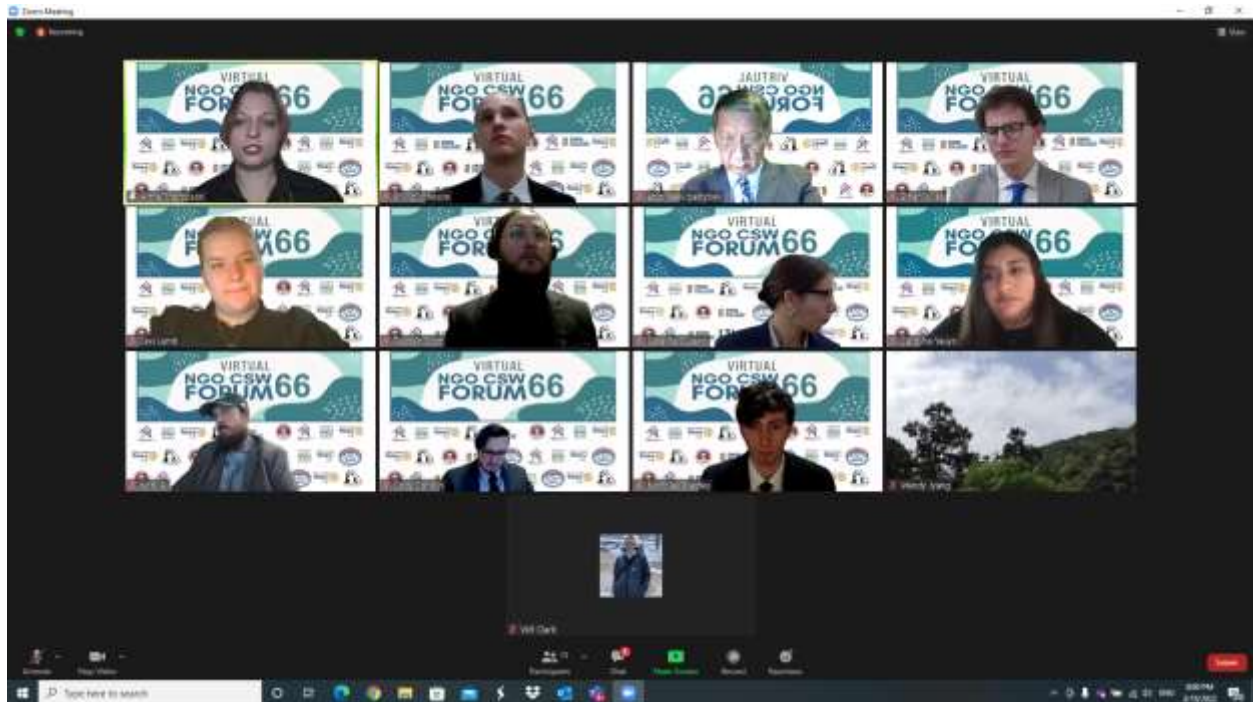


A Rousing Success: Reflections on a Student-run Event at CSW66



Group photo of the participants of the event

On March 21st, 2022 I had the great privilege of presenting at the 66th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in a parallel event entitled “Inclusive Student Engaged Learning Model to Empower Mountain Women Globally”. The event was hosted by myself and fellow members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs, as well as representatives from Snow College and the Osh Technological University in Kyrgyzstan, and was sponsored by two nongovernmental organizations in consultative status with the U.N. Economic and Social Council: the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah-China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hand Development and Cooperation.

During the hour-long event, my fellow students and I had the opportunity to advocate for the cause of mountain people and our community to an audience of educators, activists, and thought leaders that spanned the globe. I spoke about the promise and

importance of student and community-led efforts in developing effective adaptation and mitigation strategies for the challenges presented by climate change to mountain communities globally, a topic I am passionate about.



Rusden Scott speaks during the event

In particular, I highlighted the imperiled Great Salt Lake, which is shrinking at a calamitous and unprecedented rate. The impending loss of the largest Hyper-saline lake in the world introduces a raft of disastrous threats not only to the lake ecosystem and the millions of migratory birds it supports, but to the health of Utah's mountain ecosystems and the local tourist economy, which rely on the snow created by the lake in winter. The shrinking lake even affects the physical health of the local community, which is being subjected to airborne arsenic dust from the exposed lakebed – a hazard especially dangerous to pregnant women and their children.

Other students shared research and experiences on issues affecting women and girls in mountain regions ranging from access to healthcare to the incidence and effects of natural disasters. Following our presentations, we fielded a Q&A, in which observers from Austria to Africa asked questions about our research and expressed especial interest in the Student Engaged Learning Model (SEL) through which we planned, organized and hosted the parallel event.

In many ways, the event itself was both a celebration and example of the SEL Model, through which a diverse group of students are empowered to use their drive, talents, and ingenuity to develop and carry out projects that have a lasting impact in both local communities on national and even global. With guidance from a faculty mentor, the students—many of whom are non-traditional—carry out these projects from conception to execution and retain full ownership of everything they do, from group efforts like hosting events at U.N. conferences to individual efforts, like the solo research project I will be undertaking in India in the fall.

In 2016 and 2019, the Utah International Mountain Forum was highlighted for their use of this model by the United Nations Secretary General's Report on SMD, making it the only student group in the world to be recognized as such.

Rusden Scott, Utah Valley University student