

Photos worth a thousand words for minorities in the environmentalist movement

BY HOLLIANNE LAO • LIFE



Xinyu Lin, a seventh-semester civil engineering student displayed her photo story exhibit, “Our Side on the Outside” to express the issue of climate change and calling action for environmental justice. *Photo Story Exhibit by Kevin Lindstrom*

In light of the growing awareness of climate change and call to action for environmental justice, students like Xinyu Lin seek to advocate for the marginalized communities within the movement. A seventh-semester civil engineering major, her photo story exhibit, “Our Side on the Outside,” is her contribution to people like her who are passionate about the issue, but notice the lack of diversity in the field. The exhibit was open to the public last night in the Student Union Ballroom, and was funded by BOLD Women’s Leadership Network, which facilitates opportunities for women leaders in universities across the nation. Gordon Markman, a fifth-semester industrial and environmental design major, was enlisted for design and production of the exhibit.



Students viewing the displays in the Student Union Ballroom.

“What inspired [this project] is that I could see myself [as] one of the few women of color in the spaces I was in,” Lin said in reference to the lack of representation she has noticed in outdoor spaces, environmental advocacy and community service. “I actually ended up shifting my project from doing research in Ethiopia to doing this because I thought it would be a lot more relevant and related to what I wanted to do.”

The exhibit consisted of posters that featured the interviews of 18 anonymous leaders in the environmental movement from underrepresented identities. The minimalist design of the posters, with a green geometric theme, highlighted the powerful quotes sampled from the interviews and were interspersed with photos featuring nature and the content of the interviews. The interviewees were anonymous, but each poster featured a statement describing their demographic identities. They discussed the struggles of being minorities in the field, the unique experiences that shaped their involvement and what they have done or what they are doing as advocates in the movements.

“The climate crisis exacerbates existing inequities existing inequities in our society,” the introductory poster said. “We’re giving a voice to those that are most often suppressed.”

“I think that this exhibit is really great in showing the different people that are involved and that are affected by climate change and different environmental issues and ways in which they were excluded,” Liz Wimpfheimer, a seventh-semester allied health major, said. “It’s very important to realize that it’s impacting everybody.”

Some interviewees discussed the importance of education and their childhood surroundings to influence their understanding of environmentalism.



The exhibit displays issues of climate change and shows people who are affected by different environmental issues.

“The education system plays a huge role in awakening passions,” An interviewee, who describes themselves as half Indian and half Colombian, said. “That has to be cultivated because most people don’t grow up with that sort of a drive. I feel very lucky that that was instilled in me through my experiences growing up.”

Others mentioned how immigrating to the United States affected their experiences.

“Because I’m from a different country, I’ve been stripped of a lot of the privilege I had in my home country,” said an interviewee, who describes herself as a Latina immigrant who has been in the U.S. for five years.

One of the interviews featured an attorney with Native American, Cape Verdean, African American, Lebanese and Italian heritage, whose work involves “a lot of policy development and advocacy in the areas of energy efficiency, energy democratization, toxic chemical mitigation and abatement.”

“If you can’t move the current leader, all of these protest measures are very important in terms of setting the stage for future leaders,” another interviewee, a Taiwanese American female attorney, said. She is one of the primary litigators advocating against Trump’s border wall.

“My understanding of what environmental justice is has shifted,” Lin said. “It is a lot more well-rounded because of the diversity and people that I’ve talked to but there’s still so much more to learn.”

“My goal was to express her vision in the strongest way possible,” Markman said. The meticulous planning and designing that went into the visuals of the project, from the floor plan of the room to the poster design, speaks to his future goal of designing exhibitions in museum. “I’m very passionate about environmental things... being able to contribute something that can change people’s perspectives...gives a lot of meaning to what I do and it’s something I want to be able to do in the future.”

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