

# Event Details



*President Percy kicks off the climate justice symposium.*

## Description

The event, "Creating a Just Climate Future: A Community Dialogue," paired with PSU's 15th Annual Sustainability Celebration, was seeded by PSU President Stephen Percy's [climate initiative announcement last November](#).

"All of us here today are taking part in the commitment to hear and honor the rich assets and strengths of our students and our communities and to urgently take collective action to create a just climate future through education, leadership, and equity minded policies," said Lindsay Romasanta, Assistant Vice President for Global Diversity & Inclusion, the event emcee and a member of PSU's climate initiative steering committee.

Following a blessing by Judy BlueHorse Skelton, faculty in Indigenous Nations Studies, the event kicked off with the first of three panels, featuring representatives of three community organizations actively involved in climate justice issues in our region.

"Environmental justice is like a spider web," said Nikita Daryanani, who manages climate and energy policy efforts for the Coalition of Communities of Color. "Everything we do is really connected."

Daryanani described the coalition's work on energy justice and a drive to make the grid more equitable by putting more decisions in the hands of local communities. She said that a course she took at PSU helped her to better understand the energy policy landscape and that the university has an important role to play in educating current and future activists.

Ira Cuello-Martinez, who works on climate policy with PCUN (Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), said university research helps organizations like his, which works on issues such as protecting agricultural workers from climate-induced extreme weather conditions.

The community partners also emphasized the importance of intersectional education to prepare students to be leaders in climate justice, as this issue impacts everything from housing to health and requires the centering of marginalized communities who overwhelmingly bear the brunt of climate impacts.

The symposium explored possible connections between climate work in the community and at PSU.

What else should PSU be teaching students?

The second panel of local and regional climate policy leaders was asked this question, and John Wasiutynski, director of Multnomah County's Office of Sustainability, had a straightforward answer.

"We should teach students that burning fossil fuels is an existential crisis," he said. "It's actually not that wicked of a problem. We have to stop using fossil fuels. And we have the technologies to do that; we just need to scale them up."

This panel also noted that PSU faculty research has played an important part in informing regional decisions around climate action, and highlighted their interest in continuing to engage "high capacity" student interns from the university in their efforts.

The third and final panel focused on student voices. Four student activists — three from PSU and one from Portland Community College — emphasized the need for communities to have self-determination when it comes to climate adaptation.

Heifara Wheeler, a native Hawai'iian and PCC student, spoke about Pacific Island communities losing their homelands and autonomy as a result of climate change, and noted the emotional toll of advocacy work.

Pavithra Prasad, who leads sustainability affairs for the Associated Students of PSU, said that she had witnessed climate impacts firsthand in her home country of India and how that led to a sense of responsibility — both to take action on climate-related issues and to cultivate a sense of hope.

"We are hoping for the better version," Prasad said. "We need to have hope that there is a better version."

Following the panel discussions, the 15th Annual Sustainability Awards were announced, honoring members of the PSU community who are advancing the work of sustainability at Portland State through teaching, research, activism and in their daily work on campus. The new 'Community Partner' award was also introduced, going to Latino Network.

Jenny McNamara, planning and sustainability director for Portland State, also announced that an inclusive and participatory yearlong process to develop a new Climate Justice Plan for the university would kick off in the fall.

The next steps for the climate initiative include following up on opportunities to partner with community groups on climate justice issues and continuing to map the current and potential research, curricular, and creative work on climate happening across the university.

You can view some of these resources and watch for future events at [pdx.edu/sustainability/climate](https://pdx.edu/sustainability/climate).

## Timestamped Index

00:37-02:31 - Land acknowledgment from Cynthia Gomez, PSU Director of Community & Civic Impact

02:34-03:39 - Welcome from event MC Lindsay Romasanta, PSU Assistant Vice-President for Global Diversity & Inclusion

03:40-11:07 - Remarks from PSU President Stephen Percy

11:07-12:50 - Review of event agenda with Lindsay Romasanta

13:14-38:31 - *Community Action Panel* moderated by Cynthia Gomez, with reps from three community-based organizations:

- Ira Cuello-Martinez, Climate Policy Associate, PCUN
- Misha Belden, Environmental Justice Manager, APANO
- Nikita Daryanani, Climate & Energy Policy Manager, Coalition of Communities of Color

38:37-1:05:58 - *Local & Regional Policy Panel* moderated by Jennifer Allen, PSU Portland Professor in Environmental and Natural Resources, with local and regional policy reps:

- Carmen Rubio, Portland City Commissioner
- Margi Bradway, Deputy Director, Planning Development & Research, Metro
- John Wasiutynski, Director, Multnomah County Office of Sustainability

1:07:08-1:50:31 - *Student Action Panel* moderated by Todd Rosenstiel, PSU Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, with PSU and PCC student climate activists:

- Alli Miller, PSU
- Pavithra Prasad, PSU
- Jules Roth, PSU

- Heifara Wheeler, PCC

1:50:39-2:04:40 - Excellence in Sustainability Awards

2:04:40-2:09:48 - Call to Action and Closing with Jenny McNamara, formerly PSU's Director of Planning & Sustainability

## **Speaker Biographies**

### **Stephen Percy, PSU President**

Now in his fourth decade as an educator and leader, PSU President Stephen Percy has dedicated his career to fostering vibrant connections between universities and the communities they serve.

An expert in public policy, administrative ethics and urban politics, Percy is known for his ability to advance civic engagement and create innovative solutions by linking the skills and capacity of universities to the knowledge and energy of communities. He believes in using collaborative, interdisciplinary applied research to facilitate university-community partnerships that solve problems and improve the quality of life.

Passionate about promoting educational access for all students, President Percy has worked extensively with diverse, urban-serving universities, including the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Baltimore, where he was founding dean of the College of Public Affairs. He joined PSU to lead the College of Urban & Public Affairs in 2014, was appointed PSU's interim president in 2019 and named president in 2020.

President Percy has authored two books about disability rights and civil rights and co-authored four books and the textbook "American Government: The Political Game." At PSU, Percy led several campus-wide initiatives, including the planning process that resulted in priorities and goals for PSU from 2016-2020.

As PSU celebrates its 75th anniversary, Percy and his leadership team are taking a close look at how the university can expand and deliver upon its access mission by building anti-racist practices and policies.

### **Cynthia Gomez, PSU Director of Community & Civic Impact**

Cynthia serves as the Director for Community & Civic Impact for Portland State University. Previously, she worked for 9 years as the Executive Director of the Cultural Resource Centers and as faculty of community-based learning courses since 1999. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and a Master of Science in education. She is a co-editor for the literary journal *Kithe* and is a *Fishtrap: Writing and the West* Fellow. Cynthia is a certified Foresight Essentials Practitioner with the Institute for the Future and

a member of Portland State's Futures Collaboratory. She worked for over 10 years for the nonprofit Latino Network. She also worked for the non-profit Innovation Partnership and operates her own consulting firm. She served as Co-chair for the Oregon Latino Agenda for Action. For six years, Cynthia served as a Commissioner with the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs where she also served on Oregon's Environmental Justice Task Force. In 2015, Cynthia was awarded the Governors' Gold AI and Pat Reser Civic Leadership Award.

Cynthia was born in Camp 52, Arizona, a small migrant community beyond the outskirts of Phoenix and raised in Yuma on the U.S. Mexico border. A native Spanish speaker, Cynthia is also a dual U.S. Mexican citizen. She moved to Portland in 1993 where she lives with her partner and two children. She enjoys birding, cooking, gardening, and documenting the stories of ordinary people's extraordinary lives.

### **Lindsay Romasanta, Assistant Vice President of Global Diversity and Inclusion**

Lindsay Romasanta, Ed.D. (she/her/siya) joined Portland State University in 2021 to serve as Assistant Vice President of Global Diversity and Inclusion, having worked in a variety of public service settings ranging from grass roots community non-profits to public four-year institutions. Dr. Romasanta founded and led a program that was recognized with the 2020 NASPA Excellence Award in First-Gen Student Success. In 2018, Dr. Romasanta was recognized by UC San Diego with an Exemplary Service of the Year award. In 2019 and 2020, she was recognized as a Social Mobility Student Success Innovator by College Net, Inc.

Dr. Romasanta is a proud Pilipina, low-income, first-generation college graduate. Like many first-generation college students, she stumbled upon her professional passion of choice — higher education — by chance. Since that discovery, she has dedicated her professional and scholarly work helping college students achieve their dreams of higher education. Dr. Romasanta's research interests are first-generation college students, resilience, retention and holistic success of historically excluded students, strategies to support first-generation and BIPOC scholar practitioners, and anti-deficit approaches in higher education.

Dr. Romasanta has presented her work at American Education Research Association, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, College Board, Association for the Study of Higher Education, and at various universities and nonprofit organizations. She has coauthored several pieces of higher education research in book chapters and is currently working on another published piece. She is also serving as inaugural co-editor of NASPA's Journal of First-generation Student Success.

She graduated summa cum laude and received a bachelor's degree in social work and a certificate in Asian American studies from Arizona State University, her Masters of Public Administration degree from Georgia State University, and her Doctorate of Education in Leadership and Innovation from Arizona State University.

**Ira Cuello-Martinez, Climate Policy Associate, Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)**

Ira Cuello-Martinez is the Climate Policy Associate at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. On behalf of PCUN, he advocates for policies to achieve equity and climate justice in Oregon's land use. PCUN represents Oregon's farmworkers and low wage Latinx workers. Farmworkers are one the first people to feel the impacts of climate change as the summers become excessively hot. The current climate crisis is a direct result of the racial and socioeconomic inequities that exist in our systems and have left out our communities from meaningfully engaging in land use decisions.

**Misha Belden, Environmental Justice Manager, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)**

Misha is a second-generation Filipinx-American. They moved to Portland in 2017 from Seattle, WA to study Anthropology and Creative Writing at Portland State University where they received their B.S. in 2019. They are currently getting their post-baccalaureate degree in Psychology and Japanese at PSU.

Prior to joining APANO Misha worked 350PDX's as their Climate Strike Organizer alongside a team of youth organizers. And helped organize the Portland Youth Climate Summit with a team of youth from all around Oregon in 2020. Outside of work, Misha engages in community organizing with mutual aid efforts around the city.

Pronouns: They/Them/Theirs

**Nikita Daryanani, Climate & Energy Policy Manager, Coalition of Communities of Color**

Nikita grew up in Irvine, California and received her Bachelor's degree in Environmental Policy Analysis and Planning from UC Davis. After graduating, she spent two years working alongside low-income, communities of color in California's San Joaquin Valley at Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, based in Fresno. There, she coordinated community-led advocacy efforts around transportation equity, air quality, agroecology, and land use planning to drive investments to disadvantaged, rural communities throughout the Valley. Nikita worked with community partners to develop advocacy strategies and elevate environmental and climate justice priorities at the local, regional, and statewide levels. More recently, she received her Master of Development Practice from UC Berkeley, where her academic research focused on community-driven approaches to development and international environmental policy.

**Carmen Rubio, Portland City Commissioner**

We all believe in a Portland that is affordable, that is safe, with good jobs and good schools, where neighbors look out for one another, and everyone feels they belong.

Getting there requires everyone, including leaders who are honest and transparent, and who listen. This is my commitment to you.

**Margi Bradway, Deputy Director, Planning Development & Research, Metro**

I am a Deputy Director with executive leadership skills, 20 years of public and private experience, and an unwavering determination to solve problems through innovation and collaboration. I see conflict as an opportunity to create change and I like to bring people together to tackle complex public policy issues. I have two decades of public and private experience in transportation policy and urban planning. I spearhead innovation in transportation while staying grounded in my legal background to manage regulatory, financial and contractual obligations. I create opportunities for people to learn about transportation and urban planning through prioritizing public engagement, staff empowerment and an inclusive approach to project management.

**John Wasiutynski, Director, Multnomah County Office of Sustainability**

John Wasiutynski is the Multnomah County Office of Sustainability Director. The Office of Sustainability works with County staff and community members to promote programs and policies that lead to a more equitable, prosperous, and environmentally sound Multnomah County.

Under John's leadership, the Office of Sustainability has updated the joint City of Portland and Multnomah County Climate Action Plan, launched a clean energy finance program called PropertyFit Oregon, advocated for stronger air quality regulations, and worked with the Board of County Commissioners to set the ambitious goal of transitioning the County to 100% renewable energy by 2050.

Prior to John's current role as Director, he served as a Senior Policy Analyst and Resource Conservation Coordinator for Multnomah County. John has also worked as a watershed planner for the City of Washington DC, and cleaning and greening community gardens in underserved neighborhoods in New York City with the New York Restoration Project.

**Climate Initiative Steering Committee:**

- Co-chair: **Jennifer Allen**, Portland Professor of Environmental and Natural Resource Policy, Hatfield School of Government
- Co-chair: **Todd Rosenstiel**, Dean, College Liberal Arts and Sciences
- **Cynthia Gomez**, Director of Community & Civic Impact, University Relations
- **Jenny McNamara**, Sustainability Director for PSU
- **Lindsay Romasanta**, Associate Vice President, Global Diversity and Inclusion
- **Theodore Van Alst**, Tilikum Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies