

Syllabus

World Futures (FUTR 6371)

Spring 2012

Course Time/Location: Monday, 5:30-8:30 pm US Central Time

Cameron 229

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Appointments: By request

Prerequisites: none

Overview

World Futures is primarily a content course, in which we explore the long-term future of the globe by looking at various STEEP+ categories. Students will do a framework forecast as well as a book project, and present both at the end of the semester.

Objectives

The objectives of the course are for students to demonstrate:

- a comprehension of the major issues affecting the global future
- an ability to identify emerging global trends and issues
- an ability to explain global issues, trends and drivers of change from multiple perspectives
- competence in tools and techniques used to identify and explain global trends and issues

Required Texts

Readings are provided in Blackboard each week. Some are required of all, and others are “distributed” in that one class member leads the online and classroom discussion on them.

Coates, Hines, & Mahaffie, 2025: *Scenarios of US and Global Society as Reshaped by Science and Technology*, Oakhill Press, 1996. Available as download from http://josephcoates.com/2025_PDF.html or instructor can provide physical copy.

Each student will select a book relating to an area of world futures, or an overview of world futures, at the beginning of class and present on it in class on Week 13. Books must be approved by instructor. If you need suggestions, check the “content” section of the UH Futures bibliography (starts on p. 6) In “Key Documents” on Blackboard. A few suggestions:

- Meadows, Limits to Growth: Thirty Year Update
 - Drexler, Engines of Creation
 - Schwartz, The Long Boom
 - Kurzweil, The Singularity
 - Friedman, The World Is Flat
 - Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers
 - Slaughter, The Biggest Wake-Up
- Call in History
 - Lee Kuan Yew, From Third World to First
 - Peterson, Out of the Blue
 - Jones, Future Agenda
 - Glenn/Gordon, State of the Future

Approach

The foundation of the course is built around three documents—this syllabus, the schedule, and a generalization (what the course is about)—found in “key documents” on Blackboard. Your first step is to study these documents, ask any questions you wish, and then get into the introductory activities.

After the first two weeks, each week will focus on a different domain of world futures (e.g., population, resources, etc.).

Class activities

The instructor will typically lead off with a short PPT to introduce some ideas about the topic we are covering that week. We’ll then review the readings. Each student is responsible for leading the discussion on their assigned reading for that week (we may not always get to them)

At the end of each class, we will identify what we think are the most important driving forces for the future of that topic, aka “building blocks” for the scenario archetypes that will be the focus of a group presentation at the end of the semester (more on this below).

Online activities

Each week students are required to post a brief summary of their “distributed” reading for other students to comment on. For “credit,” you get a point for posting and a point for responding to at least one other post in a substantive fashion. The following questions are recommended for you to answer in your posts:

We discuss each reading using the following general questions:

- What is the main point(s) of the reading?
- What evidence or examples are supplied or are otherwise available to illustrate the point?
- What agree and disagree with?

- What is an alternative explanation from that offered by the author?

There will also be other occasional activities, such as a Futures Wheel exercise.

Group project

The class will be organized into three groups at the beginning of the semester. Each group will be assigned a different scenario “archetype” that they will be responsible for developing a very simple scenario for, and presenting at the end of the semester. It’s only a one-page summary (so don’t freak), but it will be accompanied by “building block slides” developed in class each week. At the end of each class, we’ll decide what we think are the 3-5 key drivers or building blocks for the future of that topic. Each group then identifies how they think that building block will “play out” given their archetype, which is basically a pattern of change. Teams will be responsible for keeping track of their building blocks over the semester and then summarizing how you think they will interact in a one-slide scenario summary, and presenting it to class. So, we’ll develop three scenarios of world futures by the end of class.

Individual framework project

Each student will pick a world futures-related topic to develop a framework forecast around. The pieces of the framework are chopped up into smaller bites in “assignments,” so you work on it throughout the semester (no big push at the end)/

Scanning hits

Each student will submit 5 scanning hits to “assignments”, using the form, related to the framework project. They are completed early in the semester so they can help with your framework project.

Book review

As mentioned above in “Books,” you are asked to select a book about World Futures and you will analyze it using a template that has ten questions.

Topical Schedule (see separate Schedule doc for details on each week)

Week 1: Orientation, theory
Week 2: Approaches/methods
Week 3: Demography
Week 4: Resources
Week 5: Infotech
Week 6: Bio & Nano
Week 7: Economics
Week 8: SPRING BREAK
Week 9: Environment

Week 10: Geopolitics
Week 11: Social life
Week 12: Wildcards
Week 13: Book Presentations
Week 14: Group Archetype presentations
Week 15: Make-up (if needed)

Grading

The breakdown:

Assignments: Domain framework	60%
Assignments: Scanning hits	15% (5@3% each)
Group Activities: Archetype presentations	15%
Activities: Discussion postings	10%

Interaction

The UH futures program offers a unique blend of different modes of interaction for each course depending on the students location and needs. The official course is conducted on the website (www.uh.edu/blackboard). You can search for your Blackboard username from this page. All instructions, materials and submissions are done through the website.

But since man (or woman) does not live by the Internet alone(!), we also have modes of personal interaction. The one with the highest bandwidth is, of course, attending class on Monday evenings. 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 offer an audio call-in option using a computer-based Voice-Over-IP (VOIP) connection. We use Adobe Connect, which not only offers two-way voice interaction, but also projects PowerPoints and the desktop as well.

If you are going to call into class, do the following before the first class:

- Get a headset with a mike and headphones. Using your desk speakers can create feedback.
- Click on the Adobe Connect link on the Homepage and configure your browser correctly.
- Learn how to press the TALK button to speak.

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.

Other policies

Academic honesty policy All UH students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UH catalog. Plagiarism, using research without citations or using a created production (such as other people's words) without quotations or citations, 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, and author must be included with the web material used.

Disabilities: If you have a disability and need a special accommodation consult first with the Coordinator of Health Disabilities Services, Bayou 1402, telephone 283-2627, and then discuss the accommodation with me.

Incompletes: A grade of "I" is given only in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that the student has been making satisfactory progress. An Incomplete Grade Contract must be completed.

Withdrawals: Refer to class schedule for dates to withdraw without evaluation from a course.