

How to advocate for mountain women

On October 2, 2017, UVU students had the opportunity to attend a roundtable held by the Utah International Mountain Forum—a coalition of several clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU). One of their goals is to raise awareness of mountain sustainability topics, to do this they invited leaders from four non-governmental organizations (NGO) recognized by the United Nations (UN). Dr. Andrew Taber, Dr. Jed Shilling, Dr. Rusty Butler, and Mrs. Wendy Jyang were the leaders chosen to share their insight on how to advocate for mountain women globally.

Dr. Baldomero Lago, Vice-rector for global engagement at UVU, started off the roundtable by informing the students of his recent trip to New York. This trip was necessary in helping UVU become the only institution in the state to be recognized as a member of the United Nations Department of Public Information. Dr. Lago also emphasized that the students at UVU are at the “right academic institution” to gain the experience and skills necessary to help advocate for important issues globally.

Following Dr. Lago was Dr. Jed Shilling, who serves on the Board of Trustees at the Mountain Institute (TMI). TMI works at the UN as an NGO in a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN. Dr. Shilling’s focus during his presentation was on why mountains are important to us. Mountains provides fresh water for over half of humanity and is a key component to preventing climate change. He also talked about what TMI does and why it was established. TMI helps these farmers downstream maintain their resources—especially in the Andes mountains where the melting glaciers may provide water for only 10-15 more years. Also, he emphasized how women are usually the ones that provide for the family since the men leave to go find work elsewhere.

After Dr. Shilling gave his remarks, Dr. Andrew Taber presented some solutions to the issues mountain people face. Dr. Taber is the Executive Director at the Mountain Institute which has helped him come up with solutions. Some of these solutions include training farmers to grow different crops that would help them reduce the usage of their resources. This would not only benefit their environment tremendously but also their economic situation, since these plants will provide them with more money. If these people could learn these strategies, then less men would have to find work elsewhere, because they could live off the profit the farms provide. Dr. Taber concluded his presentation by asking the students to get involved. To help these issues receive more attention, we need to be active not only globally but also locally.



Shying away from the mountain issue, Dr. Rusty Butler, the Main Representative at the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), praised UVU and President Holland for the steps

they were taking at the university. His statements were, “this is the only institution, that I am aware of, which focuses on student engaged learning at such a high level with the UN” and “the engaged learning model at UVU should be used by every other institution in the nation.” Not only does this show that UVU is stepping in the right direction with the UN but also UVU might be the best institution to get involved with global issues.

The concluding panelist was Ms. Wendy Jyang, the founder of Beijing-based WJS Liahona International Services, providing humanitarian opportunities for young people. With little time left, Ms. Jyang left the students with powerful remarks. She explained how she wanted to make a difference in the lives of women who struggle. This led her to finding people who share the same ideas as her and helped form their own group. While one person can be impactful, she said that you can be even more powerful in a group.

Overall, this roundtable helped me see the importance of issues that I had never heard about before, which made me realize that many issues go unsolved daily. Although, if we continue to push for what we believe in and find groups to help us, one day we will be able to make a difference in the world.

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