

Kyrgyz Ambassador's Visit a Triumph of the Student Engaged Learning Model



Almazkan Akmatova, wife of the Ambassador, Rusden Scott and Ambassador Amanbaev during reception on February 15, 2023

The mood was celebratory at the reception held for the visit of the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the United States and Canada, H.E. Baktybek Amanbaev, and his wife Mrs. Almazkan Akmatova to Utah Valley University. For myself and the other students, the events of the visit, which spread across three days from February 14th to the 16th, were the culmination of months of planning and preparation, done through the Student Engaged Learning model. The model--pioneered and championed by students at UVU—is a unique framework by which students are empowered to work as a group to solve real-world issues with faculty serving as a mentor. Unlike other forms of student learning, the SEL model is

operationalized entirely by students through the use of student clubs and puts non-traditional students like myself at the forefront, providing them with opportunities they are often excluded from.

The ambassador's visit is a model example of the SEL model in action. The visit was planned and ran by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a student club focused on engaging with issues facing mountain communities, in conjunction with the Utah Valley University Foreign Affairs Club and the UVU Office for Global Engagement.



Stephan Atkinson, President of the Foreign Affairs Club, Almazkan Akmatova, wife of the Ambassador, Ambassador Amanbaev and Gabe, student guide during UVU tour

On February 15th, I attended a lunch with Ambassador Amanbaev and his wife, as well as the members of the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club and relevant UVU student club leadership. During the lunch, which was hosted by Dr. Baldomero Lago. The lunch was a wonderful opportunity to discuss important developments in Sustainable Mountain Development with the Ambassador in an informal setting.

Later that afternoon, the Ambassador gave a presentation which was open to the public, where he gave us an overview of his home country of Kyrgyzstan, in the heart of Central Asia. His message focus on the Kyrgyz people's burgeoning tech sector and the many factors that make the country an advantageous place for large American interests and other global investors to invest. Following his address, the Ambassador was awarded an honorary UVU professorship.

Following that open meeting, I attended a smaller, closed-door meeting between the Ambassador and Congressman Joseph Pitts, who has been an important contributor to US relations in Central Asia, and has taken a particular interest in economic and political reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic. The discussion centered on Utah-Kyrgyz Republic relations and the ways the two mountain communities can assist one another, and mutual improvement opportunities.



Ambassador Amanbaev speaks guide reception at UVU

Later, I helped prepare the banquet room for the evening reception, which was to be the main event of the visit. As invited guests arrived, I greeted them and provided them with information about the evening's program, which included dinner, a reception line and short messages from the UVU students and faculty, as well as an address from Ambassador Amanbaev. The reception was well-attended by UVU students and faculty, business leaders, community leaders, members of the Kyrgyz diaspora. Also in attendance were current and former UIMF leadership, which made for a poignant demonstration of the lasting legacy of the SEL model in action.

Rusden Scott, UIMF member