

Interdisciplinary Intensive Course

Global Catastrophic and Existential Risk to Humanity

Winter semester (12 Oct. 2026 – 5 Feb. 2027)

Artificial intelligence, pandemics, nuclear weapons, and climate breakdown have pushed the question of humanity's survival to the centre of policy and public debate. FernUniversität in Hagen has responded **with the world's first fully online, credit-bearing postgraduate course on global catastrophic and existential risk** and on what can be done to prevent it – to be offered in English to students of all faculties.

Free participation -
apply now!
Deadline: 31 July
2026

The course takes a holistic view of existential and global catastrophic risk, built on a simple premise: today's environmental, technological, and political dangers no longer arrive one at a time, but interact and amplify one another. Because no single field can explain or govern them alone, the course is deliberately interdisciplinary, drawing on key insights from:

- Philosophy
- History
- Existential risk studies
- Complex systems science
- Mathematics
- Psychology
- Climate science
- Biology
- Computer science
- Futures studies
- Food systems science
- Engineering
- Political science
- Law
- Economics
- Geo- & Astrophysics
- Disaster studies
- Other humanities and social science

Beyond acquiring theoretical knowledge, students participate in two exclusive, interactive simulation exercises: *Intelligence Rising™*, a strategic role-play in which students represent AI-era stakeholders navigating geopolitical crises and coordination failures, and *ParEvo™*, a cooperative narrative scenario evolution exercise. In these exercises, students do not merely study a global crisis but take part in a simulated one, stepping into the roles of states, institutions, and decision-makers, and confronting first-hand the trade-offs and hard choices that managing catastrophic risk demands. Questions addressed will include:

- Why do global catastrophes matter, and why might human extinction matter infinitely more?
- What can past societal collapses teach us about our own?
- Why are humans so bad at taking catastrophic threats seriously?

- Could advanced AI and autonomous systems trigger or accelerate global catastrophe?
- How risky are natural and engineered pandemics, and can we defend against them?
- What would extreme warming, or extreme cooling do to the planet?
- How can we prevent famine when the food system fails?
- How can we govern global risks — politically and legally?

Key information on this module:

Course convener:	Prof. Julius Weitzdörfer B.A. LL.B. Dipl.Jur Dr. iur. M.A. (Cantab)
Lecturers:	Dr. Florian Ulrich Jehn B.Sc. M.Sc. Joel Naoki Christoph, B.Sc. M.Sc. M.Res.
Project coordinator:	Dr. Felix Jawinski, B.A. M.A.
Course duration:	12 Oct. 2026 until 5 Feb. 2027 (mainly self-timed but see below for mandatory exercises and assessment!)
Format:	Online (asynchronous, but <u>mandatory active participation in two live synchronous online events</u>) 17 Oct. 2026, 20:00 (max. 90 mins.): Welcome session 18 Nov. 2026, 20:00 (max. 60 min.) Briefing for ParEvo online simulation 21-29 Nov. 2026 <u>ParEvo (30 min. participation per day, asynchronous)</u> 4 Jan. 2027, 20:00 (evening, max. 60 minutes) Briefing for Intelligence Rising online simulation 10 Jan. 2027, 20:00: <u>Intelligence Rising online simulation (ca. half a day)</u>
Participants:	max. 30
Language of instruction:	English
Requirements:	Students must be enrolled in any graduate or undergraduate programme at Hagen University. Students of all faculties are eligible to apply, if they already hold a previous degree from any university.
Credit recognition:	10 ECTS, subject to recognition for specific degrees. Recognition has already been ensured with the relevant faculties

and examination offices for the following degrees: LLM (further information on other degrees will follow)

Assessment:	Marking is based on individual assessments pursuant to Section 10 (3) of the Examination Regulations . These assessments include submissions and oral contributions made during the “network-supported work” (“netzgestützte Arbeit”), Section 14 (1) No. 5, Prüfungsordnung für den Studiengang Master of Laws an der FernUniversität in Hagen within the framework of the online-based simulations <i>Intelligence Rising</i> and <i>ParEvo</i> . Each student will only have one chance to participate in this course and there will be only one chance to pass on the dates provided above.
Costs:	There are no participation fees for this module. The costs associated with the online-based simulations <i>Intelligence Rising</i> and <i>ParEvo</i> are fully covered by the Stiftung Innovation in der Hochschullehre (Freiraum 2026).

Application

Students may **apply until 31 July 2026** by submitting a brief letter of application (maximum 300 words in total) to x-risk@fernuni-hagen.de with the subject heading “COURSE APPLICATION”, followed by the full student’s name and faculty,

- **specifying your prior completed degree, your current faculty, current degree enrolment and current semester of study,**
- **outlining the motivation for your interest in the course,**
- **assuring your ability to read and discuss demanding academic texts in English,**
- **and assuring your availability for active participation in both (!) exercises.**

Selection

Unfortunately, the number of places is limited to 20. Therefore, applicants will be selected based on the following criteria:

First, academic progress plays a significant role. In addition, consideration will be given to the quality of the statement of motivation, the applicant’s demonstrated interest in the course, their proven ability to read academic texts in English, and their ability to participate actively in all mandatory sessions detailed above. We will strive to admit a diverse cohort of students from as many faculties as possible!

Participation is binding upon confirmation of admission. Participation in the online-based simulations *Intelligence Rising* and *ParEvo* is mandatory in accordance with the examination regulations referred to above.

Please check <https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ostasienrecht/existential-risks-to-humanity.shtml> for updated information, including on credit recognition!