

# Using a Planetary Health Framework to Initiate Integration of Health & Environmental Sciences in Higher Education & Research

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## Planetary Health

Planetary Health is an emerging transdisciplinary field, encompassing the vast **interconnections between human health and the natural/physical sciences**, and broadly integrating the related fields of Public Health, GeoHealth, One Health, Global Health, etc.

***"Put simply, planetary health is the health of human civilization and the state of the natural systems on which it depends."***

– Lancet Commission on Planetary Health, 2015 Report

## The International Alliance

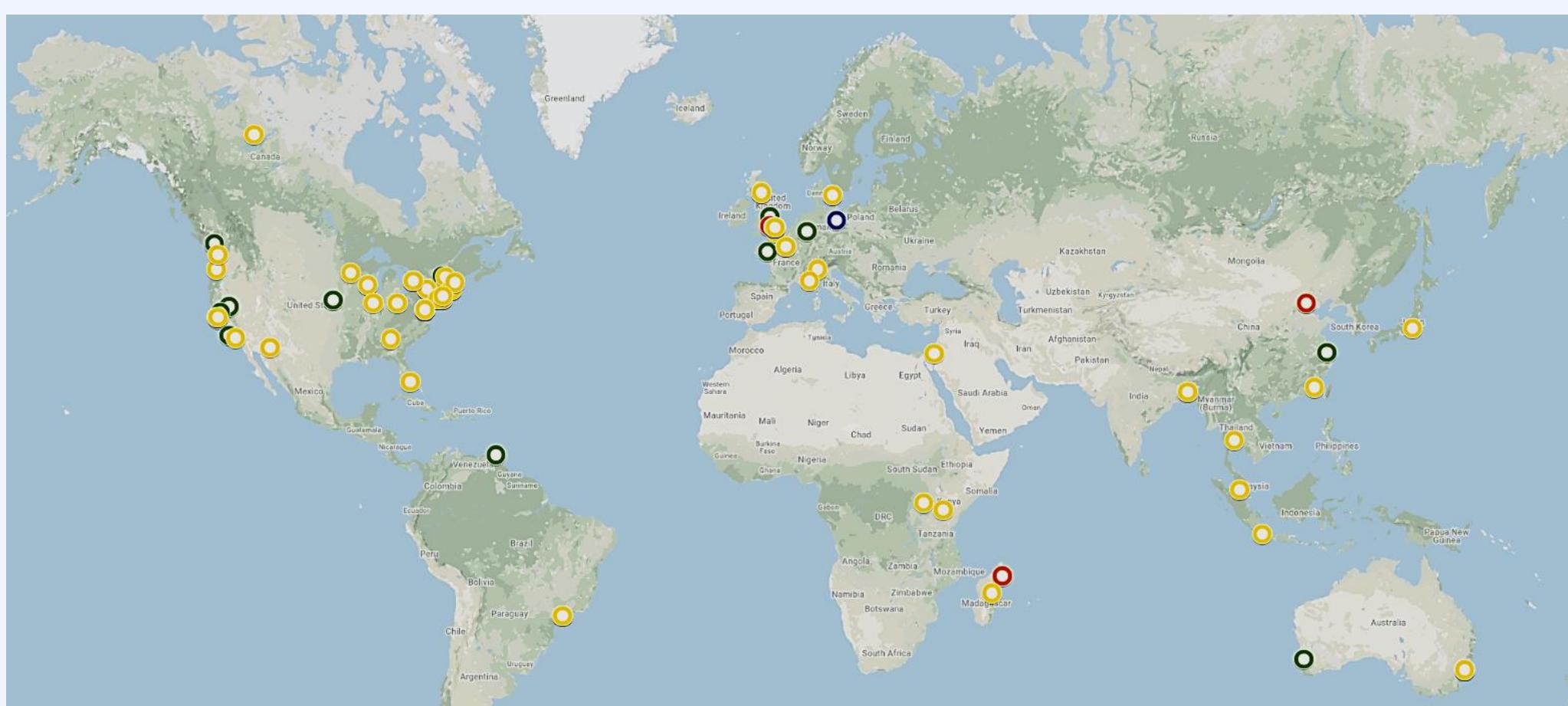
The Planetary Health Alliance (PHA) is an international consortium of **160+ universities, NGOs, government entities, and other partners spanning across 40+ countries**. Co-housed by the Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Center for the Environment, the PHA was launched in 2016 through the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. The PHA focuses its efforts on three areas:

**(1) Education**

**(2) Research**

**(3) Policy**

Upon initiating institutional membership with PHA in 2017, UNE joined their mission of supporting the growth of a policy-focused, transdisciplinary field of applied research – aimed at **understanding and addressing the human health implications of accelerating anthropogenic change in Earth's natural systems**.



## The University Council

Shortly after joining the PHA, UNE redoubled efforts to strengthen bridges between its health and environmental programs. With **15+ health professions, and robust environmental, biological, and marine sciences**, UNE is a hub for interdisciplinary collaboration. Adoption of a planetary health framework further positioned UNE to enhance academic and research partnerships between the health and environmental sciences.

Upon forming a formal Planetary Health Council, with student, professional staff, and faculty representation from across its six colleges, UNE embarked to develop a **planetary health agenda**.

- I. **Broad Engagement:** Step one involved hosting a community World Café event – a collaborative method for generating dialogue upon UNE’s present engagement in planetary health and future opportunities for growth.
- II. **Strategic Planning:** Synthesized input from the World Café fueled the Council’s strategic planning efforts, forming short- and long-term planetary health goals across four categories:
  - (1) Academics, (2) Research, (3) Events, (4) Publicity & Engagement**
- III. **Organizational Structure:** Next, the Council’s organizational structures and processes were clarified via the development of a charter and bi-laws.
- IV. **Implementation:** Four sub-committees were formed to align with and spearhead the goals of the strategic plan.

## Short-Term Goals

### (1) Academics

- Define precise criteria for “planetary health”-themed courses.
- Systematically assess the university catalog to identify and inventory current “planetary health”-themed course offerings.

### (2) Research

- Define precise criteria for “planetary health”-related research activities.
- Systematically assess university research activities to identify and inventory current “planetary health”-related researchers and projects.

### (3) Events

- Plan and implement semesterly campus events focused on planetary health themes.
  - ▶ “Climate Change & Tick Expansion” – April 2019

### (4) Publicity & Engagement

- Develop and promote brand recognition for UNE planetary health work.

## Next Steps

Upon completing the inventory of UNE’s existing “planetary health”-related academics and research, the Council will pinpoint high-impact, low-resource opportunities to jumpstart longer-term initiatives.

- **Academic incentives** for student involvement in planetary health (such as course credit, badging/microcredentials, honors distinction, etc.) are currently being explored.
- The promotion of “planetary health”-themed **research activity**, via mini-grant funding and/or campus symposiums, is also under review.
- In addition, novel planetary health partnerships and collaborations with **community stakeholders and local institutions** are being pursued.

## Recommendations

**Four core activities** supported UNE’s progress in planetary health:

- I. **Guiding Principles:** The identification of guiding principles was essential in orienting all work, including the prioritization of student involvement, interdisciplinary engagement, and equitable collaboration across the university.
- II. **Representative Participation:** Representative composition of the Planetary Health Council was crucial for university-wide investment and participation.
- III. **Inclusive Priorities:** An inclusive, student-focused strategic planning process ensured the identification of timely, relevant priorities.
- IV. **Effective Communication:** Maximizing communication strategies (e.g., website, social media, etc.) provided legitimacy and raised awareness.

### References

- Planetary Health Alliance. (2019). Retrieved from <https://planetaryhealthalliance.org/>  
 Whitmee S., Haines A., Beyrer C., Boltz F., Capon A. G., Souza Dias B. S., ... Yach D. (2015). Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: Report of the Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health. *The Lancet*, 386, 1973–2028.  
 The World Café. (2019). Retrieved from: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

