

**Statement**  
**Braden Birbara**  
**69<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**  
**Utah Valley University**  
**Parallel Event**  
***“An Inclusive Student-Engaged Learning Initiative to Empower Mountain Women and Girls”***  
**March 10, 2025**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Braden Birbara and I am a former student of Utah Valley University (UVU). It is my privilege to speak today on behalf of mountain communities as I highlight the ability of Student Engaged Learning (SEL) to promote student success especially through the education and empowerment of mountain women and girls.

Through SEL, which is exemplified by our student club, Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), we have brought together a diverse group of traditional and non-traditional students to address real-world challenges under the guidance of dedicated faculty. The SEL model has been instrumental in how we address issues, with a focused commitment to sustainable mountain development and supporting the voices of women and girls in mountain regions.

I attended UVU for two years and have lived in mountain communities for even longer. Within UIMF, we have initiated and participated in projects that make a tangible difference. Our efforts range from community health campaigns, such as observing World Polio Day, to supporting local schools and engaging with community leaders. More importantly, our SEL model ensures that our work does not stop when we graduate. Through UIMF mentorship, we continue collaborating with former students, such as myself, creating a lasting network that fosters long-term support and advocacy. This network serves as an ongoing mentorship and helps us promote the advancement of mountain communities, ensuring that the impact of our work remains long-lasting.

I am now a student at Fordham University in New York City. Although I no longer live in Utah, my commitment to advocating for these communities remains. I believe that effective advocacy for mountain issues must extend beyond their geographic boundaries and that mountain issues are world issues. Many people do not realize the importance of mountainous regions and mountain communities to their everyday lives. An objective of advocacy is increasing awareness of the importance of these regions. The SEL model employed by UVU employs this idea especially well by drawing the connections established through UIMF and leveraging them to benefit mountain communities.

No matter where we live, our commitment to the education and empowerment of mountain women and girls must continue. By applying the principles of SEL and drawing on our collective experiences, we can continue to make a difference for the betterment of people and communities in these regions.

Thank you.