Virtual event brings unexpected benefits for students

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Students attending an annual networking event at Utah State University were able to share the company of alumni from across the nation since this year’s event was held via Zoom.

Many annual events at Utah State have changed due to COVID-19. The annual College of Humanities and Social Sciences’ Networking Night, which is usually held in person with food and more than one hundred people, had to change as well.

The event allows students to meet USU alumni, make connections and ask questions about career choices. In previous years, most alumni have only visited from as far as Salt Lake City.

“Normally we’re pretty tied to Salt Lake and Cache Valley,” said Natalie Archibald Smoot, who helped plan the event. “I feel like we’ve done our best.”

Smoot said the event’s planners didn’t know what to expect, but they were happy with how it turned out.

“I didn’t have any high expectations because I know students are already Zoom fatigued out,” she said. “But we have some awesome alumni, and we wanted to give students a chance to still talk with them if they wanted to.”

Students were grateful for this social opportunity when many previous events had been cancelled.

“I thought that it was valuable to be able to connect with these alumni,” said Christina Blanchard, a USU student. “I liked that it was very accessible, that everyone could access it and be a part of it.”

Blanchard said she has not been able to participate in many activities this year, but she was pleasantly surprised at how beneficial it was.

Dion-Jay Brookter was one alumni who participated and said he was honored to be invited. He resides in California, but was in Hawaii at the time of the event.

“Being able to connect with individuals immediately gives you an opportunity to be successful,” Brookter said. “Immediately following the session I received at least four other inquiries on LinkedIn from students. So even though we weren’t able to be in person, I think it was still a great session.”

Olivia Hoge, a student representative for the college, said it was easy to see the advantages of the virtual event.

“The benefits of doing it virtually were, we got to talk to a lot of alumni from different areas that have a lot of different positions because we could just Zoom them in,” she said.

Only 53 students registered for the event this year — significantly less than in past years — but Hoge believes this event was better in some ways. Fewer students participated, but they were students that might not have otherwise. She explained how the virtual setting allowed for students off-campus to be involved as well.

“We tried to make it as interactive as we could to feel like a normal event,” Hoge said. “I was just excited that we got to do any activity. It was still really important.”