PSU Futures Collaboratory: Final Report and Recommendations to President Percy and Provost Susan Jeffords

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PSU FUTURES COLLABORATORY: FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESIDENT PERCY AND PROVOST SUSAN JEFFORDS

Collective Imagination, Collective Intelligence, Collective Agility

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Social Work Futures Website: www.socialworkfutures.com
Portland State University Futures Collaboratory Website: https://sites.google.com/pdx.edu/futurescollaboratory/welcome
WHAT IS FUTURES WORK?

The greatest existential challenge facing the human species, can in part be traced, to the fact that we have underdeveloped practices for thinking possible worlds out loud.

Stuart Candy
WHAT FUTURES THINKING HAS TO OFFER RIGHT NOW

• Connect the past, present and the future

• Learn from the past, make sense of the present as we deal with it and connect both of these to an arc of meaning and the choices we have about what happens next.

• “Unlearn” our way of thinking about what is and isn’t possible. The veil between these things is especially porous right now.

• Critical, post-modern, cultural, interpretive, participative, holistic

• Bow to Indigenous lens
COUNT ON DISRUPTION FROM HERE FORWARD – AMY WEBB
What are the best ways of thinking about the future?
ETHICS AND THE FUTURE

• Our obligation to future generations.
• To not regret the things we build – Jane McGonigal (Ethical OS).
• To be transparent about how and why we work as futurists.
• To promote human and planetary well-being.
WHAT IS AROUND THE NEXT CORNER AND ARE WE READY? OUR NARRATIVES MATTER....
THE FUTURE OF POWER

Hierarchies vs Networks

Types of Networks

FIG. 1 - Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks
THE FUTURE OF ISSUES

- Social change
- Work
- Organizational life
- Cities
- Technology
- Climate
- Food
- Communication
- Identity and human rights

- Racism and equity
- Family life
- Coupling and relationships
- Well-being (including both health and psychological)
- Religion and spirituality
- Trust
- Political life and democracy
- War (and peace)
- Not to mention “products” galore…
THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONS

- Medicine (both doctors, nurses and all health professions)
- Education (teachers - both in K-12 and higher education)
- Law
- Journalism
- Architecture
- Divinity
SPRING 2019 UNIVERSITY-WIDE FUTURES DIALOGUES

• What does the future look like from your disciplinary location?
• What does your school/college need to do to be ready for these developments?
• What does PSU need to do be prepared for the future?
• Advice for us about if/how we seek to have a campus-wide initiative focused on futures issues.
A SAMPLE OF ADVICE/INPUT WE RECEIVED ON THIS TOPIC

• “We need to move faster – we are very slow to evolve.”
• "The most important skills of the future will be how humans handle, and use information – we are still behind in preparing for that."
• “Being prepared for the cultural and identity complexities will make us more ready for the future.”
• "'Personalized education’ much like 'personalized medicine’ will quickly become real – we need to get ready for that."
• “Handling the tension between ‘fundamentals’ of learning and ‘emerging knowledge’ will become increasingly important.”
• "We need to get ready for the how the topic of the ‘future of work’ will influence our activities and goals.”
• “How do we best learn from other universities around the world that are become more future ready?”
• “No matter how much things change, we need to keep amplifying the idea that real human relationships, the art of working with other people, across differences, solving problems is important. And this is one of our strengths at PSU.”
MOST IMPORTANT FUTURES QUESTIONS FOR PSU RIGHT NOW

• What does “being ready for the future” mean right now at this moment in history? In general, for higher education and for PSU specifically? What does the future need from universities?

• What do universities of the future look like? How are they like and unlike what we do now?

• What is most important to protect as evolution/devolution/threats/opportunities inevitably happen?

• What are different scenarios for how the future might play out (including positive, negative, transformational?) – and can we plan for several of them simultaneously?
LEVELS OF “FUTURE PROOFING” TO THINK ABOUT FOR UNIVERSITIES

• Purpose – is this evolving?
• Social legitimacy – are we trusted and valued?
• As an organization – can we flex and evolve?
• As a type of work – how will roles (faculty, administrative and student) change in the coming years?
• As part of a community/ecosystem beyond the university itself – how will the future of cities will impact the future of urban universities?
• As part of a global community – how will geopolitics shape our local reality?
• In a hostile historical period for “knowledge work” – how will we adapt?
• Now as a site of deep covid-19 complexity (housing, small classrooms, digital divide, revealed precarious funding streams, other types of covid-related equity and inequity) – what is our emerging role in recovery?
PSU FUTURES COLLABORATORY – 2019-2020

• Presidential initiative initially taking shape last year and brought to reality by Interim President Percy in summer of 2019.

• Activity: Bring a cross-section of people together from across campus to dive into a year-long learning and development process of becoming “foresightful” – using and applying futures thinking and planning methods to our work at PSU.

• Goals: 1) Build a team of cross-disciplinary futures ambassadors, 2) Do exploratory projects based on these ideas across campus. 3) Deliver a list of ideas to Interim President Percy about what we recommend to increase PSU’s “future readiness” in the years to come.

• Interim report: Internationally known futurists engaging with us. Thriving, lively and committed group, projects being planned, learning occurring, big thinking happening. Our group is curious, committed, active and engaged. Please visit our website and get to know all the PSU Futures Fellows!!! We will offer some early recommendations at the webinar next week.

• https://sites.google.com/pdx.edu/futurescollaboratory
OUR EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS AS A COLLABORATORY

From a paper we submitted to the World Futures Forum journal re: case study of the PSU Futures Collaboratory – special edition on the future of higher education.
FUTURES COLLABORATORY END OF YEAR WEBINARS

• Friday, May 29 – noon. What is futures thinking and practice? A vital lens and tool kit for what comes next

• Friday, June 5 - noon. Scenarios for PSU’s future: Getting ready for post-normal times AND our initial recommendations to President Percy and the PSU community

• Friday, June 12 – noon. Noted Princeton Faculty Member, Dr. Ruha Benjamin. Race to the Future? Reimagining the Default Settings of Technology & Society (A limited number of free copies will be available of her book: Race After Technology for attendees. PSU has just acquired this as an e-book as well.)
OUR RECOMMENDATIONS – FIVE CATEGORIES

1) Our mission
2) Our structures
3) Our equity lens
4) Our pedagogy (teaching, learning and advising) practices
5) Our community
• Center the idea of future readiness as a key component of our authentic university identity and purpose and build the necessary community and structures to make that an explicit reality. We believe that irrespective of the type of degree program, future readiness will continue to be a guiding and increasing measure of relevance for higher education in the years to come.
OUR STRUCTURES

• Revise our institutional structures toward the future of work and the future of learning at work. This explicitly encourages not only responsible innovation, but also collaboration and a breaking down of old barriers that both isolate and inhibit growth.
Commit to equity work in a way that acknowledges that failure to make progress in this area forecloses our ability as an institution to fulfill its collective potential. Engage in futures-informed equity practice that is transformational to co-create a future that is fundamentally pluralistic and liberatory.
OUR PEDAGOGY (TEACHING, LEARNING AND ADVISING) PRACTICES

• Reimagine what teaching, learning, and advising might be and do so with courage. Be willing to evolve our methods to experiment and test new options.
• Actively and explicitly engage in the co-creation of the role of urban public universities by inviting and engaging deeper and more creative levels of dialogue with our community partners at all levels and sectors of our neighborhoods and civic ecosystem.
WHAT COMES NEXT?

• We’d like to continue our work “as the collaboratory” next year. Continue learning from futurists, developing our PSU futures community and applying this knowledge to real challenges in our ecosystem.

• We’d like to contribute and assist as futures-related “connective tissue” between many different improvement or evolution oriented initiatives at PSU could be helpful as we build our overall organizational foresightfulness.

• PSU is one of the very few universities nationally to engage in explicit foresight work. We’d like to grow our visibility and footprint to be increasingly “known for” excellence in this area.

• We’d like to grow our capacity to deliver both undergraduate and graduate curriculum in these areas which will have the added bonus of getting even more faculty involved.
IN CLOSING

• We have built true capacity in some new and important ways for PSU’s future.

• We have received national attention for our work in this space.

• We have received very positive input from our PSU colleagues about this work and have many interested in getting involved in whatever comes next.

• We have an imaginative, diverse, dedicated and enthusiastic group of PSU students, faculty and staff with regard to futures knowledge and practice – we believe more is possible.

• We believe PSU is stronger and more agile for this work.

• We strongly recommend continuation and expansion of our efforts in these complicated times for higher education.
What kind of story will we write about what happens next?

A thriving Portland State University belongs in Portland and our region’s future– contributing, learning and co-creating.