Teaching about the Future

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To the faculty, students, graduates, and administrators in the University of Houston System who have contributed to this new discipline of Strategic Foresight over the last 35-plus years.

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Preface

This book is the product of more than 35 years of accumulated experience of the faculty teaching foresight on the Graduate Program in Futures Studies, first at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) and now at the University of Houston (UH). The program was established by Dean Calvin Cannon and Chancellor Alfred Neumann in 1975. Dean Cannon's rationale for establishing this program in that new university was simple, "We study the past, don't we? Why can't we study the future?" And from that simple thought came the first official degree in foresight.

Dean Cannon hired two academic futurists to staff the program: Jib Fowles, a sociologist and communications professor from the New School for Social Research, where he studied with Alvin Toffler for a time, and Chris Dede, a futurist of educational technology who drafted his own futures degree at the University of Massachusetts. These faculty then hired Oliver Markley from Stanford Research Institute to turn the program into a more applied and professional direction. Peter Bishop started teaching in the program in 1983, coming from Michigan State University with degrees in sociology and social change. Andy Hines took his degree from the program in 1990 and has now returned to UH to teach and prepare students as professional futurists.

The curriculum for the futures program has evolved over that time, but it has remained remarkably stable over the last ten years. Dr Bishop started putting courses online in 2001, requiring a new level of specificity in what students had to learn and do in each course and each class. It is now time to share that curriculum with the rest of the futures community and with educators in general.

Foresight appeared in public first in France in the 1950s and then in the US and elsewhere in the 1960s. Since then, hundreds of futures courses have been taught around the world. But that number pales in comparison with the number of courses taught about the past, that is, history. There are still only a dozen or so graduate degrees in the world and no doctoral program yet. So it is unfortunate that in times of intense change, where creativity and innovation are required for competitive success, little knowledge of how to anticipate and influence the future is provided for students. It's not the teachers' fault. They were not taught about the future either.

Table P.1 History of the Houston Futures program

Year	Event
1975	University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) establishes the Futures program
	Jib Fowles and Chris Dede join as charter faculty
1978	Oliver Markley joins faculty from the Stanford Research Institute
1983	Peter Bishop starts teaching in Futures program
1996	Wendy Schultz joins faculty as Visiting Professor
2000	World Future Society holds annual conference in Houston, and annual "Best of Houston" session featuring student work begins
2001	Alumni Retreat proves instrumental in founding of Association of Professional Futurists the following year
2001	Chris Jones joins faculty and World Futures Studies Federation Secretariat is hosted by the program
2001	Program begins putting courses online (one per semester until entire curriculum online)
2005	Andy Hines joins as Lecturer, as program moves to UH main campus
2007	UH Main campus re-approves the program
2007	Hines & Bishop publish *Thinking about the Future*
2008	Students earn first of three APF Student Papers Awards: Charles Kennedy (2008), Darko Lovric (2009), Elizabeth Chapman (2010)
2009	35th Anniversary Celebration
2009	Certificate program in Strategic Foresight begins

This is where this book comes in. The University of Houston has been teaching and preparing professional futurists for decades. Now it is time to expand that mission to educators everywhere. The authors believe that it is possible to include futures thinking into every discipline at every level of education, particularly high schools, colleges, and professional schools. In fact, it is our vision that, in the long run, teaching about the future is as common as teaching about the past. The past is where the record of human achievement and failure appear; the future is where people will live as time goes on. Should they not get equal time? Should not every high school and college student who takes a course in world history also take a course in world futures? Should they not learn to envision, plan, and execute plans to create change toward a more preferable future? Of course they should.

So this book contains the UH foresight curriculum from start to finish. It contains approximately one chapter for every course in the

curriculum. It is also the basis of a week-long Certificate in Strategic Foresight course, a day-long Introduction to Foresight course and other training programs offered in organizations every year. Our students, clients, and professional colleagues suggest that this approach brings it all together. It integrates the best of what futurists around the world have been teaching in a common-sense and practical approach.

Teachers may not be able to teach everything in this book. It could be a textbook for an introductory course in foresight, which would be fine. But more importantly, it contains ideas and approaches that could be incorporated in history, social science, science, and even mathematics courses. Teaching about the future is not a big mystery. People use foresight every day. Why not explicitly teach students to use their natural human instinct to anticipate, plan, and influence their own future and the future of their organizations and communities. What greater mission could we as teachers have than to *really* prepare students for the future!

Purpose

This work is a conceptual description of the field as developed and taught by the University of Houston's Graduate Program in Futures Studies. It is the basis of our curriculum, which has adapted and evolved over the last 37 years in response to new developments in the field and changes in the marketplace for foresight. A consistent theme over this time, among the foresight community in general and foresight educators in particular, has been the need for a consistent and comprehensive description of the field – for someone to bring it all together. This is our attempt at doing so. And our hope is that others will adopt this description as a basis for a standard curriculum. We have shared it with several other programs over the years in that hope. This publication will help us to reach a much wider audience. We will be happy even if we are just able to nudge the field in a common direction.

A secondary purpose of the book is to support the training that the program has been doing in addition to the Master's Degree program. We have supplemented the Master's program with a range of other offerings: extension courses, a week-long Certificate course, a day-long Introduction to Foresight course, a Futurizing Your Teaching Practice course for teachers, and a Futures Summer Camp for students. Our participants will benefit from a big-picture yet detailed overview of the field.

A third purpose is to give secondary and college teachers an approach to futures that they can use in their classes. The book will be more conceptual, but they should be able to read it through, or at least select chapters so they might use some of the ideas in their classes.

Finally, the book could, in the future, be adopted as a text in a college introductory course. It will certainly be used in our Introduction to Foresight course.

Acknowledgements

No great thing is created by one person alone or in any short period of time. And the Graduate Program in Futures Studies at the University of Houston is no exception. Today's curriculum has been inspired by and drawn upon the collective wisdom of its superb faculty over the years: Jib Fowles, Chris Dede, Jim Bowman, Fred Kierstead, Jim Coomer, Wendy Schultz and Chris Jones, and the current faculty including Terry Grim, Draper Kaufman, and Cindy-Frewen-Wellner.

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Also, thanks to our many professional colleagues who have helped the program over the years in many different ways, whether visiting for a lecture, offering an internship or job to a student, and the like.

Finally, and perhaps most important, thanks to the students and alumni who have each left their mark on the program in some important way – without you, none of this happens.