My Time at Utah Valley University: A Retrospective

Samuel Elzinga speaking at the session of the United Nations High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development on July 19, 2018,
(The Trusteeship Council chamber, United Nations Headquarters)

It's hard to put into words the emotions I feel as I write this. This will likely be the last post I write for the website of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University, as president of the UIMF. I remember the first post I ever wrote for the coalition's website was when UIMF, in conjunction with the UVU Office for Global Engagement, hosted His Excellency Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov, the permanent representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations in February of 2018. Since then, I have written over 60 individual write ups and updates for the website, averaging at least one a month, and many times more, considering during the summer activities slowed. Allow me, if you will, to post some parting reflections and words of advice to members before I pass the torch to Dallas Karren, the next president of UIMF.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the club. Since my ascendance to the role of president, our coalition has participated in at least one initiative each year, celebrated International Mountain

Day every year at United Nations Headquarters as the guests of the permanent mission of Kyrgyzstan, and became an integral part of hosting the 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. This was all possible because of the passion and drive of students in the club. UIMF solely operates off of the student engaged learning model, which allows students as a group to gain professional skills by solving real world problems, with faculty serving them as mentors. Through this model, UIMF has become extremely successful in advocating for sustainable mountain development and the SMD agenda in the State of Utah, in the United States and at the United Nations. But at the core of the model is you: the students. These efforts are not possible without student support. You are the engine of change both at UVU and the United Nations.

Hon. David Utrilla, UVU Global Community Advisory Board Chair presents Atlas Award to Samuel Elzinga

With that being said, a lot of these efforts would be more sporadic and chaotic, if not for the advice and guidance of fabulous faculty mentors. Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev and Dr. Rusty Butler, two outstanding faculty members from UVU, have provided astute advice to the entire coalition, with individual clubs within the coalition given advice by each faculty member they had. I am personally indebted to each of these faculty members. Not only have they helped their clubs grow and learn, but they have been mentors to me as well. Professor Ryan Vogel, Dr. Greg Jackson, and Dr. Abdrisaev all helped me write my thesis, which was recently recognized

as one of the top theses in the Integrated Studies Department. Furthermore, the UVU Office for Global Engagement, which UIMF works closely with, just gave me with the Atlas Award, one of the most prestigious awards on campus. It is given to one student, one faculty member, one organization, and one person each year. This year, I was awarded it based on my commitment to public service, desire to serve others, and engagement in international cooperation. While this award is certainly quite the personal accomplishment, I earned this award largely to the work UIMF has done on campus and internationally. This award is as much UIMF's as it is mine.

As I look back on my undergraduate career, it is largely defined by my involvement in student organizations, with UIMF playing a large role personally and professionally for me. I do not think I would have had the same undergraduate experience had I not gotten involved with UIMF as a freshman. My parting words to UIMF members and students alike: get involved. It will change the course of your undergraduate career and life.

Samuel Elzinga, President, Utah International Mountain Forum