

FORE 6397-1: Selected Topics in Foresight (a.k.a. Gaming Futures)

Summer 2022

Instructor: John A. Sweeney

Time: Monday, 5:30-8:30pm CST

Location: [Zoom](#)

Contact: jasweeney@uh.edu; @aloha_futures (Telegram)

Office Hours: By appointment

Prerequisites: None (although a healthy love of games doesn't hurt!)

"Games are the closest we can come to actually doing politics repeatedly, and to pre-experiencing alternative futures so as to have a wider understanding of what might be viable preferred futures. That is to say, games are to the social sciences what laboratory experiments are to the natural sciences."

– Jim Dator

"Games require uncertainty to hold our interest, and that the struggle to master uncertainty is central to the appeal of games."

– Greg Costikyan

Overview

In recent years, games and simulations have become mainstreamed, if not increasingly popular, approaches within futures and foresight. While there is a long history of using such tools within the broader field, a new generation of practitioners, organizations, and platforms are not only fostering a renaissance but, as it were, are also mutating more traditional methods. From the *Sarkar Game* to *The Thing from the Future* and the *Scenario Exploration System* to the *Polak Game*, there are no shortage of available platforms from which practitioners and researchers can leverage play as a means of engaging others to think (and feel) about the future(s). This course looks at both the theoretical and methodological basis for designing and developing futures and foresight games and simulations. Participation in this course necessitates active engagement and the timely completion of all assignments.

Learning Objectives

Students in this course will demonstrate a/the:

- + Comprehension of the historical usage of games and simulations within the futures and foresight field
- + Capability to design and develop a custom gaming platform
- + Competence in a range of gaming and simulation approaches

Required Texts

All readings (with the exception of the book for the review) will be made available through Blackboard. It is expected that everyone will have read all assigned readings before our meeting and, most importantly, prepared either questions and/or a short response to be shared during our class discussions and/or on Blackboard. A brief course bibliography has been included at the end of the syllabus.

Learning Journey

Many, if not most, questions related to the course flow and structure can be answered by the syllabus. Befriend it, but also feel free to ask any and all questions if things are unclear. Given the uncertainty of our present moment, we may shift the schedule as needed, so there may be some “emergence” to confront. Fear not, dear companions, we shall navigate this complexity through a spirit of abiding collegiality and insatiable sense of adventure. Game on!

- + **Individual Project** - Build a game! Using one of the templates (combinatorial;), each student will create a custom game/simulation focused on a particular futures issue area (e.g. climate change, U.S./China relations, etc.)
- + **Group Project** - During the first course, we will form teams for the group project, which will focus on a reflective review for the facilitation of an existing game/simulation (e.g. Sarkar Game, Scenario Exploration System, etc.). I will provide some framing questions for you to consider, and the aim of this project is to build your confidence in using a range of games and simulations. You will be provided with class time to complete this project.
- + **Discussion Postings** - You are expected to complete all readings (before class) as these will serve as the prerequisite for both in-class and online discussions. These postings will feature 1-2 articles that will create a bridge between the preceding and upcoming class sessions.
- + **Mechanisms Review** - Everyone will select 2-3 tabletop gaming mechanisms from Engelstein and Shalev’s *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design: An Encyclopedia of Mechanisms* to be presented during the final two weeks of the semester. In addition to presenting the mechanisms, you will need to find a real-world example where they are/were used. You may access the book [here](#).

Grading

Individual Project	55%
Group Project	15%
Discussion Postings	15%
Mechanisms Review	15%

Schedule (subject to change)

- Week 1 (June 6): Orientation; Introductions; Why we play?
- Week 2 (June 13): How to Play / Anticipatory Assumptions at Play: *The Polak Game*
- Week 3 (June 20): Layers of Analysis / Macro-history at Play: *CLA & Sarkar Game*
- Week 4 (June 27) : Experiential/Participatory Play: *Thing from the Future & Our Futures*
- Week 5 (July 4): Holiday
- Week 6 (July 11): Scenarios at Play: *Scenario Exploration System & UNDP’s ForesightXplorer*
- Week 7 (July 18): Presentations (Mechanisms Review)
- Week 8 (July 25): Presentations (Mechanisms Reviews)

Interaction

The course is conducted virtually on Zoom, and if you have any issues attending course sessions, please let me know as soon as possible. All class sessions will be recorded, so you can catch up as needed. All course materials are housed on Blackboard (www.uh.edu/blackboard), which always works like a charm and never has any issues...never, ever.

Academic honesty policy

All UH students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UH catalog. Plagiarism, using research without citations or using a created production (such as other people's words) without quotations or citations, will result in a grade penalty or failure of the course. Internet sources must be credited according to the sites recommended citation guideline if available. If no citation guideline is provided by the web source, then the date, URL site owner, and author must be included with the web material used.

Disabilities

If you have a disability and need a special accommodation consult first with the Coordinator of Health Disabilities Services, Bayou 1402, telephone 283-2627, and then discuss the accommodation with me.

Incomplete

A grade of "I" is given only in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that the student has been making satisfactory progress. An Incomplete Grade Contract must be completed.

Withdrawals

Last day to withdraw drop or with a "W" for Summer 2022 is July 19, 2022. Please confirm!