

Teaching about the Future

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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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Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	xii
<i>List of Figures</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Purpose</i>	xviii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xix
Introduction	1
Introducing the Future	1
Why teach the future?	2
The problem of prediction	3
The future(s)	5
Be prepared	7
Imagine the future	9
Create the future	11
The Tricks of Foresight	11
Telling stories	11
Pursuing visions	12
The benefits of foresight	12
Structure of the Book	14
Part I Understanding	17
1 Models of Change	19
Introduction	19
Understanding Change	20
What is change?	21
How much change is there?	21
The four dimensions of change	22
A model of change: Punctuated equilibrium	34
Alternative Futures	39
“What can we know about the future?”	39
(Not) predicting the future	40
Certainty	45
Assumptions	47
Types of futures: The cone of plausibility	49

Futures Methods	52
Some definitions around methods	53
Thinking about the Future framework	54
Conclusion	60
Resources	60
2 Systems Thinking	63
Introduction	63
History	64
Generalization	66
System behaviors	70
Approach	73
Cybernetic systems	74
Complex adaptive systems	81
Conclusion	90
Resources	91
3 Perspectives on the Future	97
Introduction	97
History	98
Empirical and cultural	98
Critical	100
Integral	100
Generalization	101
Approach	102
Causal Layered Analysis	102
Integral Futures	105
Conclusion	108
Resources	109
4 Social Change	112
Introduction	112
History	112
Generalization	114
Explaining social change	114
Critical assumptions	117
Approach	119
Conclusion	148
Resources	151
Part II Mapping	157
5 Research	159
Introduction	159

History	160
Generalization	161
Choosing a domain	161
Primary research	162
Secondary research	164
Approach	165
Research supports framework forecasting	165
Conclusion	173
Resources	173
6 Scanning	176
Introduction	176
History	178
Generalization	180
Why scanning is difficult	180
Approach	181
Identify scanning hits	182
Operate at different levels of the domain	184
Keep an eye on wildcards	186
Keep track of your hits	187
Distinguish types of scanning hits	188
Establish criteria for evaluating scanning hits	189
Conclusion	190
Resources	191
7 Forecasting	194
Introduction	194
History	195
Generalization	196
Forecasting theory	198
Approach: Framework Forecasting	201
2. Summary	202
4. Era analysis	203
5. Baseline forecasting	203
Critical thinking	207
6. Baseline analysis	210
Creativity	211
7. Alternative futures forecasting	214
8. Scenario kernels	219
Conclusion	220
Resources	221

Part III Influencing	223
8 Leadership	225
Introduction	225
History	225
Era 1. Traits	226
Era 2. Situation	226
Era 3. Effectiveness	226
Era 4. Contingency	227
Era 5. Shared leadership	227
Era 6. Managers and Leaders	227
Generalization	228
Leadership distinctions	230
Approach	231
Leading people into new territory	232
Exploring boundaries of the possible	232
Committing to goals they do not know how to achieve	232
Building bridges when they know only one side of the river	233
Motivating people to do what they don't want to do	233
Conclusion	233
Resources	234
9 Visioning	236
Introduction	236
History	237
Generalization	239
Attributes of a vision	239
Vision statements	241
Approach	242
Values	242
Background	243
Conclusion	248
Resources	250
10 Planning	252
Introduction	252
History	253
Generalization	254
Approach	255
1. Planning to plan	257
2. Understanding the future	258
3. Setting the direction	261
4. Developing the plan	263

Conclusion	266
Resources	266
11 Change Management	269
Introduction	269
History	269
Generalization	271
Approach	274
1. Have a good reason	274
2. Be honest about the process	275
3. Articulate a vision	277
4. Commit to achieve the vision	277
5. Communicate!	277
6. Generate trust	278
Conclusion	280
Resources	280
Appendices	282
Appendix 1. Framework forecasting specification	282
Appendix 2. World Futures	286
Appendix 3. Scanning form and explanation	288
Appendix 4. Strategic Planning and Change Management	291
<i>Bibliography</i>	294
<i>Index</i>	299

List of Tables

P.1	History of the Houston Futures program	xvi
I.1	Benefits of foresight	13
1.1	Types of futures	51
1.2	Thinking about the Future approach and methods	56
2.1	Systems definitions	66
2.2	Cybernetic and complex systems	88
3.1	Using CLA to analyze boomer retirement	104
3.2	Phases of Integral Futures	108
4.1	Critical assumptions supporting theories of social change	148
5.1	Taxonomy of judgmental data-gathering techniques	163
5.2	Sample interview plan	164
5.3	Clark's research strategy	166
5.4	Research aspects of framework forecasting	167
5.5	PC era vs. Internet era	171
6.1	Diffusion of ideas	183
6.2	Three levels of scanning	184
6.3	Types of scanning hits	188
6.4	Criteria for evaluating scanning hits	189
7.1	IDEA framework for creative problem-solving	213
7.2	Scenario (alternative futures) techniques	215
9.1	Four types of values	243
9.2	Five stages of developing visions	245
10.1	Steps in strategic planning	256
10.2	Dimensions of an initiative	265
11.1	Eight reasons for organizational change	276
A.1	Framework forecasting specification	282
A.2	Goal hierarchy	293

List of Figures

1.1	Plausible options increase in the future	6
1.2	Shifting the cone	9
1.1	Sources of change...as covered in text	23
1.2	Levels of change	26
1.3	Linear change	30
1.4	Exponential change	31
1.5	Asymptotic change	32
1.6	Cyclic change	32
1.7	S-curve	33
1.8	Punctuated equilibrium	34
1.9	Transitions between eras	35
1.10	Successive eras	37
1.11	Four types of futures	42
1.12	Language of plausibility	43
1.13	Cone of plausibility	50
1.14	Thinking about the Future framework	55
2.1	Understanding system behavior	68
2.2	Attacking the deficit	72
2.3	Reinforcing (positive feedback) loop	78
2.4	Balancing (negative feedback) loop	78
2.5	Stock-flow model	79
2.6	Modeling population increase	80
2.7	Three types of systems	85
2.8	Four types of systems	87
3.1	Five levels of the curriculum	98
3.2	The layers of Causal Layered Analysis	102
3.3	Wilber's four quadrant model	106
4.1	Critical assumptions	149

6.1	Scanning hit form	182
6.2	Porter's five forces	185
6.3	STEEP	186
6.4	Molitor's emerging issue curve	187
7.1	Framework forecasting	203
7.2	Futures wheel	207
9.1	Vision statements	237
9.2	Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future	249
10.1	Steps in strategic planning	257
10.2	Levels of change	259
10.3	The organization model	260
10.4	Greater impact?	262
10.5	Goal hierarchy	263
11.1	Roger's innovation diffusion curve	270
A.1	Scanning form	288

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 <i>Thinking about the Future</i>
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.