

Serving Above Myself: Supporting Global Polio Eradication Through UVU's World Polio Day Observation

On October 23, 2025, I participated in Utah Valley University's 8th annual World Polio Day Observation. The event took place from 11:30 AM to 12:45 PM in LA 233, as well as through a livestream for those joining remotely. The keynote speaker was Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer, spokesperson for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) at the World Health Organization. This event was hosted by the UVU Rotaract Club and the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, with student leadership provided through UVU's Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model.



Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer Speaks during the Event

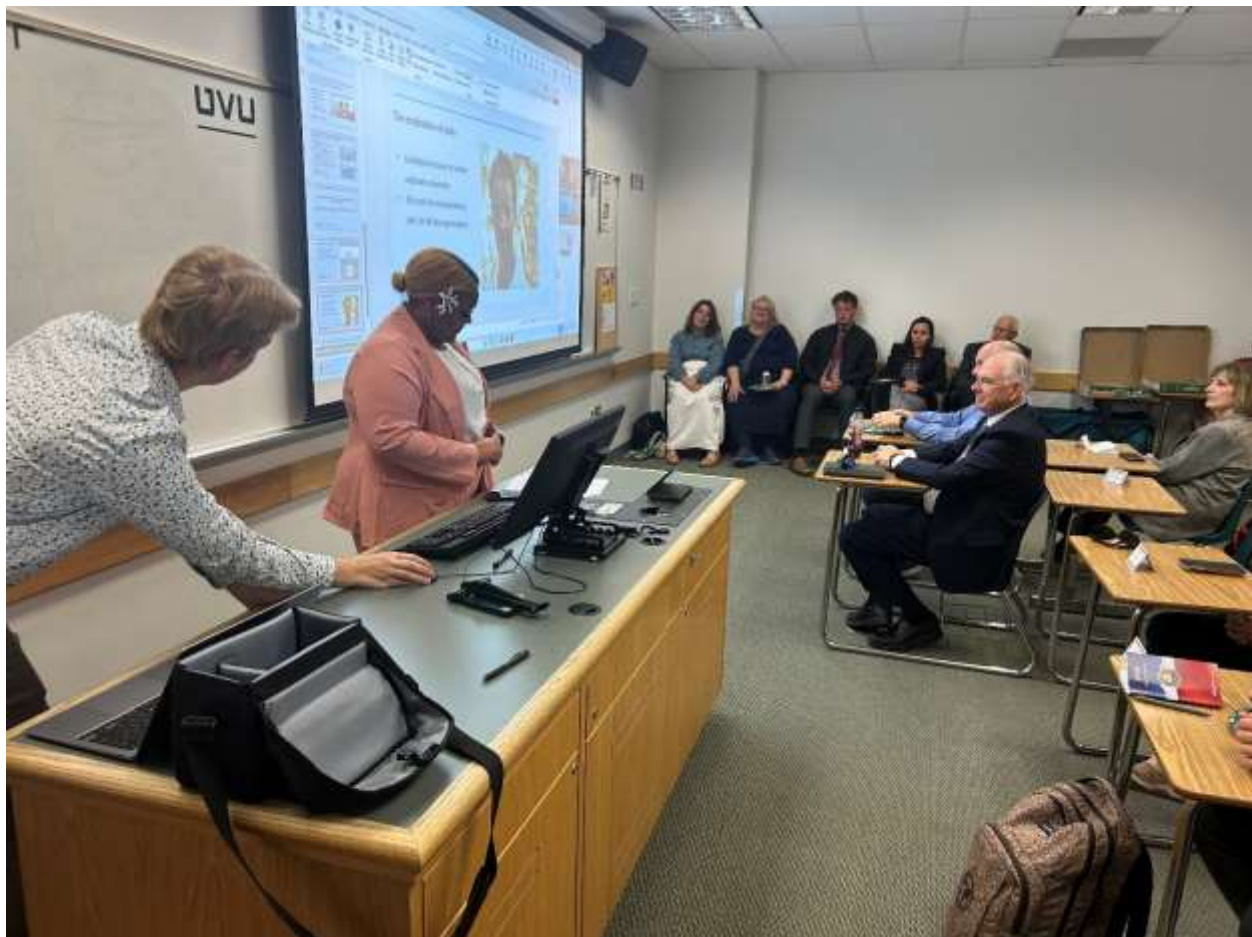
The hosts and presenters included Natalia Figueroa, President of the Foreign Affairs Club; Janessa-Michelle Purcell, President of UVU Rotaract and moderator; Erynn Lammi, UVU Rotaract Vice President; Curtis Bristol, Rotaract Vice President; and representatives from the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, including Club President Cathy Ambrose. Faculty mentors in attendance included Dr. Janet Colvin and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, among others. Students who participated in the event included several Rotaractors and Foreign Affairs Club members, including Sam Olesen and Antoine Mwamba, who also asked engaging questions during the Q&A session.

Mr. Rosenbauer discussed his experiences working to eradicate polio globally, highlighting efforts in countries where the disease remains endemic. He explained the complexities of vaccination campaigns, the role of local trust-building, and the importance of international partnerships. He

also reflected on how being a Rotarian influenced his work at the WHO, emphasizing Rotary International's long-term commitment to humanitarian service.

Analysis of Rotary International's Impact in Central Asia

Rotary International has played a significant role in global polio eradication, including in the Central Asian region. Although Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have maintained polio-free status for many years, their continued cooperation with international vaccination monitoring programs is essential for preventing re-importation of the virus. After a polio outbreak in Tajikistan in 2010, Rotary and the WHO partnered with local governments to deliver widespread immunization campaigns that successfully stopped transmission. Rotary's support in funding surveillance stations and health worker training helped strengthen public health infrastructure, which continues to benefit the region today.



Utah Valley University Rotaractors Host the Event

However, challenges remain in maintaining vaccination rates in rural communities, supporting displaced populations, and countering misinformation. Rotary's model of community-based

engagement, working through local clubs that understand cultural and social dynamics, has proven effective in bridging trust gaps. The Central Asia example demonstrates that the fight against polio is not just medical but deeply social, requiring relationships, cooperation, and long-term commitment.

Importance of the Event and Student Engaged Learning Application

This event supported student-engaged learning by placing students at the center of planning, organizing, presenting, and moderating. Rather than passively listening, students were responsible for coordinating speakers, preparing scripts, managing the event space, and engaging guests. Through these responsibilities, we connected what we learn in political science and global health courses with real-world international collaboration and diplomacy.



Natalia Figueroa, President of the Foreign Affairs Club Manages her student team during the event

This event also shows how global health initiatives directly affect local communities—not only abroad but also here in Utah. The Orem-Lindon Rotary Club’s ongoing fundraising and service work, such as Hope4Orem and scholarship support, demonstrated how humanitarian service begins at home and expands outward.

Learning Lessons and Personal Reflection

Participating in this event taught me that global challenges like polio eradication require cooperation across governments, NGOs, international institutions, and everyday community

members. I learned that commitment to service can last decades and that progress is achieved through persistence, partnership, and shared responsibility.



Group Photo After the Event

Emotionally, I felt both inspired and humbled. Seeing students, professors, Rotarians, and international professionals come together reminded me that I am part of something larger than myself. I left with a stronger desire to contribute meaningfully, whether through future international work, local service, or upcoming opportunities such as UVU's 2026 Study Abroad visit to the United Nations and the WHO in Geneva.

Participating in the World Polio Day Observation encouraged me to reflect on how I can continue to "Serve Above Myself," not just as a student, but as a global citizen.

Ryker Webb, Utah Valley University Student