

Taking the Future to the Community

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Abstract

How do you introduce and expand futures education at a community college? This article discusses IF@AACC which was established at Anne Arundel Community College in 2003 to promote futures thinking and the art of foresight. The Institute has recruited and deployed an inter-disciplinary faculty team and participants from the community to develop and support several futures programs. Included are academic courses in Exploring the Future and Globalization and its Future, professional education for faculty and staff and for secondary school teachers. The Institute works with 3rd – 5th graders but has also conducted training workshops for the National Intelligence Community.

Introduction

"As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it." (Saint-Exupery). To enable the future requires the transmission of forethought to each individual. The Institute for the Future at Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, Maryland USA (IF@AACC, www.aacc.edu/future) was created to take a step in that direction. Founded in 2003, IF @ AACC seeks to promote future thinking, foster innovation, engage learners in the art of foresight and act as a catalyst for creativity. The Institute provides foresight education and training for college students, college faculty and staff as well as local community members. Consistent with the college's strategic goal of meeting the needs of a diverse and global community, IF @ AACC provides a community focal point for futures thinking.

Multiple Audiences, Multiple Paths

Foresight education takes separate paths - each appropriate to its target audience. This article addresses each path in the context of the IF@AACC model. IF@AACC was formed by a group of interested faculty, staff and community partners. In 2003, there were no templates to copy. The idea of an institute for the future at a two- year college in the United States was unique.

IF@AACC offers two academic courses in the classroom and online and anticipates the need for eight to ten sections by the 2010/2011 academic year. Two additional courses are currently being developed for introduction in 2010/2011. The institute offers faculty and staff numerous professional development seminars and futures applications classes. These range from personal planning to how to incorporate future studies into the classroom. Off campus futures training includes several community groups, secondary school teachers, a local elementary school, other colleges and the United States Intelligence Community.

Established Academic Courses

FTR 100 – exploring the future

The first priority was to develop an academic course in basic futures studies. Futures education is a new academic field and there are no text books or standardized syllabi available to use in course development. The simple solution was to ask the most experienced futurist in the group to go out and design a course but IF@AACC adopted a different approach.

IF@AACC formed a cross disciplinary team to design an introductory futures course. The team included faculty from sociology, accounting, business management, computer science, languages, chemistry, biology, environmental science, administration and the community. The team worked for 18 months to develop the first course.

- The team's first task was to bring everyone up to speed on futures studies through reading, discussion and lectures. This education process consumed more than year.
- Once the team felt comfortable with the subject, it initiated a search for a textbook. No true text existed. The team decided that Bernard Cornish's *Futuring – The Exploration of the Future* (2004) would work as a basic text if it were supplemented with a workbook.
- The team, led by two faculty members, developed a workbook that provided focus and exercises to help students master the material from Cornish's book. The workbook was Loukides & Gardner's *Building the Future* (2006) published by the World Future Society and is now available to the general public.
- The next step was developing a curriculum. Several members of the team developed individual, complete syllabi for the course. The syllabi were presented to the team for comment and discussion.
- The teachers who were initially assigned to teach the course developed an online and face-to-face syllabus for their classes based on the team's work and their own expertise.
- The course is named FTR 100 – Exploring the Future. It is a regular 3 credit, entry level course that meets the school's general education and diversity requirements. Both requirements must be met for graduation. The course is accepted for transfer credit throughout the Maryland University system.

The class started in the fall of 2005. Annually, a curriculum committee reviews and discusses progress in the classroom. Student feedback is also reviewed. Based on these discussions and feedback, several experiments were performed with varying results.

- Students found team teaching with a cross disciplinary team to be interesting but confusing and the concept was dropped.
- Building on the positive aspects of the team approach, guest speakers provided new perspectives and introduced specialized subjects. For example, a teacher with a technology background introduced the *SimCity* program. Now, in the online and face-to-face classes, guest appearances enrich the learning experience.
- Initially, the final course assessment was based on an essay aimed at giving students the opportunity to demonstrate how well they had mastered the material. This proved to be less indicative of learning that had been hoped. A traditional final exam now supplements the essay.
- Service learning was adapted for use in the course with excellent acceptance by the students and good results. The practical nature of this engaged learning program gives the students a sense of understanding and accomplishment.
- Videos in the face-to-face and the online courses provide interest and the value of well produced, real life material.
- Seven different teachers have taught the course. They have incorporated ideas for improvement and act as a sounding board for the current faculty.

Enrollment in FTR 100 was initially low. However, the course gained traction quickly and by 2009 included six sections of about 20 students each. IF@AACC plans to cross list the course with Business and Sociology. These departments have agreed that futures studies is a subject that can help meet their requirements for several areas of study. We expect the cross listing of FTR 100 to add significantly to student enrollment in the course.

Today the syllabus includes:

- The basic "text" for the course is *Futuring – The Exploration of the Future* supported the *Building the Future* workbook. These works are supported by Daniel H. Pink's *A Whole New Mind : Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (2005) and Marvin J. Cetron and Owen Davies' *55 Trends Shaping Tomorrow's World* (2008).
- The course is based on discussion of the reading material and on exercises drawn from the workbook and *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* There are guest speakers and several supplemental enhancements. These include the use of a statistical analysis package to explore data and trends, the use of the computer program *SymCity* and videos of lectures focused on futures issues.
- FTR 100 is divided into three major topics:
 - Perspectives on the Future and Diverse Factors that Shape Future Views
 - Investigations of Multiple Futures: Driving Forces
 - Responsibly Constructing the Future

- The course also has a section devoted to the student planning her/his own life with the help of Vern Wheelright's *Personal Futures Workbook* (2007) which is distributed at no cost by the author.

FTR 110- globalization and its future

Once FTR 100 was up and running, the Futures Team agreed to turn its attention to developing additional futures courses. An advanced futures course building on FTR 100 made sense. However, FTR 100 was in its infancy. The team believed that it needed time to learn how to teach the first futures course before designing a new follow on course. The decision was made to go in another direction rather than wait for the experience with FTR 100 to build,

Careful analysis and brainstorming suggested that globalization would be a major driver of events and change in our students' futures. The Team developed a course in globalization with an emphasis on where it is going in the future. The development of this course occurred over a year and took shape as follows.

- A literature search determined that there is an extensive body of material available. However, virtually all of it constitutes well written arguments for and against the various aspects of globalization such as economic, political, ideological, cultural and ethical globalization. There is little written about the process of globalization – perhaps because the people who choose to address the subjects are experts in their field.
- Our students need structure and a basic understanding of the globalization process. Manfred B. Steger's *Globalization – A Very Short Introduction* (2003) was selected to act as a basic guide and provide this understanding. This book is supplemented by selected videos ranging from presentations by speakers like Thomas Friedman to scenes from successful Bollywood movies. Lectures and notes were developed to fill in the information that the faculty believed was missing from book and the supplementary material.
- Once the basic framework is introduced the students are exposed to arguments and counter arguments via two anthologies of selected articles and excerpts. These are, Frank J. Lechner and John Boli's *The Globalization Reader* (2008) and Louise I. Gerdes' *Globalization – Opposing Points of View* (2006).
- The futures element is introduced through readings from *Futuring - The Exploration of the Future*. The exercises focus on basic futuring tools and hands-on exercises.
- The course is organized into seven modules: Introduction to globalization, futures studies, cultural globalization, economic globalization, political globalization, ideological globalization and a summary module.
- Each module (except the freestanding, futures module) is introduced with a reading in the Steger book and a lecture supported by supplemental material. This is followed by classes devoted to discussion of the relevant issues based on the readings in the *Globalization Reader and Globalization – Opposing Points of View*. These discussions are enhanced through the use of immediately current articles from the news papers and YouTube videos.

- Each module also includes an exercise using the futures techniques that have been taught earlier to explore where globalization may be going in the future.

The Globalization and its Future course populated well and is receiving consistently favorable student ratings.

Academic Courses - Future Plans

The next phase of the futures education program envisions two new courses both of which are currently in development. They are:

Future Methods Course – This course builds on FTR 100, which is prerequisite, unless the student has comparable training from another program. The plan is to structure the course into seven topics as follows:

1. Introduce futures methods
2. Explore core futures methods
3. Utilize creativity
4. Track trends
5. Constructing multiple futures
6. Create basic future models
7. Integrate problem-centered assessment

The Impact of Globalization on The United States today and the Future Outlook - This course will focus again on globalization, but from the perspective of its impact on American society. As is the case with Globalization and its Future, the course will introduce futuring tools and then have the students apply them to the different areas of study. The course will draw on Michelle Bertho, Beverly Crawford and Edward A. Fogarty's *The Impact of Globalization on the United States* (2008) as its major source of reading material. This course will be structured into nine main topics as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Futures training
3. Fragmentation and transformation of American Society
4. Globalization and uncertainty
5. The Impact of globalization on governance
6. Globalization and American Sovereignty
7. Employment in a global environment
8. The reshaping of the American workforce
9. The outlook for American Society in the next 25 years

The plan is to complete and recommend the design of both courses in 2009/2010 and make them available to students in the 2010/2011 academic year.

Campus Activities

Student Club

IF@AACC sponsors a student at the College called the Futures Interest group (FIG). The club meets in person, and electronically and pursues activities that are of interest to the students. Recently, the Club published its first e-zine. The Club has over 20 members including a member who lives in Africa.

Continuing Education

Academic training - IF@AACC has met its objective of providing futures education to all learners by offering FTR 100 and FTR 110 through the school's continuing education program both in the class room and online. The Institute also developed a set of short courses; each focused on specific futures topics which are available for online education.

Community lectures - IF@AACC also offers monthly lectures to the entire community during the school term which are focused on relevant futures topics. These lectures are offered at 1:00 pm and are called the "Brown bag" series as attendees are encouraged to bring their lunch. Many of these lectures are available online through the IF@AACC website and iTunes University.

Speakers at the Brown bags have included Tim Mack, the President of the World Future Society, Art Shostak, Professor Emeritus of Drexel University and a noted futurist, Steve Steele, Professor of Sociology and Futures Studies at AACC, Martha Smith, President of AACC and Bob Burden, President of the Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce.

Government training - In another area of education, IF@AACC has acted as a contractor for the US Government to provide training in specific futures subjects for the national intelligence community. The programs combine lectures and training workshops.

IF@AACC has organized four seminars to date for the intelligence community and they have been attended by over 500 people. Subjects have included the emergence of China and India, technical trends, cyber warfare and the convergence of social networking, gaming and virtual reality.

Training for Faculty and Staff

Part of IF@AACC's mission is to provide futures training for the College community. This includes employees as well as students. The institute has approached this in three ways.

Basic Future Skills - IF@AACC regularly offers 2 to 4 hour courses in futuring skills such as scenario building and strategic planning. These courses are offered through the school's Institute for Professional and Part time Faculty Development (IPD).

Personal Futuring Skills – The Institute offers training through IPD to help attendees apply futuring techniques to their personal lives.

Building future thinking into existing curriculum - IF@AACC offers workshops through IPD that help faculty members from any discipline work futures thinking into their courses. For example, an ethics teacher can use futuring tools to help students imagine how the rapid social changes we are experiencing will impact ethical thinking in 10 or 20 years. A chemistry teacher can use futuring tools to help students identify the emerging trends in that field.

It should be noted that selling this concept has been difficult. Until people become knowledgeable about what futurists do, there appears to be a prejudice against the idea

based on a perception of futures studies being Tarot cards and crystal balls. The Institute has worked to dispel this image but still faces teachers whose syllabus is all ready full and who must be convinced that a futures component adds more than it subtracts.

Futures in Secondary Education

IF@AACC is extending futures training to the area's secondary schools. The Institute has partnered with the County's secondary school International Baccalaureate (IB) program to accomplish this goal. The IB program is aimed at enriching its students' educational experience and the county IB leadership sees futures studies as a means of contributing to this goal.

The partnership has moved in two directions

Faculty training:

IF@AACC has taught four and eight hour training sessions to the County schools' IB faculty. The sessions are aimed at providing an introduction to futures studies and foresight. There has been a positive response and significant enrollment. The sessions introduce futures subjects and then focus on both creating a futures module within existing courses and/or on building futures thinking into day-to-day classes.

Student training:

The Institute is discussing with the possibility of offering FTR 100 or a modified FTR 100 to IB students on-line for credit. This would, of course, bring futures education into the High School program on a formal basis.

IF@AACC is also testing the idea of incorporating futures training into elementary school after school enrichment programs. The test involves twice a week 90 minute sessions with 3rd – 5th graders. A futures concept is presented by a teacher (currently AACC Faculty) and then the students are given activities to help them understand and internalize the lesson.

The teacher is assisted by several International Baccalaureate students who are in 11th or 12th grade. They use this experience to help meet a community service requirement. The IB students are, of course, also being exposed to futures education themselves.

A typical session could involve the teacher explaining how events can have a significant impact on people's lives. The teacher and students would discuss how the arrival of a new baby or move to a new community changed their lives. Following the discussion which is normally limited to 20 minutes, the students break into groups. Each group, assisted by one or two IB students creates a skit that shows how events can change their lives. The students then perform their skits for each other.

The elementary school administration and the IB administration are pleased with the progress of this program which is in its first year. We believe that the next step is to make the program sustainable. The plan is to formalize a curriculum, create a training program for elementary school faculty who would teach it and organize the IB volunteers. IF@AACC would then offer the complete package to other elementary

schools.

National and Worldwide Reach

For the past four years, IF@AACC has published a monthly magazine. As is appropriate for a future focused organization, it is a modern e-Zine called *The Futurist*. It is focused on topics of interest to futurists and potential futurists and includes articles on learning, futures trends and developments. *The Futurist* is edited by AACC faculty members and the format permits the Institute to distribute it at no cost and with no charge. At present, the "Futurist" is sent to 40 of the 50 United States and to 20 other countries.

Outlook

In the future, IF@AACC will continue to focus its energies first on maintaining and expanding its credit courses. A long term goal is to expand the course offerings to the point at which it would be possible to offer a certificate in futures studies. Other priorities are continued focus on students at the college and secondary level and global education through the futurist. IF@AACC will also look for opportunities to further extend its educational reach.

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