Introduction to the symposium on environmental advocacy

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The world has been through a lot in the last year—a deadly pandemic that has killed over three million people, a devastating wildfire and hurricane season, and the looming crisis of climate change. These calamities have brought to the foreground what scientists have warned for decades: that humankind’s relationship with nature is out of whack, and she is fighting back. The global south, young people, and those who have done the least to contribute to the problem suffer the worst consequences.

The stakes have never been higher. As temperatures get warmer and ecosystems continue to degrade, we need nothing less than fundamental changes to our economy and way of life if we are to survive on a profoundly altered planet. In the face of vast inequalities, we also need to protect democracy from the forces that seek to erode it. But how do we affect change on a large scale? How do we bring about improvements to society that pose challenges to those in power? We need a new generation of savvy environmental activists empowered by evidence-based advocacy. Just like any skill, advocacy can be taught and learned.

For this issue of the *Journal for Environmental Studies and Sciences*, we made a call for manuscripts on the theme of environmental advocacy. Scholars and practitioners responded despite the burden posed by the pandemic and disruptions to academic institutions. In this symposium, we bring together a diverse set of approaches to the issue. We begin with “The case for environmental advocacy,” a rousing call to the need for collective advocacy to combat the climate and ecological crisis; “The Power of Positive Role Models” explores the role of films in inspiring youth in advocacy; “Making the board: Participatory game design for environmental action” shows the potential of board games for engaging people in environmental advocacy; and “Community obstacles to large scale solar: NIMBY and renewables” explores the importance of community buy-in for large-scale renewables. “Community-based climate action planning as an act of

advocacy” reveals a case study of liberal arts college collaboration in a rural community” and “Standing in the environment: new fashion grassroots and old fashion court advocacy in the time of Trump” discusses the evolution of legal standing for the environment in the courts. We also include a list of graduate programs in the USA that teach environmental advocacy and an annotated bibliography on education and advocacy for further exploration.

The symposium evolved from the Environmental Advocacy Symposium, a conference turned webinar series organized by Antioch University New England and the Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences. The webinar series broadens the conversation beyond what we could include in this issue, featuring keynote presentations from Elizabeth Yiempierre, executive director of UPROSE, and Jaysa Hunter Mellers, a youth activist who helped to shut down the coal fire power plant in her community as a ten years old. Other presentations include “Research as Climate Advocacy: Using Scholarship for Social Change,” “The Power of Nonviolent Direct Action,” “Teaching Advocacy,” and “Environmental Advocacy as a Career.” We invite you to watch the recordings at <http://www.communityresilience-center.org/environmental-advocacy-webinar-series/>.

Amidst the converging crises of our world, environmental advocacy is experiencing a renaissance. People are rising up and demanding change from governments and institutions. When the Trump administration tried to dismantle environmental regulations one after the other, communities and organizations fought back, blocking measures to permit drilling or pollute neighborhoods in the courts, on the fields, and in legislative chambers. In September 2019, more than seven million people participated in the global climate strikes led by Greta Thunberg. In the summer of 2020, Black Lives Matter protests flared in major cities around the world followed by police reform and the toppling of statues of white supremacists. In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, more than 80 million people voted for a change in executive branch leadership, the most votes cast for any presidential candidate in U.S. history.

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Let us celebrate these successes and amplify the voices of change. “Words have power,” said Jaysa Hunter Mellers. Let us use them for good.

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