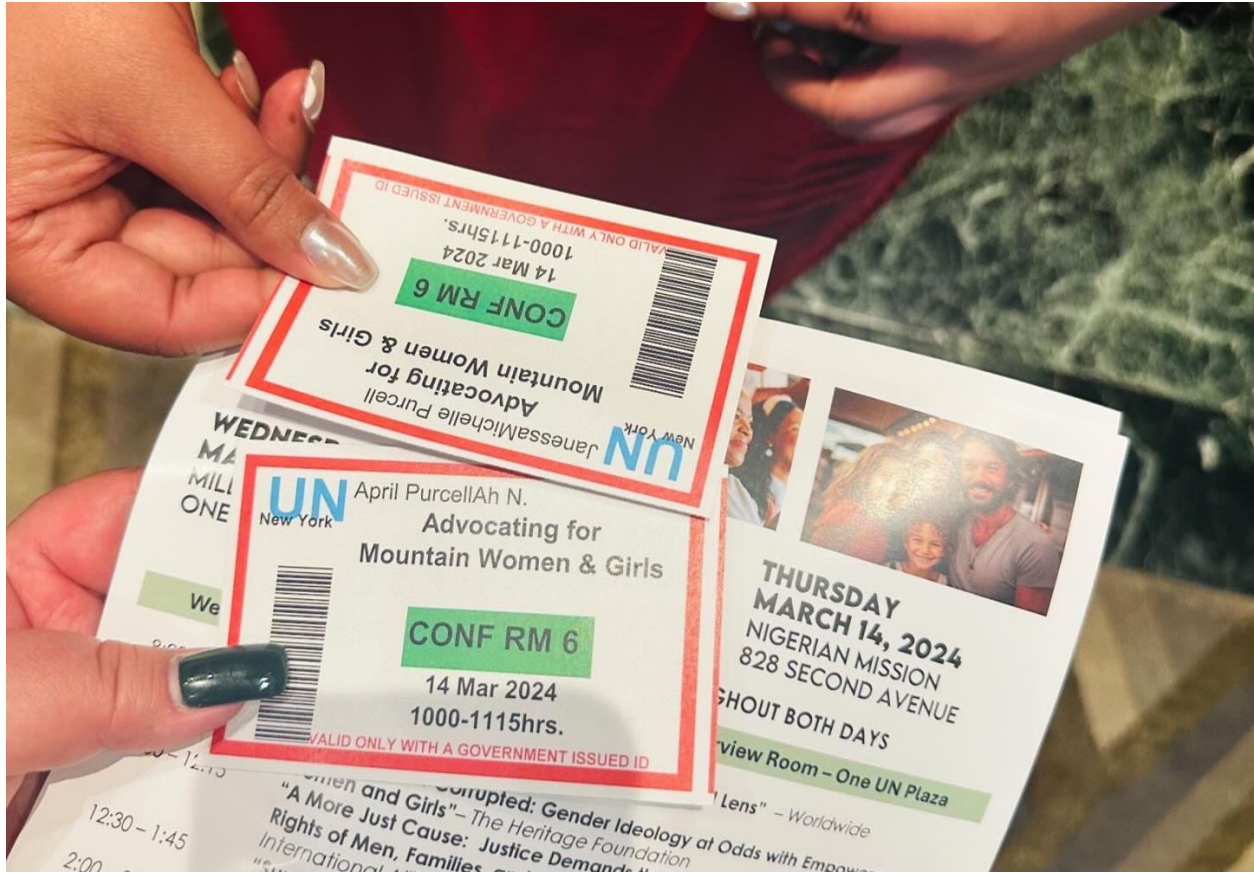


Utah Valley University delegation outside the United Nations headquarters on March 14, 2024.

On Thursday, March 14, 2024, bright and early my mom and I woke up to get ready for our presentation at a side event within the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68). Side events are usually hosted by member-states of the United Nations (UN) on issues important for them to promote during different activities at the UN. Utah Valley University (UVU) students and faculty, including me, were invited to speak about mountain women and families by the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic during their side event under the CSW68 umbrella. For the diplomats from the Kyrgyz Republic, it was also an

opportunity to demonstrate to CSW68 participants how students from their state and UVU can jointly advocate for mountain women by using a student engaged learning (SEL) model. Our team and I personally were happy to know that the Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations agreed to co-sponsor the side event as well. It was titled as "*Advocating for Mountain Women and Girls' Education through Student-Engaged Learning.*" SEL encourages students to work together on resolving certain practical problems, with their teacher mentoring them when necessary. Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU is the core of the SEL model.

With our legs aching and blisters on our feet we decided to catch an Uber to get us to the UN headquarters from our hotel in Lower Manhattan. This allowed us to take our time getting ready and still get to our meeting place on time. I messaged my peers from the UIMF, Braden Birbara, Stephan Atkinson and Noah Farnsworth who were staying in a room a floor below us, to let them know our plan if they wanted to join us. They eagerly agreed and we met down at the lobby 10 minutes before our Uber was set to pick us up. During this time, as per the SEL, we checked to make sure we had all the supplies and materials we needed for the presentations: while Braden Birbara as responsible for videography took with him the camera for pictures and recording the presentation, Noah Farnsworth, responsible for social media, was concerned about taking the tripods to hold the cameras and phones; we also ensured that we had our folders to pass out with information about UVU and UIMF and such, and our passes provided by the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations as a co-host of the side-event to get in the UN Headquarters.



Janessa- Michelle Purcell and her mom April Purcell, take a moment to take a picture of their UN Side Event Passes.

As we waited for the arrival of the rest of our delegation we watched as the flags at the entrance of the UN headquarters were put up for the day. Our Rotarian and Rotaract partners from the Kyrgyz Republic, Ritikaa Gupta, the representative from the Mountain Youth Hub, Nazik Moldotasheva the Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, our teacher in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals class and mentor for the UIMF & UVU Rotaract club and his wife Cholpon Akmatalieva, and our Department Chair Dr. Jay DeSart and his wife Patty, gathered together at the UN HQ entrance. We took the time to take a group photo outside of the UN before walking through the gates to go through the security checkpoint.

At the security checkpoint we ran into some issues as we did not have media passes to carry in our video-equipment, including tripods. We were told they would not be allowed inside

the headquarters but that they would hold onto our tripods and we could pick them up when we were done for the day. This was an issue for Braden and Noah and I was glad to see how they found a solution by relying on assistance and mentorship from Nazik Moldotasheva, the diplomat from the Kyrgyz Mission. Nazik was able to get permission from UN guards to keep a video camera and the smallest among tripods with us.

As we walked into the headquarters I felt of how big of a deal it was that I would have the opportunity to speak at the United Nations. All of our hard work, the endless meetings, and the reviewing of my statement had come down to this side event at the UN. Our delegation arrived early at our conference room. As the only UVU student scheduled by the task list to speak during the side event, I took the time to sit down and read over my statement. As per the task list for our preparations for the CSW68 visit, Stephan Atkinson, UIMF President, as a co-moderator of the side event was working with Dastan Abikov, Rotaractor from the Kyrgyz Republic to review the speaking lineup and queue up the video presentations. Noah Farnsworth and Braden Birbara set up the room to have cameras ready for pictures, video recording, and live streaming of the session.



Our conference room before the presentation begins.

Between rehearsing my statement, I helped my mom set out the flower lei's my family had overnighted for me to bring to New York. They also included a fragrant Puakenikeni lei for me to wear during the presentation. In addition to the gift bags that included folders with documents highlighting our contributions to the UN sustainable development goals we had put together and a book about UVU's history, I wanted to incorporate my island culture by giving orchid floral lei's to the Permanent Representatives of the Kyrgyz Republic and Nepal to the UN. We had to keep them cold and cover them in damp paper towels to keep them hydrated to last during the flight from Utah to New York and the days leading up until presentation day. Noah and Braden put together the gift bags to have them ready to go. Once Tannica Armstong, History and Political

Science Department Administrative Assistant, my mom April Purcell and Patty DeSart, had the gifts and lei's lined up to be presented, I sat back down to review my statement.



A packed conference room for our United Nations side event.

I have never been fond of public speaking, but Noah Farnsworth who usually sits next to me in our United Nations Sustainable Development Goals class encouraged me by reminding me that “the only way to get over public speaking is to speak in public more.” There was a lot of pressure on me to perform well, as I was the only student to speak on behalf of the UVU delegation at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, but also because I was the only girl. I take pride in being from the island of O’ahu, Hawai’i, and knew that this presentation was important not just for UVU but also for my home island and for my Polynesian and Black communities. I still felt a bit shaky about sharing my statement I spent hours and hours on but the time had come for the event to start.

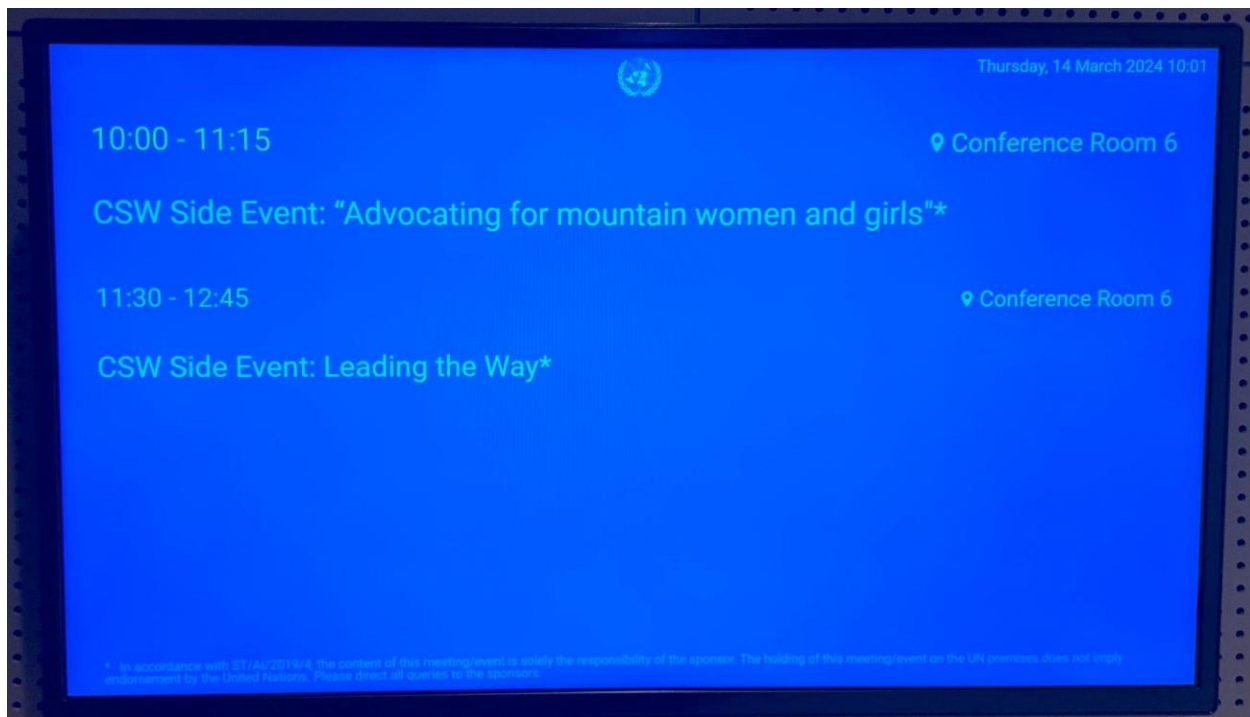
The conference room started to fill up and I was not prepared for a full house. Stephan Atkinson with Dastan Abikov began the session so that we could end our event promptly. As each presented person shared a prepared statement, I had to keep reminding myself how important it was to present well and not mess up this opportunity for future UVU students to experience. Each presentation was special and unique in the ways support for the mountain communities of women and girls is displayed. I enjoyed the statement given by Mrs. Aijan Chynybaeva, former President of the Bishkek Rotary Club. In her statement, she spoke about how the Rotary Club has impacted mountainous communities by providing resources for women to fund their businesses. She also shared the desire to set up more partnership programs between UVU and American University in Central Asia which is located in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Republic.



Janessa- Michelle Purcell, UVU Rotaract Vice President gives her statement.

The scent of the home in the lei I wore, comforted me as it was finally my turn to present and although I was nervous and stumbled over some of my words, overall I think it went pretty well. With the live stream that Noah was recording on the Utah International Mountain Forum

Facebook site, my older sister was able to watch my presentation. As soon as I was done speaking, I felt my body relax but I needed to keep my composure as our event was not done yet. My sister had texted me expressing how proud she was of me and what a good job I did. Seeing the words made me smile and relax because I told her before the event had started how nervous I was. I was more reassured when Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva waved her hand to me and mouthed “You did such a great job!” and I lit up inside. As we listened to the last few speakers, the reality that I had just spoken at the UN settled in. As a sophomore at UVU, I accomplished what most people never have the opportunity to do. I hope to have more opportunities to present and sit in on panels, I actually enjoyed it so much.



An Announcement of the side event at the UN Monitor outside the Conference

Room #6

Overall, our side event was successful. For the most part we had accomplished everything we set out to do on this school trip. There were some minor things we can do to improve for next year but we had some very positive feedback from people who had attended our event. As our

conference room was clearing out for the next event, I had the honor of presenting the orchid lei's to Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva and Ambassador Lok Bahadur Thapa of Nepal.



UVU delegation stops to take a group photo with Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva and Ambassador Lok Bahadur Thapa of Nepal wearing orchid floral lei's.

In conclusion, I am grateful to UVU and the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN for providing this opportunity to display the SEL model together with my colleagues to make this trip a success. Being able to share my culture while in New York at the United Nations made me so happy to be a representative of Hawai'i and my Polynesian culture. Without each team member committing to their responsibilities our work and efforts would not have been possible. The most important lesson I learned was the importance of the relationship we as team leaders should develop to make our team workflow smoothly to accomplish our

goals. A working relationship with one another makes all the difference in our execution of events. I hope that other students in the UIMF club here at UVU will get to experience planning, organizing, and participating in next year's CSW69.

Janessa- Michelle Purcell, UIMF President-Designate