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Leading from the Future: A Review of the Regent Foresight Program

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Abstract

In 2006 Regent University launched a Master of Arts in Strategic Foresight, and in 2007 added a foresight major to its Doctor of Strategic Leadership. In doing so, Regent joined a small group of academic programs worldwide that offer graduate professional degrees based on futures studies. To encourage further improvement and adoption of future focused degrees and majors at the graduate level, this paper discusses this program from three facets: (a) what Regent received from the futures community, (b) what Regent added to the paradigm of strategic foresight, and (c) how Regent presently assesses student learning and program outcomes.

Introduction

A mid-40s IT systems architect launches a "global futures" desk in a top U.S. consulting company to increase their capacity to serve business clients, through forecasting global patterns and mitigating risks. A late-30s community non-profit leader has her foresight training program approved as a 7-hour accredited strategic management course for HR professionals. Or a public sector executive is asked to lead an emerging issues and trend analysis study for a state agency in California. These are three stories from the 25 graduates of Regent's strategic foresight programs, from the Masters to the Doctoral level, over the past four years.

As an assistant professor of strategic foresight at Regent University, I serve 60 mid-career professionals each year, 20 are at the masters level, and 40 at the doctoral level. The School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship (GLE) presently enrolls 450 graduate students a year, with 95% being online. I serve alongside 17 other full-time faculty, some which teach innovation and entrepreneurship, but I am the primary faculty that teaches foresight or futures studies (Hines & Bishop, 2006) across all our programs, from the MBA to the PhD.

The impetus to launch the Regent foresight programs goes back to 2003. Dr. Bruce Winston, who later became the school's dean, invited me to conduct a doctoral residency on futures studies.

This was part of his larger vision to compliment the GLE's strengths in servant leadership with robust strategic leadership practices from the futures community.

In the Spring of 2004, we began to offer a "Futures Studies Concentration" as a 3-course elective option in its Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (MOL). In the Fall of 2006, GLE launched a stand along degree, a 33-credit Master of Arts in Strategic Foresight (MSF)[1]. This was followed in 2007, when we introduced a third year foresight major or final three-course sequence to the Doctor of Strategic Leadership (DSL), and course revisions at the MBA and PhD level.

Incorporating futures studies into graduate studies is not a new phenomenon (Dator, 1986 & 2002), but neither it is common in academia. Only 15-20 universities offer masters or doctoral degrees with a primary emphasis on foresight and futures studies (Ramos, 2008; Smart, 2009). Yet the past two years have seen the beginning of social networking among active and potential futures educators at sites such as Smart's FERN site or Bishop's Foresight Education site[2]. These and other steps by the learning section of the World Future Society (WFS), or the World Futures Studies Federation[3] are seeds of promise to build up a new generation of foresight educators.

To encourage further improvement and growth of formal academic programs to equip foresight professionals, this paper will review: (a) what Regent received from the futures community to launch its foresight programs, (b) what Regent brought to the paradigm of strategic foresight, (c) how Regent presently assesses student learning and program outcomes. Both new and existing futures educators should find this of interest, as well as anyone considering academic program innovation in the area of strategic foresight.

What Regent Received from the Futures Community

According to Smart (2009) there are at least 15 primary graduate programs that grant either Master or Doctoral degrees in foresight or futures studies. In the order that they started offering graduate degrees they are: Houston, 1976; Manoa, 1978; CNAM/Lipsor, 1993; Manchester, 1996; Corvinus, 1996; Turku, 1998; Stellenbosch, 1998; Swinburne, 1999; Fo Guang 2000; Tamkang, 2002; Monterrey, 2004; Regent, 2006; Lisbon, 2008; EU-Malta, 2009; and Imam Khomeini, 2009.

Two of these programs had a direct influence on the design of Regent's MSF; the University of Houston (UH), led by Dr. Peter Bishop (1998) and the Swinburne program, founded by Dr. Richard Slaughter (2004). Since 1996 I was fortunate to benefit from Peter Bishop's sessions at the World Future Society and "The Best of Clear Lake" exhibits. This deepened in 2002, as I became a founding member of the Association of Professional Futurists (APF)[4], and interacted more frequently with graduates from both Houston and Manoa.

The master of strategic foresight

In 2004 Regent invited me to develop the curriculum development for their MSF. Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, I secured the services of Dr. Peter Bishop, as a subject matter expert. Together we framed out the competencies, assessments, and curriculum inputs for the MSF core courses. These outcomes were detailed and built up

from the unit and course level. These were then summarized at the program level as overall 'program learning outcomes' (Anderson, Moore, Anaya, & Bird, 2005). The Regent MSF program now expresses these in five statements. Our students will be able to:

1. Design an environmental scanning system, enabling an organization's strategic leaders to track patterns of systemic change across trends, events and issues.
2. Create a baseline forecast of trends for an organization which contains alternative futures, uncertainties, and wildcards relating to the next decade.
3. Lead a departmental team to develop strategic plans, which includes mission, vision, and goals, appropriately matched to the near-term competitive, customer and industry environment.
4. Conduct a scenario learning process for a leadership team that tests their strategy against a range of possible future developments.
5. Present their professional specialization, foresight practices, and personal values in appropriate media such as, but not limited to a career portfolio, popular press articles, lectures, and conferences.

Regent's MSF is built on 33 credit hours or 11 three-credit courses (see Table 1). Students take seven core courses, three elective courses, and one culminating course that constitute their final project, thesis or internship. The curriculum from UH was reworked, fitting it into Regent's shorter, more intense 12-week pattern of online learning in Blackboard. Most the assignments in our core courses are field based. They enable a mid-career leader to enhance the foresight capacity of their organization, and build up their own working portfolio as a strategic leader.

Table 1.
Regent's master of arts in strategic foresight

Course	Course Title
	Required core courses (21 credit hours)
LMOL 601	Foundations of Leadership
LMSF 602	Survey of Futures Studies
LMSF 603	Social Change
LMSF 604	Systems Thinking
LMSF 605	Forecasting Techniques
LMSF 606	Scenario Development
LMSF 607	Strategic Planning
	Elective courses (students choose 3)
LMSF 616	World Futures
LMSF 617	Human Futures
LMSF 618	Organizational Futures
LMSF 622	Images of the Futures
LMSF 623	Religionists and Futurists
LMSF 624	Defense Futures
LMSF 671	Professional Futures
LMSF 690	Independent Study
	Masters Project (required)
LMSF 609	Culminating Experience

Note: Source: http://www.regent.edu/global/msf

With the exception of adding a leadership course, Regent preserved the core UH paradigm of strategic foresight. The differences now between the Regent core curriculum and UH required courses are evolutionary. For example, Regent's strategic planning course includes a robust textbook on conventional strategic management (De Kluyver & Pearce, 2009) and strategic leadership (Hughes & Beatty, 2005), as we want students to be competent in corporate foresight. Another difference is that in teaching "Forecasting Techniques," Regent students immerse themselves first in the field of operational business forecasting (Jain & Malehorn, 2005), before learning strategic forecasting with 10 or 20 year outlooks. We have found this helps students grasp quantitative forecasting methods, including time series extrapolation, exponential smoothing and regression analysis, before tackling the judgmental aspects of long-term strategic forecasting, which requires discernment to separate baseline and alter-

native futures. UH has a 'World Futures' elective, but in LMSF 616, Regent requires its students to learn Hughes' "International Futures" global model (IF)[5], and use that simulation to create a long-term policy analysis study for decision-makers (Hughes & Hillebrand, 2006). This has proved helpful for Regent graduates, when called upon to help organizations quantify their scenarios (Forge, 2009).

Beyond drawing from UH's core courses, Regent turned to other streams in futures studies to build its MSF electives. I was fortunate to meet Dr. Richard Slaughter[6] in 1999. In 2003 we were able to spend a week together filming his "Pathways to Foresight" DVD. This, combined with Dr. Slaughter's visit to Regent in 2004 for a doctoral residency, helped me internalize his critical and integral approach to futures studies (Slaughter, 2008). Based on Slaughter's (2004) social foresight and Inayatullah's (2004) work in causal layered analysis, I created LMSF 622, an elective entitled, "Images of the Future," to offer students experience in post-structural methods to diagnose societal and organizational issues (Morgan, 1997). Additional electives were developed: LMSF 617 Human Futures, LMSF 618 Organizational Futures, LMSF 623 Religionists and Futurists, LMSF 624 Defense Futures, and LMSF 671 Professional Futures.

Applied versus critical futures?

Futures studies, potentially, could be taught from a number of academic paradigms, whether the natural sciences, the liberal arts, the performing arts, the social sciences, or the professional practices (Dator, 1996; Smart, 2009). At Regent, we approach strategic foresight as a professional practice. This doesn't mean that education about the future is merely instrumental, but rather that the future is placed in a larger framework of strategic leadership and social action.

Occasionally I am asked if Regent is more like Houston or Hawaii, as if the choice is between Bishop's "more applied and business-oriented futures program,"or Dator's "more normative, critical and philosophical" Manoa program (Jones, 2004, p. 360). I am not convinced these two types are mutually exclusive. I don't see Houston's program as given over to a dominant capitalist worldview, or naively legitimizing existing structures. To the contrary, I have had Houston students take electives from Regent where they did substantial work in alternative energy paradigms, or in social foresight, such as deconstructing right-wing authoritarianism. My initial response has been that Regent shares the applied futures methodology of Houston, but also embraces the interpretive, critical and post-structural focus of Manoa (Jones, 1992). Throughout our core courses we strive for a balance between social and strategic foresight or foresight literacy and futures skills (Slaughter, 2004). While the structural tensions exist in our world economy between core and periphery, the Regent foresight curriculum recognizes the role of both private and public entities to create transformative solutions at the systemic, as well as discourse level (Inayatullah, 2004).

What Regent Brought to the Strategic Foresight Paradigm

A key distinctive in Regent's approach to strategic foresight is that it emerges out of the discipline of leadership studies (Bass & Bass, 2008). Before students encounter

futures studies, they study leadership–or the practice of how individuals influence others to accomplished shared objectives (Yukl, 2002).

Why leadership studies?

The field of leadership studies grew in parallel to futures studies, but is strongly integrated in the Regent model. In the 1979 the first PhD in Leadership Studies was offered in the United States. In 1996 Regent University became the first institution to offer an online PhD in this discipline, and its faculty have been active in the International Leadership Association.[7] Today there are 67 Doctoral programs in leadership in North America, along with 79 Master degrees (Leadership Studies, 2010).

The study of leadership has become a significant response to institutional incapability in light of the post-industrial age (Rost, 1991). Whereas the old paradigm of management focused on order and consistency, competition, uniformity and self-interest, by the 1980s, the new paradigm of leadership focused on change and organizational movement, collaboration, diversity and higher purpose (Daft & Lane, 2002). In addition, the focus of leadership research has increasingly turned toward the dynamics by which the future is created. This can be illustrated by the right column of Table 2, which lists 11 leadership theories, in rough chronological order. Thoms and Greenbeger (1995) note a past-time outlook indicates that a leader's prior relationships with followers is the major factor that influences present behavior. A present-time outlook means a leader reacts and responds to situations as they arise and the outcomes are judged to be short-term. A future-time outlook reflects a leaders' long-term visionary or entrepreneurial orientation, with a purposeful bearing on the future. The more current integrated theories fall into this third category of how leaders create and influence the future orientation of their followers and organizations.

Table 2.
Leadership theories and time outlook

Theory & Source	Past	Present	Future
Sources of Power (French & Raven, 1959)	x		
Entrepreneurial Role (Mintzberg, 1973)			x
Vertical Dyad Linkage (Dansereau, et.1975)		x	
OSU Consideration & Initiation (Stogdill, 1974)		x	
Michigan Participative Leadership (Likert, 1967)		x	
Path-Goal Theory (House, 1971)		x	x
Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard,1969)	x	x	
Leadership Substitutes (Kerr & Jermier, 1978)		x	
LPC Contingency Model (Fiedler, 1967)	x	x	
Strategic Leadership (Child, 1972; Hambrick, 1984)		x	x
Charismatic Leadership (House, 1977)	x	x	x
Transformational Leadership (Burns, '78; Bass '85)	x	x	x
Authentic Leadership (Luthens & Avolio, 2003)	x	x	x

Note: From "The relationship between leadership and time orientation," by P. Thoms and D.B. Greenberger, 1995, Journal of Management Inquiry, *4*(3), 272-292. List was shortened; strategic and authentic leadership was added.

While personal and collective action to influence the future is emphasized in futures studies (Bell, 1996), and at a popular level futurists have addressed the role of leadership or vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1996; Marx, 2006; Nanus, 1990 & 1995), most foresight education has yet to encompass the study of leadership at the curricular level. Yet anchoring foresight in leadership and organizational studies may significantly prepare foresight professionals to build the second half of their career.

Katz (1955) demonstrated that the higher a person rises in their career track, the more they need conceptual and human skill over technical competence. Futures studies has traditionally offered the technical and conceptual, but lagged to provide the human skills that are offered by leadership studies.

At Regent, without sacrificing mastery of foresight methods, graduate students study applied leadership practices such as charismatic, strategic or transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Finkelstein, 1996; House, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). They learn how aspiration and collaboration build self-efficacy and team work. As servant leaders, they learn to live in the flow of "the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future" (Greenleaf, 1977, p.25).

The convergence of foresight and leadership practices builds on long-standing convictions by futures educators that their field is grounded in action science (Bell, 1996). In my experience, Schultz (1995) first illustrated how the two disciplines could

converge. To help enrich both practices, I've focused my research on understanding the foresight-based (Slaughter, 1990) or future orientation of leaders (Das, 1986 & 2004), arising from temporal, environmental, and organizational contexts (Richter, 2003). Recent inquiry in this area has addressed this contextual temporal intelligence as adaptive or anticipatory leadership (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; Pfohl, 2008; Savage & Sales, 2008).

The doctor of strategic leadership

In addition to offering an MSF degree, Regent also created a strategic foresight major in its Doctor of Strategic Leadership (DSL) degree. This introduction of foresight for applied doctorate students came in two stages. The first stage in 2004 created a futures core course, LDSL 707. All third year doctoral students take this course (in 2010, 23 students), which focuses on futures literacy, horizon scanning, trend analysis, scenario development, and leading futures workshops. The second stage in 2007 created two-additional courses, so doctoral students who choose, can focus their last year on futures studies. These courses, LDSL 718 and 719 respectively focus on: (a) world futures, forecasting, global modeling, and sustainable development, and (b) social change, emerging issues management, and foresight within industry alliances.

I've noticed a difference in strategic foresight competences between our MSF and DSL graduates. Our MSF graduates are competent to help organizations discover the future, but our DSL graduates can help those same organizations create the future they discover. This hit home for me when a Regent doctoral student, with 20 years of strategy and change consulting began interacting with boutique futures consultancies. The futurists he surveyed were offering supplemental services to corporations, whether horizon scanning, trend analysis or scenario work, and usually in contracts under US$100,000. By contrast, his firm didn't bid on contracts under $1 million. Regent aims to prepare our DSL graduates to lead strategy and change efforts to help enterprises create the future, not just analyze it. Our DSL students may not have all the technical expertise in futures methodology that our MSF graduates develop, but they can always hire them as consultants!

Applied spirituality

Another distinctive that Regent brings to its strategic foresight paradigm is Christian spirituality (Waaijman, 2002). This arises out of Regent's 30-year heritage as a private university that emerged from its founder's roots in religious broadcasting. The majority of our graduate students are practicing Christians: Protestants or Catholics who identify with various renewal movements, whether Charismatic, Pentecostal or Evangelical (Oden, 2006; Yong, 2007).

To cultivate spiritual formation in MSF core courses, GLE asks students to turn in mid-course and end-course academic journals. Students use these to reflect on what they learning, compared to their reflection on Scripture. Our DSL students take this practice of critical reflection on the biblical text and its ideology to a higher level. They employ social, cultural and rhetorical tools to critically engage the biblical text and their own spiritual practice (Robbins, 1996). Does this mean that Regent students embrace naive idealism rather than critical realism? Not necessarily.

Following the work of Hans-George Gadamer, Christian scholars (in contrast to advocates) recognize that authority and tradition can mislead us, along with our own prejudices. But in a positive sense, these pre-formations or worldviews are the horizon from which we open to the *other* (Ebertz, 2006). Through the study of the future, with all its provocations (Johansen, 2007), GLE invites its students to critically reflect on their faith and sense of self. We expect our students to demonstrate openness to change and development in their personal life, that spans the spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual and ego continuum (Kegan, 1994; Wilber, 2000). In this sense, faith development need not embrace groupthink, but should unfold in a continuum of stages into the post-conventional spectrum of adult development (Fowler, 1996 & 2004; Streib, 2001).

About 15 percent of our students are in vocations that require specializations in spiritual leadership. In these cases, MSF or DSL students would research strategic or servant leadership from a virtues or developmental posture (Silva, 2007; Stadler, 2008). While different, this parallels research into wisdom based foresight (Lombardo & Richter, 2004; Hayward, 2005) or action logics (Torbert & Cook-Greuter, 2004), two approaches familiar to the futurist community.

Spiritual formation, at its best, matures along a trajectory formed by religious support from insiders and spiritual openness to outsiders (Genia, 1997; Hill & Hood, 1999). Hughes (2005, p.29) asserts this involves affirming the particularity of one's faith tradition, while at the same time breaking through that particularity to that which "all religions ultimately point...the infinite God, on the one hand, and the finitude of human beings, on the other."

Evaluating the Regent Program

As of the fall of 2010, Regent marks the fourth anniversary of its foresight programs. For me, launching a new Masters program in strategic foresight can be compared to pushing the proverbial elephant up a hill. For months all you think about is curriculum development and student enrollment. Then you and your faculty turn to the task of teaching as one semester flows into another. But at some point you stop pushing, you reach critical mass. The elephant now begins rolling down hill. The focus turns from teaching input to insuring student learning outcomes. Much of my effort this past year has addressed these post-launch tasks of program assessment and continuous improvement.

The need for outcome assessment

Recently the University of Phoenix, one of the fastest growing 'for-profit' schools in the United States issued its first 'Academic Annual Report.' The report claimed to be "a transparent look at how University of Phoenix measures itself and at how it measures up in the current higher education environment" based on its "internally-developed dashboard of key indicators that the University monitors as part of a system of continuous improvement" (University of Phoenix, 2008, para. 1). Most universities don't issue annual stockholders reports like Phoenix, but the business practices of out-

come assessment are here to stay in higher education (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Spady & Marshall, 1991).

Program assessment involves much more than keeping curriculum inputs up to date with workplace competencies, as much as that is needed (Plaza, Draugalis, Slack, Skrepnek, & Sauer, 2007). The heart of assessment is measuring student learning outcomes and program outputs, and then using this data to close the loop with regards to program improvement (Soundarajan, 2004).

At Regent our 'outcome assessments' are collected by our Institutional Effectiveness office. Assessment is conducted systematically at the institutional, school, program, and course level based on our institution's strategic plan, with inputs from students, staff, faculty, and deans. Here are some of the practices we have used this past year in the MSF program in continuous improvement and program assessment.

1. We perform annual "audits" of all our syllabi and their online courseware according to 'Quality Matters'[8] rubrics standards. This peer review process insures the critical course components are aligned, including the course and unit outcomes, readings/textbooks, and dialogue/project/assessments.

2. We collect online course evaluations from all students as each semester concludes. Our faculty then prepares "after-action" reports for each course taught, noting which course activities worked well, which did not work, and what modifications are necessary. As an MSF faculty we take these recommendations and implement immediate changes in textbook adoption or student assignments.

3. As program director, I annually gage our collective student performance on our five overall PLO's- or program learning outcomes (listed earlier in this article) in an Assessment Matrix. For example, our first PLO states our students will be able design environmental scanning systems for organizations to track trends. This objective is tracked across three courses in three major projects. Our program goal for 2010 is to see 80% of our students receive a score of 80% or above in this PLO. By comparing years, I can tell if our benchmarks are being met and if student learning is improving from previous years.

4. As program director I also work with my Dean at the school level to oversee and enhance other measures of program effectiveness, including student retention, recruitment cost efficiencies, and support service from our faculty and staff. I also work to increase the voice of the MSF faculty beyond myself (2 adjuncts in 2010) in our planning and decision-making processes.

The need for external alignment

Although we have had considerable success in taking our students and alumni to WFS annual conferences, as a new graduate program in strategic foresight, GLE at Regent still has a way to go to insure its efforts are producing competent foresight professionals, that can also address the civilization challenge (Slaughter, 2002). Our goals for 2011 and beyond include enhancing MSF/DSL foresight alumni social networks, benchmarking employment rates of graduates, and establishing an external advisory council.

One recent step to insure our program stays aligned with a changing marketplace was to conduct an external program review. In 2009 we asked three veteran members of APF to review a 24-page 'curriculum map' or summary of our MSF core and elective courses. Along with another MSF faculty member, I then scheduled a 60-minute phone consultation with each of these reviewers over a single question, "Are we teaching things that employers want? If not, how would you change the curriculum?"

Several positive things have come out of this external review. First, as a faculty we have reworked our LMSF 604 Systems Thinking core course to insure all our students become proficient in drawing casual loop diagrams of systems and sub-systems. This has involved removing computer modeling through STELLA to an elective, and redirecting systems thinking in this core course on the problems our students face in analyzing their organizational environment (Daft, 2010). Second, based on feedback, we have set a goal to revise our LMSF 607 course on strategic planning to include more focus on innovation. Foresight methodologies might help a team discover the future, but only innovation can help them create it (Von der Gracht, 2007). Overall, we found the external review stimulating and good preparation for a full curriculum revision in 2012-2013.

Lessons for Futures Educators

In 1676 Isaac Newton wrote a colleague and claimed, "if I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Every time I hear from my colleagues in futures studies through WFSF, APF, WFS or the Millennium Project, I am reminded that the Regent foresight program stands on the shoulder of giants, those first and second-generation futurists who have paved the way.

The lesson from Regent to new futures educators is that there are mentors in the futures community that can guide you as you launch your own career as an academic futurist and then launch a first-rate program. Another lesson is that while there is a focused knowledge base of futures studies (Slaughter, 1996), there is room for new disciplines to integrate foresight into their practices, as Regent has done from leadership studies. A third lesson for others from my Regent experience relates to outcome assessments. In the global competitive market of graduate and professional education, the future of foresight education will increasingly depend on how well we serve our students and how well we can show results.

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Notes

1. MSF is at http://www.regent.edu/global/msf, the DSL foresight major is at http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/academics/dsl/sf_requirements.shtml
2. FERN is at http://shapingtomorrowmain.ning.com/group/fsdn, Foresight education at http://foresighteducation.wetpaint.com.
3. WFS is at http://www.wfs.org, WFSF at http://www.wfsf.org
4. APF is at http://www.profuturists.com
5. IF is at http://www.ifs.du.edu/
6. Slaughter's work is at http://www.foresightinternational.com.au/
7. ILA is at http://www.ila-net.org.
8. See http://www.qualitymatters.org/

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