

## World Polio Day 2025 at Utah Valley University

With Oliver Rosenbauer



On Thursday, October 23, 2025, I helped host the 8th annual observation of World Polio Day at Utah Valley University (UVU) in Orem. The event was organized by the UVU Rotaractors and students enrolled in the Comparative Politics of Central Asia course, under the umbrella of the UVU Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF). The keynote speaker was Oliver Rosenbauer from the World Health Organization, who spoke via Microsoft Teams on the global effort to eradicate polio.

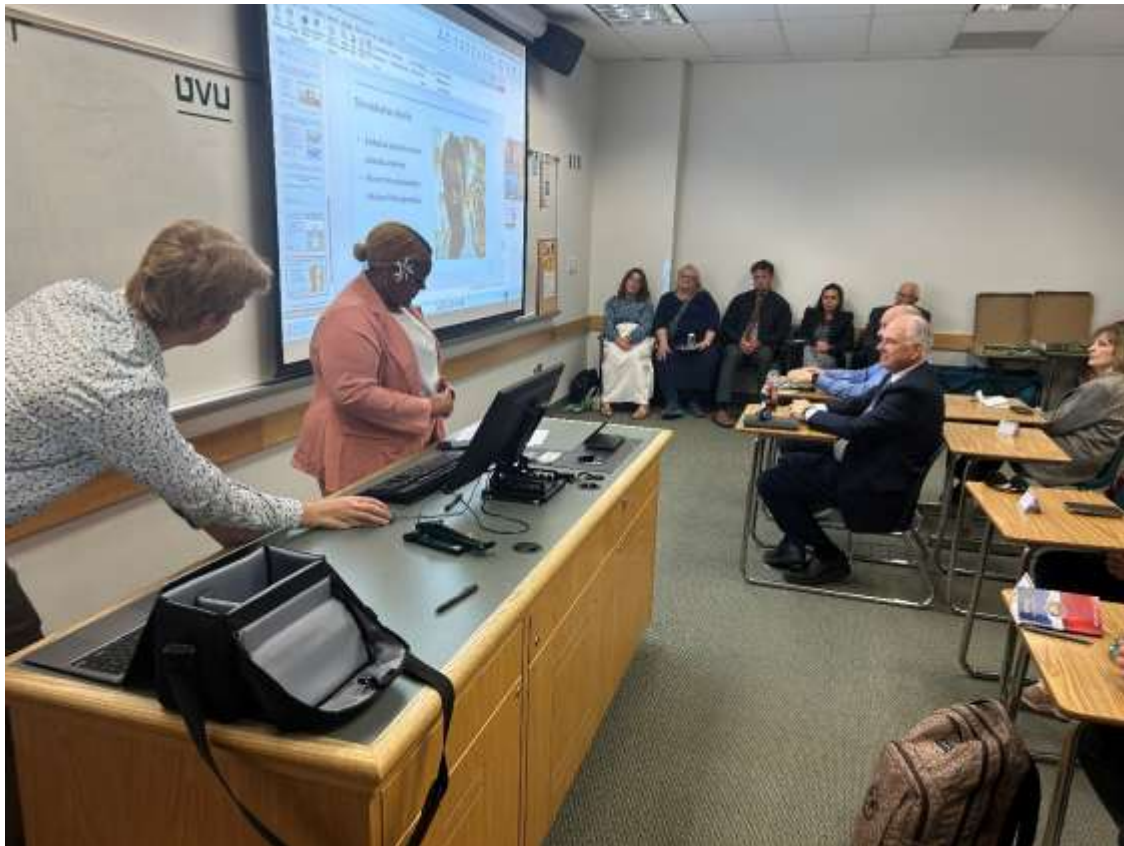


*Oliver Rosenbauer from the World Health Organization Speaks at the event*

The global polio eradication effort is greatly shaped by Rotary International and its PolioPlus initiative. Rotary has provided leadership, advocacy and funding since launching the PolioPlus program in 1985. Through its partnership in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) with organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF, Rotary has helped immunize more than 2.5 billion children across 122 countries, yielding a 99.9 % reduction in polio incidence.

In the Central Asia region Rotary's work has contributed to strengthening national immunization days and surveillance programs, supported vaccine distribution infrastructure, and fostered regional collaboration to coordinate immunization across borders. These efforts matter because Central Asia lies at a crossroads for population movements, migration, labor and border interactions that could risk poliovirus movement. Rotary's advocacy has helped ensure national governments in those states commit resources and coordinate surveillance and vaccination campaigns to maintain polio-free status.

Oliver Rosenbauer, spokesperson for GPEI under the WHO (based in Geneva, Switzerland) was the events main speaker.



**Janessa-Michelle Purcell, Utah Valley University Rotaract President Speaks at the Event**

The Event was hosted and organized by Janessa-Michelle Purcell, Utah Valley University Rotaract President, UVU Rotaractors student team, with Cathy Ambrose, President of the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, and many other Rotarians in attendance.

Rosenbauer's main talking points included the near eradication of polio worldwide, with cases reduced by approximately 99%, underscores the significance of the global community's last big push toward complete elimination, especially within Pakistan and Afghanistan (the last place polio is still present on earth). Ensuring vaccine access for all children represents both a logistical challenge and an ethical responsibility, as every child deserves the right to protection from preventable diseases. Student leadership and civic engagement serve as vital components of global health advocacy, empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to international efforts. Within the Utah and UVU communities, raising local awareness about polio connects global health issues to community service and education, reinforcing the idea that informed local action can have far-reaching global effects.

This event showed UVU's Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) model: students took ownership of the planning, organization and execution of the event, working under faculty mentorship and collaborating with stakeholders (Rotary members, WHO representative). Students within the class served as moderators and organizers, thereby engaging in experiential learning (managing a live event, coordinating logistics, editing scripts, handling budget/purchase approvals, and teaming with peers). Through this hands-on process we developed professional skills in event planning, teamwork, leadership and global health communication. The event also served as a peer-learning forum: my fellow students Natalia Figueroa, Erryn Lammi, Aemish Brock, Curtis Bristol and Kade Van Ry each assumed roles, allowing distributed responsibility and collaborative growth.



**Dr. Jay DeSart Speaks During the Event**

Other Participants student participants: Natalia Figueroa (President, Foreign Affairs Club), Erryn Lammi, Aemish Brock, Curtis Bristol and Kade Van Ry. Faculty/Rotary attendees included Dr. Janet Colvin, Cathy Ambrose, Dr. Jay DeSart, and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev.

From my involvement I learned that global health advocacy can be grounded in local institutional action; small-scale events can amplify awareness even when the ultimate goal (eradication of a disease) is very large. I learned the importance of minute organizational detail and how successful execution depends on teamwork and contingency. I also learned how partnering with established organizations (Rotary, WHO) bolsters credibility and reach of student-led initiatives. I recognized that awareness alone is insufficient; the value lies in linking awareness to concrete actions and that building networks early, with students, clubs, professional organizations, fosters leadership capacity.



**Group Photo of UVU Rotaractors and Participants of the Event**

Participating in this event filled me with a sense of pride and responsibility. I felt a surge of community, seeing the audience and watching my peers' step into leadership roles. It was gratifying to contribute directly to a global health cause while operating in a student context. I left the event feeling motivated, not only by the statistics but by recognizing how far we still must go and how student engagement matters. I felt connected to both the local UVU community and the global health sphere.

***Nicholas Robinson, Utah Valley University student***