

Urban Rural Ambassadors

National Policy Consensus Center
Hatfield School of Government
Portland State University
and
Eastern Oregon University

I think for me it's about changing the conversation. It's about building community. It's about helping us all come together and develop leaders who are going to build robust solutions to the real challenges we have.

Having students from the east of Oregon come to the west and from the west go to the east—rural students come to urban areas and urban students come to rural areas—results in their having a lot of reflection and experiential opportunities being out and in those communities. And I see the Urban Rural Ambassador Program as a key opportunity to helping us close that urban rural divide.

The challenges with affordable housing, homelessness, access to health care—those are cutting across issues, and so you go. We have more in common than we do that divides us. What happens if we collaborate to bring the expertise and the experience of Eastern Oregon University faculty and students together with the experience and the identity of the Portland State University faculty and students? You can really create an interesting conversation. But one of the biggest benefits of this, clearly, for the students was just getting to talk to each other. You know talking to people from a completely different environment. Essentially it's taking some students and faculty that live over here and work and go to school in this urban setting and taking some people that kind of do those same things in a rural setting, and we all kind of have similar career aspirations and majors. I don't think everybody had the same exact major but kind of similar avenues or whatever and basically look at like housing and just living issues in the two different settings and just kind of show the similarities and highlight some of the differences.

I feel like the people who were part of the program, especially this first year, were people who were very much on opposite ends of the spectrum, which is really good. But it's definitely hard to bridge that gap between the very rural and the very urban. So, the things I learned in Eastern Oregon I've taken and I've been able to talk about in my classes. Like today, we were talking about the fires in California, and my community development teacher didn't really know a lot about forest management--I mean, you know, her specialty is community development. So, we were able to have a conversation in class about some of the knowledge that I took from that program about what Oregon's doing for forest management and how we're creating jobs that way. So, I think what I took away from it that relates to everyday life as well as both of my majors is just the ability to talk to someone to break down those barriers and to start thinking and seeing things from their perspective even if it doesn't necessarily change your opinion. It gives you an opportunity to just see where someone else is coming from,

which then you can take out into the world. It gives you a better idea of maybe the next person you deal with.

I don't know that I've changed my opinions a lot since this. I think I just have changed how I approach issues. So, I try to use more sensitive language and those sorts of things because my intent is still the same, but I know that the way that I deliver it could be taken differently by different types of people. And so I try to, I guess, kind of read my audience, and then understand how to communicate with them.

I couldn't speak more to how awesome of an experience this was. Just the connections I made in the ten days that I was there, just the experience in itself meeting with—like, I met with a mayor, presidents of multiple institutions throughout the course of ten days and just being in that context and realizing that people are people, and they kind of share the same values, and they look at things pretty similarly, and they go through the same things, it was just such an eye-opening experience and, yeah, if you have any interest at all in getting understanding from a new place, a new perspective, this course is the way to do it. You can learn in the classroom all you want, but to go somewhere new and experience it is really how you're going to impact yourself and make some of those changes and feel the differences in yourself.