

Urban Rural Ambassadors Institute

The Urban Rural Ambassadors Institute is a collaboration among Eastern Oregon University and Portland State University. It was initiated in 2018 as a 10-day, six-credit residential summer program for students to explore urban and rural connections in Oregon, and to develop the collaborative skills to work across urban and rural Oregon. The institute enables tomorrow's leaders to learn from each other about regional commonalities and differences. Students develop the capacity to forge a path through the tension and stalemate that often characterize urban-rural debate, and to find solutions that fit local economies, values, and ways of life for the advancement of Oregon as a whole.

Current Institute Leads:

Dr. Megan Horst, Portland State University, Toulon School of Urban Studies and Planning

Dr. Christopher Walsh, Eastern Oregon University, Chemistry

Kristin Wright, National Policy Consensus Center

Support from the Community Development Education MiniGrant

Funds were used to compensate guest speakers (we had about 20 guests visit class!), and to assist in the transition to an online format.

Summer 2020: Building Bridges Online

In August 2020, we celebrated the completion of the 3rd Oregon Urban-Rural Ambassadors Institute. This year was different than in past years, as we tried out an all online format. We hope to be back in person in 2021!

Seventeen undergraduate and graduate level students from various programs (e.g Architecture, Community Development, Math, Real Estate, Urban Planning) at both Eastern Oregon and Portland State University joined together online to learn about some of the commonalities and differences across Oregon's communities.

A highlight of the 6-week class included 4 different panel discussions with diverse elected officials, government staff, and community leaders in eastern/rural Oregon and urban Oregon, mainly the Portland metro region. The main topics, selected for the urban and rural perspectives on the issues, and the panelists included:

COVID-19:

- Donna Beverage, County Commissioner, Union County
- Edward Hill, Black Food Sovereignty Coalition
- Mark Owens, State Representative, Harney County

Land use:

- Alexis Biddle, 1000 Friends of Oregon, Urban Lands Advocate,
- Robert Hassmiller, US Forest Service, District Hydrologist with the Whitman Ranger District of Wallowa Whitman National Forest
- Rebecca Small, Metro, Regional Planner
- JD Tovey, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, Planning Director

Affordable Housing:

- Mike Boquist, Community Development Director, La Grande
- Ernesto Fonseca, Hacienda CDC, CEO
- Nicole Howard, La Grande City Council and EOU Professor of History

- Christine Jarski, Economic Development Director, La Grande
- Alissa Keny-Guyer, Outgoing State Representative, District 46 (Portland)

Climate Change Impacts:

- Michael Dembrow, State Senator, District 23 (E. Portland)
- Megan Kemple, Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network
- Anissa Pemberton, Coalition of Communities of Color

The class provided students with a critical framework for serving as a leader and working collaboratively across Oregon's urban-rural "divide."

Here are a few examples of how students committed to being urban-rural ambassadors going forward:

Explore rural communities more (post-COVID) and make connections!

To seek out more BIPOC rural voices, experiences, and perspectives in Oregon

Investigating apartment development opportunities in more rural communities in Oregon.

Explore urban-rural environmental health

Going to look into opportunities in tribal planning and things outside of Portland

To find my voice and confidence to speak up for my Indigenous community which are affected by all of our topics.

Make a difference in the global impact that our cities are having on the climate along with investing more in rural development growth

Advocating for better and more governmental policies and actions towards the solutions of issues like climate change.

Community engagement in rural areas to raise their knowledge for rural perspective in regional planning

Find opportunities to get back into ecology and seek out forest services; volunteer with Oregon State Parks or Forest Service.

Media about the Urban-Rural Ambassadors Institute

Check out this brief film: [Urban-Rural Ambassadors Institute](#)

Carlisle, Madeline. 2020. How Students in Oregon Are Bridging the Rural and Urban Divide Time Magazine. <https://time.com/collection/apart-not-alone/5809203/bridging-rural-urban-divide/>

Hughes, Dick. 2019. Urban-Rural Ambassador program bridges the divide. The Other Oregon/A Voice for Rural Oregon.

https://www.theotheroregon.com/features/feature_stories/urban-rural-ambassador-program-bridges-the-divide/article_1724715c-246e-11ea-b3f5-9bef5d4dc0e2.html

Nesbitt, K. 2019. Urban-Rural Institute bridges the east/west divide. La Grande Observer. https://www.lagrandeobserver.com/archive/urban-rural-institute-bridges-the-east-west-divide/article_63156e3d-5eef-5611-ad91-18a7e0bc8b12.html

Endorsement from Governor Kate Brown

In April of 2018, Governor Brown visited Eastern Oregon University to sign a bill allocating \$9 million toward building a field house on their campus. At the media event, she took the opportunity to announce Portland State's collaboration with Eastern Oregon University on the Urban-Rural Ambassadors Summer Institute.

"I am very happy to announce the launch of the Urban-Rural Ambassadors program. This is a new partnership with EOU and with PSU and Oregon Solutions. It will challenge students, whether from La Grande or Portland to provide creative solutions to meet the needs of our diverse communities and support our local thriving economies."