Forging the Future: Teaching Futures Studies. Theory and Praxis in a Capitalist World-Economy.

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Abstract

Forging the future refers to the task of training new professionals in the futures studies field, guiding them to expanded frames of reference, creativity, and personal transformation. The article focuses on the MS Program in Studies of the Future at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), USA and uses a causal layered analysis to describe and critique that particular approach to teaching futures studies. Described are the author's personal context, UHCL program history, pedagogy, curriculum, a litany of institutional and programmatic challenges, and critical layered analysis using the University of Hawaii futures program as a standpoint for comparison.

Introduction

To this day, teaching futures studies has been most personally rewarding when I see students undergo an "ah ha!" experience or visibly demonstrate that their framework of reference has been expanded. To me, these mind-expanding exercises are what futures studies education is all about. Of course there are other moments of high insight, inspiration, or creativity that are equally validating, but the transformational nature of seeing horizons expanded is most sublime.

I presume that this aspect of futures education is central to our profession. The futures authors that I have been exposed to that had the most personal impact have inevitably been those whose concepts were the most far-reaching, the most provocative, and the most radical. It is appropriate as we stretch ourselves as a species and as a planetary culture that we learn from the exercise.

But we live on a troubled planet and teaching futures is a haphazard and fickle business—at least from my humble perspective. After two decades in the business of teaching futures in higher education, I am concerned about its future. Yet we keep minting fresh futurists, young and old, forging the future of the discipline, imbuing them with the theories and skills of our craft.

UH squared?

I am a graduate of the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa futures program, now teaching in the M.S. Program in Studies of the Future at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), at the cutting and probably soon the "bleeding edge" of what is the UH phenomenon. I have followed Wendy Schultz' footsteps from the UH Manoa program, the more normative, critical, and philosophical program in the United States, to the UHCL program, the more applied and professional-oriented futures program. While the two programs have some degree of content and methodology overlap, the divergence is still considerable. My experience as a student in one program and as a teacher in both reveals to me the strengths and weaknesses of the UHCL program, and also suggests some fundamental questions about the forces of globalization (and fragmentation). These threats and weaknesses not only confront UHCL, but also futures studies as a field. These tensions were recently the genesis for heat between Michael Marion and Wendell Bell in *Futures* and are grist for the mill in debates within the field about standards and professionalization of the field (Lum et al., 2002). The two academic centers for futures studies higher education in the US contribute to the various debates.

Since my arrival two years ago in Houston I have been facing the potential demise of the future of the Study of the Future program. The threat to the program is rooted in a variety of issues, and some of the reasons will be discussed below, but as I have been considering threats to the UHCL futures program, the litany of issues could not help but remind me of all the work done recently in deep structure, critical futures research (Inayatullah 1998, 2002; Slaughter 2002a, 2002b). Given Inayatullah's argument that futures work is both layered, deep and shallow, what could a deep analysis reveal about the UHCL program that would be of value to generate scenarios or otherwise pose alternatives in the face of a threat to its existence?

Litany of troubles in Bayou City

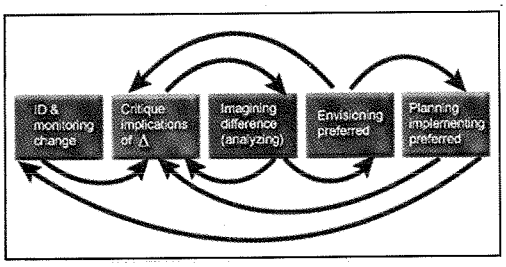
Causal Layered Analysis's (CLA) four levels are: (1) litany-the most visible, (2) the social, economic, technological, (3) worldview, and (4) the myth/metaphor. The first layer is litany: the most obvious, the superficial, qualitative trends, and problems-often exaggerated. From a post-structural perspective, this is the level of the text. Part of the most recent text is my story.

I came to the program as a Visiting Professor to help fill a position that had failed in a national search to select a tenurable candidate (to replace retiring Oliver Markley). This development alone could stand a layered analysis, but suffice it to say that the hiring problem stemmed from a number of possible issues including: the complication of a widely-respected inside candidate (Wendy Schultz), a meager population of candidates with terminal degrees in futures studies or related disciplines, and possibly the location. Houston has a bad reputation as one of the most polluted North American cities, with unregulated urban sprawl, a massive petrochemical industry, Gulf Coast heat and humidity, and the worst highway traffic in the country. For me the attractions were: a chance to teach futures studies full time, to work with Peter Bishop and Wendy Schultz (who remains related to the program), to be close to NASA and the US space program, and the verdant Clear Lake campus. The campus is surrounded by a bayou ecology: prairie, woodlands, and bayou. Since moving to Clear Lake, I have seen abundant deer, snakes, armadillos, raccoons, opossums, and birds galore. As the bayou is a prime bird migration area, I have been treated to incredible birding and have seen: wild turkey, crested caracaras, great blue herons, pileated woodpeckers, kingfishers, white ibises, and many others.

The next part of litany, the most obvious, is the story of UHCL.

History: The University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) is one of four campuses in the metropolitan University of Houston system, and the only suburban UH campus, located in southeast Houston near NASA's Johnson Space Center, the home of Mission Control and many of the astronaut training facilities. The futures program was among the very first created at UHCL roughly 27 years ago, itself designed as an upper-division institution. It is part of the larger state system of higher education and offers masters degrees but no doctoral programs. The first two professors were: Jib Fowles, famous for his *Handbook of Futures Methods*, now retired from UHCL; and, Chris Dede the education futurist, now back in Massachusetts. As they moved on, they were replaced as core faculty, first by Oliver Markley who joined the program in 1978 and Peter Bishop in the early 1980s. While the program started out as a rather socially-oriented program, dealing with intellectual issues such as the wisdom of growth, it "evolved to meet the needs of careerism," according to the current senior faculty member Peter Bishop (1998, 164).

For two decades, the program has followed a "professional" and "applied" approach to training its students. Then about five years ago, there was a programmatic shift with the addition of Wendy Schultz, with her specialization in facilitation and workshop leadership. She also brought to the program critical insights characteristic of most graduates of the UH Manoa program (Jones 1992). Wendy was brought to UHCL to allow the two tenured faculty to do part-time consulting and public speaking, and succeeded in reforming and refocusing the program curriculum. Wendy helped to subtly shape the program toward a more structured, perhaps standardized, curriculum. This structure is a template of the components of futures studies, according to Wendy, that corresponds to the structure of the program to some degree.



Components of Futures Studies (Schultz 1997)

This structure is reflected in the alignment of the units in the Introduction to Studies of the Future course, and to some extent the curriculum as a whole. The Methods I (quantitative) course tends to focus on the first two components, and the Methods II (qualitative) course covers the latter three components. A course in Strategic Planning corresponds to the last box. It should be noted that Peter Bishop has his own seven-part framework that

parallels Schultz to some extent. Many of the "content" courses (i.e., non-core courses) reflect a mix of these components, at least those developed or modeled on her designs. The structure may not fit the experiences of other futures practitioners, but fit the shared UH environment.

Curriculum Overview: The MS in Studies of the Future program is comprised of 36 credit hours, including a core of 15 credits (Intro to FS; Methods I & II; Systems Thinking; Professional Seminar), and 15 credits of electives (current program offerings: Social Change; World Futures; Women's Futures, Creating Cultures of the Future; Facilitation). There is a culminating capstone of 6 credits for a thesis, project, or internship.

Modes of instruction: The program has traditionally offered evening courses during the fall and spring "long semesters." In the mid-1990s a summer intensive, two-year program was initiated which has drawn in more out-of-Houston and international students. The summer program consists of six weeks of morning and afternoon classes. Students in this program are expected to take two courses in their local area as electives. The latest initiative is the development of web-based courses that began this fall (Introduction to FS, Systems Thinking) with eight courses expected to be available online by the fall of 2004. Similar to the summer program, it will be possible for students to complete some elective work in other institutions. Wendy Schultz now returns annually to teach during the summer program.

So why is UHCL's M.S. Program in Studies of the Future having troubles? The troubles may have started when the university neglected to advertise its "best kept secret." Or it may have had to do with faculty focused externally, or with inept administrators, or a robust late-century national economy. At the litany layer, the most obvious issue was enrollment numbers that were mostly in decline for a decade. Then there was the national search process "meltdown" in the spring of 2000, and a dean who questioned the very existence of the program (but then moved on to an administrative position in California). Morale, you might say, was not so good. A meeting of administrators with some 30-odd alumni and then some of the major luminaries of American futures studies during the 2000 World Future Society annual meeting seemed to save the day.

I was invited to join the faculty in the fall of 2000 less than a month before classes started and "hit the ground running" with the support of Dr. Schultz and her curriculum. We continued, "under review" as enrollments continued to be weak during my first two years. However, two breakthroughs and a number of other initiatives have improved program prospects. The first breakthrough was funding for a survey or local organizations, a local advertising campaign, new program brochures and poster ads. The second was my election to the position of Secretary-General of the World Futures Studies Federation, supported by the administration including the hosting of the Secretariat offices on the UHCL campus. Hopeful initiates included: an alumni reunion in the spring of 2001 that resulted a number of tangible outcomes, including a scholarship fund and a new alumni association. The most critical initiative, perhaps, is the plan to develop a web-based curriculum and online mode of delivery for the program.

With the inauguration of the first two courses in the fall of 2002, enrollment is up. But two deans later, the future of the program is still unclear. Our greatest recruitment tool has historically been word-of-mouth and the growing energy behind the alumni association could be of help. Similarly, the WFSF Secretariat office move has increased UHCL international visibility. Even before the arrival of the WFSF Secretariat, foreign student enrollment has been strong, particularly in the summer intensive program, and this trend should continue. In the end, university commitment will be the strongest glue to hold the program together. The faculty has felt that the university has not shouldered responsibility for advertising and recruitment, but the status quo seems likely to be a continuing challenge. There is also a concern that the Houston area market is saturated—and given the historical orientation of the university system to the metropolitan area, there is no strong administrative motivation to advertise nationally (Peter Bishop does maintain an ad in the *Futurist* magazine). There is a grudging realization that the program is unique and needs to be protected, but the enrollment bottom-line seems to be the driving issue. This is ironic given the thrust of the university-wide advertising motto: "Changing futures by degrees." The program has clearly had an impact on the culture of UHCL, but will it be enough to save it?

Distance education is still an open question, too. It remains to be seen whether a practical, hands-on program can be translated well into the virtual space (at least at this stage of technological development). On the one hand, there is a huge untapped market for distance education, and futures studies will be in demand. On the other hand, the classroom interaction, group activities, and projects that have served the program well over the years may not adapt well to the online experience.

There is a certain, less-tangible problematic surrounding the limitations of a two-person department. At the beginning of the program there was extensive interdisciplinary collaboration and participation by as many as a dozen related faculty. In the nearly 30 years of the university's history, many of the innovative programs have "fallen by the wayside" to be replaced by more traditional

departments and programs (Bishop 1997, 164). The primary teaching load is now shared by the two department faculty, with Wendy Schultz' summer program assistance.

From a causal layered perspective, much of UHCL's strength lies in this layer. It is a program whose focus is on the trends, developments, and details of change in the dominant, hegemonic culture. It assumes a neutral, "objective" position and as so is amenable to the flood of information and chaos of conscious existence in the early 21st century. "Just the facts, Ma'am." At the level of litany it serves its best purpose.

Thus, at the level of litany, the program has served a primarily metropolitan market, served the career needs of its students, and maintained a fairly static faculty FTE (full-time equivalent). During the course of three decades, the program has cycled through a half-dozen or so faculty, graduated over 150 students, seen countless secretaries and deans, and now has reached a point of transition.

STEEP causes: Dangerous curves ahead

The second layer of CLA is the level of meaning concerned with social causes, the economic, cultural and historical factors (Inayatullah 1998). This is arguably the layer of analysis where UHCL is its strongest. The UHCL program excels in encouraging students to "think outside the box," to explore issues related to critical thinking, to engage in systems thinking, and to work with the forces of change. Methods have changed and evolved considerably over the years. Since the early 1990s, STEEP has been a popular analytical framework used here to understand better the scope and breadth of change across society. STEEP, the acronym for Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political, is used both as a way to describe the forces of change as well as a framework to analyze trends and emerging issues. Studies of the Future at UHCL are usually focused at this level of meaning to help contextualize the wealth of litany-level detail in modern life.

In my own education, the influence of this perspective has been great. Jim Dator exposed me to McLuhan's vision of the future, whose aphorism, "we shape our tools, thereafter they shape us," has had a profound effect on my perspective and practice. Dator's "tsunamis of change" are still my favored metaphor for these truly revolutionary changes ahead of us in the coming millennia. Whether the metaphor is gigantic waves of demographic, environmental, economic, and technological change or STEEP curves ahead, it is important to begin to understand the transformational nature of these factors in the world.

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is another popular tool because it teases out the causal connections between the litany level while at the same time dwelling in litany. It has even been used around the program to explore the SWOT of the studies of the future program and related projects (such as the futures of the futures lab, a student campus resource). We have attempted to identify the key and secondary stakeholders (for example, faculty, students, alumni, organizations, businesses, UHCL, families, communities) and internal and external driving forces (for example, economic cycles, marketing (or lack thereof), demographics (second careers), developments in higher education, and the relative popularity of the field FS). But SWOT can be a conservative tool when used in isolation, narrow in its scope and imagination. It tends to reify existing structures even while teasing out subtleties.

To go beyond a SWOT analysis of the program, what might be missing from a mainstream analysis of change drivers for UHCL? What might be visible through the lens of dissent, for example? The origins of the program were at a time when deep questions were asked about the nature of growth and progress. This is no longer true as the program has focused on the career potential of students. "Pragmatic" and applied tools allow access for newly-minted students; critical perspectives are at odds with the mainstream business culture. If UHCL ever had a critical edge, it was lost along the way to finding student internships and graduate jobs. Ironically, perhaps only a third of graduates end up in futures consulting or corporate positions. My rough estimate is that about a third of graduates end up doing work not directly related to their UHCL training, and about a third end up doing some other type of professional work but integrating futures tools actively into their practice. Instructive, but also disturbing, is a vast number of students who take more than a couple of courses, but never complete their degrees. It has been argued that many of these students are just taking courses to "get the tools" and then put them to work. It may also be the case that the program is not serving their needs at some level or is failing to live up to its promise. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that there are many unhappy and disgruntled graduates and alumni, but their voices are not being heard.

Industreality R Us

The dominant worldview that seems to inhabit the UHCL program tends to be a materialistic, industrial perspective, no surprise given its proximity to the aerospace and petrochemical industries and position in the worst of USA's urban sprawl. This is consistent with the undergraduate student body of UHCL: affluent, mostly white, middle class students, primarily connected to NASA subcontractors and service providers in the Clear Lake area. While the program attracts a fairly wide cross-section of

people, the typical prospective student aspires to be a consultant or professional futurist in the private sector.

This is quite a contrast to futures education in Hawaii. The socio-political environment there was different in so many ways, and seems sometimes fundamentally different from the Houston experience (although now with a little "UH Manoa added"-UH[2]). Fundamentally, the UH Manoa program's dominant position is anti-capitalist, not true for the UHCL program. Now I am not necessarily arguing that the UHCL program should be like the Manoa program, but it does have an uncritical, hegemonic stance. Below are my gross generalizations about the differences between the two programs. The categories are based on personal observations and previous analysis of the Manoa program (Jones 1992).

Differences in Worldview

University of Hawaii at Manoa	University of Houston-Clear Lake
● Alternative futures	● Studies of the future
● Academic	● Market-oriented
● Critical theory	● Applied tools
● Transformational futures	● Baseline future
● Cooperative	● Competitive
● Internationalist, multicultural	● Domestic, monocultural
● Exploratory	● Analytical
● Periphery	● Core

Michael Marion's (2002) assessment of the field was thought-provoking and provides a number of levels on which to position UHCL's in contrast to UH Manoa. His "purposive categories of futures studies" and "continua for analyzing futures-thinkers" are applied to the two programs in the diagram below.

Differences in Perspective

Categories /Continua	University of Hawaii at Manoa	University of Houston-Clear Lake
Purposive	Questioning	Probable futures
	Preferable futures	Possible futures
Grounding	Idealist	Realist
	Academic	Applied
Style	Ideas-driven	Methods-driven
Breadth	Generalist	Futurized
Ideology	Anti-establishment	Establishment

Deconstruction: Inayatullah offers a series of probes and questions—a post-structural toolbox—to explore the deeper layers. To begin to deconstruct the UHCL program we can ask: who is privileged?

Those who have the most to gain are those in society who already have power: the predominantly white, male, and mainstream. The power structures and social constructions of reality that underlies privilege are not fundamentally questioned. Here the difference between the two futures programs is not fundamentally different; the structures of higher education in general continue to be perpetuated: the traditions, the disciplines, the hierarchies of power and knowledge. Sardar argues in *Rescuing All Our Futures* that Western futures studies is dominated by these forces. This is certainly true for UHCL to the extent that the structures of careerism and a continuation of the status quo are being perpetuated. A perfect example is the emergence of a new organization created by a network primarily of UHCL alumni and faculty, the Association of Professional Futurists (see Lum 2002).

Who is silenced? Silenced are the marginalized of society who need futures studies the most in order to envision and create their preferred futures: the economically marginalized, the housewives, truck drivers, factory-workers, homeless, and the destitute. We study the work of Jungk and Mullert, but do not follow their example. Inayatullah also asks which (alternative) future is privileged? Is it not the "baseline future," but the Texas Continued Growth future? The assumptions of the future made preferable in the current UHCL scenario are that continued growth, progress, and materialism are good, that technology will be triumphant. The assumption is that even if we are critical of the status quo, we are all ultimately destined to be "hired guns" in the capitalist world-economy— as my former professor, Dean Neubauer, used to remind us.

Genealogy: The genealogy tool is used to ask questions about the origins of what is and about what might have been. What is the subtext of victory? The Enlightenment discourse is the shining light at UHCL generally, and in the program in particular. The logical, rational scientific side of futures studies comes to light here. The dispassionate, observational perspective is honored. While the faculty occasionally represents other views of visionary and alternative epistemologies, the dominant thrust of the program is to understand and accommodate the victorious that have constituted our history. It is not a worldview that openly questions the Texans' victory over San Jacinto, the victory of the industrialists over our dear air and water, or even the victory of gluttony over saving (ironically, a quintessential capitalist core value). The Mall (owner) is the winner. The underlying culture is never questioned in any fundamental way by the structures of our teaching or the outcomes of our curriculum. At least I don't see that in the projects, internships, or theses of the program. But there are seeds of this discourse throughout the program, and it could arise as a more central concern in the future(s). The tensions between the potential for more a more "academic" program with a humanities bent, and business-as-usual may open the way for a program transformation in the future. The growing diversity of the students in the program may subtly lead the way to shifts in voices asking for the truth.

Distance: Inayatullah also asks us to step even further back from the stream of time to refocus our inquiry on the basis of alternative presents and pasts. For example, he asks which scenarios make the present remarkable? This is an interesting perspective, because the preponderance of Western FS emerges from the "industreality," borrowing Toffler's term, that underlies both former Eastern European state socialism and democratic liberalism. So, most popular alternative scenarios of the last three decades would not be remarkable: Continued Growth, Socialism with a Human Face, Green, or Totalitarian. The common scenarios for students these days are a mix of gung-ho techno-optimist, reformist, and light green narratives. These are not remarkable. More remarkable would be a UHCL futures program featuring the marginalized voices of women and non-Western cultures (Sardar 1999). That would be remarkable. A shift to a visionary, normative scenario would be most remarkable. I am reminded, however, of Jim Dator's Transformational image of the future-another scenario that would be remarkable from the perspective of the standard "baseline future" at the core of UHCL teaching. The prospect of truly post-human technologies and entities emerging in the next century also suggests a range of remarkable scenarios for the program. Machine Intelligence would undoubtedly transform its future! Certain former students have been calling for the program to take a more normative stance towards the industrial worldview that it has (allegedly) cultured. From that perspective, and the reality of the UHCL culture as a whole, such as greening of the program, would also be remarkable, at least for the short term.

Alternative pasts and futures: The interpretation of the past that is valorized is primarily that of the American futures studies enterprise (see Slaughter 2002c; Bishop 2002). It is a European, Western, liberal democratic and hegemonic history. And it is generally non-reflective. Again, although students are potentially exposed to some of the history of the FS field, there is no central focus on critical or alternative futures. Histories that make the present problematic would include the traditions of understanding from other cultures, such as Hindu and Islamic epistemology. Equally, the "herstories" of women would turn the program on its head.

Reordering knowledge: Fundamentally, we lack a range and depth of voices at UHCL that could reorder knowledge in any fundamental way. Ultimately, it can only be transformed if there is an integration of knowledge from across civilization, gender, and episteme. The last question suggested in Inayatullah's poststructuralist toolbox is: How would the reordering of knowledge "denaturalize" current orderings? If the discourse shifted radically in another direction, it would privilege the alternative ordering-the inner would be "outed," and the deep, critical aspects of the field would come into light. It would serve the counter-culture, not the dominant one. It would shift the focus from Houston to the farthest peripheries of the world (nay, the cosmos?), it would become the Other in the midst of "Babylon." Reordering knowledge would replace the foreground with the background, make the program truly the conscience of its hands.

Welcome to the machine

At the final level of our causal layered analysis of the UHCL program, is the question of the underlying myth and metaphor of the program. As a child of the Industrial Revolution, the UHCL program is in many ways like the Machine: the bureaucratic structures and hassles, the forms and assignments, regimented time and schedules, the transcripts, the deadlines, and grades. The core curriculum is centered on methods and systems science, reflections of the industrial paradigm in which we are still embedded. Even deeper, the myth of Progress imbues our teaching and practice (mostly) with hope for the future and social constructions of reality that preclude our considering the alternatives, or the dark side of "growth" and "progress."

As a child of the Enlightenment, one of the myths of the UHCL program is the myth of Science. It is manifest in

the title of the degree and the structure and function of curriculum and instruction. Situated as it is in the state university setting, a question has to be asked about the extent to which the UHCL program is a captive of the reductionist, scientific mindset: how can a presumably trans-disciplinary program continue to exist in a hostile, regimented organizational academic framework? However, this is not a mythic-level problem for UHCL, but one facing most current university FS programs. Given the "checkered" history of futures education around the globe, I think the "jury is still out" on whether the traditional university is the best venue for futures research and education.

Don't Bite the Hand That Feeds You (Just Nibble)

This was intended to be a loving but critical analysis of the UHCL Studies of the Future program. I have learned a lot in the two years of teaching in Houston, am grateful in many ways, and I care about the future of the program and its alumni. The irony or maybe the lesson I get from studying the UHCL program is that it offers some powerful tools and perspectives to better understand the changing reality around us. Students often experience profound shifts in their viewpoints and mental maps as they progress through the program, despite its limitations. It is also a cornerstone of the field, as one of the longest-running and most successful futures programs on the planet. Even with its shortcomings and shallow coverage of the field, it is the best program at the level of litany and causes, at the level of preparing students to do professional-level work in an organizational setting. It offers the strongest set of applied, planning and facilitation tools currently of any program of which I am aware. The enrollment draws a curious selection of what today are considered "geeks and geezers" in leadership literature: tech-savvy entrepreneurs and second-career seekers who are a reflection of the cutting edge of two (or three) generations. I am learning a lot from them and hope the rest of the world will, too.

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