

FORESIGHT

FORESIGHT: A DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD.....

By Joe Murphy



The task of the futurist is to inform decisions by critically studying the future, comparable to how historiographers examine and synthesize the past. Foresight is a science and an art but it is not clairvoyance.

I am a futurist finishing a Master of Science degree in Foresight through the University of Houston.

In this description of strategic foresight practice, the field of professional futurists, I submit its value proposition of research and creative thinking about what lies ahead to the wider test of your input.

Strategic Foresight is not a grandiose appellation for futurists designing for the gap between the present state and the optimal future. Futurists do not make predictions (yes or no judgments on discrete occurrences) or see visions. Be wary of futurists claiming the future is declaratively X or Y. Seek out professional futurists who ask questions with you to co-create diverse paths. Like academics who offer the most value by helping refine and navigate the problem, futurists provide frameworks to guide through the investigation and the design of prospective futures.

I share common concerns about attention-seeking celebrity and “crackpot” futurists and I believe that the work of a futurist should be more gadfly than glittery. My philosophy of foresight is rooted in asking questions. “What if,” “why not,” and “how might” launch investigations, some may say interrogations, into future directions. We ask to challenge assumptions and seek unseen connections. The outcome of our futures work should be a mindset of questioning more than a set of predictions.

Futurists assist describing the futures which reflect our values, our destination myths. The work of futurists to understand the future could not happen without historians’

critical hindsight, theories and patterns of change. History is one-third of Foresight. The rest of the story is what futurists do.

What Futurists Do

Professional futurists stand apart from others plying quantitative and qualitative forecasts. We explore alternative futures springing from breaks in trends, design preferred futures, and adapt strategy. When chaos shocks statistical models, futurists divergently ask; “what could cause the trajectory to change and in what directions, “Whose actions could alter drivers in the web of implications?” With the power of narrative, professional futurists employ visioning and ideation alongside subject experts to craft stories of possible, plausible, and probable scenarios that get around our biases in and of the present.

The chaotic future is not predictable, but armed with systems thinking we do not shy away from investigating the structure and behavior of complex futures. We scientifically subject data points and theoretical frameworks to testing.

The major output of Foresight is creative thinking, overlapping academia in this sense of learning how to explore relevant pasts, fashion critical insight about surrounding environments, and providing new contributions. Other outputs include preparing for disruptions, filling the next user needs, decreasing uncertainty, efficiency in getting to failure faster, and effectiveness in projects’ long-term promise.

Healthy futures require skepticism. Futurists are required to explain how we increase confidence, contribute results, improve judgment, and how the strategies we inform are more closely aligned with emerging landscapes. Ask professional futurists why and how and expect analytical methods. If futurists can increase our ability to strategize creatively and systematically than a disregard for their work is an easy trap to avoid.

(Continued on next page)

FORESIGHT: A DESCRIPTION

(Continued from previous page)

Foresight +

My path to Strategic Foresight included study of physics and business as well as experience in librarianship and technology. Every professional futurist brings their own diverse experience to foresight training: I know futurists who hail from design, military, finance, energy, and insurance. Before studying Foresight, I was a Science Librarian at Yale University. Much of my work involved serving the past and preparing for the future's opportunities and complications, so I now apply librarian expertise in "the ask" to craft critical questions about joint futures. Much of librarians' value is in convergent synthesis of data, application of information, and translation of information into knowledge. I am a data-driven futurist by training and empathize with our future through literature as artifacts of our cultures.

I am also completing an Executive MBA program and am as grounded by day-to-day operational needs as I am stretched by long-term considerations. Yet, rather than tempering, this MBA has multiplied my ability to prototype and frame constraints to bridge present states with goals. The foresight management confluence provides an economic basis of futurists' contribution of closing gaps in organizational success and future readiness of projects.

A bachelor's degree in Physics similarly grounds while expanding my competencies as a futurist. Science provides STEM frameworks for problem solving, studying change and deep causes, and the structure of reality alongside a creativity-extending sense of wonderment.

These anchors; scientist, manager, librarian, along with formal training ensure that my work as a futurist is accountable to evidence, that my divergent multiple futures are answered with convergent analysis. I use data to make projections and know when imagination needs to be

inserted as well as systems dynamics, design thinking, and challenging our biases. With critical insight, I define limits and know when the past ceases to be a good indicator of the future. I apply my ethos to consider the stakeholders of the future and the future for all stakeholders in all contexts.

Synthesis

The Masters of Science degree in Foresight worth of techniques puts to ease fears of madness without methods. I worry that we professional futurists have not communicated well enough the value of researching the future. Futurists impute critical analysis yet are judged by outcomes of prediction fail rates instead of contributing ways of thinking.

As with history and science, the future is never a perfectly complete story. Futuring is iterative as we adjust our understanding. We can each think like futurists by challenging assumptions and our preconceptions of the future.

We cannot afford a lack of tactics for addressing the future. If you are less than fully convinced that this outlined practice of foresight provides value to your work be it as a futurist or other, please do share your critique and additions so that we may continue to refine and grow.

Joe Murphy, foresight student and former Librarian.
Libraryfuture@gmail.com

EMBA, San Francisco State University, Summer 2017.

Masters of Science in Foresight, University of Houston, Summer 2017.

Masters of Library & Information Science, University of Hawaii 2006

FORESIGHT

FORESIGHT STUDENT BES BALDWIN TO INTERN AT EVONIK CREAVIS

By Andy Hines

Foresight student, Bes Baldwin, will be doing an internship this summer and fall at Evonik Creavis in the Corporate Foresight group in Marl, Germany. Evonik is a globally-active chemical company, with their Foresight team centralized in Germany. Creavis is the strategic innovation unit of Evonik, focusing on mid to long-term innovation.

There are five full-time staff on the Foresight team with different backgrounds, including one, Björn Theis, who teaches in the Master's degree Foresight program at Freie Universität Berlin. The Foresight team is supported by "Foresight Partners" from other units of the company.

These people support the Foresight Team on projects in innovation foresight (i.e. - identification of potential new products) and strategic foresight (e.g. - scenario analyses).

We are very pleased for Bes and it is great to develop a relationship with Evonik Creavis for the Foresight program. We'll look forward to Bes' report when she gets back.



Bes Baldwin

REFLECTING ON FUTURISTS IN MEDIA 2016

By Andy Hines

As futurists, we learn to be patient and take the long view. So, when something catches our attention, we catch our breath and compose, because the 4th quarter tracking results of Futurists in Media reported 106 relevant hits, compared to 24 in the 4th quarter of 2015, which is a 341% increase, if my math is right. Again, let's not get carried away with a single data point. But, is there a potential uptick of coverage of futurists in the media? Not enough data to say yet, but we'll keep our eye on it. A few other observations from the last year...

In terms of who's getting covered, most of the coverage is still related to press releases or articles about upcoming keynotes by futurists. Futurist speaker Jack Uldrich, in particular, continues to generate coverage, but there are many other keynotes being mentioned. Interestingly, organizational futurists continue to gain a lot of coverage. Ray Kurzweil of Google and Sheryl Connelly of Ford are by far the most prominently mentioned. (Of course, Kurzweil



made his name well before Google.)

It is interesting, but perhaps not totally surprising, that relatively few Association of Professional Futurists (APF) members were mentioned. Doing project work is not likely to generate news headlines. APF member mentions were about the same as a category that

we call "accidental" futurists, that is, when someone who does not identify as a futurist is called one by the writer/publisher of the story.

(Continued on next page)

REFLECTING ON FUTURISTS

(Continued from previous page)

The most heartening news...the coverage is overwhelmingly neutral to positive, which anecdotally speaking is a nice improvement. A little dust-up with the passing of Alvin Toffler, triggering the predictable “futurism is dead” story that seems to accompany the passing of famous futurists. And, we even had a story about fewer

sightings of futurists in “square quotes.” Of the 282 relevant hits last year, fewer than eight were judged to be negative, and only half of those were deliberately hostile towards futurists. Historically, there were far more negative and hostile stories.

We’ll keep tracking. Not quite enough data yet to make substantial conclusions, but starting to see some interesting developments.

CONGRATS TO FALL 2016 GRADUATES

By Andy Hines

Congratulations to our fall 2016 graduates: **Gandhi Bhakthavachalam, Maria Romero, and Johann Schutte**. I miss them, but am happy to see them moving forward!

Gandhi has an amazing array of talents and interests beyond the future, including being a professional tennis player. Nonetheless, he went through the program full-time and did outstanding in all of his classes – a true master of time management! His Master’s project mapped out an alternative economic system.

Maria also went through the program full-time, which made it seem far too quick. She jumped right in as my graduate assistant and was always an eager participant in extracurricular activities, working on projects for

the Forest Service, Herman Trend Alert, Student Needs 2025+, and Aperio Insights. She also used her graphic skills to redesign our Framework Foresight cone and our scanning process, as well as updating our system for reaching out to prospects, students, and alumni.

Johann started out in the program from South Africa, taking one class at a time. But, he decided that it was taking too long and moved to Houston to take courses full-time. He was also a GA and participated in the Forest Service and Student Needs 2025+, as well as doing internships with UNESCO and UCB, a global biopharma company.

We look forward to continuing our journey together, as professional colleagues now! We hope, no, make that expect, that each will stay involved with the foresight community as they take their next steps!



Gandhi Bhakthavachalam



Maria Romero



Johann Schutte

HINES GRADUATES FROM COUGAR CHAIRS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY.....

By Matt Oltremari

Dr. Andy Hines, assistant professor and program coordinator for the Foresight program in the department of human development and consumer sciences (HDCS), recently graduated from the Cougar Chairs Leadership Academy (CCLA) and sat down with us to discuss his experience with the program.

Q: You recently graduated from the Cougar Chairs Leadership Academy. Can you explain a little about what that program is all about?

A: The CCLA is a year-long program that provides leadership training for UH faculty. It is an important initiative of Provost Short, who is very passionate about the need to cultivate and develop leadership at UH. There were about two-dozen other faculty in my cohort, drawn from programs all across the university. While the leadership lessons can be applied broadly, the specific purpose, as the title suggests, is to groom faculty for future positions as Department Chairs....or perhaps beyond.

Q: What prompted you to participate in this program?

A: The program was brought to my attention by HDCS Department Chair, Marcy Norwood, who is a champion for our professional development.

She had gone through the program and highly recommended it. As I considered whether to participate, I realized that even though I had been in leadership and taught leadership, I had very little formal leadership training myself. So, I decided to take advantage of the opportunity.

Q: What kind of time commitment was involved?

A: We met about once a month for day-long workshops on various aspects of leadership. The commitment, however, is not to be taken lightly. There are no excused absences. Thus, we always had perfect attendance, which really promoted a sense of community among participants.

Q: How will you be able to apply what you learned in the Cougar Chairs Leadership Academy in the future?

A: I was pleasantly surprised at how good the program was. I mean, we're all busy and committing a Friday every month is kind of a big deal. In hindsight, I am really glad I did it. I learned a tremendous amount about being an effective leader. Even in areas where I had some previous knowledge or experience, I found useful perspectives. And, I should add the instructor, Dr. Idahlynn Karre, is a gem. Everyone loved her! I am already applying what I learned in my role as program coordinator.

The year-long CCLA is "dedicated to developing a network of problem solvers in all UH departments who will work together to produce and sustain high quality programs through the leadership of Faculty." Since beginning in 2014, each of the three CCLA cohorts have included approximately 30 participants. HDCS has been well-represented with four faculty members now having completed the program – Dr. Andy Hines, Dr. Holly Hutchins, Dr. Marcella Norwood, and Dr. Consuelo Waight.



Dr. Andy Hines

FORESIGHT SPRING GATHERING - 2017

By Andy Hines

The annual Foresight Spring Gathering was held over the weekend of April 21-22 and was a blast! It was a terrific way for students, faculty, alumni and friends to get together, network, socialize, and learn.

On Friday night, a dinner was held at our old favorite, Goode's Taqueria... great tacos and margaritas. Then, the party moved on to Axelrad's Beer Garden, suggesting that we futurists are tapped into the scene – a big crowd, live bands, hammocks, fire breathing – a little bit of everything!

We regrouped on Saturday at the UH Cameron Building for a day of "Good Futures Work." The morning featured a demonstration/exercise on "Working with Systems Scenarios" by Christian Crews of Kalypso Foresight. Christian first developed this technique with fellow alum Sandy Burchsted, when he was a student in the program. He has been refining it with alum Laura Schlehuber at Kalypso. Small groups picked a topic and worked through the various steps, including developing third order impacts and looking at how the various impacts influenced one

another. It was great to experience this technique firsthand – many of us had heard about it, but not tried it out.

After lunch, our sponsor at the US Forest Service, Dave Bengston, led the group through an Implications Wheel exercise. Before the gathering, Dave chose a topic from our current scanning and scenario project, got some input, and the participants generated implications at the workshop that we hope to use in the project.

The remainder of the afternoon featured a series of 15-minute sessions of tools, projects, and cases:

- Eric Kingsbury described the Foresight Game concepts for youth in Tajikistan that he and fellow students, Mina McBride and Daniel Riveong, recently presented to UNICEF.
- Professor Emeritus, Oliver Markley, shared some insight from his ongoing work on "Intuition in Foresight" for which he was recognized by the APF Most Significant Futures Work program.
- Student, Mark Sackler, described his experience in putting together an awesome series of futures podcasts on his Seeking Delphi site.

- Alum, Sean Daken, shared his experience on "Foresight & Entrepreneurship", based on his experience in launching startups since he graduated from the program.

- Bo Roe, a student and member of the Forest project team, shared his experience in developing a custom approach to scanning source identification for the forest scanning team.

- Alum, Lee Shupp, teaching at the CCA program, shared some cool project work that a team of his students put together this spring.

- Katherine Prince and Jason Swanson, Certificate and Master's alums respectively, talked about how they have adapted the Framework Foresight approach in their project work at Knowledge Works.

- Finally, Dr. Peter Bishop of Teach the Future, shared a new technique he is developing for combining uncertainties into a manageable number of scenarios.

After a stimulating day, we capped off the weekend with a pool party. One of these years, someone will actually go in the pool! The challenge has been issued!

