

Course title:	Global Challenges – Sustainable Futures
Instructor:	Dr. Andrzej Ancygier
Email address:	a.ancygier@gmail.com
Track:	A-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.

Course description

This course introduces students to politics, governance, and ethics of sustainability in an increasingly interconnected world. The defining challenges of our time - ranging from poverty and inequality to climate change, biodiversity loss, and political polarization - are global in nature. Yet the current system of governance, built on competing sovereign countries, remains poorly equipped to address problems that transcend national borders. As societies confront these shared threats, they are compelled to adopt a new logic of cooperation, responsibility for the global commons, and awareness of the long-term consequences of human activity.

Throughout the course, students will explore the major global challenges shaping the 21st century, divided into economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions. Special attention will be given to the causes and consequences of climate change, as well as to the international frameworks designed to address it, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Paris Agreement will serve as a case study for examining both the possibilities and limitations of global climate governance.

Beyond environmental concerns, the course will investigate wider systemic issues such as income disparity, migration, gender inequality, the rise of populism, and the rapid development of new technologies. We will discuss how artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and innovative governance models might contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future. The final sessions encourage students to think critically and creatively about global interdependence and to envision pathways toward a fairer, more resilient world.

Classroom discussions will be complemented by field visits and guest lectures that connect theoretical insights with real-world practice.

Student profile

The course is designed for students with different academic backgrounds and a general interest in sustainability and sustainable development. There are no special prerequisites for the course.

Course Requirements

- 1.) Class participation
- 2.) Presentation
- 3.) Exam (two parts)

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced Intermediate level (Mittelstufe II) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Class participation: 40%

Presentation: 30%

Exam (two parts): 30%

Reading

A digital course reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Monday, July 20, 2026	<p>Global economic issues:</p> <p>We begin by exploring the root causes of global poverty and rising income inequality, both between and within countries.</p> <p>The session considers possible strategies to address these challenges and questions whether free trade and globalization deepen or reduce economic disparity.</p> <p>Discussion will also focus on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on employment and the global economy, leading to a broader reflection on whether capitalism in its current form can ensure a fair and sustainable future—or if alternative economic models are needed.</p>
Thursday, July 23, 2026	<p>Global social issues:</p> <p>Recent years have seen growing polarization within and between societies, as shared values and the capacity for dialogue and compromise seem to erode. Alongside this, persistent issues such as racism, gender inequality, and discrimination continue to challenge social cohesion, while migration reshapes communities and sparks both opportunities and tensions.</p>

	<p>During this we will also examine the role of social media and disinformation in deepening divisions and consider how trust, empathy, and a sense of common purpose might be rebuilt. Finally, we discuss whether Artificial Intelligence can support social inclusion or risks intensifying existing divides.</p>
Monday, July 27, 2026	<p>Global political issues:</p> <p>As democracy faces pressure from populist movements and authoritarian leaders, we ask whether the world is entering a new age of autocracy or simply navigating a difficult phase of democratic transformation.</p> <p>The session explores the erosion of trust in institutions, the impact of misinformation, and the challenges of global governance in an increasingly fragmented world.</p> <p>We will also examine major contemporary conflicts, identifying their common roots—such as inequality, resource competition, and nationalism—and discuss possible paths toward peace and cooperation.</p>
Thursday, July 30, 2026	<p>Global environmental issues:</p> <p>Future archaeologists may remember our era as the Age of Plastic—a time defined by pollution that will outlast us for millennia. Yet it is also an age of noise, desertification, and the greatest loss of biodiversity since the dinosaurs.</p> <p>This session examines whether these and other environmental crises are an inevitable price of progress, or if economic growth and environmental stewardship can coexist. We will discuss pathways toward sustainable development and explore how innovation, policy, and individual choices can help restore balance between human activity and the planet.</p> <p><i>Exam part 1</i></p>
Monday, August 3, 2026	<p>Climate change:</p> <p>Climate change remains the defining challenge of our century—an ongoing process that will shape our lives and those of future generations. This session explores its driving forces and far-reaching consequences for ecosystems, economies, and societies worldwide.</p> <p>We will also examine the global governance structures addressing the crisis, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and discuss how effective international cooperation can be achieved in confronting this shared threat.</p> <p><i>*Visit to Climate Analytics</i></p>
Thursday, August 6, 2026	<p>Energy transition:</p> <p>The transformation of the global energy sector offers a rare source of optimism in challenging times. Shifting from fossil</p>

	<p>fuels to renewable energy can help address many of the issues discussed earlier—reducing CO₂ emissions, alleviating energy poverty, improving air quality, and even mitigating inequality and authoritarian dependence on resource rents.</p> <p>Yet this transition also brings new challenges, from technological and financial barriers to social acceptance and geopolitical shifts. This session explores both the opportunities and the obstacles on the path toward a cleaner and more equitable energy future.</p>
Monday, August 10, 2026	<p>The Future:</p> <p>How can we ensure that present and future generations enjoy a quality of life equal to or greater than that of the past? Can humanity overcome the economic, social, political, and environmental challenges that define our era?</p> <p>While definitive answers may be out of reach, this session encourages participants to think critically and imaginatively about possible futures. The focus will be on developing the ability to view global issues through long-term, interconnected perspectives and to envision pathways toward a more sustainable and just world.</p> <p><i>Exam Part 2</i></p> <p><i>Visit to the FUTURIUM Berlin*</i></p>
Thursday, August 13, 2026	<i>Students' Presentations</i>

*Field trips may be subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, adaptation of class times is possible.