

Citizens are the true experts in climate change

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A display outside of the Tulane Climate Action Day symposium asks, "What should living with water look like on Tulane's campus?" The answers include water gardens, native landscaping and re-purposing rain water. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A panel of experts discussed the importance of understanding the critical role that public citizens play in climate change research and policymaking Tuesday during the Tulane Climate Action Day symposium on the uptown campus.

"When it comes to weather and climate, the expert is not the guy on TV, and it's not the app on your phone. It's you," said Julia Kumari Drapkin, CEO and Founder of [iSeeChange](https://www.iseechange.org/), an online community weather journal, and a panelist at the symposium.

Platforms like iSeeChange encourage participants to document environmental anomalies in their communities. This type of crowdsourcing of environmental data helps alert scientists who study climate change to abnormal environmental patterns while also giving community members a voice within the research arena.

“It’s about bringing together scientists, decision-makers, and citizens to co-investigate the topics that people care about,” said Drapkin. “How do we reach people and create more equitable dialogue about how to adapt to climate change?”

Beverly Wright, who served as a panelist alongside Drapkin, is executive director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice. Wright believes the answer to Drapkin’s question lies in community education. Wright said that communities informed about existing policies and environmental health are better able to advocate themselves for policies addressing environmental inequities.

“I’ve never met a community that made a bad decision for themselves, as it related to their health and economy, once they had all of the information. It’s our job to provide that information,” said Wright. “Solutions within environmental justice require an environmentally literate populace.”

The discussion on “Climate Justice: Socio-environmental Change and Collective Responses” was moderated by Amy Lesen, a research associate professor at the Tulane ByWater Institute. It was one of several panels to take place during a full-day lineup of interdisciplinary discussions of climate change.

The day’s keynote speakers included Brown University sociologist Timmons Roberts and Texas Tech University climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe. The day also featured talks, information tables and an engaging “Design Jam” all focused on climate change and approaches to action.

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