

Statement
Dr. Jay DeSart
Utah Valley University, Utah
68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Side Event
Advocating for Mountain Women and Girls' Education through Student-Engaged Learning"
March 14, 2024

Dear co-hosts of this side event Ambassador Kasymalieva, and Ambassador Lok Bahadur Thapa, dear Minister Baatyrova. I thank you for the opportunity to speak at this forum in support of the mountain communities, women and girls. I also thank my friend, Ambassador Kasymalieva for featuring a side event last year and during this session as a learning opportunity for UVU students. As stated by our moderators, this event is included in UVU's United Nations Sustainable Development Goals class, and students are taking a mid-term examination as we speak by contributing to this side event.

Since 2011, our students have been advocating for sustainable mountain development in the state of Utah and globally through the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs. UIMF is a core of the Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model. SEL encourages students to work jointly on resolving practical problems with their teacher mentoring them. Students are managing everything at this event based on rubrics from the curriculum, while their teacher, my colleague, Dr. Abdrisaev, is watching their actions in the audience.

Pedagogical research shows that students learn best when they are actively engaged in their own learning process as a group. In addition, the SEL model is inclusive by involving both traditional students, or youth, and non-traditional learners. Thus, the students' education becomes even more of a student-driven process. Non-traditional students are learners older than 25, who balance education with taking care of their families and jobs. This diversity of students allows them to teach each other different skills while implementing their assigned projects.

Our studies also show the important role of student clubs including Rotaracts (student clubs of the Rotary International) in making students full-fledged contributors to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As Rotaractors, they serve both local and global communities, in addition to self-sustaining activities. Every year since 2017, our students have self-funded their visits to these CSW sessions, and Rotaractors from the Kyrgyz Republic came here in a similar way. UVU and UIMF were featured six times in the triennial United Nations Secretary General's reports on Sustainable Mountain Development. The last 2022 report highlighted the SEL model and the contribution of the non-traditional students.

Our goal is to provide our students with greater understanding and engagement with the global community and our partnership with the Kyrgyz Republic is evidence of the model's effectiveness. Our Political Science program at UVU has a variety of emphases to allow students to customize their bachelor's degree to their interests. One of the largest emphases in our program is our Global Politics emphasis, and our students participating in this event today are pursuing that emphasis. In

addition we are proposing a Global Politics minor to bring this understanding and experience to non-Political Science majors as well.

It's noteworthy to also point out that UVU is an open-enrollment institution. We give educational opportunities to *all* students who want to learn. In that way, our program is having an impact across the socio-economic spectrum in promoting civic engagement with the global community. Because of its simplicity and availability at any campus worldwide, it can also make education an important pillar for the implementation of a Five Year action for development of mountain regions.

Thank you.