

Course title:	Global Challenges – Sustainable Futures
Instructor:	Andreas Scheel
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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

The course introduces students to the politics, governance and ethics of sustainability. The key challenges of our time are global by nature. However, the current system of global governance based on sovereign states (often in competition with each other) is ill equipped to face global challenges such as poverty, climate change, environmental degradation and availability of resources. While states struggle to provide a sustainable future for their citizens, they are increasingly forced into a logic of sustainability for all people and responsibility for the global commons. This new logic is based on the concept of interconnectedness and the impact of our actions on the generations to come.

The course examines major current global challenges divided into economic, political and environmental issues. Climate change is only one of many environmental issues facing our planet, but due to its importance and overwhelming impact, it will be given the main focus of this course. We will not only look at the science behind and consequences of global warming, but will also study the two pillars of the global climate governance: the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The analysis of the UNFCCC process will further lead us to review the Paris Agreement from 2015. We will discuss how effective it can be in dealing with one of the biggest threats of the 21st century and whether it can still achieve its goal of limiting global warming to “well below 2°C/1.5°C”.

A special session will be devoted to technological, political, social and economic solutions to environmental issues. Do we – as purported by some – need to replace capitalism and stop economic growth in order to prevent further environmental destruction? Or is there a way to move towards a “green growth”, and utilize the benefits of the free market to increase environmental protection? This will lead us to the question of what the future will look like. Will we continue to cross planetary boundaries and endanger the capability of different ecosystems? Or will the 21st century witness a major shift away from fossil fuels and environmental destruction to a more sustainable economy?

The discussions in the class will be complemented by at least two field trips and possibly a visit of a guest speaker.

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.

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>

Course Requirements

- 1.) Attendance and class participation
- 2.) Presentation
- 3.) Exam

Grading

Attendance and class participation: 20%

Presentation: 40%

Exam: 40%

Reading

A digital course reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Monday, July 28, 2025	<p>Global economic issues: Analysis of the reasons for global poverty and increasing income disparity globally and within particular countries.</p> <p>How can these issues be solved or at least mitigated? Is free trade exacerbating the problem, or is it part of the solution?</p> <p>What are the Outcomes of COP29? What is the current Status Quo?</p>
Thursday, July 31, 2025	<p>Global political issues: We will be covering a variety of challenges, starting with the rise of populism to the threats resulting from failed states and dictatorships.</p> <p>We will also investigate how real the threat of terrorism is and examine how effective democracy is in dealing with all those challenges.</p> <p>Visit to The Impact Hub Berlin*</p>
Monday, August 4, 2025	<p>Global social issues: The recent years witnessed an increased polarization of the society. The ability to find the common ground and the art of compromise seems to be disappearing.</p>

	<p>What are the main drivers of these trends? What can be their repercussions? How can these challenges be mitigated?</p> <p>Short Introduction in Foresight Techniques (Scenario, Delphi)</p> <p><i>Students' Presentations (Part I)</i></p>
Thursday, August 7, 2025	<p>Global environmental issues: Air and soil pollution, desertification, increasing amounts of waste: are those and many other environmental challenges the price to pay for improved quality of life? Can we enjoy fast economic growth while decreasing our impact on the environment?</p> <p>Visit to the IGZ Großbeeren (The Future of Food)*</p> <p><i>Students' Presentations (Part II)</i></p>
Monday, August 11, 2025	<p>Climate change: Due to its importance, a special session will be dedicated to this environmental challenge. We will investigate the driving forces and consequences of climate change.</p> <p>We will also look at the global governance structure dealing with this issue, with a main focus on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).</p> <p><i>Students' Presentations (Part III)</i></p>
Thursday, August 14, 2025	<p>Solutions to environmental issues: While technological solutions for a majority of environmental issues already exist (e.g. renewable sources of energy, filters for power plants and factories, recycling), many of them are either not implemented at all, or carried out too slowly to mitigate the increasing pressure on the ecosystems.</p> <p>How can this be changed? What is the responsibility of different actors, from politicians to individuals, in moving towards a more sustainable society and economy?</p> <p>Visit to IMPARI Fashion Store (Upcycling)*</p>
Monday, August 18, 2025	<p>The Future: What does the future hold for our global society? How can we ensure that the current and future generations will enjoy at least the same, if not a better quality of life than the past generations? How can the economic, social, political and environmental challenges be mitigated?</p> <p>While no definite answers can be provided, the goal of this session is to strengthen the students' ability to think in global and long-term dimensions.</p>

	Visit to the FUTURIUM Berlin* <i>Students' Presentations (Part IV)</i>
Thursday, August 21, 2025	<i>Final Exam</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.