

USU Workforce Development Panel

Chase Anderson

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Allie Salter, Veronica Villhard, Andrea Olsen, and Andrew Deceuster discuss workforce development issues.

At least once a year, the Utah outdoor industry comes together to meet and collaborate, discuss issues important to the industry, and celebrate successes from the past year. This year, in Heber, Outdoor Product Design and Development faculty, a student, and an industry partner had the chance to host a workshop on workforce development and the opportunity to prepare the next generation of outdoor industry leaders within the state.

The audience had the pleasure of listening to Andrew Deceuster, OPDD director and assistant professor, Andrea Olsen, OPDD assistant professor and a 10+ year apparel design veteran of Columbia Sportswear Company, Allie Salter, director of product development at Cotopaxi, and Veronica Villhard, OPDD senior and former apparel design intern at Patagonia.

Speaking to a group of people involved in Utah's outdoor industry, the workforce development panel spoke on the unique opportunity that the industry has to collaborate with outdoor-focused degree programs across the state. Throughout Utah, there are opportunities for agencies, companies, and other institutions to create pipelines to recruit and hire talent, develop curriculum that reflects industry needs, and collaborate with institutions and programs on projects to better prepare students to come into an organization bringing value and impact to the industry.

Panel members agreed that there's a need for increased communication between institutions and employers

to keep course curriculum closely aligned with skills and knowledge needed in the industry. In addition, the overwhelming consensus was that students are being trained with relevant, highly valuable skills, and can impact companies as an intern from day one. OPDD students are proving that companies should value internships even more highly due to the energy, fresh ideas, and technical skill they bring to the workplace.

Increased communication and collaboration in the classroom as well as placing students into industry pipelines ultimately leads to a vibrant industry that creates more innovative products due to a highly skilled and passionate workforce.