

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
Strategic Foresight



Welcome to the Certificate in Strategic Foresight presented by the Futures Studies program at the University of Houston (UH). The UH Certificate in Strategic Foresight is offered twice annually on the campus of the University of Houston.

This document contains a synopsis of the modules in the curriculum, including the learning objectives for each module. Please contact Dr. Peter Bishop at pbishop@uh.edu or 281-433-4160 if you would like to learn more about the Certificate program.

Objectives

In this historical period of rapid change and surprising twists and turns, many enterprises are turning to the emerging discipline of Strategic Foresight to get a handle on how they might be successful in a changing future. The University of Houston has offered a Master's degree in Strategic Foresight for 35 years, and is now offering a summary of that curriculum as a week-long course leading to a Certificate in Strategic Foresight.

The overall objective of the course and the discipline as a whole is to anticipate unexpected change and to create preferred change in the world and in the enterprise. While the future is unpredictable, understanding the dynamics of change and the plausible ways in which the future could change is the beginning to becoming comfortable with and even eager to embrace the changes that are coming. It is not necessary to predict the future accurately to be successful. Rather one must simply be able to move quickly and accurately at the first signs of change. Secondly, the ability to move with the change, to rapidly counter threats or capitalize on opportunities, requires a compelling vision for the enterprise, a plan that moves in the direction of that vision, and a consistent, long-term campaign that implements the plan. So the Certificate in Strategic Foresight is fundamentally about anticipating changes in the world and creating change in the enterprise that will lead toward the preferred future.

MONDAY

Introduction

The Certificate curriculum is divided into three parts –

- ❖ **Monday** – an introduction to the UH approach to change and Strategic Foresight, including the two primary theoretical components of the field – systems thinking and theories of social change.
- ❖ **Tuesday-Wednesday** – the first of two major divisions of Strategic Foresight -- long-term forecasting of expected and plausible changes in the world, including the fundamentals of information gathering and scanning, trend extrapolation and scenario development. Wednesday afternoon is an optional work session to begin one of the two products required for the Certificate – an alternative futures forecast on a topic of the participant's choosing.

- ❖ **Thursday-Friday** – the second of the two major divisions of Strategic Foresight -- creating transformational change in the enterprise and in the world, including visioning and goal setting, strategic planning and change management. Friday afternoon is an optional work session to begin the second product required for the Certificate – a strategic plan for an enterprise of the participant’s choosing.

Change

The UH approach to Strategic Foresight categorizes change using four dimensions – its source, its level, its time horizon and its rate. These categories distinguish Strategic Foresight from other forecasting and planning activities. They also lay the foundation for an overall model of change called Punctuated Equilibrium that divides the past, present and future into coherent eras. The present is an era as well, but one that has not yet been named by future historians. It also carries the inertia of the previous era and the possibilities of the next. Understanding this dynamic is a necessary component to being successful in this and subsequent eras.

Systems Thinking

One of the characteristics of Strategic Foresight is the underlying connectivity of change. This module describes how futurists see change as the manifestation of the underlying system that generated it. It also covers the differences between traditional cybernetic systems and the newly emerging disciplines of complexity science and agent-based systems that support a more organic and less mechanical approach to change and organization.



Social Change

Understanding and influencing the future is fundamentally based on change in human systems – i.e., social change. Authors and intellectuals have pondered the nature of social change over the ages. This module reviews the most common theories of social change in historical and contemporary analysis in order to forecast different outcomes to current changes using different theories.

TUESDAY – WEDNESDAY

Framework Forecasting

The UH approach to forecasting sorts the information we gather about change into different categories, each with a different purpose –

- * **Set-up** – the definition of the domain to be forecast and the objectives of doing the forecast in the first place
- * **The past** – recent discontinuities that separate the previous and current eras in order to understand the difference between “that was then” and “this is now.”
- * **The present** – current conditions in the domain (demographic, environmental, technological, economic, political/legal, and cultural) and the stakeholders who have the influence to affect its future
- * **The expected future** – assumed constants, on-going trends, and stakeholders’ plans that, if realized, will create the most likely changes in the future
- * **Alternative futures** – trend reversals, unfulfilled plans, potential events, emerging issues and new ideas and proposals, any of which could create plausible alternative futures.



The Expected Future and its Implications

Most futurists spend little time on the expected or most likely future because they believe something else will happen instead. While something else will probably happen, the expected future is a good place to begin because the expected future is most familiar to clients

and audiences. What is more, the implications of even the expected future can hold surprising developments that deepen our understanding of the future.



Critical Thinking

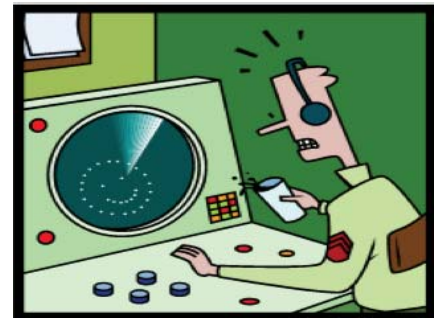
Critical thinking appears on every educator's list of learning objectives, but few actually teach it. In Strategic Foresight, critical thinking is the process of identifying the assumptions required for the expected future to occur and then challenging them to produce alternative futures. It rests on a specific process that analyzes the support for inferences, such as the forecast of the expected future, by identifying the evidence that supports the inference and the assumptions required by that evidence. Challenging those assumptions in plausible ways then generates material for alternative future forecasts.

Scenario Development

Alternative futures are the core of Strategic Foresight. This module describes the purpose of scenarios, the various methods used to generate them and the most compelling ways to present them.

Scanning

Using the radar analogy, scanning is the process of looking for the weak signals of change before they become apparent to everyone else. Change does not stop once the framework forecast is created. So scanning is a means of keeping the framework and one's awareness of change sharp and up to date in order to prevent being surprised in the future.



Work session (optional)

Some people might like to take a break after two and a half days of learning so we include an optional work session mid-week. The Certificate course requires a framework forecast of the participant's chosen domain for the full Certificate. This half-day session allows participants to apply what they have learned by beginning the work on that forecast in the presence of the instructor and other students.

THURSDAY – FRIDAY

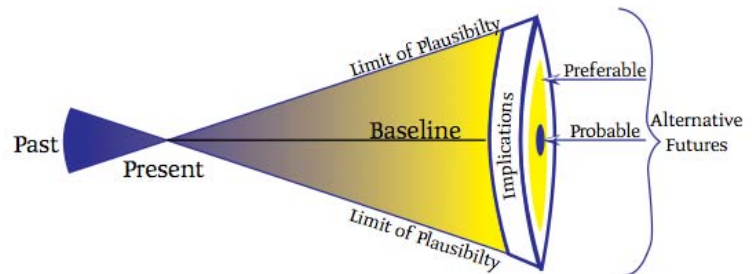
Leadership

Describing change (forecasting) involves the macro forces of the world and the actions of its most influential stakeholders. Creating change, on the other hand, always begins with people, people we refer to as leaders. Leaders are not necessarily those in charge. Rather they are the visionaries who seriously advocate creating a new era and enroll others in the campaign to create that era.



Strategic Planning

Proposing a visionary future is one thing; bringing it about is something else. Movement towards the visionary future begins with a strategic plan, which is actually not a plan at all, but rather an agreement on the destination to be achieved and the most effective means for achieving it, including the commitment of all involved to do their part to achieve the visionary future.



The Future is many not one

Change Management

But even the plan itself is not enough. The plan must be implemented, sometimes with considerable difficulty and against considerable resistance. Like the subject of leadership, much has been said and written about the process of creating change. This module reviews the various strategies proposed and provides the participants the opportunity to select those strategies which seem most appropriate for their enterprise and domain.

Summary

The Foresight Maturity Model, developed by Terry Grim, a UH futures graduate, is a rubric used to assess how well an enterprise practices the various skills of strategic foresight—i.e., its maturity. We use the Model to review these practices and discuss how they might be implemented in one's own professional practice and/or enterprise.

Work session (optional)

The course concludes with another optional work session, this one devoted to preparing a strategic plan for the participant's enterprise. Instructors and other students will assist participants in getting started on this all-important assignment.

All sessions are held in small, lecture-discussion groups. Small group exercises are interspersed throughout the course to investigate the topics more thoroughly and apply the techniques learned more skillfully. Evening activities are also available to round out the week as a complete immersion experience in Strategic Foresight.

Contact Dr. Peter Bishop (pbishop@uh.edu) or Philippe Destatte (destatte.philippe@institut-destree.eu) for program information

Contact Hilde Calet (calet.hilde@institut-destree.eu) for registration and logistics.