



**WORLDS  
APART?**

**UTAH'S URBAN  
RURAL DIVIDE**

University of Utah Honors College  
2017-2018 Praxis Lab

Worlds Apart? Addressing the Urban/Rural Divide was a Praxis Lab at the University of Utah in the 2017-2018 year. It was taught by Political Science Professor Matthew Burbank and Philanthropy Matters Principal Consultant Katherine Fife.

Students were Emily Anderson, Anne Marie Bitter, Avery Conner, Henry Gilbert, Hannah Horman, Nate Kunz, Savannah Mailloux, Cierra Parkinson, Zach Vayo, Beth Wineke, and Ashli Young.

Special thanks to Mike Martineau, Amy Bergerson, Erin Sine, Erica Rojas and Dean Sylvia Torti

**WORLDS APART?  
ADDRESSING  
UTAH'S URBAN  
RURAL DIVIDE**



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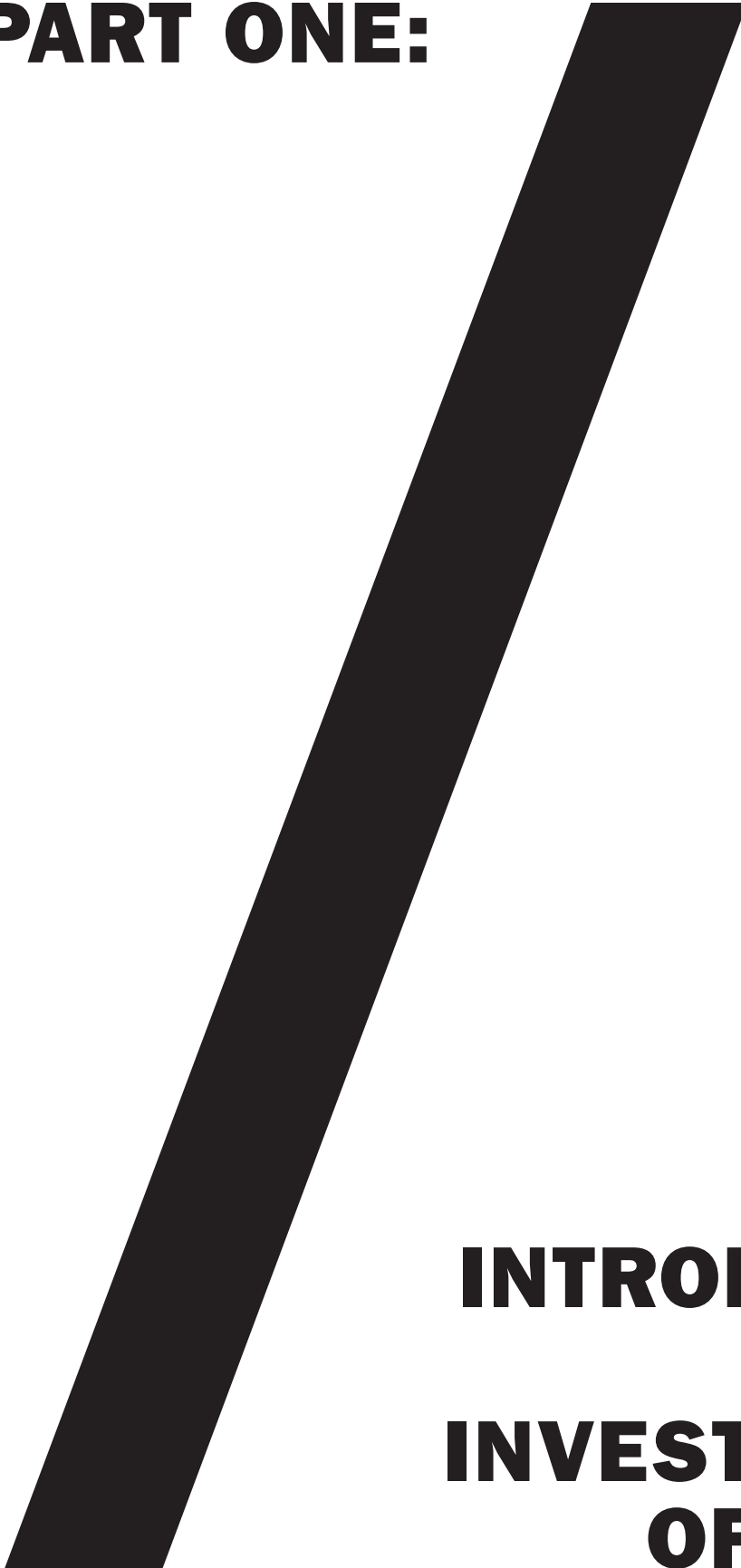
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**PART ONE:**



**INTRODUCTION  
&  
INVESTIGATION  
OF TOPICS**

## INTRODUCTION

Praxis Labs rely on theory in combination with action. Therefore, in our Praxis Lab “Worlds Apart? Addressing Utah’s Urban-Rural Divide,” we sought to address the dynamics of the divide, and create a solution in order to bridge this gap. This was done through two semesters that each had an individual focus: research and solutions.

The fall of 2017 was spent researching and understanding the geographical, cultural, political, demographic, and lifestyle differences between rural and urban communities. At the end of this semester, each student conducted individual research. Students were then grouped by topic, and began to prepare possible solutions for presentation.

The spring of 2018 was dedicated to creating and implementing a project to connect these various communities. After the group presentations, the class began to further their individual and collective research to choose the topic of interest. The class collectively decided to focus on education. From this, the class hosted an event to spread awareness, supplemented existing campus groups, and provided information increase access to technical and community colleges. This was done to decrease urban-rural higher education stratification.

## SPONSORS

On behalf of the participants of this year’s Urban Rural Divide Praxis Lab, we would like to graciously thank the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute as well as the Salt Lake City Corporation for sponsoring our efforts over the past year. With your generous support, we were able to further research issues affecting Utah as a whole and focus on promoting greater awareness of educational disparities across the state. Your support has helped us leave a lasting impact and share vital information with key policy makers as well as members of the public that could lead to positive community change. We also are very appreciative of the many guest speakers who took the time and effort to contribute their experience and knowledge to our class. Your remarks always provided needed insight and helped us understand various aspects of the urban-rural divide.

The Praxis Lab Program could not do what it does without the generous support of sponsors that are invested in promoting positive community change. Thank you again for your thoughtful support to the Urban Rural Divide Praxis Lab.

## OUR TEAM



The class at the Praxis Lab Summit  
 Back row: Katherine Fife, Hannah Horman, Nathan Kunz, Cierra Parkinson, Emily Anderson, Savannah Mailloux, Anne Marie Bitter, Beth Wienke, Matthew Burbank  
 Front row: Avery Conner, Ashli Young, Henry Gilbert, Zach Vayo

### Emily Anderson

Emily is a senior studying journalism and the Middle East. She grew up in Roy, Utah — a city along the Wasatch Front. Emily is the editor in chief of The Daily Utah Chronicle and Wasatch Magazine, and in preparation for a career, has undertaken numerous internships including at KUER and The Salt Lake Tribune. While researching potential guests as an intern for KUER's "RadioWest," she was fascinated by the work of Arlie Hochschild — a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley. She wrote the book "Strangers in Their Own Land" about her experiences during 10 trips to southwestern Louisiana between 2011 and 2016. Hochschild had a "keen interest in how life feels to people on the right — that

is, in the emotion that underlies politics," she said in the book. She found a number of paradoxes that challenge liberal America's perception of conservative white America, like Ayn Rand followers who give to the poor and Tea Party activists who clean pollution from rivers. As a student pursuing a career in journalism, Emily is interested in investigating and amplifying the wide range of viewpoints in the state. She felt this class was an opportunity to explore and become more acquainted with a rural point of view.

### Anne Marie Bitter

Anne Marie is a junior studying Anthropology and Political Science. She grew up in Orange County, California and moved to Utah five years ago.



Her interest in the Urban-Rural divide stemmed from the majority of her extended family living in rural locations. She observed the various barriers to education, healthcare, and other opportunities her family faced and wanted to be a part of the solution. She originally focused on illicit opioid use in rural Utah. However, she then turned her perspective to a core issue within the opioid crisis, which is a lack of hope. She felt this hopelessness could be counteracted by increasing higher education opportunities to rural individuals. Furthermore, by increasing the educational attainment within a community, economic diversification can occur. This would broaden the options of everyone in the community.

### **Avery Conner**

Avery is a sophomore majoring in geoscience with an emphasis in geophysics. She grew up in the rural town of Big Timber, Montana. Part of the reason why Avery decided to go to the University of Utah was to experience living in an unquestionably urban environment in order to truly understand the differences between rural and urban areas. She saw the Urban-Rural Divide Praxis Lab as a great opportunity to continue researching and understanding the urban-rural divide, as well as make an impact on an issue that is important to her. With the knowledge that she and many of her high school classmates left their hometown after graduation, Avery was greatly interested in efforts to develop the economies of rural towns so as to provide opportunities for the people that want to stay. Education goes hand-in-hand with economic development, and thus fit well with Avery's personal interest.

By providing educational opportunities to people in rural areas, more people are likely to develop businesses or fill in necessary positions within their hometown, which broadens the community's economy.

### **Henry Gilbert**

Henry is a sophomore in the electrical engineering program. He is from Salt Lake City, and enjoys skiing, biking, and hiking. His interest in the urban-rural divide comes from spending a lot of time exploring the state of Utah, and being fascinated to see the completely different lifestyles that exist in the different parts of the state. The 2016 presidential election piqued his interest in this topic. Henry was particularly interested in topics of economic development. He enjoyed discussions comparing the thriving, diverse economy along the wasatch front to the single-sector economies in rural Utah. Education is another topic of interest for Henry because education intersects with so many other dimensions of the urban rural divide, such as economic development, social change, and healthcare.

### **Hannah Horman**

Hannah is a student in her second year studying psychology. She grew up in a rural area of Utah. A large part of why she chose the university of Utah was to experience living in an urban area. After having been on both sides of the urban/rural divide, and having experienced the disparities in education, community, and healthcare access herself, she was interested to learn more about it in an academic setting rather than just from her personal experiences with it. In exploring the

urban-rural divide in class, she was especially fascinated by the social differences and the barriers preventing access to reproductive healthcare and opioid abuse help. Education in many ways intersected with those issues, as well as several other impactful issues.

### **Nathan Kunz**

Nathan is a senior studying Economics and Statistical Analysis. He split his life growing up in very urban South Salt Lake, Park City, and recently moved to Herriman. Armed with only the perspective of someone who's lived along the Wasatch Front, Nate spent some of his time in 2016 as a State delegate where he met a side of Utah he had never seen-- one full of disaffected people frustrated with the direction of their State. His passion for economics coupled with that newfound perspective are what drove him to apply for the Urban Rural Divide Praxis Lab. The opportunity to apply a subject he loved to a problem he cared about was an incredible opportunity. More influential than anything was a new frame of mind that came from becoming the father of his newborn daughter. He thought a lot about the kinds of opportunities any parent would want their child to have, wherever they live, and resolved to help do whatever small part he could to provide those opportunities. It's no secret among people who've studied economics that there's a lot of love for education as a tool that greatly benefits communities and people at every level. Therefore, increasing post-secondary educational access to help other parents around the state open doors for their own children seemed like a no brainer.

### **Savannah Mailloux**

Savannah is a junior pursuing a degree in geography. She grew up in Connecticut and attends school at the University of Utah. She was inspired to pursue this course after learning more about land management issues within the United States. Her primary interest throughout this course was better understanding the use of natural resources, especially water, in relation to the economy. After determining the final project would be about education, she was excited to learn more about improving access as well as affordability within higher education. Conducting research has allowed her to gain knowledge about some of the disparities present in urban and rural communities.

### **Cierra Parkinson**

Cierra is a sophomore majoring in business with an emphasis in operations and supply chain management. Cierra grew up in St. George, Utah and is currently living in Salt Lake City to attend the University of Utah. Her interest in the urban-rural divide has grown throughout her time at the University of Utah as she has explored the possibility of pursuing a minor in urban ecology. This interest in urban ecology and the built environment were a topic of interest within the praxis lab, as well as learning how these spaces impacted local community members access to health or education resources. Ultimately, the group's decision to focus on education for the project was exciting to Cierra because improving access to education for Utah's population also affects many other issues within the urban-rural divide such as economic growth and community health.

### **Zach Vayo**

Zach is a junior studying history. He grew up in the Salt Lake Valley. As a Utahn from an urban setting, he has visited southern Utah many times to hike and get away from it all. Despite identifying with the natural landscapes of the state as a whole, he became increasingly aware that his urban perspective gave him the mindset of a tourist in rural Utah. His interest in the class thus arose out of a desire to better understand the perspectives of rural Utahns. Over the course of the class, he became particularly interested in issues surrounding the single-sector economies that often dominate rural spaces - namely, agriculture/ranching and mining/energy extraction. As such, he found education to be a potentially useful angle in promoting economic diversification in rural areas, thereby helping to bridge the urban-rural divide.

### **Beth Wineke**

Beth is a junior pursuing a degree in political science with an emphasis in public policy. She also holds minors in chemistry and economics. Beth grew up in Boise, Idaho. Her interest in the urban-rural divide has grown throughout her time studying political science through courses such as The American Presidency, as well as Water Policy. Beth took The American Presidency during the 2016 election, and an important topic of discussion within the class was the influence of rural populations in the election. Additionally, Water Policy focused on differing experiences of urban and rural populations in regard to water. Water and environmental issues were a topic of interest for Beth within the

praxis lab, as well as health issues. Ultimately, the group's decision to focus on education for the project was exciting to Beth because education addresses many other issues along the urban-rural divide such as health and economic conditions.

### **Ashli Young**

Ashli is a sophomore pursuing a nursing degree. She joined this Praxis Lab largely because of her background coming from the rural area of Shelley, Idaho. Attending school at the U allowed Ashli to see how different it was living in urban Salt Lake than in her rural hometown. She wanted to participate in researching the urban/rural divide so she could use what was learned to better understand her own experiences. As a future nurse, the topics Ashli was most passionate about in this course centered on disparities in health care accessibility between urban and rural areas. After exploring how this aspect of the divide affected rural areas struggling with opioid abuse, Ashli was initially committed to addressing this issue in the class project. However, the visit from Lt. Gov. Cox changed her mind to the divide in higher education. She was able to identify with his rural backstory and his comments on education caused Ashli to reflect on her own experiences and realize that education really is the greatest equalizer. Striving to help rural students attain higher education could help reduce the feeling of hopelessness present in some rural areas that contributes to issues like opioid abuse. Addressing this gap also could help open doors and opportunities to students that may have seemed impossible before.

**Matthew Burbank**

Matthew Burbank is a co-instructor for this Praxis lab and a faculty member in the Department of Political Science. Growing up on a wheat farm in Montana and attending a high school with fewer than 100 students, Matthew represents the rural part of our urban-rural instructional team. Like many of the people we learned about during this year, Matthew went to college, graduated, and later attended graduate school but never had the opportunity to return to a rural area. This class offered a wonderful opportunity for him to work with talented and dedicated students and an excellent co-instructor to address an engaging, complex, and important issue facing Utah and the United States.

**Katherine Fife**

Katherine is a co-instructor for the praxis lab. She earned her Master's degree in family ecology from the University of Utah and her BA in sociology from Westminster College in Salt Lake. While she was raised in an urban part of Utah, Katherine has worked in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors for more than two decades, spanning both rural and urban areas. In 2016, Katherine founded the consulting firm, Philanthropy Matters, working with philanthropies of all types, and in all areas, to help deploy their charitable resources in a more focused, efficient, and meaningful manner. Having experienced the divide through philanthropy, she was inspired by the further inspection done by the students throughout the year and is hopeful that this experience has sparked thought and conversation among community leaders, policymakers, and other key stakeholders that will ultimately bridge the divide and result in long term benefits for our entire state.

## INVESTIGATION OF TOPICS: FALL SEMESTER

Over the course of fall semester, our class examined various facets of the urban-rural complex in order to gain a broad contextual understanding of urban and rural issues, as well as to determine potential project topics for the spring. Considering the multidimensional nature of the “urban-rural divide,” each week of the semester we dove into several thematic subtopics, including definitions of urban and rural, politics, economic development, and demographics/health/social indicators. To better understand these issues, we relied on a combination of readings and guest speakers. Moving toward selecting a spring project topic, each member of the class completed a research paper based on a topic of their choice. We then coalesced into three groups based on similar topics to present on potential directions for the spring. After several weeks of discussion and debate, we selected post-secondary education as our project focus for the following semester.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Urban Area FAQs. <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/uafaq.html>.

### Defining Urban & Rural

We began the semester by attempting to delineate distinctions between urban and rural spaces. While urban and rural may seem like largely intuitive categories, the process of defining them proves somewhat messy in practice. Perhaps the closest equivalent to a standard definition is that of

not urban.<sup>1</sup> These definitions suggest a level of clean bifurcation that belies an often more nuanced reality, as urban and rural spaces tend to bleed into one another at the margins. Exurbs, for example, comprise bedroom communities physically removed from metropolitan areas whose residents generally commute into cities for work, thereby

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the Census Bureau, which defines an urban area as an incorporated places with a population of over 2,500, with “urbanized areas” comprised of regions of over 50,000 people (the Office of Management and Budget, or OMB uses the term “metropolitan area” in place of urbanized area to distinguish from smaller clusters, termed “micropolitan”). In lieu of its own definition, rural spaces are defined as anything that is

blurring the lines between urban and rural spaces. Additionally, while definitions tend to focus on the number of people in a given area, a region’s economic profile often serves as a marker of urbanness or ruralness. Urban areas tend to have diversified economies, incorporating numerous economic sectors in comparatively close proximity. Rural areas, meanwhile, represent landscapes dominated in many cases

by single-sector economies, especially agriculture or energy.

Utah, for its part, is an overwhelmingly urban state, as is the case of most states in the West. While the vast majority of its land area is rural, roughly 91% of Utah's population clusters in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the four Wasatch Front counties (Salt Lake, Utah, Davis, and Weber) comprise over three-quarters of the state population, with Washington, Iron, and Cache Counties comprising smaller urban areas and Tooele, Summit, and Wasatch Counties closely tied to the Salt Lake metropolitan area. In general, Utah's urban areas witnessed strong recovery, and even growth, following the 2008 recession. Indeed, the Wasatch Front has emerged as a growing economic destination on the national stage, with monikers such as the "Silicon Slopes" extolling its expanding tech sector (though growth has produced its own problems, notably congestion and air pollution). However, many of the state's rural areas continue to see contracting job markets a decade later, especially in counties historically dependent on coal mining. Thus the much-touted vibrancy of the Utah economy has proven very unevenly distributed, a state of affairs that Natalie Gochnour, director of the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute and one of our first guest speakers, has termed "A Tale of Two Utahs."<sup>3</sup>

## Politics

During the 2016 presidential election, there appeared to be a deep rift between urban and rural populations in the U.S. The majority of those living in rural areas voted for Donald Trump, although some of those regions – like

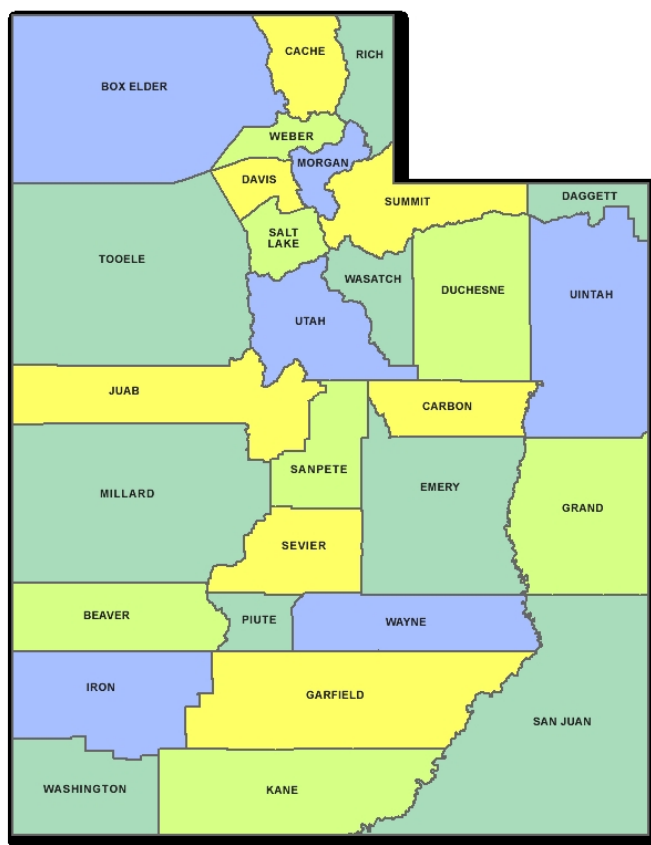


Diagram of Utah Counties

states in the rust belt – traditionally vote for the Democratic candidate. Meanwhile, those living in urban areas primarily voted for Hillary Clinton. It's difficult to define urban and rural areas, so many sociologists place these groups on a continuum. Although urban and rural areas cannot be compared as a dichotomy, there appears to be a political divide between those who identify as being from a rural area and those who label themselves as being from an urban area.

Of the articles read and discussed in the class, the consensus among political and social scientists appeared to be that those who live in rural and urban areas, while on a continuum, vote

<sup>2</sup> "Utah: 2010 Population and Housing Unit Counts." *U.S. Census Bureau*, July 2012, 1-33. <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-46.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "What Would a Marshall Plan for Rural Revitalization Look Like?" Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. <http://gardner.utah.edu/marshall-plan-rural-revitalization-look-like/>.



**4** Dante J. Scala and Kenneth M. Johnson. "Political Polarization Along the Rural Urban Continuum? The Geography of the Presidential Vote 2000-2016." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 672, no. 1 (2017): 163.

**5** Scala and Johnson, "Political Polarization," 178-180.

**6** Katherine Cramer Walsh. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 529.

**7** Scala and Johnson, "Political Polarization," 168-170.

differently. Scala and Johnson, citing a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, wrote that the differences between these two groups correlate with living preferences. "Liberals prefer living in areas where people live closer to one another and can walk to stores and other amenities. Conservatives, on the other hand, prefer living farther apart from their neighbors, even if that means they have to drive significant distances to reach schools and restaurants."<sup>4</sup> While comparing presidential election results in 2012 with those in 2016, Scala and Johnson used multivariate spatial error regression models to analyze the combined influence of factors like race, language, education level, and religion. They found that with all of the other identifiers taken into consideration, whether an individual lived in an urban or rural area still had an effect on how they voted.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting, however, that, while the largest urban areas tended to be the most liberal and the farthest-outlying rural areas the most conservative, Scala and Johnson identified a "tipping point" between the two that occurs in suburban spaces, thus demonstrating that the outlying portions of metropol-

itan areas often vote more similarly to rural areas. Walsh's study found that a rural identity, along with perceived inequity, influenced political viewpoints. Her research "reveals the role that class- and place-based social identities combined with perceptions of distributive justice play in the construction of political meaning."<sup>6</sup>

One of the primary issues that voters in rural areas have with what some commonly call the "urban elite," which often includes establishment politicians, is that they raise taxes for everyone while rural folks feel that those in urban areas unfairly benefit from social welfare programs. Walsh referred to this throughout her article as a belief in "distributive justice." Scala and Johnson, using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, found that other issues that create a rift between groups include so-called moral issues like abortion and gay marriage, immigration, and gun control.<sup>7</sup>

The reasons behind the split seem to vary by issue, and aren't always clear. For example, different views on

Praxis Lab members with the Legislative Panel: Representative Lowry Snow, State Senator Luz Escamilla, Representative Brian King, and moderator Pat Jones



gun rights may be due to guns' utility in rural areas and high rates of gun violence in urban areas. Walsh notes, however, that rural populations frequently vote against their own interests. She cited the debate between Thomas Frank and Larry Bartels, in which Frank argues that the Republican party distracts those in rural areas from distributive justice issues, while Bartels feels that working class individuals — many of them living in rural areas — understand their own economic interests and vote accordingly.

cies, they also suggested than partisan politics in Utah do not necessarily map directly onto an urban-rural split. As a heavily conservative state, most of the suburban Wasatch Front leans Republican along with rural areas, with Salt Lake City proper representing the state's lone bastion of strong Democratic support. Additionally, issues perceived as mostly rural, such as poverty, have many have urban components; Sen. Escamilla noted that her district, comprised of the diverse west side of Salt Lake City, is among

**8** Walsh, "Putting Inequality in its Place."

**9** Walsh, "Putting Inequality in its Place," 529.

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***"ALTHOUGH IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT THE CAUSES BEHIND THE DIVIDE ARE, THERE APPEARS TO BE A CLEAR RIFT BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL VOTERS."***

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Walsh chalks it up to identity — that is, rural populations understand that they have been slighted in distribution, which has created a group consciousness that leads them to frequently distrust the government and vote in a block.<sup>8</sup> "Their reluctance to tax the rich is rooted in a complex narrative in which government action is by definition an injustice to themselves, and taxation only results in rewarding the antithesis of good Americans' work ethic," she found.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, this is only one argument among many.

To better understand urban-rural political issues with regard to Utah in particular, our class hosted a legislative panel, comprised of Representative Lowry Snow (R - St. George), State Senator Luz Escamilla (D - Salt Lake City), Representative Brian King (D - Salt Lake City), and moderator Pat Jones. Though the legislators noted issues of particular concern to rural constituen-

the poorest in the state, indicating the disparities of wealth even within urban areas. The legislators maintained that state-level politics are often less acrimonious and partisan than at the national level. However, Rep. Snow noted that the most divisive issue for urban and rural Utahns is public lands — an issue which recently returned to the forefront of political debate when former President Barack Obama designated Bears Ears National Monument (it is worth noting, however, that while white rural Utahns tend to oppose the designation, the same is often not true for indigenous people who form a majority in rural San Juan county).

Although it is unclear what the causes behind the divide are, there appears to be a clear rift between urban and rural voters — even if the boundary between the two groups is not clearly defined. Going forward, these differences will likely continue to have a profound



10 Utah Foundation. "Sagebrush Rebellion Part II Analysis of the Public Lands Debate in Utah." (2013)

11 Utah Foundation. "Sagebrush Rebellion."

effect on America's politics and elections until lawmakers can figure out a way to mend the split and make up for distributive shortcomings.

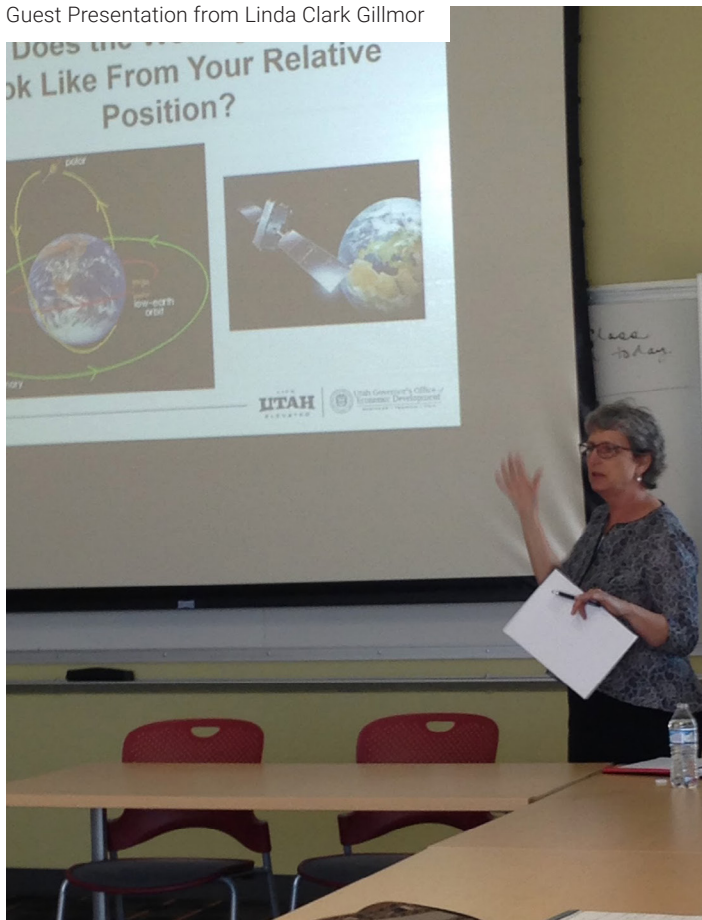
### Economic Development

Rural counties throughout Utah are losing their young people due to a lack of economic opportunity, which leads to further economic struggles for those living in rural areas. In Utah, agricultural jobs have declined as farmers have to compete with increasing global competition. Many of Utah's rural economies are based on oil or coal extraction, which have boom and bust cycles dependent on the global market. As income tax decreases due to lower

wages and salaries and a smaller tax-base, these counties have less funds to develop the necessary infrastructure to attract new capital that would bring jobs. Over the fall semester, our class welcomed numerous guest speakers to expound upon these issues. These included Pam Perlich, director of demographic research at the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute; Linda Clark Gillmor, director of rural development at the Governor's Office of Economic Development; Dave Conine of USDA's rural development office; and Jake Garfield from the Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office. Overall, their commentaries reinforced the notion that single sector economies - whether agricultural or energy-based - have left Utah's rural spaces economically stagnant, even as urban Utah has witnessed dramatic economic growth and transformation. Additionally, our class readings indicated that some of Utah's options include avoiding the development of public lands and instead diversifying rural economies, creating incentives for Utah companies to outsource jobs to rural counties, and establishing technical schools in collaboration with companies that would provide training for specific jobs available in that area.

As coal and oil extraction has become more efficient over the last several years, the amount of jobs in the field has been greatly reduced.<sup>10</sup> One of the solutions that public officials are considering to boost declining and stagnant economies in rural Utah is opening up public lands to further development for coal mining and oil extraction.<sup>11</sup> This answer may not create sustainable growth, as oil-based economies are subject to boom and

Guest Presentation from Linda Clark Gillmor



bust cycles, and coal economies have seen a decades-long decline. Further, these resources are limited, and Americans are increasingly moving toward renewable energy. Counties with these resources may benefit from working to diversify their economies rather than relying solely on coal and oil for employment. Diversification can be done in ways that fit each community, whether that be jobs in agriculture, manufacturing, technology, or tourism. Debates surrounding the status of tourism in rural spaces, which tie back to the intensely politicized subject of public land use, often prove fraught. While outdoor enthusiasts from urban areas may see an increased focus on tourism as a boon to rural economies, Linda Gillmor cautions that the resultant jobs are often seasonal and/or low-paying.

As another potential avenue for diversification, President Barack Obama encouraged American companies to “insource” rather than outsource manufacturing jobs during his time in the White House. President Donald Trump has continued some of this rhetoric. While many large American companies said that at this point it wouldn’t be feasible to move already-outsourced jobs back into the country, smaller Utah-based companies that rely on manufacturing can build plants in rural Utah as they grow.<sup>12</sup> Several counties have already welcomed “insourced” manufacturing, such as Summa Robotics in Emery County.<sup>13</sup> These moves improve job availability, but there is a lot of room for growth.

In order to attract “insourced” jobs, rural residents need to have access to

technical training. The technical training, however, often compels graduates to move to urban areas to find jobs in that field. If businesses build manufacturing plants in a rural area and work with a nearby technical college to provide specific job training there, then this problem could be fixed.<sup>14</sup> The economic development director in Carbon County pointed to Virginia as an example of how technical training could be useful, saying the state trained miners in computer coding. “We have got to be innovative to grow,” she said.<sup>15</sup> Sanpete County’s economic director is working with Snow College to facilitate training not only for current industries, but also industries that the county wants to locally grow and attract.<sup>16</sup> Technical colleges working hand-in-hand with businesses looking to “insource” could foster significant economic growth

Turning around declining and stagnant economies in rural Utah will take more than just one action or party. The answer to the problem doesn’t only lie in government action, but also depends on the private companies. The public and private sector will have to work together to diversify rural economies, attract and create “insourced” jobs, and establish technical training jobs to help rural residents fill those jobs.

## Demographics, Health, & Social Indicators

Owing to economic stagnation, rural areas often face difficulties in attracting and retaining young people. Rural communities generally see little population growth; even when young people grow up in rural spaces, they may move to urban areas in adulthood to pursue education or employment.

**12** Ben Hart and Joel McKay. “Diversifying Rural Utah Economies.” *KCPW*. Interview. May 30, 2017.

**13** Utah Foundation, “Sagebrush Rebellion.”

**14** Hart and McKay, “Diversifying.”

**15** Utah Foundation, “Sagebrush Rebellion.”

**16** Utah Foundation, “Sagebrush Rebellion.”

**17** Alana Semuels, "The Graying of Rural America", *The Atlantic*. 2 June 2016.

**17** Lois M. Collins and Lauren, "Suicide in a small town: Why rural teens are at risk and what one county is doing about it," *Deseret News*. 14 December 2016.

As a result, rural communities are frequently forced to reckon with aging populations. Combined with the lack of a young workforce, this means that communities often struggle to maintain their tax bases, making it difficult to maintain infrastructure and social spending. Those who remain in struggling communities may feel trapped, unable to move due to high real estate prices elsewhere. These effects are far from uniform, with some rural areas faring better than others. However, these patterns remain persistent in many small towns across the country.<sup>17</sup>

With regard to healthcare, distance proves a major barrier to access in many rural communities. Major hospitals and healthcare providers tend to cluster in urban areas (in the case of Utah, along the Wasatch Front) areas. Additionally, rural areas often have difficulty attracting health professionals to their communities. The result is that, for rural residents, accessing healthcare often necessitates the time and cost of a much longer trip to a care provider than is the case for urban residents. These disparities are especially pronounced for mental health care. The combination of lack of access to mental health professionals, as well as the stigma that may exist in tight-knit communities around seeking care, mean that Utah's rural youth face disproportionately high suicide rates (Utah as a whole experiences a youth suicide rate well above the national average). In response, some communities, such as those in Sevier County, have looked to bolster grassroots support systems to address suicide prevention.<sup>18</sup>

To better understand access to health care, our class invited Lisa Nichols, the Intermountain Health Partnership Director at Intermountain Healthcare. Nichols discussed the notion that "zip code is more important than gene code," meaning that health outcomes can often be attributed to a person's environment and geography, as well as socioeconomic status. The implications of this idea profoundly affect rural spaces, but are certainly not limited to rural areas. For instance, residents of Salt Lake City's west side have life expectancies several years shorter than their counterparts in more affluent east side communities. In order to address some of the barriers to access, IHC has worked to scale the costs of its services based on income, as well as to "deputize" health centers in rural areas.

## INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

### Economic Development

#### MEDIA REPRESENTATION /

EMILY ANDERSON

Although many have challenged the fairness of their efforts, both former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke tried to listen to the public before making any recommendations regarding Bears Ears National Monument. Public opinion and understanding, however, can be swayed by representation of ideas in media. A study conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2007 showed that the media's political framing affects opinion, even to the extent of influencing voters to switch parties, and mobilizes people to vote on those opinions.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, media coverage of the national monuments debate, especially in larger local newspapers that are circulated in both urban and rural parts of the state, have the potential to impact opinions and political activity. Research into media representation analyzed the inclusion of various stakeholders in the coverage of the national monuments debate by Utah's two largest newspapers — The Salt Lake Tribune and Deseret News.

While sifting through articles and compiling an extensive list of the groups represented, it was apparent that rural non-indigenous residents had fewer grassroots organizations and advocacy groups than other stakeholders. Rural residents were more likely to have their voices heard when they grouped themselves with larger advocacy groups, like environmentalist groups or right-leaning groups. The low level of civil society in this

group can be explained by a number of factors. According to Pew Research, in 2015 rural adults were 7 percent less likely to use the internet than both urban and suburban adults.<sup>20</sup> They were also 6 percent less likely to use social networking sites than suburban adults and 10 percent less likely than urban adults.<sup>21</sup> Social media and the internet are crucial to forming and building successful grassroots organizations and advocacy groups.

#### LOCAL AGRICULTURE /

HENRY GILBERTI

I studied initiatives to purchase local produce and examined how these initiatives impact the economies in both rural and urban communities. I found that programs by both federal and local governments that promote Local First initiatives have succeeded in boosting economies in both rural communities and urban centers.

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT /

AVERY CONNER

My individual paper focused on economic development in rural areas. For many rural towns, able residents are moving "to other places with more opportunities, leaving behind those with few other options and concentrating poverty in struggling communities."<sup>22</sup> Not all rural communities are in decline, however. One way some are thriving is by relying on Community Economic Development, a process by which sustainable economic opportunities are made available by utilizing resources already available in the community. This may include developing a tourism industry based around natural

<sup>19</sup> Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan. *The Political Impact of Media Bias*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Center, "Rural Citizens Are Less Likely To Use Internet" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center, "Rural Citizens Have Consistently Lagged Behind" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Nora Johnson, Adhir Kackar, and Melissa Kramer, *How Small Towns and Cities Can Use Local Assets to Rebuild Their Economies: Lessons from Successful Places* (Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency, 2015).

features of the surrounding area or emphasizing festivals unique to the town, among other things. A nearby post-secondary educational opportunity can also be of great benefit to a community by drawing people to the area. There is no single formula for how to make a rural community successful, so each location must depend on its own unique qualities.

#### **EDUCATION OUTCOMES / NATHAN KUNZ**

My individual paper was based on exploring educational differences between rural and urban students around Utah. The topic is generally very broad, and there are a lot of dimensions in education where differences between the educations of two different populations could be found. Quality, access and outcomes are some of the primary ways we can start to make evaluations. What was most surprising was that rural students do not perform poorly compared to the urban counterparts. Despite lower quality facilities, much longer distances to schools, and less qualified faculty, rural students test scores are at least comparable to urban students. This compelled me to want to know why then that these students choose not to pursue post-secondary education, even despite expressing interest while in high school. With a shrinking rural Utah education seems like the best way to help these communities help themselves.

#### **Housing & Water WATER DEVELOPMENT / BETH WINEKE**

My research focused on past and potential water projects affecting Utah and how they differ between

urban and rural areas. I compared the Glen Canyon Dam with proposed Bear River development and the varying implications of these projects for local economies and the environment. I also analyzed the ways in which these projects are marketed based on their implied use, which is a function of their place along the urban-rural continuum; for example, agriculture is an important use of water in rural spaces, while housing and industry are more prevalent uses of water in urban areas. These kinds of water developments also carry varying economic effects that may impact communities differently based on whether they are primarily urban or rural, given differing recreational and job opportunities in each respective area.

#### **WATER ACCESS / SAVANNAH MAILLOUX**

In my research regarding water policy, I focused on understanding water literacy, sustainable farming practices, access to clean drinking water, and the use of dams in urban and rural areas throughout the United States. Specifically, I identified areas most vulnerable to drought, the use of sustainable farming practices, and the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Through this research, I discovered ways in which the United States can improve access to water and their farming practices to better serve the needs of the community and the planet.

#### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING / CIERRA PARKINSON**

As Utah's population and economy grows, it's important for the state to support both its urban and rural residents in one of the most basic human



needs: housing. Utah ranks 26th in the United States for highest housing wages and is currently in an affordable housing deficit.<sup>23</sup> State and local efforts need to be made in order to combat the increasing lack of affordable housing across the state. Utah could adapt affordable housing creation methods and frameworks from other states to meet the unique needs across urban and rural boundaries within state boundaries. Drafting legislation to develop incentives to alter zoning laws in favor of new housing or allowing ADUs within cities are only partial solutions to a larger housing issue but the positive outcomes that they could yield would make an impact on Utah's economy. Further research in this area should be conducted on alternatives to the aforementioned possible solutions and if other options such as increasing municipal housing funding options or combating local level concerns can play significant roles in increasing affordable housing availability.

#### **HOUSING INVESTMENT / ZACH VAYO**

In this paper, I used data from the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute to perform a county-level quantitative analysis of housing construction for 2016. On the whole, these data did not support the existence of an urban-rural housing bifurcation – at least not in any simplistic sense. Generally, the Wasatch Front counties showed more consistent housing investment both in relation to each other and the rest of the state. The counties of rural Utah, on the other hand, were highly erratic. Garfield and Grand Counties, for example, added housing units to an extent hugely disproportionate to their

population growth, likely as a result of their outdoor recreational draws. On the other extreme, the unfortunate counties of Carbon, Emery, and Wayne added housing even as their populations shrunk. Piute and Daggett counties saw no new investment in housing, with San Juan faring little better.

Overall, the rural counties often showed more comparatively more investment in repair than new housing construction – a testament perhaps to their aging housing stock, as well as aging communities that cannot as effectively draw in young people and their purchasing power in twenty-first century Utah. For their part, the Wasatch Front counties dominated home construction while nonetheless maintaining the most acute housing shortages. This disequilibrium of populations creates interrelated housing issues for urban and rural areas. I suggested that potential solutions may include more robust tax incentives for the construction of affordable housing, or funding from programs such as USDA Rural Development to shore up rural Utah's housing stock. Ultimately, however, there is no silver bullet, as today's housing issues are tied to the larger economic and demographic realities transforming the state.

#### **Health Care ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE / ASHLI YOUNG**

My research focused on the differences in urban and rural healthcare, specifically on the differences in accessibility, patients, and providers. For the accessibility aspect, I explored research on four indicators of healthcare availability, which are an area's access

**23** Danica Lawrence, "Breaking down the Affordable Housing Crisis in Utah," FOX13now.com. FOX13, 20 June 2017.

**24** Michael D. Alessi and Robin Pam, *Health Care in the Rural West: Persistent Problems, Glimmers of Hope* (Report for Stanford Rural West Initiative, Bill Lane Center for the America West, April 2015).

**25** "Rural Healthcare Workforce." Rural Health Information Hub. February 1, 2017. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/health-care-workforce>.

to physicians, safety net resources, hospitals, and emergency medical services. The results of all of these indicators can be summarized with the following quote: 'In general, the rural population is less safe-guarded by boards of health than is the urban population. The physicians are farther apart and are called in later in cases of sickness... The necessity for disease prevention is therefore self-evident and a betterment of these conditions is a nation-wide obligation.'<sup>24</sup> This quotation also mentions the preventative care issues that came up in my exploration on the differences between urban and rural patients. Although the research found that rural patients possibly have a greater need for medical care for certain issues, they don't use preventative care practices as regularly as urban areas do. And finally, my research showed that two major reasons for shortages in rural physicians are the increase in specialists and the lack of recruitment from rural areas.

In order to address these issues, I made the following suggestions. Medical schools should work to help increase the number of primary care providers in rural areas by recruiting more med students from rural areas. Non-profit organizations could strive to improve access to resources like safety net clinics. Incorporating telehealth technologies or creating interprofessional care teams that include specialists could also prove advantageous.<sup>25</sup> These ideas could reduce the lack of access but it is also important to address how we could lessen the degree of need. Primarily, organizations should work to help rural communities understand the importance of preventative care

and reduce barriers preventing them from obtaining it. Whatever the solution, these healthcare disparities need to be addressed to improve the health-care experience of rural Utah.

## OPIOID ABUSE / ANNE MARIE BITTER

My individual research project focused on the Opioid Crisis in Rural Utah.

Utah is ranked seventh in the nation for the misuse of opioids. Furthermore, rural counties have some of the highest rates of opioid misuse in the state. This, in combination with up to three hours travel time to rehabilitation centers, put rural counties at an extreme disadvantage for treating this problem. Essentially, rural Utah has some of the highest illicit use of opioids in the country and enormous barriers that prevent proper treatment and help.

Many rural areas in the US use jails as detox centers for drug users due to long distances to healthcare facilities; Utah is no exception. However, due to the lack of medical equipment and training in these jails, unneeded suffering and death has occurred. This has often occurred because emergency medical services cannot reach these remote locations in time.

Therefore, I proposed that Naloxone, a medication that quickly reverses the effects of an overdose, be implemented in rural jails. This would give these communities the tools to act quickly in life or death situations. Furthermore, due to Good Samaritan Laws in Utah, it is legal for a layperson to administer Naloxone. This would legally protect law enforcement officers administering Naloxone to individuals overdosing.

## ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE / HANNAH HORMAN

My research project was focused on Utah healthcare, specifically barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare services in rural areas. While this is an issue in both urban and rural areas, there are some factors in rural Utah that exacerbate the difficulties of access. Rural physicians are less likely to be able to prescribe long acting, more effective forms of birth control, partially because they are less likely to be trained in placing those methods.<sup>26</sup> Rural pharmacies are less likely to be able to supply emergency contraception in a timely matter.<sup>27</sup> Sex education in Utah is abstinence only, which means that students don't learn about contraception in school, and rural students are less likely to have alternate resources to learn about contraception than urban students.

A barrier that is somewhat specific to Utah is the negative attitudes towards premarital sex perpetuated by the dominant and prevalent religion of the LDS church. Over two thirds of teens named the possibility of their parents finding out as their main reason for not using birth control or protection during sex.<sup>28</sup> This creates even more of a barrier in areas with small populations, where everyone knows everyone. If the only doctor who could prescribe you birth control is good friends with your mom, it might be hard to trust doctor-patient confidentiality.

There are some possible solutions to these issues. One is dissemination of accurate information about birth control, possibly through websites. Helping patients to feel more confident in

their anonymity and confidentiality would help in areas where there are social barriers. Alternatively, another solution would be finding a way to decrease the stigma around contraception in these areas.

**26** Britt Lunde, Paul Smith, Manpreet Grewal, Tara Kumaraswami, Allison Cowett, and Bryna Harwood, "Long Acting Contraception Provision by Rural Primary Care Physicians," *Journal Of Women's Health* 23, no. 6 (2014): 519-524.

**27** Fernard D. Samson, Rebecca Loren, Nicki Downing, Sarah Schroepel, Patricia J. Kelly, and Megha Ramaswamy, "Availability of Emergency Contraception in Rural and Urban Pharmacies in Kansas," *Journal Of Rural Health* 29, no. 1 (2013): 113-118.

**28** "Survey Says: Hide the Birth Control (April 2015)." Power to Decide. April 2015. Accessed April 27, 2018. <http://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/survey-says-april-2015>.



## GROUP RESEARCH PROJECTS



Group one's presentation

### **Group 1: Housing and Water / Savannah Mailloux, Cierra Parkinson, Zach Vayo, Beth Wineke**

This presentation explored the fundamental issues of housing and water availability for Utah's growing population. Throughout our research, we focused on the various uses of water between urban and rural populations, and well as the importance of housing development both in urban and rural spaces. Both of these resources represent limits on Utah's population capacity, but our research found that pointed and purposeful investment in these resources can help to solve these problems in the future. Given rural Utah's heavy use of water for agricultural purposes and the large urban population in Utah, the conclusion was drawn

that rural water use is driven largely by urban demand. Investments in this issue could focus on water literacy programs and proper metering of water used outside the home. Additionally, availability of affordable housing is becoming increasingly important in both urban and rural spaces. Rural areas do not experience high investment in housing development, and this is one area of opportunity for growth and stabilization of these communities.

### **Group 2: Economic Development & Education / Emily Anderson, Henry Gilbert, Nathan Kunz, Avery Conner**

Earlier in the semester, research and discussions concluded that there is a significant economic divide between struggling, single sector economies

in rural Utah and thriving, diverse economy along the wasatch front. This presentation explored strategies to bridge this gap. Each of the presenters framed their findings from the individual research projects in such a way that addressed this economic divide.

The first strategy to attempt to bridge this economic divide was to promote "buy local" movements, encouraging urban communities to buy their produce for rural areas. Buy local initiatives have been shown to have a positive impact on agriculture based economies, like those in many parts of Utah. The second strategy was to emphasize the value of education for rural communities. Educated communities have lower unemployment, higher average salaries, and stronger economies. The third strategy was to focus on community development in rural towns to make the towns destination places. This could be done through festivals, outdoor adventures, or other unique features that may be specific to each rural town. The fourth strategy was to create a "rural voices" project to help rural communities express themselves through social media and journalism. By leveraging their voice in state and national media, rural communities could express their needs and influence policies that would provide economic support.

This group concluded that reviving the economies of rural Utah is a complicated issue, community may need to use different strategies depending on their needs. However, struggling rural communities are not without options; there are strategies that struggling rural towns can pursue in order to revive their economies.

### **Group 3: Health / Anne Marie Bitter, Hannah Horman, Ashli Young**

This group focused on healthcare accessibility disparities in rural versus urban Utah, particularly in regard to access to resources for preventative care, opioid drug abuse, and reproductive health. In order to demonstrate how rural areas are less safe-guarded by the benefits of preventative care, this group conducted an "Accessibility Walk." Each Praxis member was given a card labeled with a Utah county and cards were color-coded to demonstrate rural and urban counties. Group members then read off the county's access to four healthcare accessibility indicators, which are an area's access to physicians, safety net resources, hospitals, and emergency medical services. Praxis Lab members took a step forward if their assigned county had the resource and stepped back if their county did not. To show the gap between the counties on opposite extremes, Salt Lake County took 6 steps forward while Duchesne County took 8 steps backwards. This activity illustrated the stratified nature of health care accessibility in Utah.

This group also presented on how the four healthcare accessibility indicators affected sexual health and opioid drug abuse resources. Findings again showed that rural areas were greatly lacking in these resources when compared to urban areas. Rural areas have limited access to sexual health resources and experience more social and informational barriers. Similar barriers are found in regard to rural Utah's opi-

oid abuse crisis. After discussing how rural Utah residents are hit hard by this issue and must travel farther and longer to get proper resources, this group decided to suggest a Naloxone campaign for the class project. The hope was that if more Naloxone could be made available in rural areas, less rural residents would have to detox in jails without proper care and the class would be able to address a small part of the healthcare inequality facing rural Utah. The group suggested the class work to increase Naloxone availability for law enforcement, rural pharmacies, and mail order. Another aspect of the suggested project included providing Naloxone trainings and spreading awareness

### **Selecting a Topic: Why Education?**

The class researched many dimensions of the urban-rural divide, which resulted in many possible directions to take for the class project. Initially, before the winter break, Praxis Lab members had been debating between focusing on education or the opioid drug crisis. Even so, they ultimately decided to focus the overall project on education. This decision was based on research on the education divide, the connections between education and other topics, a compelling presentation from Lieutenant Governor Spencer Cox, and the overall class goals.

Research from many studies, such as the 2012 Utah Foundation report on education, showed that although Utah's students at rural high schools perform equally well on standardized tests and are adequately prepared for post-secondary education, rural students are less likely to attend college than high

school students at urban schools. Rural students have many challenges that urban students do not have, such as distance from colleges, financial barriers, and a college degree requiring jobs in their communities. This research shows that rural students coming out of high school need additional support in order to continue their education.

Additionally, education intersects well with all of the other topics discussed in the class. For example, if people from rural areas are educated and then return to their communities, can provide these areas with more trained professionals such as politicians, healthcare professionals, and entrepreneurs. Therefore, having more college educated individuals can bridge many of the urban-rural divides studied in the class such as healthcare, social issues, economic disparities, and political representation.

The class ultimately decided to focus on education after a compelling presentation from Utah's Lieutenant Governor Spencer Cox. He lives in Sanpete County and talked about his family history in rural Utah. He described how those in his family who did not attend college have struggled to get by, and how those in his family who pursued education have found much easier lives. Yet despite this trend, few in Sanpete County attend college. Lt. Governor Cox also discussed the prevalence of feelings of hopelessness present in rural areas and how education could combat that hopelessness and indirectly impact issues like the opioid drug crisis.

All of these factors together compelled the class to focus on a project centered around education.

**PART TWO:**



**OUR CLASS  
PROJECT**

## INITIAL UNDERSTANDING

**29** Shawn Tiegan, Stephen H. Kroes, Morgan L. Cotti, Sarah Wald, and Michael Merrill. "Reaching for Educational Equity: An Evaluation of Utah's Rural Schools." Utah Foundation (November 2012). [http://www.utahfoundation.org/img/pdfs/rr712\\_complete\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.utahfoundation.org/img/pdfs/rr712_complete_evaluation.pdf).

Research conducted by the Utah Foundation in 2012 found that while students from Utah's rural areas are prepared for and capable of academic success, a smaller proportion enroll in post-secondary education in comparison to their urban and suburban counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the excellent potential of rural students and to enhance economic opportunities for the entire state, the project focused on spotlighting the challenges of post-secondary education to create resources that may help open the right doors for rural students and inspire them to choose the path that is right for them. Aspects of the project were created with the goal to assist rural students with three higher education pathways, namely universities, technical and community colleges.

The project also set out to explore issues contributing to students from rural areas not finishing academic programs. These included a lack of resources, not being able to stay in communities in which they were raised during or after attaining their education, and a lack of economic opportunities in rural areas that are aligned with educational degrees attained.

## POSSIBLE PROJECT IDEAS

After deciding that the focus of the Praxis Lab would be on the urban-rural divide within education, the class still had to narrow its scope for projects. Education is a very broad topic to cover, and the projects that were considered ranged greatly in their variety. The class debated on confronting issues at all points involved in post-secondary education, including creating ways to guarantee that students are aware of all options available to them, finding ways to provide greater access for students to available educational opportunities, increasing retention rates both in post-secondary education and within rural communities, and spreading information to lawmakers and other professionals to expand the impact of the class's efforts. Each idea that was proposed was considered for its sustainability, impact, and the ability of the class to actually accomplish the project.

## FINAL PROJECT DECISION

After considerable debate, the class decided to split into two groups in order to focus on separate aspects of the urban-rural divide in education. Specifically, the two groups were interested in increasing retention rates for rural students at the University of Utah and evaluating post-secondary educational opportunities for rural students, especially outside of four-year universities. By structuring the final project of the Praxis Lab in this way, the class was able to act on local issues relating to the urban-rural divide in education, as well as act on issues affecting the entire state of Utah. The class found it important to engage in action that would involve all of Utah. When one part of the state faces hardships, the entire state experiences the consequences. Due to this knowledge, it was decided that the project needed to encompass the areas facing the most difficulties within the state. Currently, rural Utah is experiencing more economic hardship than its urban centers. As such, the class put an emphasis on reaching out to rural areas, despite being located on the Wasatch Front.

## OVERALL PROJECT GOALS

There were three overall goals for the class project: 1) increase mentoring opportunities for rural freshman students at the University of Utah to help them persevere past their first year in an effort to increase retention rates, 2) evaluate alternative postsecondary education resources for rural students, specifically technical and community colleges, and 3) gather information on and spread awareness of the issues facing rural students throughout Utah pertaining to post-secondary education. This information was gathered in order to share the findings with school administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders, in an effort to increase awareness and identify potential solutions to improve academic success.

As mentioned previously, the class split up into two committees in order to address these goals. One committee focused on mentoring in higher education and the second committee focused on community and technical colleges. Both groups also had an aspect that involved the goal of gathering information on rural individuals and spreading awareness of these issues.

## FIRST PROJECT COMPONENT: MENTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The goal of this part of the project was to introduce rural students to resources to increase academic success at universities. This was done through gathering data on the U's proportions of urban and rural students, conducting a survey of current UofU students, supplementing existing University of Utah programs, and increasing general awareness. The outcomes of these four different aspects are briefly described below. Each is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

**1** The data gathered through the Center for Institutional Analysis showed that while the U has a greater proportion of student from urban areas, its rural students do just as well if not better than their urban counterparts.

**2** The purpose of the student survey was to understand views of current university students on the rural dynamic on campus and gauge their interest in mentoring rural students. This data, along with the data mentioned above, was shared with mentors, leaders, and other invested individuals.

**3** The existing university program that added a focus on rural students was the Campus Life Mentors Program.

**4** General awareness was increased through the "Rural Day" event that helped provoke thought and inspire action from those in attendance.

### Data from the Center for Institutional Analysis

As the rest of the project continued, we thought it was important to get a sense of the state of post-secondary rural education here at the University of Utah. Mike Martineau from Institutional Analysis at the University of Utah provided some data visualizations to help provide this much needed context. The data included all first-time freshmen who had a Utah Zip Code at the time of entrance. The vast majority of students admitted come from the Wasatch front, with one zip code

in Salt Lake County accounting for over 135 Freshmen. Many outlying and rural areas sent only one or even zero Freshmen students to the University of Utah in 2017.

Due to time constraints, we were only able to get a rough approximation of how the University of Utah's population is broken up over the Rural-Urban continuum, but some of our results were encouraging.

The dataset was divided into the Wasatch Front and St. George as the



Urban Part of our state, with the rest being Rural. By this approximation, we found that rural students tend to perform well. Of course, there could be a problem with how the data was divided or selection bias in the type of student that attends the University of Utah. However, these findings are consistent with results from a 2012 Utah Foundation report that found Rural students perform just as well as their urban counterparts in standardized testing.<sup>30</sup>

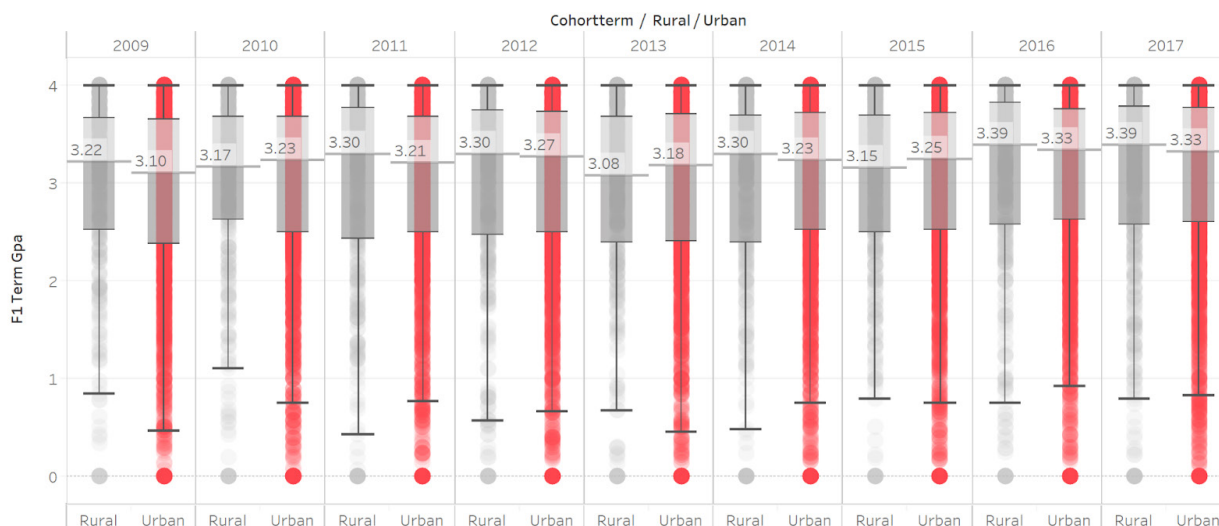
### Data from the University of Utah Student Survey

A survey was distributed to students at the University of Utah in order to gauge their interest in a mentorship program involving rural students, as well as determine their previous knowledge and involvement in mentorship programs. Unfortunately, the response size of 55 students was too small to be considered representative of the undergraduate student population, but what the survey did reveal is helpful for further consider-

ation and research. As expected, only 16.4% of the students that responded had a rural background. This is very similar to the average percentage of incoming rural students from Utah between 2005 and 2017, as described by the data obtained from the Office of Budget & Institutional Analysis at the University of Utah. Of those that took the survey, slightly less than a third of the students had been involved with a mentorship program, either by acting as a mentor or by being mentored themselves. 45.5% of the respondents were unsure if they would want to act as mentors to students at the University of Utah with a rural background, while about a third stated that they would be willing to mentor rural students. These statistics imply that a vast majority of the respondents had at least some interest in a mentorship program for rural students on campus. This can be taken as a positive indication that the class's efforts to increase mentoring opportunities for rural students can be sustainable.

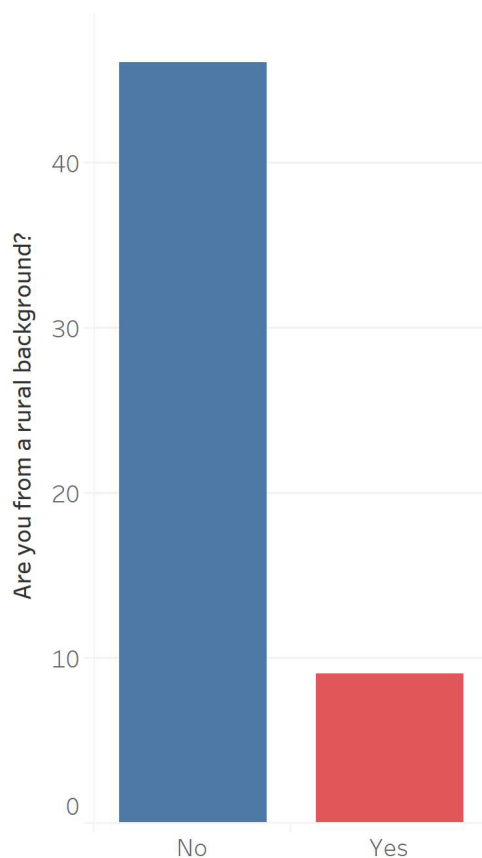
**30** Tiegan et al. "Reaching for Educational Equality."

First Term GPA Box Plots

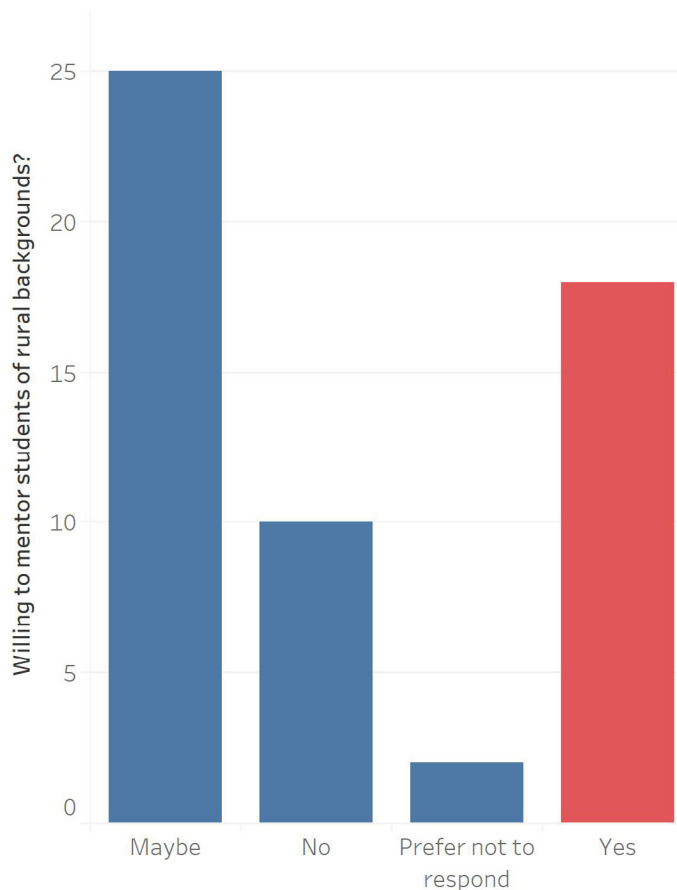


First Term GPA of Incoming Students at the University of Utah from 2009 - 2017  
Gray plots correspond to rural students, red plots correspond to urban students





Number of Respondents from Rural and Urban Backgrounds



Number of Respondents Reflecting Willingness to Mentor Students with a Rural Background

<sup>31</sup> "High School Benchmarks 2016: National College Progression Rates." National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. October 27, 2016. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks-2016-national-college-progression-rates/>

### University of Utah Campus Life Mentors: Adding a Rural Dynamic

According to a 2016 National Student Clearinghouse report, rural students were less likely to return for a second year of college than other groups of students.<sup>31</sup> While this is a multi-faceted issue, a common setback is financial reasons. By becoming involved with a mentorship program during their first year at a university, students can seek guidance and a sense of community to move past this challenge (and others) to their education. Mentorship programs provide students with a connection to the university and create a sense of community by linking students with resources,

people, and other programs on campus. They can provide students with direction in achieving their goals, as well as show them opportunities they likely would not have otherwise realized were available to them.

Due to the effectiveness of mentorship programs in increasing the retention rate of students, the University of Utah already has programs in place that match interested students with mentors. One such program, the Student Success Advocates, allows students to get in contact with professionals on campus that assist the student's academic development. The director of this program, Dr. Amy Bergerson, provided the Praxis Lab with multiple

resources and suggestions that allowed the mentoring component of the project to turn out successfully. Another mentorship program at the University of Utah is Campus Life Mentors (CLM). This program pairs students with peers that have received mentorship training. Though this technique does have a higher turnover rate for mentors, as students join and leave the program annually, it has the benefit of introducing new experience as well as new mentors each year.

The mentorship group of the class decided to work with CLM to broaden the scope of mentoring at the University of Utah by actively including rural students. By pairing with a program that already exists on campus, the efforts of the Praxis Lab will continue to be applied and practiced after the Praxis Lab itself has ended. In order to work with

on the specific problems faced by rural students and how to help their mentees with these challenges. The class is currently looking into a partnership that will continue the trainings in coming years.

### **Rural Day: Increasing General Awareness**

Rural Day was an event hosted on April 2nd, 2018 with the Hinckley Institute of Politics. Partners included the Honors College, Salt Lake City Corporation, and the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. The purpose was to raise more awareness about individuals from rural areas, with a special focus on Utah's rural students and the barriers they face in their higher education. Students, faculty, and people from the larger community were invited in and presented with the problems facing rural individuals and possible solutions. It was the hope of

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## ***MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH A CONNECTION TO THE UNIVERSITY AND CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY BY LINKING STUDENTS WITH RESOURCES, PEOPLE, AND OTHER PROGRAMS ON CAMPUS.***

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CLM, members of the class met with the Associate Director of New Student and Family Programs, Erin Sine. Associate Director Sine's position places her in charge of CLM, and she was quite enthusiastic about the class's suggestions. Through collaboration, it was decided that the applications for mentors and mentees will now include a question to identify if they have a rural background in order to include this as a part of the pairing process. The class is also facilitating a training for the mentors of the Fall 2018-Spring 2019 school year that will inform them

the Praxis Lab to elevate the conversation surrounding rural areas and create a desire in the individuals who attended to be a part of finding solutions to the issues of Utah's urban/rural divide.

The event had two main aspects to help increase awareness of rural areas. The first consisted of the keynote and panel speakers who touched on different issues in the urban/rural divide. The second consisted of the organizations who came and tabled to showcase some of the resources already available to rural students on campus.



Rural Day Speakers: Lynn Pace, Dr. Jason Taylor, Honors Dean Sylvia Torti, Lt. Governor Spencer Cox, and Juliette Tennert

Honors College Dean Sylvia Torti opened the evening. She gave an introduction to Praxis Labs, speaking to their relevance and importance, and then introduced the speakers.

#### LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR SPENCER COX

The Lt. Governor shared his story, which shows the struggles that rural individuals face and how education can be a solution to those issues. He opened by mentioning that his story is not unique to his hometown of Sanpete country but is actually a common story for rural Utah. To briefly summarize what he called the “tale of two families,” the Lt. Governor’s father came from a big family with six brothers. They lived in what most would call abject poverty now, but they didn’t know they were poor since everyone was. Three of the brothers ended up getting some college education and the other three did not. The three who didn’t have struggled all their lives and have not found much worldly success. For the brothers that did complete a college education, they moved out to

bigger cities in order to take advantage of better opportunities.

The Lt. Governor used his family’s story to show the situation facing rural Utah. Overtime, those that do get an education realize that there aren’t many opportunities in their rural hometowns and move away. Those that don’t get an education, whose parents who are often struggling and on welfare, stay and follow in that same lifestyle. They struggle to make ends meet because most of the jobs in rural Utah can’t support a family. This spiralling effect contributes to the cycles of intergenerational poverty that is seen at much higher rates in rural Utah. The main thing that the Lt. Governor said needs to happen is rural Utah needs to “stop exporting our kids.” Rural Utah needs to keep those educated young adults and future entrepreneurs in their hometowns. But, as Cox stated, “if rural Utah could’ve solved rural Utah’s problems by themselves, we would have done it by now. We need your help; we need the big cities to help us out.”

#### JULIETTE TENNERT

*Director of Economic and Public Policy Research at the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute*

Juliette Tennert, a representative from one of the class sponsors, provided insights on how she sees the urban/rural divide in the field of economics. The statistics she shared showed the gap between urban and rural economies but they were also encouraging because they showed Utah’s ability to reach out to those struggling rural areas. Utah’s economy is one of the best

in nation. The state has added jobs at a faster pace than any other state in the U.S. However, while the state as a whole has grown, there are 11 counties in Utah that have experienced job decline. Utah's economy, although number one for economic diversity, is not without challenges. Rural area economies go through booms and busts, but there is great opportunity to leverage Utah's broadband to help rural areas get the education needed to diversify their economies. Tennert stated, "For economists, education is key. Economic growth is fueled by educational opportunity." Even while mentioning how the data shows this gap in urban and rural economies, Tennert said, "There is such tremendous opportunity... If any state can figure this out, Utah can figure it out."

#### LYNN PACE

*Senior Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs with the Salt Lake City Corporation*

Lynn Pace, another representative from one of the class sponsors, shared his views on the urban/rural divide and why Salt Lake City is interested in helping to address it. Salt Lake City has made a commitment to be a part of the dialogue striving to find solutions to problems that affect the state as a whole. As he stated, "no one community is an island," so as Salt Lake works to help these other areas like rural Utah, they are working to help the state as whole continue to improve. When thinking of the divide, Pace shared a story to illustrate what Utah still needs to figure out. He comes from a family of ten kids where the second helpings were typically divided to individuals according to their needs, rather than

just spreading everything equally. Pace used this story to explain that if Utah is the number one economy in the nation, there are enough resources to go around. Utah just needs to figure out how to properly allocate its resources so that each of its unique counties get what they need to first get out of poverty and then to thrive.

#### DR. JASON TAYLOR

*University of Utah Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy*

The concluding speaker of Rural Day was Dr. Jason Taylor, a UofU faculty member.

He brought the focus of the evening back to the class project by sharing some of his research on higher education. He brought attention to the three barriers that rural students face in their higher education, namely family, finances, and culture. In regard to family, Dr. Taylor shared that the largest influence on student's postsecondary decisions is family, in terms on whether and where a young adult goes to college. To address this barrier, colleges and universities need to find ways to support and connect with students and their families earlier. Before the student gets to college, they should have the opportunity to engage with campus and nurture relationships prior to enrollment. Also, Dr. Taylor shared that most students take a pause in their education; many students do not complete their education in four consecutive years. Colleges should recognize this and strive to still be connected with students during their pauses.

In regard to finances and culture, the student's ability to pay and sense of belonging matters. As mentioned by Dr. Taylor, "Low income students are more sensitive to the price of college. This means that as prices go up, enrollment goes down... they are also very loan averse." He suggested that state and institutional policies should be adapted to help support students financially. Dr. Taylor specifically mentioned something that other institutions are trying, which is providing emergency aid on an as needed basis. There is good evidence that this model has a huge impact on retention rates of students. Culturally, there is often a huge gap in the social and cultural experiences between campus and the student's home community. This includes differences in class sizes, interaction with faculty members, and a more diverse culture instead of the homogenous one students may be used to. It is important to signal to students that they belong on campus. Dr. Taylor suggested that large universities like the U engage in some self-assessment of how rural students feel on their campus, ensuring they are able to feel welcome and that they belong.

#### **TABLERS**

For the second aspect of rural day, the following organizations tabled to showcase some of current resources available to rural students on campus: Student Success Advocates, Learning Success Center, Office for Undergraduate Research, and the Honors College.

#### **MEDIA COVERAGE**

Jana Cunningham, a UofU Communications Specialist, helped plan a media release for the Rural Day event to spread the word to students on

campus. Rural Day was also advertised through the Utah Daily Chronicle and Her Campus. The evening was also broadcast to the larger community through both Channel 4 and the Hinckley Institute Forum and website. The class hopes to use these outlets continue to share the informative messages from the speakers with more people and open more conversations about rural Utah and its students.

## SECOND PROJECT COMPONENT: TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

One important goal of this lab was not to be prescriptive, but rather to help open doors for Utah's rural students. This meant taking a holistic view of rural post-secondary education and trying to evaluate the broader set of options available to rural students. Including technical colleges and concurrent enrollment was one way to increase the flexibility of our project and expand its reach to students who, for a variety of reasons, do not see college as a good fit for themselves.

This decision was based on the belief that there is a unique set of circumstances in rural communities that makes a one-size fits all approach more difficult. One of the most obvious problems was the lack of economic diversity in rural communities. Once a rural student leaves for college, chances are that coming back to their home will not provide them with a career in their field. To make the most of their investment a newly college educated student would be forced to leave their community in search of a career. As a result, an already aging rural community has been deprived of a bright young person who could have served as an example to others and bolstered the strength of the local economy. Some students might see that possibility of being forced to leave and decide not to go to college. Without alternatives, that child might abandon further education altogether.

The class focus on technical schools was also inspired by Governor Gary Herbert's declaration that 2018 is the year of technical education. The Utah

System of Higher Education estimates that their 2016-2017 CTE graduates will rake in an additional \$931 million dollars in added income over the next thirty years compared to if a technical education had not been obtained.<sup>32</sup> Jobs that one can qualify for with a technical education span the economy, from health professions, to technology, business, engineering, and even more. That wealth of options, as well as prospects for higher wages, coupled with the cost efficiency of many Utah's public programs makes them an attractive option for a lot of Utahns.

However, understanding the current state of technical education for our rural students is crucial to implementing effective strategies. Through conversations with school and government leaders it started to become clear that awareness of technical school as an option to further education might not be universal. There are a number of colleges and Universities in Utah's System of Higher Education such as Utah State University, Salt Lake Community College and Snow College that offer online and in-person technical education or concurrent classes that can help students in high school start preparing for their careers. There is also concern that students aren't interested in technical programs coming out of High School. If that's true, then an approach centered on increasing awareness of a program would not necessarily be effective. The last question we had was whether people in rural communities felt like they had adequate

<sup>32</sup> Blair Carruth and Joseph Curtin, "2017 Report on Technical Education," Utah System of Higher Education, Issue Brief (November 2017), <https://higheredutah.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-7-CTE-Annual-Report.pdf>.

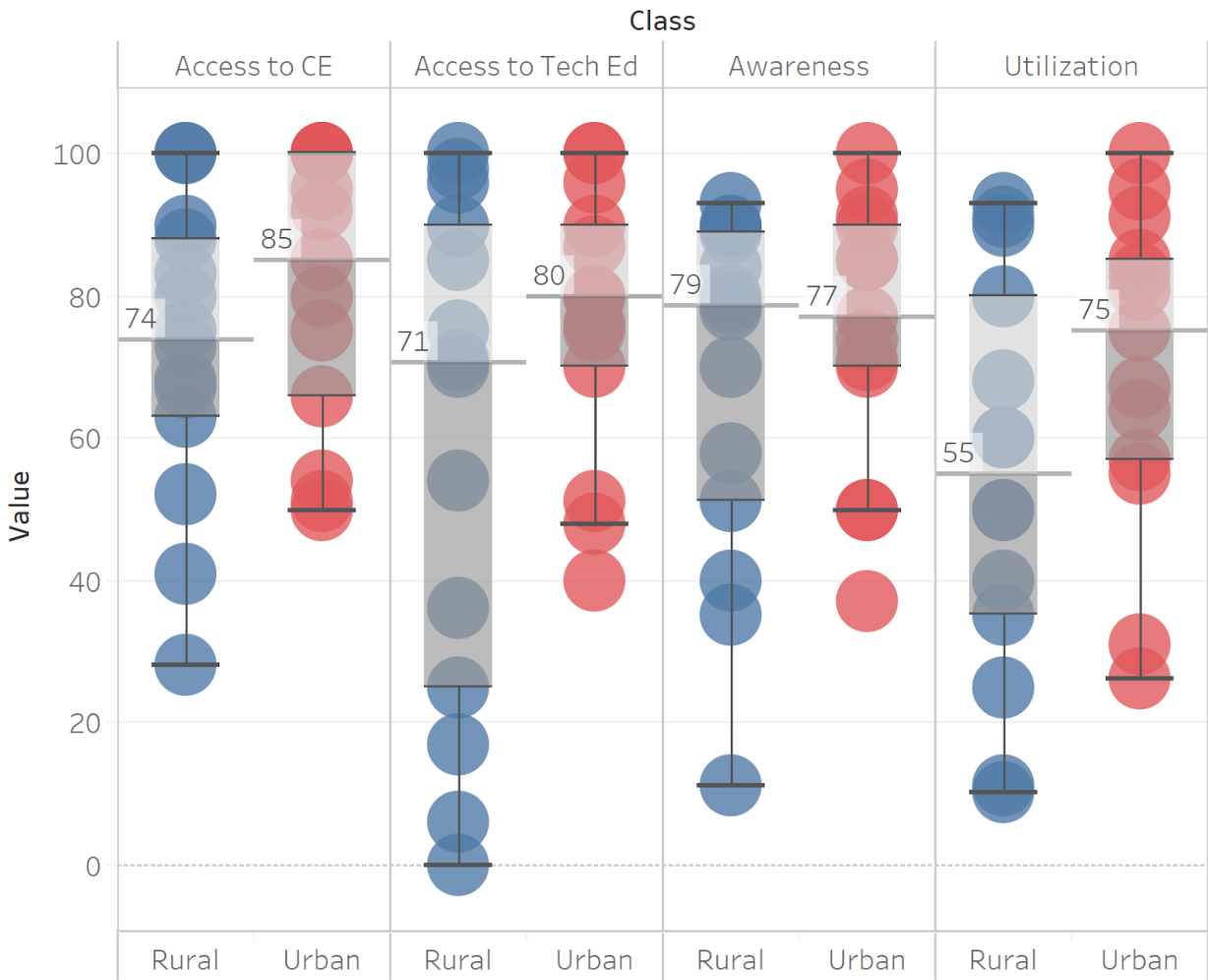


access to concurrent and technical school resources. Even with interest and awareness, people who do not feel like the resources are there they may be discouraged from trying to use what is available. Those communities also may not have nearby campuses, poor internet or not have access to the programs or courses that they need.

The goal of this part of the project was to explore the problems that face communities trying to bring technical education and concurrent enrollment to their students. To this end, the lab

developed a survey that asked respondents to rate student access to concurrent and technical education programs, as well as utilization of those programs, awareness, and interest. Respondents were also asked to rank commonly cited barriers to technical and concurrent education and then were given space to respond with what they felt the role of these programs plays for students in their area. The survey was distributed via email to more than 200 counselors, principals, and superintendents from Utah’s public high schools.

Chart of individual survey responses by locale type



Access to CE, Access to Tech Ed, Awareness and Utilization for each Class. Color shows details about Calculation1.

## Technical School Faculty Survey Results

The survey received 27 responses from 19 different counties around Utah. The majority of responses came from school counselors, several principals and one superintendent. Fourteen of the responses came from a rural county, as well as thirteen from urban counties.

Unfortunately, such a small sample size makes statistical analysis less valuable. Simple t-tests on target variables did not find significant differences between the responses of rural and urban faculty.

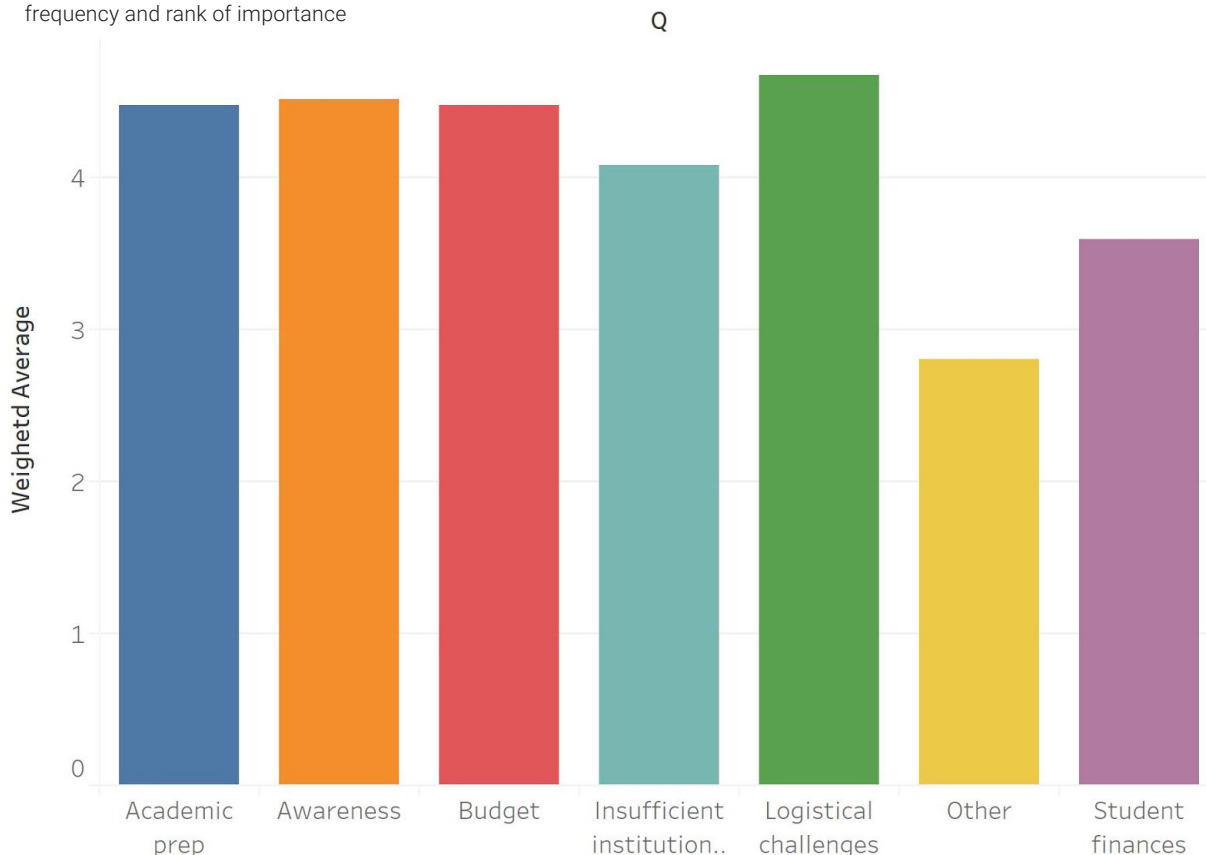
The limited number of responses from each area also make it impossible to factor in regional differences between different rural and urban counties that undoubtedly face their own unique

sets of issues. That being said, the survey does provide an opportunity to learn about what faculty at these schools thought were the most important barriers to technical and concurrent education for students.

By weighting the average responses for each variable we find that several factors rank highly as a barrier to technical and concurrent education. Logistical challenges such as distance, academic preparedness, awareness/interest, and school budgets all score very similarly.

However, using only what respondents chose as the most important barrier, we see much larger variability. Logistical challenges are rated as most important more frequently than any other factor, followed by school budgets and

Weighted average of all responses using frequency and rank of importance





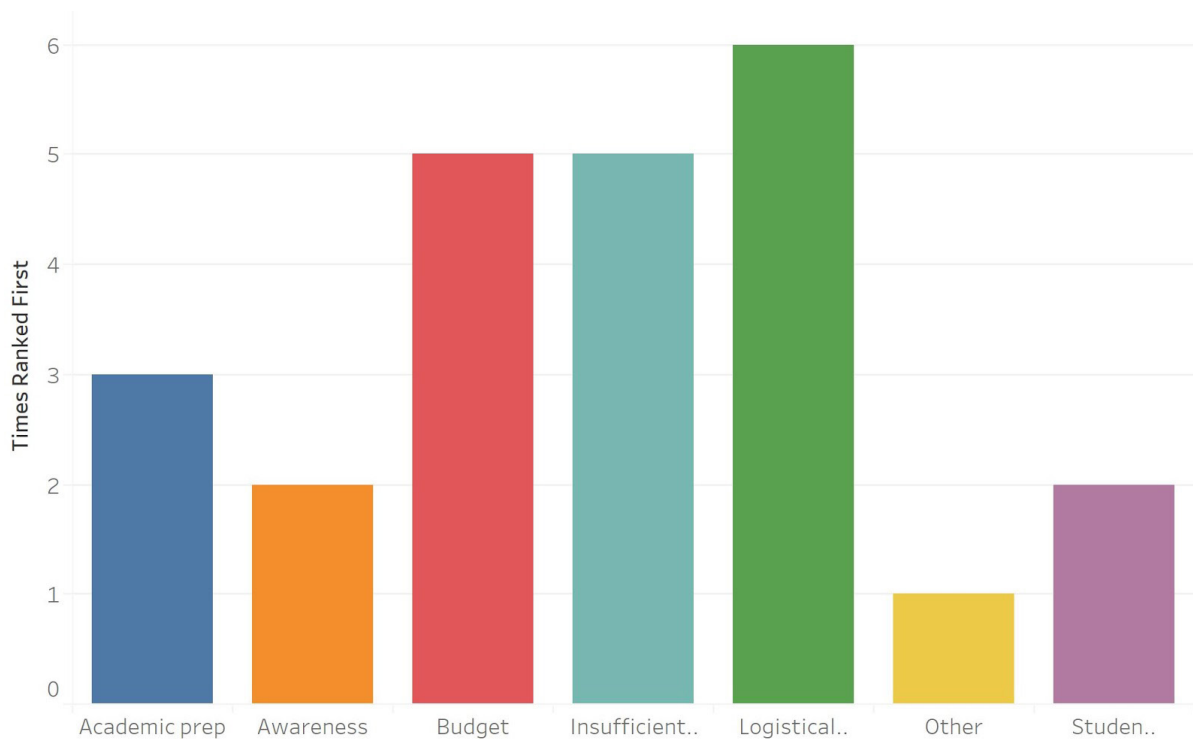


Chart using only the highest ranked barrier from each respondent

insufficient institutional support from partnering schools. Student finances consistently ranks the lowest as a barrier to technical and concurrent education.

Clearly, distance and other logistical challenges play a very important role in whether a student chooses to pursue a technical education. This could be due to the fact that most technical colleges are located close to I-80, so students in rural counties with less access to those areas may struggle with getting to campuses as well as finding housing. Utah State University is one school that does a better job reaching out to more remote areas of Utah by putting extension offices in all but one county in Utah.

Other barriers such as smaller school budgets may make it harder for some schools to bring in teachers who are

able to instruct college-level concurrent courses, which can limit student access to programs. The remoteness of rural schools also make it more difficult to recruit quality personnel. It might come as a surprise that finance scored so low when others came in so high, but the cost efficiency of concurrent and technical programs could account for that difference.

It's important to note that the perspectives of school faculty may not accurately reflect the feelings of students. Issues closer to the respondents may end up ranking higher than if students were asked directly. Nonetheless, it's still important to hear the thoughts of school leaders who interface with partnering institutions, set up concurrent programs and are primarily concerned with funneling resources to their students.

# PART THREE:



**FINAL  
REMARKS**

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this Praxis Lab, our class has made significant strides in the discussion surrounding Utah's urban-rural divide. The fall semester of the course helped us to learn more about the dimensions of this divide and its varying implications for all members of Utah's community, while helping us define and cement what it was that we wanted to focus on in the spring. Our experiences in learning about varying social and political indicators throughout Utah demonstrated a clear difference in many areas between urban and rural populations in Utah. Additionally, learning from guest speakers and individual research projects helped to highlight specific issues along the urban-rural continuum and provide resources for further study. In choosing to focus on education, we hope to have made a difference that can affect all segments of the urban-rural divide, including economic, political, and health-related issues.

Our project consisted of a handful of different components that all contributed to an overall elevation of the discussion surrounding education along Utah's urban-rural continuum. Through our work with the Campus Life Mentor program, we have highlighted the importance of students' geographical identities, and highlighted the fact that rural students at the University of Utah may experience different needs than their urban counterparts. Additionally, the Rural Day event that we hosted helped to describe the urban-rural divide to the University of Utah community, while highlighting the importance of the conversation surrounding education along the urban-rural divide. The survey that was sent out to educators throughout Utah helped to provide unique perspectives from educators of various backgrounds about their experiences with higher education in Utah, specifically focusing on technical education and community college. Presenting all of these findings at the Praxis Lab Summit enabled us to share the valuable information we have learned with the greater Honors College community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Future efforts to address the divisions between urban and rural educational attainment should be addressed primarily through financial means. Many comments that we gathered on the issue of higher education focused on financial difficulties experienced by students and families in accessing education. Future work in this area could focus on providing scholarships for students with rural backgrounds, or other means of making college more affordable for all.

Further study of the urban-rural divide could address other identity characteristics as well, such as race and gender. Our research did not study these identities, but focused on a more general discussion of higher education along the urban-rural divide.

Further research could be conducted into incentivizing specific degree programs. Some concerns we encountered regarding higher education stemmed from the lack of jobs available in certain degree programs. If students were to go back to their communities, they may not have the ability to apply what they learned while in school. Bridging the gap between the two by highlighting some of the economic advantages or skills of a degree program will allow for a better understanding of what a career could look like after school.

## NOTE

Toward the end of the lab, the class discussed how the remainder of our funding should be used. With little time left, we thought it appropriate to donate to an organization or project whose efforts aligned with the overarching goals of the lab to support rural post-secondary education. After speaking with several stakeholders, we learned that Piute county plans to build a freelance training and co-working space in one of its community centers. The space would centralize resources for residents to take online classes and perform remote work, thereby connecting them to jobs that wouldn't normally be available in the community.

Our class is still exploring the possibility of a donation toward the creation of the Piute County Freelance Incubation Center, but we hope that its creation would encourage residents to seek training and education to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded by remote work.

