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A community of futurists and the state of the futures field

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Abstract

Criticisms of futures studies ought to be evaluated in comparison with those of other fields. For example, compared to the established disciplines, futures studies is less fragmented and has many positive features. Also, controversies among futurists do not mean that futures studies is not a field. Rather, one hallmark of any field of inquiry is that its members constitute a disputatious community. Moreover, futures studies is unified by interlinked and overlapping networks of communications and influences among futurists, a shared transdisciplinary matrix, and the growth of a futurist canon. The future of futures studies is bright, because it is reasonable to hope that futurists will be able to establish the field in most of the world's colleges and universities. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Criticisms of futures studies

Nonfuturists sometimes criticize—even savage—futurists and futures studies, although they may know little or nothing about what contemporary futurists actually do. Such attacks, often depicting futurists as half-baked prophets, are usually so far off the mark that they are more likely to reveal the ignorance of the attackers than they are to expose the deficiencies of futurists, although they can, unfortunately, foster false beliefs among the public about the nature of futures studies. Yet such attacks appear to be less frequent recently than they were earlier, and today community and national leaders, as well as the public, have a greater understanding of futurists and futures studies than they did twenty, even ten, years ago. Thus, many futurists no longer pay much attention to such uninformed critics.

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It is less easy, however, to brush off the criticisms of futures studies by futurists themselves. For example, the late futurist-sociologist Richard L. Henshel once remarked that a ‘contemporary futures conference attracts more frauds and phonies than any other form of meeting’ [1]. Also, the editor of *Future Survey*, Michael Marien, certainly among the best informed of futurists, has been an outspoken, though friendly, critic of futures studies. Among other things, he believes that futures studies ‘lacks a shared understanding of what it is and a shared vision of what it ought to be’ [2]. He says that it has fragmented and been trivialized in recent decades, and, worse, he seriously doubts whether a field of futures studies—or whatever one chooses to call it—even exists [3].

Indeed, what should we futurists think about a ‘field’ whose own practitioners trash it with comments such as the following:

- ‘There is no consensus on important problems, no shared goals or standards of adequacy, and no body of knowledge’.
- ‘Futures studies is disintegrating and proliferating into subfields’.
- ‘The futures field is flooded with internecine hostility and divided into imperialistic and intellectually isolated groups’.
- ‘Some futurists are close-minded and undisciplined, and ignore evidence that challenges their politics’.
- ‘We have failed to tackle the major empirical and moral problems confronting humankind’.
- ‘Many futurists are ideological and fanatical, consumed by advocacy and self-righteousness’.
- ‘We are overly concerned with domestic issues while largely ignoring world events’.
- ‘Both academic administrators and the public have a low regard for futures studies’.
- ‘Works in the futures field are incoherent, poorly written, arcane, mystifying, and obscure’.
- ‘There is no consensus and no scientific unity’.
- ‘University programs in futures studies attract the academically weakest graduate students’.
- ‘There has been no progress in the futures field, only changes in fashion and mere taste’.
- ‘Writings in futures studies are boring’.

These are devastating comments. Who would want to be a part of such an enterprise?

But hold on. For the sake of making a point, I deliberately misled you. Futurists did not say these things about futures studies! In fact, it was my fellow sociologists who made these scathing remarks about sociologists and sociology. And all within the last decade [4–6].

When we futurists criticize futures studies, we should ask, ‘Compared to what?’

2. Futures studies compared to established disciplines

For example, compared to the established disciplines, including those in the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences, futures studies is less fragmented. A major trend among the developed disciplines is their decomposition. They have become divided into specialities and subspecialities, and re-divided, yet again, into sub-subspecialities. The process, according to Burton R. Clark [7], ‘operates across universities as an uncontrollable self-amplifying phenomenon’. Thus, the older, developed disciplines, unlike the newer, less developed futures field, have become so fragmented and complex that no single person can master more than a few parts of them.

Also compared to the established disciplines, futures studies is generally better written, more open-minded, more concerned with taking the whole Earth into account, less trivial, more committed to solving the major problems confronting humankind, more willing to address questions of moral judgments and goals (e.g., exploring preferable futures), and considerably less boring. Compare this with comments about futures studies and sociology made in Ref. 8.

Although it may be true that some academic administrators and parts of the public still have a low regard for futures studies, they sometimes have a low—or even lower—regard for some other fields as well. For example, sociology, according to some sociologists, has lost credibility with some administrators, as well as politicians and the general public, for being both too ideological on the one hand and arid and irrelevant on the other hand. Such a judgment, however, may not be justified—just as it may not be for futures studies—because it ignores many empirically and theoretically sound works, some of which have been useful in policy making.

It may be true, too, that some futurists have been advocates of one cause or another. But isn’t that part of our job? As futurists, we are concerned about desirable futures, especially as defined by the values of human freedom and well-being. For example, Edward S. Cornish says that a ‘main point in thinking about the future is to change it—to make it better than it would be without deliberate choices and actions’ [9]. And as Jim Dator says, ‘It is now humanity’s challenge to invent, create, and sustain life (if we wish life, especially humans, to evolve into the future), and not merely and passively to “study” it’ [10].

Thus, some futurists, through their action-oriented work, show why it is important, for example, to protect the environment and to create a sustainable world, while other futurists work to promote social justice, to establish peace and harmony, to prevent genocide, and to encourage members of the present generation to act responsibly for the welfare of future generations. Distinctively, these and other issues, and the values underlying them, are one source of cohesion and unity for the futurist community.

3. A community of futurists

But this does not mean, obviously, that all futures work meets the same high standards of excellence and rigor or that even the best examples of contemporary

futures work cannot be improved upon. Nor does it mean that there are no disagreements and controversies among futurists, including debates about what excellence in futures work is and, indeed, about what counts as futures work itself. But again, compared to what?

In every field of inquiry, we can find examples of both good and bad work, and no field, unless it is stagnant, is free of controversy. That is precisely how fields develop and advance: through critical inquiry and discourse.

In fact, some writers, such as the late social psychologist Donald T. Campbell, say that the hallmark of a field of inquiry is that its members constitute a ‘disputatious community’ [11]. Arguing about the proper purposes of collective inquiry, debating the question of what the subject matter of that inquiry ought to be, disagreeing over what theories and methods are appropriate, differing as to what its distinctive assumptions and philosophical foundations are, wrangling about where to draw its boundaries (e.g., who is included and who isn’t?), and, perhaps most important, caring about the answers—are what it means to be a member of a field or a discipline.

Thus, when Michael Marien argues with other putative futurists about whether or not futures studies is a field, what its boundaries are, or other debatable issues of our ‘collective enterprise’, he is, quite despite himself, helping to establish the patterns and flows of communication and influence that define the very field of futures studies whose existence he denies.

This is so because the interlocking networks created by such patterns and flows help to empirically define the boundaries of the field and to identify who is a member of the community of futurists. Although Richard A. Slaughter says that ‘the boundaries cannot be defined clearly’, because futures studies is ‘richly interconnected at the margins with many other enterprises and fields’, he does not say that they cannot be defined [12].

We can go even further. There is a difference between who is a futurist and what the *substantive* boundaries of the futures field are. Below, I give some criteria by which to decide who is a futurist and who isn’t. But the subject matter of futures studies is a different issue. Futurists, by the very nature of our holistic and integrative action approach, rely on the knowledges of many different fields. Thus, we frequently use the work of nonfuturists that we find relevant to our purposes. Although doing so may appear to make the field’s boundaries fuzzy, it also immunizes futurists from catching the diseases of intellectual parochialism and overspecialization.

Finally, in any field there is always a struggle between some members who try to keep the field openended, even as its canon grows, and other members who rush to achieve early closure and to propose supposedly lasting formulations of the field’s principles and methods. The former try to incorporate and cope with the puzzles, obscurities, diversity, and ambiguities of the field, while the latter tend to ignore them and to accept neat, simple, and often wrong solutions.

Clearly, some balance between the two camps is required. ‘On the one hand, there is the very real danger that a discipline will dissolve into a kind of mindless antinomianism where everyone does his own thing and listens only to the sounds of his own voice. On the other hand, there is the equally real danger that a discipline will harden into a brittle orthodoxy where ritual, rules and formulae long outlast the

logic responsible for their invention' [13]. Futurists, for the most part, have avoided both intellectual anarchy and rigid orthodoxy, while creating many shared elements of a culture of collective inquiry.

4. A transdisciplinary matrix for futures studies

There is considerable evidence, for example, that futures studies today is an identifiable collective, intellectual activity, with its own distinctive features. Such evidence ranges from futures organizations and periodicals [14] to conferences of futurists, university futures courses, and futures consulting groups. Equally important is the emergent transdisciplinary matrix for futures studies. Thomas S. Kuhn, after some second thoughts, proposed 'disciplinary matrix' to describe most of the items of group commitment that in his earlier work he had imprecisely called a 'paradigm' [15].

Using Kuhn's ideas and drawing on the work of several futurists, I identify in *Foundations of Futures Studies* [16] some features of a transdisciplinary matrix for futures studies as an action and transformational science. They include:

- A perspective encompassing both past change and possibilities for the future different from the present.
- A belief that futures thinking can increase the effectiveness of human action.
- A faith in the use of knowledge in policy formulation and implementation.
- A self-identity as a futurist.
- A shared set of assumptions.
- Common purposes (e.g., making the world a better place where all human beings will have an equal and good chance of living long and satisfying lives, a commitment to the well-being of future generations; toward that end: studying possible, probable, and preferable futures; exploring images of the future; investigating the knowledge and ethical foundations of futures studies; interpreting the past and orientating the present; integrating knowledge and values in designing social action; increasing democratic participation in imaging and designing the future; and communicating and advocating a particular image of the future).
- Shared methods and exemplars.
- Shared key concepts (e.g., image of the future, future shock, tempocentrism, time frames, time horizons, alternative futures, possible futures, probable futures, preferable futures, post-industrial society, sustainable development, self-altering prophecy, issues management, scenarios, trends, life-sustaining capacities of the Earth, human values, among others), compare this with Slaughter, 1993 [17].
- A similarity in underlying theories of human behavior and social change, involving active human agency and socio-cybernetic processes (despite the fact that futurists have no GUTs—i.e., no consensus on a Grand Unifying Theory).
- An orientation toward conscious decision-making and social action aimed at adapting to or controlling the future.

- A wide-ranging use of the knowledge of many disciplines as needed to understand the phenomena under consideration in any study or project.
- A holistic perspective as necessitated by the information needs of social action.
- A concern with the social implications of scientific and technological changes and, more generally, a concern with the consequences of all human behavior, both intended and unintended.
- A dedication to understanding the general processes of change, be they psychological, political, economic, social, or cultural.
- Shared values (e.g., the freedom and well-being of humans, a concern for all living things, and a concern for the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth, both now and for the indefinite future).

5. The growth of intellectual capital

Looked at over time, the work produced by futurists, like that of the practitioners of other fields, may be uneven, either up or down at any one point compared to the year or decade earlier. However uneven it may be, there is a trend toward cumulative growth in the body of work that constitutes the core of futures studies. The best work of the past remains accessible to us, and the ‘canon’ of futures studies—i.e., its rules, principles, and standards, and the core books and articles recognized as authentic exemplars of the futures field that every futurist ought to know—continues to grow.

We continue to rely on the past work of Roy Amara, Robert U. Ayres, Eleonora Barbieri Masini, Daniel Bell, Kenneth and Elise Boulding, Harrison Brown, Lester R. Brown, Harlan Cleveland, Joseph F. Coates, Edward S. Cornish, James A. Dator, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Yehezkel Dror, Mahdi Elmandjra, Amitai Etzioni, Victor Ferkiss, Ossip K. Flechtheim, R. Buckminster Fuller, Dennis Gabor, Johan Galtung, Theodore J. Gordon, Willis W. Harman, Olaf Helmer, Richard L. Henshel, Hazel Henderson, Erich Jantsch, Robert Jungk, Herman Kahn, H.D. Lasswell, Harold Linstone, John and Magda Cordell McHale, Pentti Malaska, Michael Marien, Joseph P. Martino, Pierre Massé, Donella and Dennis Meadows, Donald N. Michael, William F. Ogburn, James A. Ogilvy, Hasan Ozbekhan, Aurelio Peccei, Frederik L. Polak, Peter Schwartz, Robert B. Textor, Robert Theobald, Allen Tough, Alvin Toffler, Warren W. Wagar, H.G. Wells, and others.

Most of the above pioneers of the futures field still remain active and creative contributors to its development. Also, other futurists have joined them in contributing to the expanding intellectual capital of the field, people such as, to mention only a few, Enric Bas, Clement Bezold, Sam Cole, Hugues de Jouvenel, David Hicks, Andy Hines, Rolf Homann, Sohail Inayatullah, Ashis Nandy, Mika Mannermaa, Javier Medina Vásquez, Peter H. Mettler, Ian D. Miles, Peter Moll, Reed D. Riner, Francisco Sagasti, Ziauddin Sardar, Arthur B. Shostak, Richard A. Slaughter, and Markku Wilenius.

Moreover, beginning in the 1980s, the intellectual capital of futures studies was further enhanced by the synthesis of earlier futures work as well as by efforts to

specify and elaborate the knowledge base and philosophical foundations of the field. Among other things, these works identify shared exemplars and emergent professional ethics. They tend to combine exegesis of past work by futurists with the findings of many related fields in an attempt to discover or formulate underlying themes, lessons, principles, epistemologies, and codifications [2, v. 1 and 2; 16, v. 1 and 2; 18–24].

Futurists today have character-defining intellectual traditions and a considerable body of knowledge. We have concepts, theories, methods, and substantive principles that can be placed between the covers of a book, that can be taught to others, and that can be put to practical use.

6. Who is a futurist? Some criteria

Some years ago, a wealthy individual, who shall remain nameless, was greatly influenced by a book by a sometime futurist, so much so that he wanted to do something to promote futures thinking about the problems and opportunities facing humankind. He proposed giving a gift of several tens of millions of dollars, with plans to donate additional funds later, to a major American research university, if the university were willing to use it to study the future. In response, the university appointed a committee of its professors who were asked to write a proposal of how the money would be used to carry out the donor's wishes.

During the course of the committee's deliberations, several futurists from around the country were individually consulted. I was one of them and made a trip to the university where I worked briefly with the chairman and other committee members. I also sent them some futurist writings and suggested the names of other futurists whom I thought they ought to consult, which in a few cases they did.

It was, I believed at the time, a breakthrough opportunity for the advancement of futures studies. My hope was that three or four futurists would be newly hired full-time to the faculty to constitute the core of a program of futures studies and that other faculty participants, mostly people already holding appointments at the university, would be appointed jointly between the program and their own departments. To keep standards high, all appointments would be joint with existing departments and go through the usual university appointment procedures. To encourage participation by other departments, the futures program, in addition to its full-time positions, would be given several half-time positions with salaries to offer other departments for their joint-faculty participants. I knew that such a strategy could work, because we had used it to establish the African-American Studies Program at Yale.

What really happened? The committee members, who knew little or nothing about the futures field before then, apparently had an epiphany during the course of their deliberations. It was revealed to them that, in fact, in each of their traditional and established departments they had been researching and teaching futures all along. A sideshow contortionist would have had some serious competition from these earnest academicians as they twisted and distorted themselves to show that what they and their colleagues were already doing was related to the future.

In some sense, of course, they were right. There isn't much knowledge that cannot somehow be brought to bear on the future and, as I explain below, there is an inherent future orientation to all inquiry-based education. Moreover, we futurists might have looked on all this with approval—a giant step forward, with powerful, mainstream disciplines recognizing the importance of the future as a topic for investigation and with established scholars bringing the future into their research and teaching agendas—if it were not at the expense of the alternative possibility of starting a genuine futures studies program at a major research university. Rather, the vultures had gathered and they hoped simply to divide the several tens of millions of dollars up among themselves, add some window dressing about the future, and continue doing what they had been already doing.

In some more basic sense, they were wrong. They were not futurists and they had not been doing futures research or teaching futures studies. I asked myself:

- How many were members of futures organizations?
- How many had participated in conferences of futurists?
- How many had published in futurist journals?
- How many had written books specifically about the future?
- How many had had their writings regularly cited by futurists?
- How many had taught futures studies courses?
- How many routinely and repetitively interacted in any way with futurists?
- How many had ever been a student in a futures studies course?
- How many had read any significant part of the futurist literature?
- How many had seriously considered the future in their work before the offer of money came?

The answers? Very few, if any, had done any of these things. Futurists, to the contrary, have done many of them. Yes, Virginia, futurists exist, and, yes, we know pretty well who they are—and who they are not.

7. What are the prospects for futures studies?

The future of futures studies may be bright, contingent upon expanding the presence of futures studies in the curricula of colleges and universities throughout the world. I would not suggest, however, that we put all our futures eggs in one basket. Thus, we ought to continue to pursue futures work through private consulting firms and autonomous institutes and centers, within military and governmental institutions, and within both non-profit organizations and business and industrial corporations. Yet there may be special and multiple payoffs for giving some priority to establishing futures studies more widely and securely in educational institutions, especially at the university level.

As full-time members of faculties in futures programs of colleges and universities, futurists would have the long-term, dependable resources and the freedom necessary to devote our time to the development of futures studies itself. For example, we

would be able to produce, on a far larger scale than we do now, crucial empirical studies, critical syntheses and evaluations of key futures works, continuing epistemological explorations of the knowledge base of futures studies, codifications and organizations of the substantive contents of futures studies, methodological critiques and innovations, biographies of important futurists, and histories of the development of key ideas in futures studies. Additionally, futurists could nurture working relationships with members of established university departments, encouraging them to take up futures work themselves, and futurists would have access to sources of foundation funding less available without university sponsorship.

Equally important, futurists would be able to establish university-based futures laboratories, including survey and field research centers, and inquiry-oriented seminars. These data-generating tools could be used not only for the production of new knowledge about the future, but also for the training of the next generation of professional futurists. In such futures laboratories and seminars, student-apprentices would become junior colleagues and co-researchers of their professors of foresight. As they engaged in expanding and revising the knowledge base of futures studies, such students would be learning new, inquiry-based futures knowledge, the skills of futures researchers, and the principles of critical thinking.

They would also become socialized into the culture of futurists, absorbing, among other things, the commitments to search for solutions to humanity's problems and to design social action to create desirable futures as well as the humility that comes with the understanding that the best of such solutions are both hard to come by and far from perfect.

Such an image of a university future for futures studies is not mere wishful thinking. Universities are constantly changing—and never more rapidly than they are today. Sohail Inayatullah and Jennifer Gidley, for example, identify four factors affecting changes in today's universities: globalism, multiculturalism, virtualization, and politicization [25]. Those of us who now inhabit universities have seen in our own lifetimes some of the consequences of these and other forces as our universities have become wired and electronically networked, both inside the university and outside to the world. We have seen the creation of dozens upon dozens of special programs and new departments, ranging from minority-group studies of various sorts, women's studies, and gay and lesbian studies to programs on the environment, policy studies, and AIDs. And in some cases we have seen the transformation of our once national universities into international institutions and of our once remote ivy towers into corporate structures of commodified education and commercial, entrepreneurial activity, including the startup of biotechnology and internet companies.

Although the pace today may be more rapid, change, as we all know, is not new. Universities are the product of a long history of development and, during the last century and a half, they have been transformed into places of inquiry [6]. The modern research university brings together research, teaching, and study in ways that can be mutually reinforcing and beneficial. One result is that research universities are not particularly past oriented in their approach to knowledge. Today, they do not view their mission as being primarily a conservator of preexisting knowledge and a conveyor of that knowledge to the next generation.

Rather, inquiry-based education is future-oriented. It seeks to produce new knowledge and to develop inquiring minds among its students, minds trained to ask critical questions, including those that challenge the received 'wisdom' of the past. As Clark says, the commitment to inquiry generates 'a forward-looking attitude. When possessed by its dictates, the orientation of faculty and students alike shift[s] from past knowledge to future knowledge: those caught up in inquiry. . . have a distinct preference for the new' [6, p. 2].

Clark further points out that this leads—or, perhaps more accurately, will eventually lead—to a society rooted in inquiry as a means of problem solving. The affinity to futures studies seems obvious, because such a society is—or will be—necessarily deeply engaged in a kind of futures thinking.

Of course, this trend toward inquiry-based education has not yet reached every educational institution, has not fully permeated many that it has reached, and has spread to universities in some countries more quickly and thoroughly than in others. Moreover, although modern research universities have become the most prestigious and powerful of educational institutions, alternative models remain and even proliferate, such as colleges that survive by teaching from the preexisting knowledge base, using relatively low-paid and overworked professors who are assigned teaching loads so heavy that they must make herculean efforts to maintain any sort of a research and publication program. And, many—if not most—of them eventually give up.

The perceptive reader, surely, will now be asking him- or herself why, if inquiry-based education is necessarily forward looking, are futurists still of the opinion, as I certainly am, that university faculties need to be more futurized than they are? And why do futures studies programs need to be added to university curricula—not so much to benefit futures studies but to improve the research, teaching, and learning of the university community?

The answers, I think, are partly to be found in the overspecialization of research activities. The old joke about the specialist who knows more and more about less and less until he or she knows everything about nothing is an exaggeration, but it contains some truth. At the frontiers of any given discipline, inquiry is usually very narrowly focused on some specific research questions generated from within the discipline itself. Typically, some bits of new knowledge are produced that advance the field into the future. But that future, at least in the short term, is limited to the future of the field itself.

We can all be thankful, of course, for the many scientific discoveries that increase both the length and quality of human lives. And we can be especially grateful to those researchers who are consciously motivated in their research by the belief that it will eventually produce results that will improve human well-being. But there is usually a long and bumpy road between the production of knowledge and the application of that knowledge in ways that will beneficially affect the everyday lives of any significant number of ordinary people. Often, researchers are more focused on the short-term competitive race for the fame of discovery than they are by the desire for the long-term improvement of the human condition.

Futures studies, of course, is not simply about any future. It is about the future well-being of people. It is an action science, and the action is social in the broadest

sense, including the political, the economic, and the cultural. As such, futures studies aims to produce knowledge and foresight that can be used by people to steer toward more consciously-chosen futures [26]. Thus, futures studies places as much emphasis on the utilization of knowledge as on its production, and futurists in our search for solutions to human problems look not only to the futurist canon but for any knowledge, from whatever source, that might be useful.

Also, futurists, given our purposes, explore values and the nature of the good society. Attempting to contribute to the creation of preferable futures, obviously, implies that we know—or are willing to try to discover—what a preferable future is. This means that futures researchers—or at least some of us—must devote some of our time to the study of human values and we must be responsibly concerned about the future consequences of our work for human welfare.

Unlike many members of mainstream disciplines, futurists cannot argue that our highest priority is simply getting the facts and producing knowledge for its own sake, leaving concerns for the consequences of its production and use to others. Futurists are practitioners who apply knowledge as well as researchers who produce it and teachers who teach it. It is our business to be ethically concerned about what to study, how to study it (including protecting the rights of human subjects of research), the purposes for which knowledge is used, and the consequences of its use for human freedom and well-being.

Thus, futurists ask, as sociologist Robert S. Lynd did years ago, ‘Knowledge for what?’ [27] Already that query is being addressed in universities, for example, in schools of medicine, law, engineering, and agriculture, and, more recently, in schools of environmental studies, management, education, architecture, social work, nursing, and librarianship. But such schools, although informed by knowledge, are not involved primarily in the production of new knowledge. Rather, they focus on professional practice or vocational training.

Futurists, if added to the intellectual world of modern research universities, would bring together research, teaching, study, and *practice* in new and more unified, holistic, and future-oriented ways. We could also try to establish connections among various disciplines, professional schools, and ourselves by organizing study groups, each aimed at finding solutions to a major problem facing neighborhoods, cities, states, nations, or humanity as a whole.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I claim that compared to the mainstream disciplines, especially the established social sciences, futures studies is generally less fragmented, while being more open-minded, more concerned with taking the whole Earth and all humanity into account, more willing to tackle major social problems confronting humankind, more likely to bear on important human values, better written, and less boring.

Criticisms of futures studies by futurists and intellectual controversy among futurists are not necessarily indicators of the disintegration of futures studies or of its not being a genuine field. To the contrary, such criticism and controversy generally are

a healthy sign of a field's vitality. Every field of intellectual inquiry that is alive and well is importantly defined from time to time—if not all the time—as a disputatious community.

Today, futurists exist as a worldwide community of scholars who more or less share features of a transdisciplinary matrix, from a self-identity as a futurist, shared assumptions, and key concepts to common purposes, a holistic perspective, and shared values. Additionally, futurists have created a body of futurist knowledge—a canon—that substantively defines the field. The intellectual capital of futures studies has grown and continues to grow.

The substantive boundaries of futures studies may always remain somewhat fuzzy, because of futurists' holistic- and action-orientation. Any given policy issue may require bits of relevant knowledge from many different disciplines. But futurists are identifiable with reasonable accuracy. There are a dozen or so criteria that define us, including, and perhaps most important, the scope, frequency, and nature of our interactions with other futurists. A futurist is someone who repetitively communicates with, influences, and is influenced by futurists on some topic having to do with the systematic understanding and conscious shaping of the future.

What are the prospects for futures studies? Good, I believe, especially if futurists can manage to establish futures studies programs in educational institutions throughout the globe, especially in modern research universities. Futures studies has much to offer to the research-teaching-study-practice mix of such universities, including a holistic, unifying approach that tends to reduce the confusion of infoglut created by the specialized production of knowledge, an integrated research and action-oriented approach that encourages transdisciplinary cooperation and seeks to make knowledge accessible for human use, an explicit concern with understanding possible and probable futures that puts foresight firmly on the university research agenda, a commitment to exploring the meaning of preferable futures that brings human values and responsibility into the center of objective intellectual discourse, and, finally, a dedication to helping to create the good society that invites direct participation in designing social systems for the future.

These are constructive contributions to academic communities everywhere. As Henshel [1, p. 408] also said, a contemporary futures conference 'generates more genuinely important ideas' than any other form of meeting. Can we, as a community of futurists, work together to bring those ideas more fully into 21st century colleges and universities?

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