

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KANPUR

Proposal for a New Course

1. Course No: ENG7XX

2. Course Title: Ecosickness and Planetary Health

3. Per Week: Lectures: 3 (L), Tutorial: 0 (T), Laboratory: 0 (P), Additional Hours [0–2]: 0 (A), Credits (3L+T+P+A): 9

Duration of Course: Full Semester

4. Proposing Department/IDP: Humanities and Social Sciences

Other Departments/IDPs which may be interested: Earth Sciences; Biological Sciences and Bioengineering; Environmental Engineering; Sustainable Energy Engineering; and interdisciplinary programmes concerned with health, sustainability, climate and environmental change.

Other faculty members interested in teaching proposed course: NA

5. Proposing Instructor(s): Dr T. Ravichandran

6. Course Description

This advanced doctoral-level course develops a theoretically rigorous and research-intensive interdisciplinary framework for examining the entanglements between ecological degradation, environmental change, illness, and planetary wellbeing across human and more-than-human worlds. It approaches “ecosickness” as a critical and interpretive concept through which illness can be understood not merely as an individual biomedical condition but as an embodied, ecological, cultural, political, and planetary phenomenon. The course brings Environmental Humanities into sustained dialogue with Planetary Health, Health Humanities, Medical Humanities, One Health, Political Ecology, Environmental History, Posthumanism, New Materialism, Earth-system science, Science and Technology Studies, and Critical Global Health.

A central intervention of the course is its interrogation of the historical separation between human health and environmental health that has structured modernity, public health, medicine, development, and environmental governance. It critically examines human exceptionalism, biomedical reductionism, and the nature–culture divide, asking how the health of human bodies is inseparable from the health of ecological systems. The course examines how climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, toxicity, extractivism, altered disease ecologies, food and water insecurity, pandemics, urbanization, and environmental disasters become embodied as illness, vulnerability, displacement, anxiety, grief, and social suffering. Particular attention is given to the uneven distribution of environmental health risks through caste, class, gender, indigeneity, disability, geography, coloniality, and political economy. The course therefore asks not only who becomes sick under conditions of environmental change, but also whose suffering becomes visible, whose knowledge counts, and how environmental futures are shaped through unequal relations of power and expertise.

The course moves from the individual body to the social body, ecological body, and planetary body, asking how bodies become sites where environmental histories are registered. Key concepts include environmental health, planetary boundaries, the Anthropocene, the Great Acceleration, slow violence, toxic embodiment, environmental illness, solastalgia, ecological grief, climate anxiety, ecological distress, disaster trauma, environmental memory, multispecies health, transcorporeality, vulnerability, resilience, and planetary justice. Students will critically examine ecological distress while resisting its reduction to individual pathology and recognizing its social, ecological, and political dimensions.

Literary and cultural texts are central. Novels, short fiction, poetry, film, visual culture, testimony, illness narratives, speculative fiction, ecocinema, and digital media will be read alongside scientific and policy discourses. Primary and theoretical materials may include Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, Richard Powers, Jeff VanderMeer, Kim Stanley Robinson, Paolo Bacigalupi, N. K. Jemisin, Indra Sinha, Donna Haraway, Stacy Alaimo, Rob Nixon, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ashlee Cunsolo, Glenn Albrecht, Anna Tsing, Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton, Arturo Escobar, Achille Mbembe, and scholars of Planetary Health Humanities. The course also engages Indigenous, feminist, decolonial, and more-than-human perspectives on health, care, and ecological reciprocity.

At the advanced level, the course emphasizes conceptual synthesis, comparative analysis, close reading, interdisciplinary research design, and critical engagement with competing epistemologies of health. It culminates in the question of what it might mean to move from planetary illness toward planetary care, ecological justice, regenerative futures, and a more expansive conception of “cosmogenic health.”

A) Objectives

1. Critically examine the conceptual emergence of Planetary Health and its relationship to Environmental Humanities, Health Humanities, Medical Humanities, One Health, and EcoHealth.
2. Develop a theoretically sophisticated understanding of “ecosickness” as a cultural, ecological, embodied and planetary condition.
3. Interrogate the historical and philosophical separation of human health from environmental systems and critically assess human exceptionalism and biomedical reductionism.
4. Examine how climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, toxicity, extraction, altered disease ecologies and environmental disasters become embodied in individual and collective life.
5. Engage major theoretical frameworks including slow violence, political ecology, environmental justice, transcorporeality, new materialism, posthumanism, multispecies studies and critical global health.
6. Analyse ecological grief, solastalgia, climate anxiety and environmental distress without pathologizing legitimate responses to ecological loss.
7. Study relationships among environmental change, social inequality, coloniality, caste, class, gender, indigeneity, displacement and structural vulnerability.

8. Explore planetary boundaries, Earth-system change, tipping points, planetary health governance and the ethics of sustaining human flourishing within ecological limits.
9. Critically analyse literary, cinematic, visual, testimonial and digital representations of illness, contamination, disaster, pandemic, extinction, ecological grief and planetary futures.
10. Develop interdisciplinary research questions and methodologies connecting cultural analysis with scientific, medical, ecological and policy knowledge.
11. Examine Indigenous, feminist, relational, more-than-human and decolonial understandings of care, reciprocity and ecological wellbeing.
12. Evaluate competing models of resilience, sustainability, adaptation, mitigation, regeneration, planetary justice and ecological care, and formulate theoretically grounded visions of healthier more-than-human futures.

B) Course Content and Distribution of Lectures

Unit	Topic	Lectures
1	Genealogies of Ecosickness, Environmental Health and Planetary Health	04
2	From Medical Humanities to Planetary Health Humanities	04
3	Anthropocene Bodies: Embodiment, Environment, and the Nature–Culture Divide	04
4	Toxicity, Pollution and Slow Violence	04
5	Climate Change, Disease Ecologies and Planetary Epidemiology	04
6	Biodiversity, Multispecies Health and the More-than-Human	04
7	Ecological Grief, Solastalgia, Eco-Anxiety and Environmental Affect	04
8	Environmental Justice, Coloniality and Unequal Health	04
9	Water, Food, Urban Ecologies and Planetary Health	03
10	Pandemics, Disasters, Memory and Ecological Futures	03
11	Doctoral Research Colloquium: Planetary Care, Cosmogenic Health and Doctoral Research	02
	TOTAL	40

C) Prerequisites, if any

There is no formal prerequisite. However, the course is intended for Ph.D. scholars in Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly, those working in English Literature, and advanced researchers working in the humanities, social sciences, environmental studies, health studies, public policy, science and technology studies, and allied interdisciplinary fields. Prior familiarity with critical theory, environmental humanities, health humanities, or environmental studies will be advantageous.

D) Short summary for including in the Courses of Study Booklet

This advanced doctoral-level interdisciplinary course examines the interconnections among ecological degradation, environmental change, human health, and planetary wellbeing through Environmental Humanities and Planetary Health Humanities. It develops “ecosickness” as a critical framework for understanding how climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, toxicity, extractivism, altered disease

ecologies, pandemics, and environmental displacement become embodied in human and more-than-human worlds. Drawing on Planetary Health, Health Humanities, One Health, Political Ecology, Environmental Justice, this doctoral-level interdisciplinary course examines the interconnections among ecological degradation, environmental change, human health, and planetary wellbeing through Environmental Humanities and Planetary Health Humanities. It develops “ecosickness” as a critical framework for understanding how climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, toxicity, extractivism, altered disease ecologies, pandemics, and environmental displacement become embodied in human and more-than-human worlds. Drawing on Planetary Health, Health Humanities, One Health, Political Ecology, Environmental Justice, Posthumanism, New Materialism, and Earth-system thinking, the course explores the Anthropocene, planetary boundaries, slow violence, toxic embodiment, ecological grief, solastalgia, climate anxiety, multispecies health, transcorporeality, planetary justice, and ecological care, while engaging with literature, film, visual culture, illness narratives, scientific research, and policy discourses to develop interdisciplinary approaches to environmental health, ecological justice, planetary care, and regenerative futures.

7) A. Suggested Primary Texts / Cultural Materials

- Ambikasutan Mangad’s *Swarga: A Posthuman Tale* (2017)
- Amitav Ghosh, *Gun Island* (2019) and *The Great Derangement* (2016)
- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (2014)
- Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People* (2007)
- Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (2014)
- Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (2020)
- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)
- N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (2015)
- Oana Aristide, *Under the Blue* (2021)
- Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* (2009)
- Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (2018)
- Samanta Schweblin’s *Fever Dream* (2014)
- Selected ecological poetry by Joy Harjo, Craig Santos Perez, Ada Limón and Jane Hirshfield
- Selected films/documentaries on climate change, toxicity, pandemics, ecological grief and environmental justice
- Selected environmental-health testimonies and disaster/contamination archives

B) Recommended Core Readings

- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Albrecht, Glenn. *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World*. Cornell University Press, 2019.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- Cunsolo, Ashlee, and Neville R. Ellis. “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-related Loss.” *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 8, 2018, pp. 275–281.

- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Härting, Heike and Heather Meek, eds. *Planetary Health Humanities and Pandemics*. Routledge, 2025.
- Heise, Ursula K., Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann, eds. *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Routledge, 2017.
- Houser, Heather. *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*. Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Latour, Bruno. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Polity, 2017.
- Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Myers, Samuel S. & Howard Frumkin. *Planetary Health: Protecting Nature to Protect Ourselves*. Island Press, 2020.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Whitmee, Sarah, et al. "Safeguarding Human Health in the Anthropocene Epoch: Report of the Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health." *The Lancet*, vol. 386, 2015, pp. 1973–2028.

C) Further References

- Adamson, Joni, and Michael M. Davis, eds. *Humanities for the Environment*. Routledge, 2016.
- Bratman, Gregory N., et al. "Nature and Mental Health: An Ecosystem Service Perspective." *Science Advances*, vol. 5, 2019.
- Crawford, P., Brown, B., & Charise, A. (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities*. Routledge. 2020.
- Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. "The Anthropocene." *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41, 2000, pp. 17–18.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Horton, Richard, et al. "Planetary Health: A New Science for Exceptional Times." *The Lancet*, 2014.
- Lerner, Henrik, and Carl Folke. "The Concept of Health in One Health and Some Implications for Science." *Science & Technology Studies*, 2017.
- Macy, Joanna, and Chris Johnstone. *Active Hope*. New World Library, 2012.
- McMichael, Anthony J. *Human Frontiers, Environments and Disease*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Moore, Jason W., ed. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* PM Press, 2016.

- Ojala, Maria, et al. “Anxiety, Worry, and Grief in a Time of Climate Change.” Annual Review of Environment and Resources, vol. 46, 2021, pp. 35–58.
- Rockström, Johan, et al. “A Safe Operating Space for Humanity.” Nature, vol. 461, 2009, pp. 472–475.
- Steffen, Will, et al. “Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet.” Science, vol. 347, 2015.
- Selected reports and datasets from WHO, IPCC, IPBES, The Lancet Planetary Health and Planetary Health Alliance.

8) Other Remarks: This is a distinctive interdisciplinary course that brings Planetary Health and environmental illness into sustained dialogue with the Environmental Humanities. It foregrounds literary and cultural narratives as important modes of understanding environmental health, enabling meaningful interdisciplinary engagement with fields such as medicine, engineering, environmental science, and public policy. The course is designed to contribute to an emerging area of scholarship at the intersection of planetary health, environmental humanities, and health humanities.

Proposing Instructor: Dr T. Ravichandran

Signature: T. Ravichandran

Department: Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur

Date: 15/09/26

The course is approved / not approved.

DPGC Convener: _____

Dated: _____

Approved by SPGC: _____

Dated: _____