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On Earth Day, Rhea Suh Applauds The New School on Climate Action

 Students and faculty discuss features of the Dome of Memory, a geodesic dome constructed of corrugated cardboard and binder clips, during The New School's Earth Day celebration at the University Center.

“There’s an old joke that everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it,” Rhea Suh,

president of the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), said to a packed house at The New School's University Center last week. It's encouraging, Suh added, to be at an institution that "talks the talk *and* walks the walk." "I want to applaud you for divesting from fossil fuels, for investing in clean energy, for marching in our history's largest climate protest in New York and reshaping your entire curriculum to focus on climate change and sustainability," Suh continued, referring to The New School's bold new [Climate Action Plan](#). "That's an example that every other college should follow. We need your creativity and forward thinking now more than ever." Suh made her remarks during TED(C) Talks, the culminating event of "[Earth Matters](#)," a daylong symposium featuring workshops, pop-up classes and discussions on climate action and sustainability spanning the disciplines. Suh shared the stage with Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky, who gave a creative presentation and performance based on his new book, *The Book of Ice*. Panels at the event included "Exploring Sustainable Fashion," "Food for Thought: Sustainable Food Systems," and "Cities Under Siege: Climate Change Resilience Panel." At Parsons Paris, which also celebrated Earth Day, students and faculty members

participated in an e-waste workshop led by Art, Media, and Technology director [Benjamin Gaulon](#) and a panel discussion, “The Remaking of Making.” At The New School, [Michelle DePass](#), dean of the [Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy](#), introduced TED(C) Talks with a reflection on the evolution of Earth Day, which began in New York City 45 years ago. “On this day in 1970, the environmental message from the mayor of New York City was to be more tidy—he tried; it was a start!” DePass said to laughter. “You contrast that with Mayor de Blasio stating earlier today, ‘You can’t have environmental sustainability without economic sustainability.’ Now, *that* is the core of our mandate for the future.” DePass added that because the issue of climate change is so complex, “we know that the key to a solution will not be found in one task, one discipline, or one way of thinking.” “That’s where we come in,” she continued. “The interdisciplinary nature of The New School, combined with our commitment to social justice, puts us in a unique position to respond to the climate question. Suh, who was born the same month the first Earth Day was celebrated, also reflected on how much has changed since the inaugural event, “including the earth itself.” She cited rising global average

temperatures, as well as sea level rise, melting glaciers and extreme weather events, as evidence of just how much has changed. “The reminders of this new reality are all around us,” she said. “New York is still rebuilding from Hurricane Sandy, one of the worst natural disasters in recent history, and California is dealing with a historic drought.” But while there have been many environmental shifts since the first Earth Day, one thing, Suh said, has stayed the same: “the power of Americans from all walks of life to create a better world for future generations.” By way of example, Suh noted the creation of the U.S. national park system, the Environmental Protection Agency and of course, Earth Day. Now, she said, “it’s our turn.” Suh said that success in confronting this problem depends on “empowering Americans from all walks of life to come together to press for change.” “Environmental and economic sustainability have to walk hand in hand,” she continued. “We must be a movement that includes the poor. All of us must come together to address our biggest challenge.” However, she said, a movement can often start with one person. She encouraged everyone in the audience to be that person. “Be the person who pushes your community to adopt smarter and

more sustainable practices. Be the one who challenges myths and false information. Be the one who talks to neighbors and friends about why these issues matter. Be the one who stands up, speaks out, and uses what he or she has learned at this school to fight for change,” she said. “Do that, and this one degree, your one degree, will make all the difference to our world.” For more information on The New School’s Climate Action Plan, visit <https://www.newschool.edu/sustainability/climate-action-plan.pdf>.

This article originally appeared on [The New School News](#). Photo courtesy of Kasia Broussalian and The New School.



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