

**Restorying Futures
(FORE 6397)
College of Technology
Foresight
University of Houston**

Spring 2023 // Tuesdays 6:30-9:30pm ET

Course no. 6397 // Jun 6th–Jul 25th

Instructor: Adam Cowart // adcowart@uh.edu

Office hours: By appointment

Zoom Link for Virtual Classes:

<https://cmu.zoom.us/j/96941555500?pwd=WVRqOXVNeWM3OEwxamJYekRYNEU5QT09>

Class Resources: Canvas

Description

Welcome to Restorying Futures. Stories are our gateway to the future. They allow us to access temporal spaces OUTSIDE of the present - both pasts and futures. Stories we tell about the future are tied to memory and the past. The individual and collective act of patterning anternarrative (pre-narrative) bets on the future into emplotted anticipatory stories is as much an act of memory and retrieval as it is prospection and speculation. We must then be critical of the stories about the future that emerge through the invisible alchemical process Ricouer refers to as the "poetic ordering" of the narrative.

This course seeks to provide futurists, designers and social innovators with the tools to disrupt futures fixedness, to draw attention to where we as individuals, organizations, cultures and civilizations might be "stuck" in a story and, through a series of replicable prompts and protocols, upset the internal consistency and narrative coherence of the current story to imagine new possibilities in the future space.

Restorying Futures draws on futures and design thinking, narratology, historiography, systematic inventive thinking, and psychology and narrative therapy (among other disciplines) to provide practitioners with the critical and creative tools to reimagine the stories we tell about the future. Major topics will include storyworlds vs. stories and levels of abstraction, the systemicity of story - particularly speculative, storylistening, narrative retrieval.

Students will leave this course with a sophisticated set of methods and develop a deep and nuanced understanding of stories as ever-changing and ever-emerging technologies to imagine and learn from the future. This is no mere academic activity. By developing a storytelling dexterity NOW, you will gain a necessary skillset for formulating and reformulating stories in your career. Put simply, when you are busy and rushed and something just isn't working about the scenarios or story lines for futures conception with a client, you will have the capability to restory the focal future rapidly and iteratively. So this deep period of practice and reflection should manifest in a utilitarian competency down the road.

Approach

In this course, students will be pushing the boundaries of futures storytelling and engage in a deeply immersive practice centered around a series of in-class workshops, bookended by selective readings prior to class, and post-class cultivation of a futures storytelling praxis. Assignments include a weekly reflective memoing process, a praxis restoring experimental weekly assignment, a weekly submission on the individual restoring project, and a final portfolio of restored futures cultivated during the course.

Central to the approach of the course is to iterate again and again, applying suggested methods repeatedly to generate quantity overall quality. Quality comes later! In the individual project, students are asked to choose or develop an individual story about the future which might be their own or for someone else, along with a second story at a higher order of scale. This second story could be organizational, a distinct group, a culture, national, or even planetary or civilizational. These stories will be the site of restoring throughout the course. The weekly praxis assignments will apply the same types of techniques but on a “fresh” new story, typically crafted by you, chosen weekly to act as an experimental space.

Learning Outcomes

Overall this course aims to:

- (a) Provide a rich array of methods and methodologies from which to cultivate a futures oriented storytelling practice.
- (b) Develop an appreciation and literacy of futures storytelling that can be transferable across disciplines.
- (c) Enrich our understanding of story and narrative as a malleable technology.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and define storytelling theories and their relation to strategic foresight and futures
2. Understand the relationship between content, form, and emplotment in shaping prospective stories
3. Apply storytelling techniques to a range of future narratives in order to craft richer stories that afford vividness and valence
4. Critique the conception and telling of future narratives through the lens of storyteller and storylistener
5. Construct new future narratives through iterative application of storytelling techniques

Required Texts and Supplies

Readings will be provided electronically via Canvas.

Schedule and Workload Expectations

There are 7 classes in the summer mini course schedule, starting on June 6th and concluding on July 25th. Expect to spend around 10 hours per week including preparation for classes, reading, and assignment completion. There will be no group work beyond in-class workshops.

A Note on this Syllabus

This outline is a living document, reflecting an evolving process designed to respond to emerging constraints and affordances. Some elements may change as we go.

Course Overview

Below is an outline of the arc of the course and topics covered week by week.

6/6/23	1	Tuesday	Introduction + Storystyles
6/13/23	2	Tuesday	Wholes
6/20/23	3	Tuesday	Parts
6/27/23	4	Tuesday	Storysystems
7/4/23	NA	Tuesday	Independence Day - No Class
7/11/23	5	Tuesday	Durationality
7/18/23	6	Tuesday	Metamorphosis & Regeneration
7/25/23	7	Tuesday	Presentations

Schedule

Episode 1: Introduction & Storystyles | June 6th

Synopsis: In which we are introduced to the concept of futures restorying, gain clarity of expectations and deliverables, and dig into our own storying practices.

Episode 2: Wholes | June 13th

Synopsis: In which we explore the concept of wholeness in narrative form and emplotment, and apply wholeness prompts to our stories.

Episode 3: Parts | June 20th

Synopsis: In which we explore the concept of parts in narrative form and emplotment, and apply part prompts to our stories.

Episode 4: Storysystems | June 27th

Synopsis: In which we consider the next relationship of stories at different levels of scale, sensemaking of systems, and living storywebs and how to reimagine and restory.

Episode 5: Durationality | July 11th

Synopsis: In which we consider durationality and longer than average temporal trajectories, and the challenges of restorying these types of future narratives.

Episode 6: Metamorphosis and Regeneration | July 18th

Synopsis: In which we explore story fields, biomimicry, and archetypal expression of narrative form and various applications.

Episode 7: Presentations | July 25th

Synopsis: In which we share back our stories and findings.

Recommended Texts

If we had all the time in the world, here are a few relevant texts that won't really be covered in this class, but consider reading in the future. See Canvas.

Assessment

15% Weekly Reflective Memoing
15% Engagement and participation in class
15% Weekly Restorying Praxis Assignment
15% Weekly Restorying Assignment
40% Restorying Final Portfolio

Assessment Details

Weekly Reflective Memoing

Due Date: Weekly the Monday Following Class (Jun 12, Jun 19, Jun 26, Jul 3, Jul 17, Jul 24, Jul 31)

This individual assignment is due weekly. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure a regular cadence of reflective practice as part of the learning experience. Weekly submission should be at least one page, but can certainly be much longer. The weekly memoing reflection submission should not be just a single snapshot within the week, but at times a series of vignettes, responses, realizations, questions, etc, that culminate in a summation. The weekly reflective memoing should also respond to the Weekly Prompt Questions provided by the instructor. Criteria is based on the MEMO acronym.

Criteria	Description
Mapping	Comprehensive documentation of decision-making trail, including uncertainties and inspirations. Over the course of your memos both weekly and from week to week, a progression should be evident in thinking, comprehension, and application, along with any shifts in direction.
Extracting	Throughout this process, students should be extracting insights, patterns, and discontinuities in their process and frame them as meaningful qualitative data outputs. By doing this, students should be able to point to confirming and disconfirming data outputs in regards to their own emerging thinking.
Maintaining	A self-reflective practice includes the recognition and acknowledgement of context and changing conditions as the researcher (student) continues to evolve their thinking and body of work. Periods of “low” and “high” energy, inspiration and enthusiasm will inevitably emerge. Documenting this as part of the process supports the healthy maintenance of the research and helps provide continuity through periods of variation.
Opening	The fluidity of ideas is important to capture and communicate throughout a research-oriented process of exploration and discovery. Musing without foreclosure helps cultivate curiosity.
Learning Objectives	Consider the 5 learning objectives and if progress has been made in these areas as you dig into your futures storytelling practice.

Engagement and Participation in Class

This class will be highly interactive. Outlets for demonstrating participation include engaging in full class discussion, smaller group breakout discussions, active engagement in crits both on and offline, and posting and responding to Canvas discussions. The instructor will track examples of active engagement and participation.

Criteria	Description
Informed Class Contributions	Engagement in full-class and break out discussions that draw upon readings, previous discussions and exercises.
Ask Beautiful Questions	A beautiful question is one that is authentic and ideally opens up new areas of inquiry and curiosity. Curiosity is key. Often, the question we don't ask, the "stupid question" is the beautiful question.
Positive Energy	How you show up means a lot. This doesn't mean you necessarily have to be bouncing off the walls. And everyone has there ups and downs during the semester. What this means is simple: "The success of an intervention is dependent on the interior state of the intervenor" Your interior state will directly impact the success of this class.
Generosity	Building on the ideas of others, gently pushing for clarity when necessary, sharing thoughts and insights.

Weekly Restorying Praxis Assignments

Due Date: Weekly the Monday Following Class (Jun 12, Jun 19, Jun 26, Jul 3, Jul 17)

There are 5 praxis assignments due. Each of these assignments is related to an in-class activity. The purpose of these assignments is to apply the methods explored in class in your own storytelling practice in some way selecting using own future story created during class.

Criteria	Description
Depth of Exercise	The volume and variety showcase a rich series of iterative experimentations to produce numerous variations on the story.
Clear Presentation	Activity prompts, inputs and outputs, are clear and concisely organized. The beginning story, the iterations, and the final product are clearly organized.
Refinement	A clarified and refined final "version" of the

	future story and clear explanation as to how you arrived at that final version.
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Weekly Restorying Project Assignments

Due Date: Weekly the Monday Following Class (Jun 12, Jun 19, Jun 26, Jul 3, Jul 17)

There are 5 praxis assignments due. Each of these assignments is related to an in-class activity. The purpose of these assignments is to apply the methods explored in class to your two select future stories: one personal and one at a higher order of scale.

Criteria	Description
Depth of Activity	The volume and variety showcase a rich series of iterative experimentations to produce numerous variations on the story.
Clear Presentation	Activity prompts, inputs and outputs, are clear and concisely organized. The beginning story, the iterations, and the final product are clearly organized.
Refinement	A clarified and refined final “version” of the future story and clear explanation as to how you arrived at that final version.
Commentary	Commentary throughout allows for a “play by play” walkthrough of each iteration and how it contributed or didn’t contribute towards the progression of the story.

Restorying Final Project Portfolio

Due Date: July 31st

In the final class you will present a draft version of your final portfolio and lead a brief crit session with your fellow classmates including questions and concerns that you may have in order to make a final refinement of the portfolio. The portfolio should succinctly show your end-to-end process for your individual and collective story, from beginning narrative, through each of the “milestone” iterations, through to a final restoryed future, as well as commentary for each stage and evolution of the process (this commentary can and should be inspired and culled from your weekly reflective memoing, but also build upon the memoing in the sense of a reflective

commentary that encapsulates not just the in-process but the in-retrospect elements of process consideration).

Criteria	Description
Clear Throughline	Easy to follow from beginning narrative through to final product. Clarity includes the comprehensive and labeled iterations of what methods were employed, the challenges that came with each, and the summary output.
Aesthetic of Presentation	Whether a textual narrative, visual postcards, storyboarding, or other representations, the final portfolio should be of professional quality.
Conclusion and Lessons Learned	A final summation that includes what has been learned and possible next steps.

Re-submission

The larger group assignments will include several “crits” throughout the semester, to provide feedback, etc. While this does not constitute “re-submission” there will be regular deliverables for the group assignment and there will be opportunities to “course correct” where appropriate. For the weekly reflections, this is really for individuals to reflect on what they are encountering and experiencing in class. Honest reflections are critical. So re-submissions are allowed, but expectation is within the first few weeks, folks “get” the concept and re-submissions should really be necessary.

Lateness

If you submit an assignment late, you will only be eligible for 90% of your original grade. That is the only penalty, so even a very late assignment should absolutely be turned in – in other words, there is no good reason to not turn in every assignment. This will not only ensure you’ve spent the time reading, discussing, and reflecting, but will also ensure you have a rich repository of your evolving thoughts, feelings, and impressions at the end of course.

Class Requests Discussion Group Hygiene

This is a studio-style course. Much of our time together will be spent in breakout activities and discussions. Clarity of role and purpose supports collaborative environments. To that end, when we do breakout for discussions in particular, the following roles should be decided upon on an ad hoc and rotating basis:

- Discussion Leader (keeps the discussion moving forward)

- Recorder (documents discussion)
- Time Keeper (keeps deliverables on track)
- Reporter(s) (responsible for leading talk back from the group)

*Adapted from Don't Just Do Something, Stand There by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff

Community Agreements (adapted from AORTA)

Some guiding principles for class engagement can be helpful in providing a generative learning environment for all. Some considerations on how best to support your own, and each other's, learning journey:

- No One Knows Everything; Together We Know a Lot: This agreement asks that we all practice being humble, and look for what we have to learn from each person in the room. It asks us to share what we know, as well as our questions, so that others may learn from us.
- We Can't Be Articulate All the Time: We want everyone to feel comfortable participating, even if you don't feel you have the perfect words to express your thoughts.
- Move Up, Move Up: If you're someone who tends to not speak a lot, please move up into a role of speaking more. If you tend to speak a lot, please move up into a role of listening more.
- Embrace Curiosity: Allow space for play, curiosity, and creative thinking.
- Acknowledge the Difference Between Intent and Impact: The ask in this community agreement is that we each do the work to acknowledge that our intent and the impact of our actions are two different things, and to take responsibility for any negative impact we have. (This can be as simple as apologizing.)
- Be Aware of Time: Please arrive punctually and return on time from breaks, etc.

Interaction

The course is conducted online. All content, daily interactions, and assignments are housed on the Canvas website (canvas.uh.edu). Students should visit Canvas regularly to see the weekly topics, readings, posts, and what the assignments are. The instructor will also regularly use email communication to advise of any updates/changes, and respond to questions.

Housekeeping

Classes The UH futures program offers a unique blend of different modes of interaction for each course depending on the student's location and needs. The official course is conducted on the website Canvas but we will be using Zoom for the classroom experience.

But since one does not live by the internet alone, we also have personal modes of interaction. The one with the highest bandwidth is, of course, is attending virtual class on Monday evenings via Zoom. Those who cannot attend the class in either of these ways can also listen to a recording of the class and post any comments on the Archive Comments discussion board on the Home Page. The objective of the class time is to enhance and deepen the learning from each week's lesson through discussion and activities. Those who do attend report that they learn more when they do so.

We also record the class for students who have a regular conflict with class time (work or other responsibilities). Finally, the website itself has an easy-to-use discussion tool that allows people to post and reply to any of the material posted. Use it in addition to or instead of the other modes of interaction. Even if you can't read all the posts, you are encouraged to 1) respond to posts that are addressed to you and 2) routinely check for posts by the instructor.

Communication with the instructors can be 1) in class, 2) through slack, 3) through regular email (adcowart@uh.edu), 4) through Canvas, or 5) by Zoom.

DROPPING THE COURSE: The last day to drop the course without a grade is February 2, 2022.

Disabilities: Students who require individualized accommodations for this course must inform the professor in order that appropriate arrangements can be made. For information about services provided by The Center for Students with Disabilities, please call 713-743-5480.

Academic honesty policy: All students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UH catalog and the student Life Handbook for the University Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism, that is, using research without citations, or using a created production without crediting the source, 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, author must be included with the web material used.