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WHO WE ARE

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From rural Pennsylvania, Jordan Katcher deeply values community culture, collaboration, and inclusivity. She has lived in ten states and in southern Germany. She is both a Community Development Specialist with the Utah Community Development Office and an Associate Instructor at the University of Utah. She enjoys learning from others, self-reflecting, and laughing as often as possible.

“Let go of who you think you’re supposed to be; embrace who you are.”
- Brené Brown

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Bachelor of Science in Urban Ecology
I grew up in the desert next to the sea (Saudi Arabia) moving to the ice (Montana) and now I am stuck in the Middle the beautiful (Utah).

Biker, activist, plant and cat mom.
We extend many thanks to those that have taken time out of their
day to help our team obtain information about various communities
in Utah. As follows, acknowledgements will be listed in accordance
with assigned case studies. Thanks to those that helped the Bluff,
UT case study: Mayor, Ann Leppanen; Chair of San Juan County
Planning Commission, Sarah Burak; Bluff Area Mutual Aid (BAMA)
Representative, Amanda Podmore, and President of the Business
Owners of Bluff, Jennifer Davila. Thanks to those that helped the
Bryce Canyon City, UT case study: Mayor and stakeholder of
Ruby’s Inn, Shiloh Syrett; Garfield County Planning Commision
Director, Kaden Figgins; and Garfield County Tourism Director,
Falyn Owens. Thanks to those that helped the Moab, UT case study:
Moab City Council Member, Tawny Knuteson-Boyd; Moab City
Council Member and Co-owner of Poison Spider Bicycles, Karen
Guzman-Newton (and husband); and Special Projects Manager at
Moab City, Kaitlin Myers.

Special Thanks to Jordan Katcher and all attendees of
presentations throughout the semester.
Gateway communities across the intermountain West region attracts a lot of the people because of the recreational facilities, national parks, scenic rivers, and other public lands that make the landscape beautiful. However, the areas have been subjected to significant challenges due to the evolving circumstances brought by COVID-19. Restrictions imposed by the government have directly affected tourism, healthcare, and infrastructure available in these areas. One of the challenges in the gateway communities is that they experience a slow process of growth compared to other towns and cities. Considering this issue, the main goal of this study is to encourage dialogue, community participation, and engagement in shaping the community instead of imposing them on a preset plan. Apart from providing a platform for the people to voice their ideas, we can also develop a loose framework where the future of the community is designed by the feedback from the people living in the gateway areas.
In this year’s “Listening To” project, the target of the study is to understand how the people in gateway communities of Bluff, Moab, and Bryce Canyon are responding to the COVID-19. The pandemic has not only changed the lifestyle of the people but has also influenced the shift in how the study is conducted. In the past, this project was conducted through in-person engagement unlike now that the case studies, interviews, and resource inventory are done online. The study seeks to identify effective strategies that can be used by service providers to assist communities during this season. The survey and research findings can be used to develop appropriate recommendations on how society can form short, medium, and long term goals. Allowing the gateway community members to participate is a significant resource in that it not only adds value in the society but also influences the practicality of the mitigation strategies to preserve and enhance the beauty of the community for future development. Other key issues identified include the need to improve access to healthcare services and developing the infrastructure.

The collaboration in gateway communities in Utah: Moab, Bluff, and Bryce Canyon provided us with primary details about the current status, challenges, and goals during the pandemic and beyond.

As members of 2020 “Listening To” project, we are grateful to the communities for their cooperation and participation in the project during this difficult period. This research provides various insights based on the information collected from the gateway communities so that we can increase their resiliency in case of a future crisis. The members shared their experiences within the community and their intense desire to protect their homes. The diverse community voices can be used to develop solutions that will address the concerns, passions, and a common ground to manifest the vision of the people.
COVID-19, otherwise known as the novel Coronavirus, initially began to spread in the United States in early 2020. However, officials from the World Health Organization (WHO) report the first case may have occurred in November 2019. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness spread by respiratory droplets produced when an infected individual sneezes or coughs (CDC, 2020). Because COVID-19 spreads quickly and easily between people, “social distancing,” typically referring to staying at least six feet apart from others, has become common speak.

COVID-19’s initial impact was on the continent of Asia, however, it quickly transpired into a worldwide pandemic, claiming the lives and livelihoods of many. In the beginning, the World Health Organization had a difficult time responding to COVID-19 due to very little information about how the illness spread and no information on effective treatments. The number of individuals infected, hospitalized, and deaths attributed to COVID-19 have consistently and rapidly increased. On May 1, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 3,303,296 total positive cases globally (CDC, 2020). Worldwide shutdown protocols and “stay at home” orders became more and more common, with many people only leaving their homes to shop for groceries or for essential services, such as picking up prescription drugs. Many countries began to close their borders and require people to quarantine 14 days upon arrival from countries considered as “hotspots” or places with rapidly growing infections and most non-essential travel came to a halt. By July 26, 2020, global case counts had increased nearly five-fold to over 15,000,000 (CDC, 2020).
In response to shutdowns, loss of wages, and growing concerns around testing, the United States federal government created the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) in March 2020. Under FFCRA, employers with fewer than 500 employees must provide two weeks (up to 80 hours) of paid sick leave at the employee’s regular rate of pay due to COVID-related illness or quarantine (Department of Labor, 2020). In addition to paid sick leave, Section 6001 of the FFCRA enables Americans to be tested for COVID-19 free of charge (116th Congress, 2020). Even with free testing and paid time off for quarantine and isolation, COVID-19 has firmly taken root and disrupted the United States of America with positive cases increasing from 1,095,682 May 1 to 4,110,385 on July 26, 2020.

In Utah, the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget created the Utah Leads Together plan to communicate public health and economic recovery plans to the public in March 2020. Early on, the Governor’s Office introduced a model they termed “assess, test, trace” and funded various efforts to ideally provide easy access to COVID-19 assessments, low-barrier testing, and robust tracing. At the beginning of COVID-19 response, there were several “no bid” contracts awarded under Governor Herbert’s direction to assist in these areas. Some of these efforts have since come under fire, with $108 million spent by May 12, 2020 (McKellar, 2020). Emergency procurements have since been stopped in the state of Utah.

To support its assess, test, trace model, the State of Utah funded development of an app named Healthy Together developed by local software development firm, Twenty, at a price tag of $6 million (McKellar, 2020). This app was originally intended to assist with daily symptom checking assessments, help users locate testing sites, and bolster contact tracing efforts. It has since had location services disabled due to suspicions this functionality was negatively impacting public uptake of the app.
In addition to assessment and tracing, the state also provides testing services. On March 31, the state contracted with Nomi Health, which provides testing to Utahns at seven different locations around the state through an initiative named Test Utah (Carlisle, 2020). This initiative has also come under speculation, as all testing would have already been provided free of charge under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, but has also been applauded by some for providing testing to rural communities across the state.

Utah Leads Together version 2.0 featured an appendix written by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and the consulting firm Leavitt Partners, in coordination with the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget that introduced specific tiered health recommendations. These “phased” or “color-coded guidelines” were designed to provide suggestions and guidance to Utahns in most industries and for other spaces like schools or for social gatherings that could be turned up or down like a dial, not on and off like a light switch (State of Utah, 2020). On April 29, 2020, Governor Gary Herbert signed the Phased Health Guidelines into an executive order (Herbert, 2020). There have been multiple iterations of the Phased Health Guidelines since their rollout in April, with the most recent version updated July 27, 2020 enabling further relaxations in restrictions, with a continued emphasis placed on face coverings and physical distancing (Herbert, 2020).

One area of note in the state Phased Guidelines are their reference to state and national parks on page 9. While in the “red” or highest risk category, Utahns are advised not to engage in activities at a state park located outside their county of residence. Beginning in the “orange” or moderate risk category, readers are advised to follow guidelines for state and national parks set forth by the National Park Service and local jurisdiction in which the park is located. For cities near national parks shutdown during the red phase, economic hardships have ensued.
Gateway communities are cities or towns adjacent to natural tourist attractions such as national parks, scenic rivers/lakes, and other public lands. Some examples of these communities are Moab, Utah (located near Canyonlands and Arches National Parks) and Jackson Hole, Wyoming (located near Grand Teton National Park). This close proximity between the communities and natural attractions results in unavoidable economic, social, and ecological relationships. Tourists travel from near and far to visit these natural attractions and as a result many of these communities become economically reliant on these visitors. The same can be said of these tourists relying on gateway communities to provide many required services during their visits (i.e. lodging, food, etc.). This relationship with tourism generated by the natural attractions has both positive and negative effects on these communities as a whole.

Gateway communities serve as an integral piece of the great American landscape. The nature of these communities present challenges and problems that differ from the norm. In some cases these challenges can be unique to a single community. Some examples of these challenges include but are not limited to single sector economies, real estate prices driving long time residents out, and congestion due to rapid growth. As more and more people choose to visit the natural amenities adjacent to these communities a variety of challenges await to be addressed and tackled by Gateway Communities. Thoughtful planning and efforts will be integral to the sustaining of these valued and loved communities.
The workshops research process can be broken up into three main areas; a development stage, secondary research, and then finally conducting and analyzing our interviews. The first stage began with developing survey and interview questions. The direction of these questions was determined by the course focus. Several class periods were dedicated to collaboratively developing questions which would get to areas of interest to us. These areas include economic matters and social issues featured heavily in our questions. Both survey and interview questions were developed, although for this workshop we only used the interview questions. After the class had deliberated and formed a set of questions, they were sent to the broader GNAR Initiative, who in concert with our instructor finalized the questions which were then used in all of our interviews.

After developing our questions we were split into three teams and assigned a Gateway Community to use in our case studies. This second stage was dominated by secondary research into our assigned community, exploring its demographics, economy, geography, and history. This secondary research is featured not only in our case studies but was also presented in the first of three presentations conducted throughout the workshop. While exploring these communities we also began to pull together contacts who would be reached out to for interviews.
This leads into the third stage of the research process, the conducting and analysis of interviews. These interviews are the core of our case studies, presenting themes, practices, and insights from the communities themselves. Each team was given one or two contacts by the workshops instructor but more were found through secondary research and references. The interviews typically lasted about thirty minutes, although this often varied interview to interview. With the interview questions having been determined beforehand the structure of the interviews, and in turn the data collected from them was very systematized. From the notes and data collected from the interviews, case study teams extrapolated themes and produced an Interview Write-Up (featured at the end of this report) which lays out their own interview process and the themes they found. These themes were also presented in the second presentation of the workshop. The research process ended with final presentations of the now completed case studies, exploring not only interview themes, but also community and workshop take-aways and recommendations for issues faced by the communities.
BLUFF
CASE STUDY
LAURA ESTRADA, MASON BERGLUND AND JUDY (NA KYUNG) KIM.
INTRODUCTION:

As things get harder during this year, we try to focus on the things that we can understand and grasp. One of those things is learning about places and observing what they are going through. In this case study, we are looking at the Town of Bluff. We show some of their demographics, some current hardships, as well as recap interviews with townspeople in order to show what their experiences have been and how they are dealing with new challenges all around them. We want the experience of this case study to be the story behind Bluff. We know that the voices of small towns are not always heard, so we want to explore Bluff’s story and bring it to life for those who don’t know it. As you move through this study we want you to look for the voices of Bluff and understand their experience and enjoy what we have learned.

HISTORY:

Bluff is a small town in southeastern Utah. It was incorporated in 2018, but the land was actually settled in 650 A.D. by Ancestral Puebloans. Bluff has a rich history that is very intertwined with nearby Navajo Nation. Much of the town’s culture and income stems directly from this relationship. The town’s population, which is around 250 people, is aging and majority white, but the Navajo people make up the majority of the town’s workforce. The local economy is almost entirely reliant on tourists, coming for nearby attractions such as Monument Valley, which you can see in the background of this slide, Bears Ears National Monument, and the Sand Island Petroglyphs.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Due to Bluff’s small size and recent incorporation, accurate demographic and population data is not available online. From interviews with town officials, we found that the total population is about 250 with an average age of approximately 55. The population is majority white, but heavily influenced and interactive with nearby Navajo Nation.
GEOGRAPHY:

Bluff has a fairly moderate climate compared to the rest of Utah. Very average warm, dry summers and cold, snowy winters are the norm in the town. With an elevation of about 4,400 ft, Bluff sits way below nearby Bears Ears national monument (8,700 ft). It even sits lower than the Valley of the Gods, which has an average elevation of about 5,000 ft. The locally low elevation combined with proximity to the San Juan River makes Bluff flash-flood prone.

COVID-19 RESPONSE:

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) confirmed the first COVID-19 case in Utah on the 6th of March 2020. The patient is believed to have been exposed to the virus while traveling in a cruise aboard the Grand Princess Cruise ship. The patient was older than 60 years living in Davis County.

San Juan County confirmed the first case of COVID-19 on 27th March 2020. It was a male patient who was below the age of 65. The county made the first announcement of a positive case in Bluff on 16th April 2020, which is about a month after the first case in the state.

A total of 17,906 cases in Utah and the total of 386 cases in San Juan County were reported as of 22nd June 2020 and the number has continued to rise. The number of confirmed cases in San Juan County reflected a high per-capita case rate compared to other areas in Utah. This rate is even slightly higher than that of New York City, which is the location of the nation’s most severe outbreak. The Bluff area had 12 positive test results as of 19th May 2020. This number was considered as a moderate risk considering Bluff is a small, rural community of about 250 residents.

State and local governments throughout the country have provided various regulations to manage the spread of COVID-19. However, they have varied in each state. Utah declared a state of emergency on 6th March and meetings of more than 10 people were banned.
COVID-19 RESPONSE CONT:

Some of the closures ordered include schools, daycare, bars, and dine-in restaurants.

Reports reveal that Utah has the worst hospital capacity in the United States based on the number of available hospital beds and physicians. In Utah, the ratio of hospital facilities for 1000 patients is an average of 1.82 hospital beds and 2.11 certified physicians. The national statistics report that the average ratio of physicians per 1,000 people is 2.96 and hospital beds per 1,000 people is 2.4. Health institutions in San Juan County include a few United Navajo Health System clinics and 2 hospitals. Moreover, there are only 3 designated testing sites available in the area for individuals who suspect they may have been exposed to the virus. Due to the limited testing capacity, the reported case figures may understate the true number.

The State of Utah has reported that it has ample Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, gowns, and other personal protective equipment needed during the pandemic. The state reported receiving donated gear and purchasing PPE - enough to serve its people for two months. The testing capabilities in most states have dramatically increased since the pandemic began. According to the State of Utah website, there are many options available for coronavirus testing, including sites operated by Intermountain Healthcare, University of Utah Health, Steward Health Care, and TestUtah.

Utah Department of Health has been mobilizing command posts and setting up communication centers to provide the public with information on how to prevent the spread of the disease. The state also communicates through its website by equipping people with information on self-protection, child care, education, and mental health, as well as providing guidelines on how to manage the effects of the disease. Both San Juan County and the Town of Bluff have their official website where local COVID-19 information is posted. The information is updated on a regular basis and local officials ensure the residents can receive up to date, accurate and accessible support.
There are various communication channels within Bluff. Most of the businesses have placed posts on their websites informing their customers to put on masks when coming to collect their takeout. Videos have also been created stating the procedures required to be observed during the pandemic. Social media is also a tool used to pass information to the community and visitors.

On 12 June 2020, Governor Gary Herbert issued an executive order to keep most of the state in the yellow phase, which is the Low Health Risk Status. Under the same order, Kane County has been moved into the green “new normal” health risk status. Bluff and Mexican Hat have also been moved from orange to yellow, while Salt Lake City remains in the orange phase. The people in Bluff feel that the state government has put them at a high risk given that the town has a small and aging population. Town officials agree that the decision came too soon.

On July 8th, San Juan Public Health made an announcement, changing the way they communicate totals and cancelling the weekly briefs that began on May 6th. While Utah has moved to lesser restrictions in recent, San Juan County officials have mentioned that if case rates continue to rise, they may resume weekly briefs.

**CHALLENGES:**

Bluff has had many new experiences as they navigate through this new world with COVID-19. This new navigation includes challenges with their community as well as communities surrounding them. This information was gathered through personal interviews and correspondence.

The first main challenge is the lack of supplies required for support of the sick and needy. Bluff has shortages of PPE as well as testing kits, and the nearest hospital is 30 miles away. The nearest grocery store is located in the same city, making essential travel a hassle. Another challenge is the premature opening of towns and counties. Bluff fought back against the state’s re-classification of San Juan County from high risk to moderate risk status. Most of Bluff’s economy comes from tourism but their community is at higher risk than many others. The town is composed of many retirees and people getting away from the city.
CHALLENGES CONT:

They are a tightly knit community that values safety, so they know they couldn’t open up as quickly as the towns around them. So, they untied and asked to stay at high risk status as nearby towns reclassify to orange, yellow, and green. This was a tough decision for residents because they knew it meant economic activity would come to a near standstill, but that was a risk they were willing to take to ensure everyone’s safety.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES:

Contact tracing is one of the tactics used to respond to infectious diseases. However, the strategy fails with lack of testing services. The state of Utah has the capacity to do 5,000 tests per day which is double since the pandemic started. The state officials are making efforts to raise it to 7,000.

According to San Juan Public Health, San Juan County had performed a total of 3,295 tests as of 11 May. The total number of tests in Bluff stands at 209, of which total positive tests reported are 12. The positive cases are about 5.7% of the total cases tested.

Before COVID-19, Utah had discussed resilience through Utah Public Radio’s Project Resilience. The program has continued through the pandemic and focused on strategies, tips, and tools for life in COVID-19. Individuals create recordings, podcasts, and other outlets to share their experience and things that have helped them become resilient. Example titles include “Tips for Exploring Canyon County During COVID-19,” “Adjusting to College While Managing Mental Health, Disability,” etc.

Various innovative strategies have been adopted to navigate through the pandemic, such as transitioning to online meetings and video conferencing. The majority of public services have been forced to work remotely to reduce the in-person interactions. The change has also resulted in the development of infrastructures such as Wi-Fi access. Another strategy is requiring people to put on face masks in public places and other practices such as social distancing. The restriction policies have also influenced change in how services are offered. For instance, the majority of the restaurants are offering takeout rather than dine-in services.
LESSONS LEARNED:

Bluff has been forced to adapt to a plethora of new challenges in the presence of COVID-19. Communication was one of the first problems and it continues to prove its difficulty. Due to the fact that Bluff’s residents are from an older generation, they have been slow to adjust to virtual life. While it has been a learning curve for everyone, using Zoom conferences has actually increased attendance of town hall meetings. Residents are learning the advantages to the virtual transformation and will be able to take advantage of it in the future.

Another lesson learned was the importance of preparation and readiness. This is a theme throughout the country, but Bluff was especially overwhelmed. Over reliance on tourism and lack of foresight lead to vulnerabilities throughout the town’s infrastructure. Beyond that shortfall and considering the poor economic state, Bluff has made impressive strides in relief efforts. A standout in these efforts has been Bluff Area Mutual Aid (BAMA), for setting up food and supply deliveries to San Juan County residents, including Navajo and Ute Mountain Nations. These were all new experiences for the Bluff community. They have now developed better skills in order to move forward and have that knowledge for future situations.

NEXT STEPS:

Status of COVID-19 Positive Cases and Risk Level
There was an announcement today in the Governor’s Press Conference that Bluff and Mexican Hat will move from “Orange” to “Yellow” risk status “within the next 24 hours.” Please review the Guidelines that are posted on the utah.gov website if you have any questions as to what “Yellow” entails. The numbers in San Juan County continue to rise. Yesterday the number of COVID-19 positive cases was 339; today the count was 343. The Bluff Town Council appreciates the level of caution and care that Bluff citizens have taken to protect our health and welfare. A move made by the State to “Yellow” does not mean that the Bluff community cannot continue to use the Guidelines detailed in the “Red” and “Orange” risk zones. Wearing masks in public, washing hands, and social distancing are encouraged by the Council.
NEXT STEPS CONT:

The most recent information on the 2020 Census is that Bluff has had only a 7.3% response from our citizens. Please either go online, call, or print a form to mail in so that each household in Bluff can be counted. If you need assistance with the Census, please leave a message with your name and contact information on either the Bluff Town office phone (435-672-9990) or through email at office@town-of-bluff.org.

Ann K. Leppanen
Mayor of Bluff June 11th 2020

As of 1 August, this letter is the most recent news update on the Town of Bluff website. As we talked to the people in Bluff we were able to understand a little more of what this letter meant for Bluff. As stated previously, Bluff has tried to stay one step behind the guidelines of San Juan County to be cautious. With many places reopening, Bluff has decided that their next step is keeping themselves one step behind everyone in the county. If other towns change to orange status, Bluff stays at red, and so on. Bluff’s people intend to make sure that their town is kept as safe as possible from the constant growth infection cases.

They have shown true community and leadership by asking this from the county and by enforcing it in their town. This has also helped them with being able to keep down the amount of cases in their town and ensure that everyone is safe and getting the help they need.

Communication within Bluff has transformed with the development of their own situation. News releases were originally daily, but have transitioned into weekly updates, except in times where an update is urgent. Bluff has prioritized transparency with their people and making sure everyone is well informed. Moving forward, we recommend that the town creates a plan for urgent and weekly information releases. Whatever system is used in times of emergency should be tested regularly to ensure all residents can receive warnings, similar to how island communities test hurricane sirens or how homeowners test smoke detectors.
HOW SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN HELP:

The best way to support those in need is through volunteering and donating. The state needs volunteers in healthcare institutions. The health institutions are filled to capacity and there is limited staff support. Individuals with healthcare certifications could help care for lower-acuity patients. Donations needed include disposable masks, cleaning supplies, liquid hand soap and sanitizers, toiletries, thermometers, non-perishable food, bottled water, children items, and baby necessities.

The town is new, thus having opinions from experts would be a significant resource for the town to make appropriate decisions on matters like accounting, planning, zoning, and budgeting. The town also needs outside resources like grants, volunteers, and foundations who would help in financing various projects. Having outside observers will also enlighten the town about areas that need improvement. Food donations would also help stock food banks for emergencies. The town also needs testing resources from outside to expedite the testing process and inform those who have contracted the virus to self-isolate. Moreover, the town’s economy desperately needs tourists, but only if they can adhere to social distancing rules and safety precautions.

It is evident that the people of Bluff care about safety. The state has been communicating with the cities on the progress of the pandemic. As businesses open up again, they must adhere to and enforce safety precautions if they want to remain open and attract consumers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the people in Utah have filed for unemployment. The benefits of unemployment have significantly increased. Whereas the Utah state payments are at an average of $430 per week, the federal government is offering an additional $600 more. Unemployment support needs to continue to encourage prioritizing safety throughout the country.
Our class has taken on the task of listening to Utah Gateway Communities during COVID-19. Our aim for this class is to generate a report that encompasses what these small, tourism and/or seasonal economy-based communities are experiencing during this pandemic and produce possible solutions, suggestions, and support for problems they are encountering. We are doing this using internet data and research, as well as one-on-one virtual interviews with community members. The class is conducting three case studies focused on Bryce Canyon City, Moab, and Town of Bluff.

Our group of 3 was tasked with conducting the study on Bluff. Our process began with using online forums and past reports to gather information including the town’s history, current economy, demographics, geography, and an outside view of what their pandemic response has been like so far. We are now in the interview phase. We have connected with various community members and listed their names and association with Bluff in the next paragraph. We asked the same 10 questions in each interview and compiled responses into excel sheets to sort and tabulate common answers. From there we were able to tally recurrences of similar responses and further analyze them to create themes we found throughout the process. This report is the summary of those themes.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Ann Leppanen, Mayor - July 6th.
Sarah Burak, Chair of Planning Commission - July 7th.
Amanda Podmore, Bluff Area Mutual Aid (BAMA) Representative - July 8th.
Jennifer Davila, President of the Business Owners of Bluff - July 9th

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Mason Berglund (Note taker)
Laura R. Estrada H. (Interviewer)
Judy Kim (Note taker)
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

THEME #1 Tourism Economics

When it came down to it, while we did the interviews we heard many of our interviewees say that a lot of the money that comes into the town is from tourism and sadly with everything that has been happening today a lot of that money isn’t coming into the town. There are many reasons for this but for the most part it is because of the agreement that they had within their community to keep each other safe. When Utah was green lighting areas for going back to “new normal” Bluff was one of the areas that pushed back and agreed that to keep each other safe they needed to stay closed longer leading to the tourism money that they usually gain during this time to almost be nonexistent.

People have been unemployed for 3 months at least during the slow season, then COVID hit and closed down the businesses after they’d already been closed for 3-4 months.- Amanda Podmore

‘Don’t come here right now’; They can’t support outside visitors.- Sarah Burak

The community does rely on tourism to make money.- Sarah Burak

Tourism revenue is at 10-15% of normal.- Ann Leppanen

THEME #2 Top-Down Guidance and Cooperation

Not all of our interviewees came out and said which level of government was to blame, they communicated that government policies (or lack of) have hindered Bluff more than helped. The lack of Top-down guidance has allowed the responsibility of solving safety issues trickle down to local governments. Bluff is not equipped to take on such problems. The town’s main priority is protecting its people. While local government can create policies encouraging use of face coverings and social distancing, they cannot enforce it because it is not law. County, State, and Federal governments do not seem to share the same priorities as Bluff and neglect to take protective measures, leaving the town to its own devices.

County policies have HELPED community - 5 counts

County policies have HINDERED community - 14 counts
State policies have HELPED community - 1 count
State policies have HINDERED community - 9 counts
Federal policies have HINDERED community - 1 count
Federal policies have HELPED community - 1 count
“Have not seen support for local-generated policy if it conflicts with the County, State, or National policy” - BAMA Rep. Amanda Podmore

THEME #3 Which outside sources are needed?

Bluff, Utah is an emerging town and there are a lot of things that are yet in place. Compared to other towns, Bluff is not well prepared to manage most of the arising issues especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to severe outcomes. Being a new town it will attract a lot of visitors which is a plus to the town’s people because they get customers. However, it should be a respectful visitation adhering to simple policies such as putting on face masks and observing social distancing regulations. It will be also helpful if the government can provide funding and grants to manage projects like developing a plan for the town, park services like constructing the greenways and bike paths.

According to the people one of the primary services that Bluff, Utah needs from outside sources getting volunteers and experts in various fields. Several projects are underway and the town would greatly benefit from consulting volunteering experts in managing critical areas such as financing. The town needs to be educated on how to load documents, town accounting, budgeting, and planning among other aspects necessary to enhance the progress of the town. The town can also benefit from having outside observers who would help in pointing out areas that need more attention. Also, with the ongoing pandemic, the testing centers are quite limited, getting more resources from outside will help the town in ensuring that the people in need of isolation are identified at an early stage.
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

More cooperation from government; wearing face masks, practicing social distancing - Ann Leppanen
Outside help in forms of grants for projects - Jennifer Davila
More outside testing - Jennifer Davila
Respectful visitation while the community is slowly opening; people need to wear their mask, keep their distance and hiking parties of 30 people - Jennifer Davila
Expertise on things of town accounting, budgeting, planning, zoning and creating a master plan for the town - Amanda Podmore
Working with volunteers and foundations to come up with a funding program for infrastructure - Amanda Podmore

THEME #4 Navajo within healthcare

Many things have been happening around San Juan county but something that has been hit harder during this time is the Navajo Nation population that lives within that area the four corners. With the loss of job opportunities that Bluff has to offer for them and the lessening of resources The Navajo Community has seen an increase of cases and hardships with getting for themselves, and their livestock. They have had more opportunities to get people tested and have enforced more rules then what most of Utah is doing at this point but have still been hit really hard because of the loss of jobs and the limited connections they have to the outside world. We wish we could now more about how they are doing but we are lucky that some of the people we talked with have a connection to them and were able to tell us a little on how they are doing.
Devastating to Navajo Nation- Ann Leppanen
Navajo Health Department is packed to capacity- Ann Leppanen
The Navajo has been hit much harder than Bluff.- Sarah Burak
If people needed something, they can’t get it right now on the reservation. -Sarah Burak
Navajo Nation has had higher testing rates because it’s been accessible and more free and affordable for all.- Amanda Podmore
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

THEME #5 Community preparedness

Something that was important in our conversations with all our interviewees was finding out how the community felt about their own preparedness during hard times. This is a brand new situation full of different problems that arise continuously and so trying to understand what is happening and dealing with it at the same time has been hard especially for a small town where the decisions were left to them. This is the case with Bluff even though they had done good with the way things are going for them in the case of asking to make sure they stay in the zones the town feels comfortable with and not just moving with everyone else and opening up quickly, supplies are still in need and a way to get their economy is still something they are trying to figure out during these times.

Wishes they had not been given a false sense of security from federal and state gov. community would have begun preparing sooner - Ann Leppanen

Country leaders have made the pandemic a “local issue,” forcing the town to rely on its non-existent infrastructure - Ann Leppanen

Stock up on supplies sooner - Jennifer Davila

Reach out and communicate with each other sooner, focus on keeping people safe - Jennifer Davila

Navajo Nation is grateful for Bluff for protecting workers - Jennifer Davila

‘Stay at home’, ‘We want you to visit, but not now.’ - Sarah Burak

Having the supplies on hand would be important; hospitals and places all over the country like having a supply of PPE on hand so that people weren’t scrambling initially to make do, and like make their own bleach bottles and make their own masks. - Amanda Podmore

From personal conversations with members of Navajo Nation, they did not feel prepared.
- Amanda Podmore
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

THEME # 6 Healthcare

Many of the things that we are noticing in the world today is the lack of preparedness for situations that we thought would never happen to us. We see many places struggling with different types of diseases and conflicts but because we are not experiencing it or have solved our own problems there is a lack of preparedness in an overall sense. Well with the situation happening today As a whole country we were not prepared for this and then it got passed to state and the local officials which reduced the amount of things that the town had in order of supplies and making sure that all their people had what they needed. In Cases like Bluff they noticed that having supplies was something they wished they had more off and had stocked up on earlier so that they didn’t feel unprepared to take care of their residents. No something that they have done that has helped them was making sure they didn’t open up their town as quickly as other towns were doing. This was partly because of their residents being older generations but also in the consideration that they didn’t have the supplies to make sure everyone who came would be taken care of if something were to happen or vice versa if someone brought COVID into their town. Bluff has been very thoughtful in making sure that everyone in their town and outside of their town knows that they will do anything to help keep them safe.

Town Council Immediately closed all businesses on declaration of pandemic with NO complaints from community - Ann Leppanen
Community asked to stay in red zone when Gov. wanted to move to orange - Ann Leppanen
Town pulled together and decided safety is most important, even those who disagreed on incorporating - Ann Leppanen
Worried about tourists bringing COVID to Bluff - Jennifer Davila
The community are worried about tourists bringing the virus into the community and since they do have the lack of resources that they do. - Jennifer Davila
The slowest community to open back up in Utah - Sarah Burak
Petitioned at least twice to stay in an orange or red level as the governor has been opening up more places in Utah - Sarah Burak
THEME #7 Local Cooperation and Communication

Within the Town of Bluff, the people have decided that safety is the priority. As Navajo Nation has already seen devastation, the community is in agreement that the danger is too great to open too early, especially with their aging, vulnerable population. The townspeople even came together and asked the governor to keep San Juan County at a red zone danger classification to help protect its people and workers. Competing business owners and residents from all political fields have really pulled together and made the bond within the community stronger. Effective communication from council leaders and other town officials, such as weekly email updates and virtual town hall meetings have aided the comradery tremendously. While relations and communication with external governments has struggled, Bluff has internally flourished.

Town Hall meeting attendance has gone from a handful of people for in-person, to as many of 30 via Zoom.

Community voted against in-person meetings

“Community particularly wanted to stay in the orange zone (as opposed to yellow), ... people in the community have really put safety first.”

THEME #8 Impacts on community budget & mitigation strategies

The community is tourism-oriented which means that the budget has been adversely affected due to the reduced budget income received from resort tax, sales tax, and transit from tax. The economic status of the community has been affected at an average of 85% to 90% drop which reflects the depletion of reserves available. Also, the community center has been closed thus there are potential losses that can be seen on the revenue because the people using the space have rented. The revenue cut has also impacted the capacity of the town to meet the government administrative needs such as having their police officers. One of the mitigation strategies in the community is that businesses have supported each other during this season. The community has been holding weekly meetings in which different professionals or experts are invited to help the people to get the right papers filled and guiding them through the process. Second-ly, the community is like a year old and it has a good budget to work with the programs proposed that can be put on hold until the situation is managed.
BRYCE CANYON CITY CASE STUDY

AHMED BALHARITH, CLINT CAMPBELL AND KATIE LARSEN.
INTRODUCTION

People search for ways to disconnect from the modern day hustle of society, oftentimes looking to nature or small towns for help in reconnecting and rebalancing priorities. Ruby’s Cowboy Inn, Inspiration point and Fairyland loop may seem like names of rides at local amusement parks. In reality, they are major draws to visit Bryce Canyon City and the surrounding area. The city, shown as Bryce on some maps, is in Garfield County, Utah. The town was formerly known as Ruby’s Inn and was officially incorporated on July 23, 2007 (VisitBryceCanyonCity.com). Much of the local government is made up of members of the same family. Bryce Canyon City is adjacent to Bryce Canyon National Park. The park generally draws an average of 2000 visitors a day during the summer high season. People travel from all around the world to immerse themselves in the amazing views.

Bryce Canyon City was settled originally by Reuben C. “Ruby” Syrett in 1916. Syrett built a lodge and accompanying cabins for visitors coming to visit Bryce Canyon. Today, family members of Ruby Syrett still work in Ruby’s Inn with many members of the Syrett family serving as local government officials for Bryce Canyon City. Ruby’s Inn is the hub of the local community and much of the land of Bryce Canyon City is privately owned by the Syrett family.

HISTORY

Although no permanent structures have been found, it is believed that the Paiute Indian tribe was the first to occupy the Bryce area. The community of Bryce Canyon City was originally founded in 1916. The town of Bryce Canyon City was often known as Ruby’s Inn city until 2007 when it was officially deemed a town and took on the name of Bryce Canyon City.

DEMOGRAPHICS & GEOGRAPHY

Bryce Canyon City is home to around 224 people, according to 2018 census data. Approximately 38.2% of the population is male, while 61.8% is female. The median age is 22, younger than the state average; Utah’s median is 31. The racial makeup of the town is quite diverse, as shown by the pie chart (City-Data, 2010). Bryce Canyon has an average humidity of 39% and wind of 13km/h.
Most days see no precipitation. The warmest weather conditions begin in May and end in September. Cooler temperatures are from October to April. However, these weather conditions are variable due to the park's high elevation.

**ECONOMICS**

Many residents make a living through tourism-related commerce, such as food service, lodging, or retail. The estimated median household income is $52,592. Bryce Canyon City has a population of around 224 people. With such a small population, the economy can be very volatile. Small changes create large shifts in the labor pool and job market. Looking at the current economic census data for Bryce Canyon City, the most common job held is food prep worker; many of the city occupants currently work in food. Food workers are necessary in towns with high tourism. The town’s median income is 48,750 dollars.

**COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Data regarding COVID-19 has been sparse for Bryce Canyon City. Thus, our data is based on Garfield county statistics. These statistics aren’t fully comprehensive as of yet, although we plan to contact county officials in order to gain more information. The Garfield county website directs interested parties to a webpage listing the updated information on handling COVID-19, as well as information on how many cases there are county wide.

As of 6/28/2020, there have been 13 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Garfield County. Diagnosis of the first case is unknown, but since referencing this website in early June, the count has gone up from 4. Amid this rising count, Garfield county is in the Green Phase, which permits citizens to return back to the ‘new normal’ and allows visitors within their communities. Just a few months ago, Garfield county was under statewide restrictions, not allowing visitors to come through, and recommending people take shelter in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Bryce Canyon City is in a unique position due to the fact that the closest hospital, Garfield Memorial, is 25 miles away. Some citizens are not motivated to get tested or treated due to the inconvenience.
CHALLENGES:

Bryce Canyon City is fairly desolate, the esteemed hospital in Garfield County is more than a 40 minute drive. Thus, getting tested would be a challenge as well as seeking medical attention in case of emergency. The city’s economy is heavily based on tourism and interaction, these times have left streets desolate and residents searching for employment opportunities. City officials wish to diversify the economy after facing these times.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES:

Garfield County listened to state orders in late March to shut things down immediately and shelter in place. There are several National and State parks in the county, all of which were shut down for a number of weeks. Public lands in the county were often only permitted for residents to use; visitors were told to stay out (no camping, etc). Garfield county also implemented a new county wide website used to inform people about health impacts and economic impacts of COVID-19. This website has quickly become the major source for information regarding the area.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Bryce Canyon City was very quick to close at the beginning of this pandemic, which prevented a lot of issues coming their way. At the same time, the closing welcomed a lot of hardship—which would come to last for months and months. Bryce Canyon City being so dependent on tourism as their economic driver has left them in a compromising position. After listening to residents it seems that they wish to diversify the economy to provide long term stability. Garfield County as a whole has taken advantage of increased eco-tourism in the past few years and while it presented as a resilient economic driver, they and so many other gateway communities are seeing the negative effects.

Another lesson present throughout many conversations with stakeholders of Bryce Canyon City was the importance of fostering a healthy relationship with The
National Parks System as well as The BLM and so on. The closing of a national park, such as Bryce Canyon, influences the economy of nearby communities greatly, proper communication and understanding of so was very important near the beginning of the pandemic as well as when the park reopened.

**NEXT STEPS:**

Bryce Canyon City hopes for more tourists to boost their economy and make up for lost time in order to get through the winter months. They are marketing their amenities as open and hope that people can still enjoy their town amid such restrictions.

**HOW SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN HELP**

Masks and medical equipment are expected answers and after talking to community members it seems like having PPE is one topic that was mentioned repeatedly. Garfield county has a small stockpile of PPE that is being issued at will to local companies who need it. Although Garfield county has an adequate supply currently making sure they have PPE to last through the winter is a great way for service providers to help. Mobile testing support for hotspots, although in conversations mobile testing wasn’t mentioned it can be a very valuable tool for rural communities. Making sure people have quick and convenient access to testing helps prevent community spread of COVID-19 and can help people make informed decisions about the needed precautions and quarantine. Clear effective communication from government leaders is also ideal. Residents and officials seem to have felt supported, locally and on a state level. Grants for local business have been very helpful in keeping local businesses operating during the downturned economy. Multiple grants have been given and service providers should continue to find funding to help small businesses.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The best thing about this workshop was being able to listen to leaders and residents of Bryce Canyon City, we as a group feel like the people who know the actions that need to be taken are the people of Bryce Canyon City and the surrounding area. With that being said we do have some recommendations that have been echoed from interviewees.
The first recommendation is to make strides to diversify the economy of Bryce Canyon City. Everyone we spoke to knows the importance of this action. Bryce Canyon has been hugely impacted by the downturn in tourism due to COVID-19. Providing stable jobs and tax revenue from and industries not tied to outside visitors would be hugely beneficial to the resiliency of the city.

The Second recommendation would be to create a great working relationship with Bryce Canyon National Park. There were many comments about the slow reopening of the national park and the uncertainty surrounding the opening. It would behoove the community to have as close to a symbiotic relationship as possible. With great communication we feel much uncertainty could be resolved and Bryce Canyon City and surrounding communities could better plan reopening businesses and organizing seasonal workers.
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

ABOUT

During our workshop based on COVID-19 response in Gateway communities otherwise known as GNAR communities, specifically Bryce Canyon City, we completed interviews with local residents and government officials. The point of these interviews was to connect and listen to people that could help give our class an inside perspective of how Bryce Canyon City was operating and responding to the challenges of COVID-19. Coming up with questions to use during the interview process was a class effort. The class brainstormed ideas then decided what questions to use based on a voting system. The questions with the highest number of votes would then be screened by members of the state who have regular contact with GNAR communities. After the questions were screened, we as a team were provided a list of the approved questions. The process of interviewing was straightforward, one member of our group would ask questions while the others would take notes. Our notes were then transferred to a coding system used to pull the interviews apart to find valuable information. The coding system is an excel spreadsheet where we would write down comments speakers made and attach numbers that correspond to different themes. The coding system is very useful in identifying themes we could research more.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Shiloh Syrett, Mayor of Bryce Canyon City, Stakeholder of Ruby’s Inn
Kaden Figgins, Garfield County Planner and Economic Development Director
Falyn Owens, Garfield County Director of Tourism

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Ahmed Balharith
Clint Campbell
Katie Larsen
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

SUMMARY OF THEMES

Tourism:

Tourism and diversifying the economy was the biggest theme we saw. Every speaker brought up this topic multiple times. Every speaker also had ideas and reasons why Bryce Canyon City was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Diversifying economy in rural county,

The county shut down, “our main streets are ghost towns.”

No development plans in over 18 months that didn’t include tourism.

All surrounding cities are interconnected if Bryce closes the Cities leading to Bryce empty; over 2 million Visitors per year to the park.

Healthcare:

Health care was a theme brought up due to the fact we are talking about how a pandemic is affecting gateway cities. How local hospitals and workers were being affected is a very important topic. All the interviewees mentioned healthcare at least once.

1 hospital, handled as well as they could, 15 In county, good job

All the COVID patience at the start are from people out of town.

Started the COVID webpage early on.

Low income residents benefitting financially from the pandemic, they are paid more in unemployment than minimum wage job

Local cases are now starting to be reported

Things may change quickly depending how cases rise

Infrastructure:

The theme of infrastructure was brought up to show the different aspects of Bryce Canyon City that could be used to help diversify the economy and also was mentioned to illustrate how all the communities in the area are closely connected,
Infrastructure cont.
Fiber Optic internet in the area
Close to major Freeways
Issues with not having enough private land to build housing and businesses on
Rubys Inn is the largest employer in Garfield county, many nights no rooms rented out, even senior officials in the company were filing for unemployment. All of Garfield county intertwined because they all rely on tourism.

Government interventions:

The topic of how the different levels of government respond to the pandemic was often brought up in our interviews. Interviews seemed to think everyone had the best intentions but not everyone was on the same page. Many different levels of government were trying to come up with solutions to stop the spread of COVID-19 these policies also shut down large amounts of the tourism sector when Bryce canyon park closed.
Commissioners are pro-opening, same with the parks.
The state has done the best they could.
Federal side, they had to beg National parks to reopen. Wish was able to get them to open sooner.
INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 will be a year discussed at length in the history books of the future. COVID-19, a fast spreading infectious virus, will comprise a large section of them. The virus has left nations and communities in states of crisis for the greater part of the year. Moab, Utah is one of these communities that has been greatly affected by the pandemic. Inherently a “gateway community”, Moab is located in close proximity to Canyonlands and Arches National Parks. Sitting at the doorstep of these natural amenities has resulted in unavoidable economic, social, and ecological relationships between the parks and Moab. The following case study will take an in-depth look at Moab and how the COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to affect its community.

HISTORY

To understand Moab’s present and future, we need to acknowledge the past. The first settlers of southeastern Utah were an Indigenous population. The Indigenous population that we are most familiar with are the Ute, Navajo, Palute, and Hopi. Within each of the tribes, there are different bands, for example, the Ute people that lived in Moab were and are known as the Mountain Utes.

In the late 1700s the trade route “The Old Spanish Trail” was founded. Moab, located on the Colorado River, was the safest crossing point for traders and settlers. The current bridge stands where the settlers would have crossed.

In the late 1850s, Mormon Missionaries attempted to settle but encountered the Ute people. Due to conflicts, the Mormon Missionaries abandoned the post. In the late 1870s, European settlers and farmers were permanently settled. Moab was officially a town in 1902. Moab then became a boom town when uranium deposits were founded. The inflection of people during that time showed that the basic infrastructure was poor. Moab improved the infrastructure just in time for both Canyonlands and Arches to become National Parks in the late 1960s early 1970s, when national park tourism became popular.
DEMOGRAPHICS

Moab is a city of 5,259 people (census.gov, ACS 2018, DP05). Slightly over half of whom identify as males (50.8%) with the rest identifying as female (49.2%). Moab’s populace are also mostly young adult/middle-aged, with 54.5% of the population being within the 20-55 age range. The remaining population is nearly evenly split on either side of this range, with 22.7% being younger and 22.8% being older than the 20-55 age range. In line with the rest of the state, Moab’s population is overwhelmingly white (90.8%); the second largest single category is Native American (4.2%). Additionally, Moab’s Hispanic population accounts for 16.5% of the total population. 79.7% of families living in Moab only speak English, of the 20.3% which speak another language speak Spanish (13.2% of the total population) (ACS 2018, S1601). Educational attainment in Moab is, on average, slightly below that of the rest of Utah. When broken down by age group while younger groupings (ages 18 through 35) have higher rates of attaining a bachelor’s degree and above than the state average, older groupings (age 35 and up) fall consistently below that average (ACS 2018, S1501).

GEOGRAPHY

Moab is located in southeastern Utah. It has a semi-arid climate with an annual high temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit and an annual low temperature of 42 degrees Fahrenheit. During the hottest month of the hot season, July, the average high is 95 degrees Fahrenheit and an average low is 68 degrees Fahrenheit. The coldest month of the cold season, January, has an average high of 38 degrees Fahrenheit and an average low of 20 degrees Fahrenheit. The average precipitation of Moab is 9.45 inches, whereas Utah gets an average precipitation of 14.85 inches. Moab has an elevation of 4,544 feet, just below Utah’s average elevation of 6,348 feet (Weathersparks; Best Places.)

Moab is unique because it is near two of the “Mighty Five” National Parks in Utah, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. It is also near Deadhorse State Park and other public lands, that include bike trails (Sliding Rock), hiking trails, camping sites, and the Colorado River.
The Colorado River is not only an important piece of history, but also important to Moab’s tourism. However, the Colorado River has had some floods in the past. This is due to unstable rock and soil, which also causes landslides. Moab is near the Moab Fault and the fear of earthquakes worries some residents. Wildfires are another cause for concern, since Moab is much drier than most of Utah (Utah Geological Hazards Portal).

**ECONOMY**

Moab’s economy is heavily impacted by its close proximity to two national parks (Arches National Park and Canyonlands National Park). This proximity to the parks has a large impact on Moab’s economic makeup and activity. Many industries that are tied to tourism make up a large portion of Moab’s economic activity. 44% of economic activity takes place in the following industries: arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services. 13.2% of economic activity occurs within educational services, health care and social assistance, and 12.3% falls under retail. Locals to Moab hold a variety of occupations within these industries. The occupational makeup within Moab’s workforce is as follows (occupations holding a significant percentage are shown):

- 47.9% Service Occupation
- 19.6% Management, business, science, and arts occupation
- 15.5% sales and office occupation
- 10.9% production, transportation, and material moving occupation
- 6.1% natural resources occupation

An economy dependent on tourism leaves itself vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of seasonal tourism. Slow or low volume tourist seasons can have major ramifications on Moab’s economic welfare. The reaction by both the American people and Government to a pandemic, such as COVID-19, could have a major effect on the volume of visitors Moab sees, ultimately affecting the financial welfare of the community as a whole. Within the occupations held by the working people of Moab, the large majority (85.7%) of workers are private wage and salary workers. The median household income in Moab is $48,879 compared to the national median household income of $63,879.
In the year of 2018, 7.9% of families had recorded 12 consecutive months of income below the national poverty line. The 2018 national poverty rate was 11.8%. One in four single mother households experienced an income below the national poverty line.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Moab is located in Grand County. As of 31 July, the county has confirmed 44 cases of COVID-19. Within Grand County, there are only 17 staffed and licensed beds, and they are all located within Moab at the Moab Regional Hospital. Additionally, the hospital has no ICU beds. The county and city are unprepared for a more serious outbreak, like the 606 confirmed cases and 22 deaths seen in San Juan County by the same date.

Grand County was put into soft lockdown on May 17th by the Southeast Utah Health Department. This closed restaurants and much of the hospitality sector. However, by May 28th the governor had moved Grand County from the orange, moderate risk, phase into the yellow, low-risk, phase despite protest from the Grand County. Guidelines for the yellow phase include limiting groups to less than 50 persons, following social distancing in public spaces, using face coverings, but allowing for many businesses and services to reopen. Moab has enacted these guidelines, requiring restaurants and businesses operate with social distancing measures in place. The county was also able to pass a mandatory face-covering order in spaces where social distancing can’t be enforced. These guidelines, alongside resources for residents and businesses, are all easily found on the city's website. Moab's testing center is also at the Moab Regional Hospital, with the next closest location over 56 miles away at the Green River Medical Center.

CHALLENGES

The rise of COVID-19 has brought many challenges. Moab, along with the world, has had challenges of its own. The process of researching for this case study uncovered some of the major challenges that the City of Moab will have to address moving forward.
The first challenge is Moab’s budget. Moab City’s budget is funded entirely by sales tax. This causes the size of the budget to either grow or dwindle based on economic activity within the city. A slow tourist season, as with COVID-19, results in a very lackluster city budget moving forward. As one can imagine, Moab’s economic activity, especially activity resulting from visiting tourists, has and will continue to be affected by COVID-19.

The second challenge is a divide within the community. As is true in the U.S. entirely, government mandates in reaction to COVID-19 have been met with mixed emotions. The first divide within the community came in May as a result of the government mandated soft lockdown and the subsequent lifting of that lockdown. Moab felt the opinions of its citizens on both sides of these mandates. Some of the citizens held the opinion that government mandated economic shutdowns were an infringement on personal freedoms while others felt it was a necessary precaution for the greater good. A similar divide exists on the issue of wearing masks in public spaces where social distancing is not possible. These are not issues unique to Moab but the nature of how they affect a gateway community comes with specific challenges.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Before innovative practices can be developed, a community needs to know what needs there are. For Moab, two of the most pressing needs found in the community were food and housing security, especially for workers who now find themselves unemployed. Local restaurants, which now find themselves with more food than they can sell, donate their surplus to community centers where families can pick up any food they need. But, as one interviewee said, solving food insecurity was the easy part. Moab has a large seasonal working class, which saves part of their wages to make it through the season which they don’t work. When COVID-19 came around there were families which hadn’t had an income for close to 4-6 months, who now struggle to find re-employment. These families, predominantly renters, are unable to pay rent. Although some security was found in an eviction moratorium passed by the Governor, the moratorium was short lived, pushing these families to the brink of eviction.
In response to this, the community put together a Housing Fund which, through a simple application process, was able to raise close to $43,000 and provide rent relief for 56 families.

Another solution developed in response to the effects of COVID-19, which was mentioned in our interviews, is the potential adoption of a Recreation, Arts, and Parks (RAP) tax. While still awaiting community feedback through an opinion question in the 2020 ballot, this tax would be a response to cuts in the city’s budget, which have hit programs in the areas of recreation, art, and public parks particularly hard. This tax would be an extension of the already existing sales tax, adding an additional 0.1%.

LESSONS LEARNED

An overarching theme throughout the interviews was the realization of just how dependent Moab’s economy is on tourism. This stands perhaps as one of the largest single lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience. Although many have seen this dependence as a shortcoming, and that a more diverse economy would be a better direction for the city, some see further tourist development as the way forward.

Infrastructure is another area where issues begin to arise. Here both healthcare and internet infrastructure arise as potential problems. The lack of preparedness in healthcare, including available beds as a chief concern, impacts both the community’s ability to respond to outbreaks and healthcare coverage across the community. Broadband is more emergent of an issue; with the move of many jobs online, Moab’s broadband infrastructure has become strained. While solutions to these issues seem to still be in the works, the first step of recognizing them has been taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After listening to the interviewees and hearing about their main struggles, we have come up with some solutions to their three main problems—City Budget, Tourist Economy, and the Healthcare Demand/Plan. We want to acknowledge that these are potential solutions that are more observations, as our understanding of their own government, economy, and the city budget is limited due to some constraints, which we will discuss in the next section.
The reliance on tourism is shown by Moab’s City Budget. As discussed in Lessons Learned, all of the interviewees have said that they were surprised about how dependent Moab is on tourism, specifically sales tax. All of their income comes from sales tax, as they do not have a property tax. Our first suggestion of additional/alternative income would be looking towards implementing a property tax. They only received 40% of their normal income during the start of the tourist season, which is around March to November. In the long term, relying on sales tax is not as sustainable, as noted by the interviewees. COVID-19 and the quarantine has made people in other cities look towards smaller communities to move to or purchase a second home. Our last suggestion in supplementing the city budget would be looking towards diversifying the tourist economy.

As mentioned above, the tourist season is from March to November, and Moab only collected 40% of its average income in the beginning of the tourist season. Looking for opportunities in those three months of off-season is imperative for resiliency of the city and its residents. This could mean enhancing the reason why tourists come in the off season or catering more to seasonal workers and the residents. Another way to diversify the tourist economy is by entering a different market sector.

Lastly, the increase in demand for healthcare is a rising issue as COVID cases are increasing. Even though Grand County cases are low in comparison to other Counties, Moab Regional Hospital is the main hospital that serves Grand County. With only 17 beds, there is cause for concern if cases were to rise in Grand County. We have not seen a plan nor have we interviewed a member of the healthcare department. With more time, we would suggest a plan to address the increase in demand for healthcare and testing supplies. We would also suggest a reopening plan for the county’s possible return to orange or red. In addition to these plans, the county needs to solidify a generic pandemic plan.

Moab has to improve their infrastructure again, as they did during the Uranium Boom, where a large influx of people stressed basic infrastructure. The city’s response ensured that they would not be a boom and bust community.
MOVING FORWARD

Given more time, we would specifically address Moab’s city budget, diversification of the economy, and the increase in demand for healthcare. First, we would perform more interviews and surveys that specifically address the issues. Due to time constraints, we were not able to ask as many questions as we wanted to, nor could we perform surveys. Surveys are a way to get quantitative data rather than just qualitative data. For example, we would gather data about the city budget, the amount of public lands nearby, and the amount of tourists. Second, we would analyze similar communities to find examples of successful diversification of economies. In addition, we would look at how other communities reopened their economies while expecting an increase in healthcare demand. Lastly, we would visit Moab to perform in person interviews, as we were not able to visit. These interviews would be for gathering more data, as well as to represent hard to reach demographics, such as teenagers, non-government workers, part-time workers, and healthcare workers.

WORKS CITED FOUND IN APPENDIX OF DOCUMENT.
The interview process began by coming up with several interview questions. These questions were developed through collaboration between the students in the “Listening to Gateway Communities” course and the instructor, and the GNAR Initiative team at the University of Utah. These questions were each geared to collect information on specific parts of the Gateway Communities’ experience with COVID-19, such as impacts on tourism and the broader economy, and the experiences of certain demographic groups throughout the pandemic.

After initial contact with the interviewees, a date and time was set for the conversation, as well as figuring out the medium through which the interview would take place (call or video chat). For our first two interviews, all the student group members would be on a video call together while the student who would be conducting the interview called the interviewee on their cell phone. Throughout the interview the group members could communicate silently through a chat box in the video call, recommending further questions and asking for clarification.

In total, three interviews were conducted. The first two interviewees were Karen Guzman-Newton and Tawny Knuteson-Boyd, both currently serving members of the Moab City Council. Both of these contacts were provided by the CMP 4280 Workshop instructor. The third interviewee was Kaitlin Myers, a Special Projects Manager for Moab’s Planning and Zoning department. Kaitlin was reached out to, in part, due to her involvement in a Housing Fund program in Moab focused on providing rent relief to families struggling to maintain housing since the onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent economic downturn.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Tawny Knuteson-Boyd - Moab City Council Member
Karen Guzman-Newton (and husband) - Moab City Council Member
Co-owner of Poison Spider Bicycles (past 11 years)
Kaitlin Myers - Special Projects Manager at Moab City
SUMMARY OF THEMES

Each point is a note from an interview, some repetition will occur

Tourism Reliance:
Realized the extent of the community's dependence on tourism to national parks. Not great to have “all of your economic eggs in one basket,” thinks they should diversify economy
Tourism town, made apparent on the reliance on tourism, back in March and April when things got shut down, there was fear with the impact on city budget (tax revenue).
Increased interest in diversification of the economy

Social Relations in the Community:
“Dramatic divide” in opinions among residents on tourism (never go back to tourism/go all in), government intervention, and masks
Community is split over tourism; some people remember the “good old days when people had the town to themselves”
Despite community differences, people are good at taking care of each other; everyone is onboard with wearing masks (except a small group who aren’t)

Intra-Government Relations (County/City and State):
(I1) Interviewee wished the state has been slightly quicker moving in locking the economy down, so that there wouldn’t have been conflict at the local level (local business vs local gov)
(I3) It felt rushed to go to yellow, they wanted to stay in orange, they have no control over the types of tourists, businesses forced to open, people have been resistant to go back to work
(I3) Reopening felt forced, but good collaboration, stay in stride with the governor
(I3) Wanted more support from the state to take the lead from their health department, to show what’s safe in reopening
Impacts on City Budget:
“Budget is completely run by sales tax”
Numbers for April, budgeting at 10% of normal turned out to be 44% higher than what they were expecting, furloughed/laid of 89 employees (mostly part-time), 40 employees from aquatic center were laid off
No property tax to fall back on
Some city budgets (recreation and arts) which were subsidized were cut, but there is a proposed tax which would fund them (RAP tax)
The city has been spending in reserves in the past couple years, the city was already in the hole (several million) with losing sales tax
April numbers expected 33% of normal but was closer to 50-60%
A lot of locals spent a lot of money, and paid sales taxes

Impact on (Seasonal) Work:
Restaurants/bars (especially those which had not done to-go orders) and any rental business which relies on tourism were hit hardest
Female workers, servers, housekeepers, tour operators – specifically workers in businesses who usually get a lot of business March – October
Seasonal tourist workers are hit the hardest (specifically very low income seasonal workers in hotels/restaurants/housekeeping) let go in November, with the expectation to go back to work (which didn’t happen) people who haven’t been making money for 4-6 months (in April)
Latinx, Hispanic, native populations are a large portion of these workers
COMMUNITIES

3 different counties. 3 different cities. 300 miles of each other.
Moab is the most developed gateway community of the three and near two of the Mighty Five, Arches National Park and Canyonlands National Park. Bryce Canyon City is one of the newer gateway communities centered on one family’s diner, Ruby’s Diner; much of the land is owned by the same family, the Syretts. Bluff is the newest of the three gateway communities, only incorporated in 2018, with the majority of the workforce being the Navajo people. All have had to adapt quickly to COVID-19 right as their tourist season started.

COMMUNITY

Community members within each town have all communicated and supported each other well. In Bluff, they have recognized the importance of safety of the public over their own economy. They fought against reopening and opted to stay in the red and orange zones, even though Bluff’s COVID Case count is relatively low. They also protected their workforce, which consists mostly of Navajo people. In Bryce Canyon City, locals are encouraged to support each other and the local businesses. In Moab, funds were allocated for rent relief, and local restaurants handed out excess food to those in need.

TOURISM

Each of the communities have recognized their own reliance on tourism and the need to diversify if they want to be resilient. In Moab, most of the income comes from the sales tax. Bluff’s aging population is mostly retired, which created a difficult decision to weigh people over profits. In Bryce Canyon the concern is if businesses and the community can survive the winter.
HEALTHCARE

COVID-19 has made all the gateway communities realize how underprepared their healthcare infrastructure is for the potential demand for hospital beds and tests. The Moab Regional Hospital serves all of Grand County, with 17 beds. As the most developed and the largest of the three communities, Moab has the best opportunity to provide this healthcare infrastructure. However, if cases were to increase the hospital would be quickly overwhelmed. In both Bluff and Bryce Canyon City, their hospitals are 25 to 30 miles away. This is an issue for getting tested as well as their basic healthcare needs.

GOVERNMENT

The United States has had difficulty with intergovernmental cooperation, as well as support for safety mandates. All gateway communities have mentioned at least one of the following: 1) Communication between the local, state, and federal level is not as fast as needed, 2) People are divided on mask usage 3) Support is needed for health departments, not just the government, and/or 4) Reopening seemed forced or too soon.

Moab is one of the most developed Gateway communities, as they have dealt with the potential for boom and bust in the past. The town improved resiliency by fixing basic infrastructure and meeting the hierarchy of needs. Yet, they are still having issues with meeting the same needs that Bluff and Bryce Canyon City have.

INTERVIEWS

During the process of the workshop, primary data gathering has come from interviews. Interviews allowed us to follow a similar process that the GNAR Initiative would have, as described in the Research Process Section. Most of the students have mentioned a couple of takeaways from the interviews in the class discussion and a survey:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

1). They wish they had more time with the interviewees whether over more interviews or a longer duration.
2). They want to ask more questions to build up a rapport or get more specific into the successes and struggles.
3). They want to reach out to more individuals such as businesses owners, seasonal workers, and nearby park directors.

In the same survey, students were asked about the interview questions: “What was your favorite interview question?” and “What question, in your opinion, generated the most meaningful answer?” The most popular answer among both was Interview Question No. 5 “What groups in your community do you see as being the hardest hit by COVID-19 and the following economic downturn? How is your community supporting these groups?” This open ended interview question allowed us to understand their bias. Depending on the interviewee’s background they would discuss which group was affected. For example, one of the Moab interviewees is a business owner, and she discussed the businesses that were affected by COVID-19, whereas another interviewee was working in affordable housing, and they discussed the lower income population that was affected.

The questions that generated the most meaningful answers in the students opinion (after Question No. 5) were Interview Question No. 3 “ If you could go back in time to January 2020, what policies or procedures would you have recommended your community do to prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic?”, Interview Question No.4 “ How have county, state, and/or federal COVID-19 policies helped or hindered your community?”, and Interview Question No. 6 “What are some innovative policies or practices that your community is trying out as you navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic?”
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Question No. 3 asks the interviewee to reflect on the city’s own decisions as well as if there were any corrections they would have made. Question No. 4 asks the necessary question about the government and how they are being assisted. Question No. 6 is a way for us to provide a better resource for other gateway communities that may be struggling with the same issues, and provide potential solutions.

The students’ favorite questions (after Question No. 5) were Interview Question No. 1 “How has COVID-19 changed your personal view on tourism, healthcare, infrastructure, etc. In your own community?” and No. 2 “How has COVID-19 changed your community’s view on tourism, healthcare, infrastructure, etc. In your community?” These two are great leading questions, as they allow us to understand the interviewee better and to build a better rapport.

WORKSHOP

Our University of Utah community and this project parallel the Gateway communities and their navigation through COVID-19. As much as these Case Studies are a resource for other Gateway Communities now and in the future, this workshop has provided the same to our education. We, along with the interviewees, are learning and listening, as they try to understand and survive issues that have arisen. Our workshop team worked through our own challenges, such as virtual learning, and working on one case study rather than two. We did this to get the most out of the interviewees for the case study as well as provide a resource for other communities. We are also a resource for future workshops.

The students in our team had never heard the term “Gateway Communities” before this workshop. In fact, our first lesson was on the definition of Gateway Communities and the GNAR Initiative. However, within twelve weeks, we learned the names and faces of the Gateway Communities, and how valuable working with Gateway Communities can be,
KEY TAKEAWAYS

This project evolved to a specific focus in order to better assist communities struggling with their reactions to COVID-19.

THE BENEFITS OF DOING THIS WORKSHOP ONLINE:

- Flexibility: This course was as adaptive as it could be. The class time was at four o’clock pm. Groups met up when they could, and in some cases, we were given the opportunity to set our own deadlines. Social Interaction: The lecture was held via Zoom, where we met with the professor and other students twice a week to ask questions, interact with the whiteboard, and go into group breakout rooms. This encouraged engagement as well as necessary human “contact”.

THE CHALLENGES OF DOING THIS WORKSHOP ONLINE:

- “Hands-on” Learning: This class was all virtual, so we were not able to meet in person with our groups, our instructor, or with our interviewees and the community. This was a challenge because getting face to face contact would help build trust.
- Responsibility: With flexibility also comes responsibility. Everyone needs to do their part, or the project fails.
- Working from Home: Lack of motivation, distractions, and neglecting mental health

Overlapping Benefits and Challenges:

- Convenience: For some this was a benefit as they could work on homework and work when they wanted. This became a challenge due to wide variations in time zones.
- Technology: For some, this was a benefit because they had good internet connection and/or they found it easier to present over Zoom. For some, this was a challenge because they had poor connections and/or they prefer presenting and meeting people in person.
- Working From Home: For some this was a benefit as this is a comfort and convenience, where they were able to focus better. The challenges of this were mentioned above.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GATEWAY COMMUNITIES:

- Invest in expanding the economy. Sole reliance on tourism makes communities vulnerable to seasonal flux, weather challenges, and other common variables in addition to the pandemic. Focus on industries that are immune to such factors, and/or have opposite seasons.
- Unite with other Gateway Communities to create a louder voice in conversations with county, state, and federal governments.
- Offer virtual alternatives for meetings, even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. A combination of in-person and virtual participation for town halls or other public gatherings will make them accessible to more people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Have a plan for emergency situations.
- Communicate plans for things like food rationing and medical assistance to the public regularly.
- Post information to a website, email list, and other public forums to keep people informed and ready to take action.
- Stock items like masks, ventilators, sanitizer, etc. widely, for distribution to communities in a shutdown.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORKSHOPS

Conduct additional interviews. Try to represent different ethnic backgrounds, economic classes, and other demographics. The more data the better.

Visit the communities that are under study, if possible.

Communicate with team members clearly and concisely. Use one medium of communication to avoid confusion. Community documents on apps like google docs are great tools for gathering everyone’s input.

Record interview sessions. The ability to hear conversations exactly as they were is extremely valuable when tabulating qualitative data.
APPENDIX PG 1:

BLUFF CASE STUDY WORKS CITED:
https://www.sltrib.com/news
https://coronavirus.utah.gov/

BRYCE CANYON CITY CASE STUDY WORKS CITED:
http://plan.cap.utah.edu/listening-to-projects/
From Katie Larsen to Me: (Privately) 04:49 PM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVjze2wJz78
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VkjnmNIZ3pPAqz7Z6rTwIFG7SW4IBFHzz0VRmAyNUQ/edit?usp=sharing
https://www.visitbrycecanyoncity.com/

MOAB CASE STUDY WORKS CITED:
"Moab Regional Hospital.” Moab Regional Hospital, mrhmoab.org/.
“U.S. Census Data.” United States Census Bureau, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/
Utah Climate, www.bestplaces.net/climate/state/utah
APPENDIX PG 2:

Survey Questions

1. How has COVID-19 changed your personal view on tourism, healthcare, infrastructure, etc. in your own community?

2. How has COVID-19 changed your community’s view on tourism, healthcare, infrastructure, etc. in your community? (Ask them to address different community groups such as local businesses, non-profits, restaurants, low income workers, etc.)

3. If you could go back in time to January 2020, what policies or procedures would you have recommended your community do to prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic?

4. How have county, state, and/or federal COVID-19 policies helped or hindered your community?

5. What groups in your community do you see as being the hardest hit by COVID-19 and the following economic downturn? How is your community supporting these groups?

6. What are some innovative policies or practices that your community is trying out as you navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. How has your community’s budget been impacted? Any mitigation strategies?

8. What does your town need from outside sources right now?

9. Where do you go to access information about COVID-19?

10. We are trying to understand how the current situation is affecting your community. Is there anyone else in the community you think we should reach out to?