

FOUNDATIONS OF PLANETARY HEALTH

13 - 17 July 2026
Utrecht, the Netherlands

Supported by UNESCO Chair Global Health & Education, and UU Planetary Health Education Hub



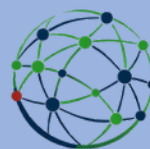
COURSE MAGAZINE



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General information

As the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation escalate, understanding the interconnections between human health and planetary well-being has never been more crucial. Central to this understanding are the intersections between human (and non-human) health, justice and equity as marginalized communities typically share an undue burden of this crisis.

This course highlights how the planetary health crisis extends far beyond climate change alone: it represents a broader environmental and systems-level challenge that intensifies ongoing public health issues and is driven by social inequities, unequal access to resources, and disparities in political power. In this course, participants will build a foundational understanding of the key concepts, frameworks, and justice-oriented perspectives that shape the field of planetary health.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Define key concepts, principles, and frameworks within planetary health and articulate their relevance to contemporary global challenges.
2. Analyse the relationships between environmental change, social inequities, resource distribution, and human and non-human health outcomes.
3. Evaluate major determinants of planetary health across ecological, social, and economic domains.
4. Interpret current evidence on the drivers of planetary degradation and their implications for population health.
5. Apply foundational frameworks to assess scenarios that illustrate the interconnectedness of environmental systems and human well-being.

*This course is open to all with an interest in planetary health and climate justice. If you already have a strong grounding in planetary health, the course **Transforming Systems for Planetary Health** may be a better fit for you.*

Course Coordinators: Dr. George Downward, Dr. Joyce Browne, Prof. Ajay Bailey, Prof. Roel Vermeulen, drs. Camilla Alay Llamas, drs. Juliette Mattijsen, Mr. Goof Buijs

Course Dates: July 13 - 17 2026, 9.00 - 17.00 daily. See day to day course programme for details (to follow)

Course Code: M12

ETCS Credits: 1.5

Location: University College Utrecht

Contact: drs. Camilla Alay Llamas - c.a.llamas@uu.nl

drs. Juliette Mattijsen - j.c.mattijsen-3@umcutrecht.nl



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Course Programme

Day 1: Monday 13/07 - Foundations of Planetary Health

9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Introduction to Planetary Health

11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Fundamentals of climate change and environmental health

George Downward

- To illustrate the relationship between ecological change and human health and analyse its impact on health outcomes and natural environments.
- To explain what the planetary boundaries are and the current state of Earth's natural systems
- To describe the social, political, and commercial determinants of (planetary) health, and critically evaluate the role of the public, private, and governance sectors, distinguishing between health-promoting and health-harming components within those sectors.
- To introduce circularity and donut economics
- To explore the fundamental science underlying climate change and the assessment of environmental exposures

13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Rethinking sustainable solutions for climate induced challenges

- To challenge dominant narratives around climate-induced migration by critically examining why and how communities choose to remain in place, and what this reveals about the limitations of current sustainable development frameworks.
- To explore the concept of community-based adaptation strategies, understanding how intergenerational learning, place attachment, and cultural knowledge systems can inform more just and people-centred climate adaptation policies.

15.30 - 17.00 Session 4: Unmasking Climate Disinformation

- To critically identify the actors and narratives driving climate disinformation and how they obstruct meaningful climate action.
- To evaluate the impact of climate disinformation on communities and explore effective counter-strategies rooted in climate justice.

Day 2: Tuesday 14/07 - Drivers of Planetary Degradation

9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Complexity, biodiversity and interactions of humans and natural systems

George Kowalchuk

- To discuss the development, maintenance and functioning of biodiversity as determined by ecological processes and interactions with atmosphere, water and soil, and the impact of the anthropocene era to biodiversity

11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Political, economic and production drivers of the crisis

- To examine how the political mandates and decision-making processes of transnational institutions drive - or hinder - global climate and sustainability governance.
- To analyse how diverse stakeholders and institutions shape economic and production systems, and the implications of these dynamics for equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Agricultural industry (TBA)

15.30 - 17.00 Individual and group reflections

- To engage in both individual and group reflection to critically examine personal perspectives and collectively deepen understanding of planetary health themes.



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Course Programme

Day 3: Wednesday 15/07 - Impacts of the crisis

9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Mental Health and Climate Change

John Jamir Benzoni Aruta

- To understand how climate change is affecting people's mental health, from emotional distress to anxiety, depression, grief, and suicidal behaviour. This session will discuss ways of coping, and identify ways forward towards climate action.

11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Urban inequalities and intersectional Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) challenges

Ajay Bailey

- To explore the intersectional challenges urban poor face in the Global South through two ethnographic case studies in India and Indonesia. We will use projective techniques for students to rethink WASH services in relation to climatic events.

13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Food Systems, Environment, and Health Interactions

- To analyse the interconnections between food systems, environmental sustainability, and public health, drawing on interdisciplinary insights to critically assess the social and ecological trade-offs of current food production and consumption patterns.

15.30 - 17.00 Session 4: Planetary health and Small Island Developing States

- To critically identify the actors and narratives driving climate disinformation and how they obstruct meaningful climate action.
- To evaluate the impact of climate disinformation on communities and explore effective counter-strategies rooted in climate justice.

Day 4: Thursday 16/07 - Mitigation and Adaptation

9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Volgermeer tour

*Information available in the following page

Goof Buijs

- To observe and reflect on the ecological restoration of Volgermeer as a real-world example of sustainable land remediation and the transformation of contaminated sites into functioning natural environments.

11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Ethics, Justice and Intergenerational Responsibility

Joyce Browne and Juliette Mattijsen

- To discuss the concept of climate justice and planetary health
- To identify root causes of climate (in)justice, and its links to social justice
- To explore how commitments to climate justice can translate in (research) practice

13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Sustainable Research

Iskander Khairoutdinov

- To introduce students to the principles and practices of sustainable research, fostering critical awareness of ethical, environmental, and social responsibilities in designing and conducting research.

15.30 onwards (free time)



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Course topics

Site visit: Just north of Amsterdam lies the Volgermeerpolder (also known as "Volgermeer"), right next to the village of Broek in Waterland. It's a nature and recreation area covering over 100 hectares and has become known as the largest polluted area in the Netherlands. Following a period of peat extraction after the First World War, the area gradually became a landfill for the Municipality of Amsterdam. Between 1945 and 1980, large quantities of chemical waste, along with household and construction waste, were dumped there. After the landfill closed in 1980, the area was remediated and opened to the public in 2011. The toxic residue in the soil was covered with a sheet, topped with a clean topsoil. Monitoring wells were installed around the area to monitor the leakage of contaminated groundwater. Conditions have been created to allow peat to regrow in the rice paddies on top of the sheet. This is called "Natural Cap," a future-proof solution for encapsulating the entire area with peat.

The site visit will include an introductory session followed by conversations with scientists and experts working on the Volgermeer project, offering participants a unique opportunity to gain firsthand insights into the ecological restoration efforts and research underway at the site.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.volgermeer.nl/>

Day 5: Friday 17/07 - Sectoral transformations & future pathways

9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Post-growth economies

- To critically explore the principles of post-growth economies and evaluate their potential as alternative frameworks for addressing ecological limits, social equity, and human well-being beyond GDP-driven development models.

11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Empowering communities at the local level

- To examine how community-led initiatives and local empowerment strategies can drive meaningful and sustainable change from the ground up.

13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Short movie

(TBA)

15.30 - 18:00 Session 4: Feedback and reflection, followed by closing programme



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Course Coordinators



GEORGE DOWNWARD

COURSE COORDINATOR
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
EXPOSOME & PLANETARY HEALTH,
JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT

Dr. Downward is an Associate Professor at UMC Utrecht and an affiliated researcher at the Institute of Risk Assessment Sciences (IRAS), Utrecht University, where his research focus examines how environmental and planetary disruptions, in combination with personal risk factors, contribute to communicable and non-communicable disease. He has a special interest in planetary health, vulnerable groups, and low-middle income countries.

George's publications examine the relationship between our changing world and human health in a variety of ways as exemplified by recent publications on air pollution on health, the role of scenario analysis in achieving the SDGs, and the importance of sex and gender disaggregated data.



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AJAY BAILEY

COURSE COORDINATOR

PROFESSOR, CHAIR IN GEOGRAPHIES OF HEALTH, INCLUSION, & DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY AND SPATIAL PLANNING, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Professor Bailey is passionate about creating sustainable and inclusive futures. He specialises in the intersection of (planetary) health, ageing, and inclusive cities. With a strong foundation in anthropology and demography, Ajay brings a unique perspective to the challenges faced by rapidly urbanising communities in India, Bangladesh, Curaçao, and the Netherlands, where he focuses on integrating human-centred approaches to health, urban infrastructures, and social equity.

Ajay has an extensive experience managing research teams across countries, leveraging my excellent leadership skills to drive collaborative, cross-cultural initiatives, and is very interested in qualitative research, teaching, and capacity building of young researchers. His work ensures that cities grow in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient for all ages, and is committed to driving innovative solutions that bridge the gap between demographic realities and environmental imperatives, contributing to a healthier planet and more just societies. Ajay is passionate about qualitative research, teaching, and capacity building of young researchers. His work significantly contributes to expanding the field of transnational mobilities, ageing, inter-generational relations, health systems research, health services, reducing barriers to care, while establishing meaningful North-South and South-South collaborations.



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CAMILLA ALAY LLAMAS

COURSE COORDINATOR

PROJECT MANAGER & JUNIOR
RESEARCHER, PLANETARY HEALTH,
JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT / HUB
MANAGER, PLANETARY HEALTH
EDUCATION HUB, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Dr. Llamas is a general physician from the Philippines, where she gained hands-on experience providing medical and surgical assistance to underserved and remote communities - grounding her early career in community-based care and health equity.

Alay is currently a project manager at UMC Utrecht, and serves as Hub Manager of the Planetary Health Education Hub at Utrecht University. Her work centres on capacity building, equitable partnerships, and education, with a particular focus on transforming how knowledge is developed and applied through a planetary health lens. This includes reimagining planetary health curricula in higher education institutions in Asia to foster transformative, justice-oriented learning in low- and middle-income settings, while championing community engagement as a cornerstone of meaningful and sustainable health development.

Her expertise spans clinical medicine, community health, global health, capacity building, curriculum design, and planetary health education.



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JOYCE BROWNE

COURSE COORDINATOR

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR GLOBAL HEALTH / EPIDEMIOLOGY, WITH A FOCUS ON MATERNAL HEALTH, JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT & FACULTY OF LAW, ECONOMICS AND GOVERNANCE (UU)

Dr. Browne is a medical doctor and epidemiologist. The continuing global inequities in reproductive, maternal and perinatal health are the driving force behind her research and professional interests.

Her work focuses on global maternal health research, health equity and equitable partnerships in global health, research capacity building in low- and middle-income countries, and global health education.

She currently is Associate Professor of Global Health at the Julius Center for Health Sciences and Primary Care, UMC Utrecht in the Netherlands. In addition, she is the chair of the Dutch Knowledge Center on Global Health board.



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ROEL VERMEULEN

COURSE COORDINATOR

PROFESSOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL
EPIDEMIOLOGY & EXPOSOME SCIENCE,
INSTITUTE FOR RISK ASSESSMENT
SCIENCES, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Professor Vermeulen is Professor of Environmental Epidemiology and Exposome Science at the Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences at Utrecht University. He holds an adjunct professor position at the Julius Center, Department Public Health Healthcare Innovation and Medical Humanities (UMC Utrecht) and a Visiting Professorship at Imperial College London, UK. He has been appointed Distinguished University Professor at Utrecht University as of 15 July 2024.

Since 2024, Roel is Scientific Director of the Institute for Preventive Health (i4PH) of the EWUU alliance of the universities of Eindhoven Wageningen (WUR) , Utrecht and UMC Utrecht. He chairs the planetary health community of Utrecht Life Sciences.

Roel coordinates the Dutch research program on the exposome (Exposome-NL), leads an EU project (EXPANSE) as part of the European Human Exposome Network, coordinates the Dutch Hub of the European infrastructure on Exposome research (EIRENE-NL), co-coordinates the International Human Exposome Network (IHEN) and coordinates an EU project on micro- and nanoplastics (AURORA). Additionally, he has served on many international committees including the World Health Organization and the National Toxicology Program in the USA. He was a member of the Dutch Health Council for over 12 years and has authored/co-authored over 800 academic publications.



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JULIETTE MATTIJSEN

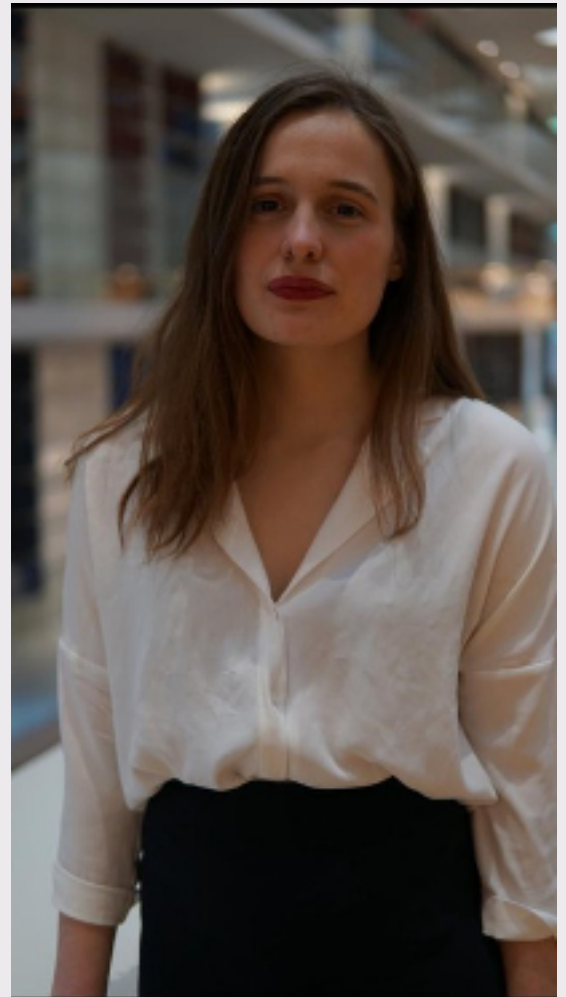
COURSE COORDINATOR

MEDICAL DOCTOR, PROJECT MANAGER
AND JUNIOR RESEARCHER, GLOBAL
HEALTH / PLANETARY HEALTH, JULIUS
CENTER, UMC UTRECHT, THE
NETHERLANDS

Juliette Mattijsen is a medical doctor, activist, and researcher dedicated to advancing health justice, decolonizing medicine and addressing ecological and social determinants of health. Determined to achieve health for all, she has participated in over 12 high-level United Nations political meetings, advocating for the integration of health in all policies.

Juliette is affiliated with UMC Utrecht, where she works as a project manager and junior researcher, focusing on climate justice and planetary health education. As an activist, she founded the People's Health Movement Netherlands and engages in a wide range of grassroots initiatives - from supporting Doctors for Gaza to organising local efforts in Rotterdam aimed at tackling housing inequality and promoting universal health coverage.

Driven by a commitment to social transformation, Juliette works at the intersection of healthcare, climate advocacy, and community action, striving to build a more just and equitable world for all.



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GOOF BUIJS

COURSE COORDINATOR
MANAGER, UNESCO CHAIR/WHO
COLLABORATING CENTRE GLOBAL
HEALTH & EDUCATION

After finishing his Master study in Human Nutrition his first job was teaching health science at the Amsterdam teacher trainer institute. Next, he moved into the field of health promotion, as health promotion officer in Amsterdam. At the Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion NIGZ he specialized in school health promotion, first on the Dutch level to introduce the national health promoting school programme and leading several European projects. In 2007 he became the manager of the Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) network until 2017.

In 2018, with Professor Didier Jourdan, he set up the UNESCO Chair Global Health & Education, which is also a WHO Collaborating Centre. His specialisation is bringing health and education sectors together. He is an experienced networker, expert in co-creation, trainer, and organizer of local and global events. He supports cooperation among people, focusing on everyone's talents and uniqueness. He is an environmental activist for most of his life.



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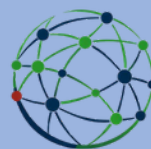
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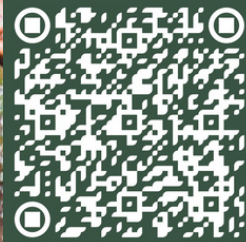


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