

## **Hosting Women of the Mountains Conferences through student engaged learning**

The Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of clubs at Utah Valley University ([www.utahimf.org](http://www.utahimf.org)), was founded in 2011 after students co-hosted the second International Women of the Mountains Conference in Orem, UT, in order to advocate for mountain women, cause in the State of Utah, North America and at the United Nations.

The first Women of the Mountains conference was hosted by Utah Valley University in 2007 and served as an academic forum to both raise awareness and advocate eliminating gender inequality, as well as address sustainability challenges in mountainous areas in North America and worldwide. In subsequent conferences, students undertook service learning initiatives under the umbrella of the Mountain Partnership where they played major roles in organizing and hosting through the engaged learning model. Under that model, we gained professional skills and experiences by addressing real-world problems of mountain women advocacy at the local, regional and United Nations levels with an instructor as a mentor.

The fourth international Women of the Mountains conference was hosted in Utah, October 7-9, 2015 solely through the efforts of the Utah International Mountain Forum. Members of the coalition, the majority of whom are non-traditional students, raised funds to host the event and brought diplomats, experts, and women from mountain nations worldwide to Utah. The goal was to engage students in creating awareness and seeking solutions compatible with gender-related goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development documents.

The United Nations Secretary-General's Report on sustainable mountain development A/71/256, highlighted the UVU model of student engagement, specifically mentioning UIMF, in advocacy of gender and sustainable mountain development agendas of the United Nations. It emphasized the important role which students play not only in hosting the conference but also in adopting the final document of the conference with recommendations concerning the implementations of sustainable development goals and mountain targets in particular.

The document recommended that SDG #5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," needs to have strong support for improving women's rights and welfare, including women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; that SDG target #6.6, "protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains..." requires stressing the role that women play in the protection of the environment and water sources; and the implementation of SDG target # 15.1, "ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular, ...mountains..." takes into account the critical role women play as promoters of innovation, development, and cooperation for the common good.

This model allowed us as students, including non-traditional students, to gain professional skills and experiences through the advocacy of the mountain and rural women causes on local and global levels. While we share with you our experiences with hosting the international Women of the Mountains Conferences, our colleagues will report on their contributions to the advocacy of rural and mountain women globally.