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# A Walk in the Future

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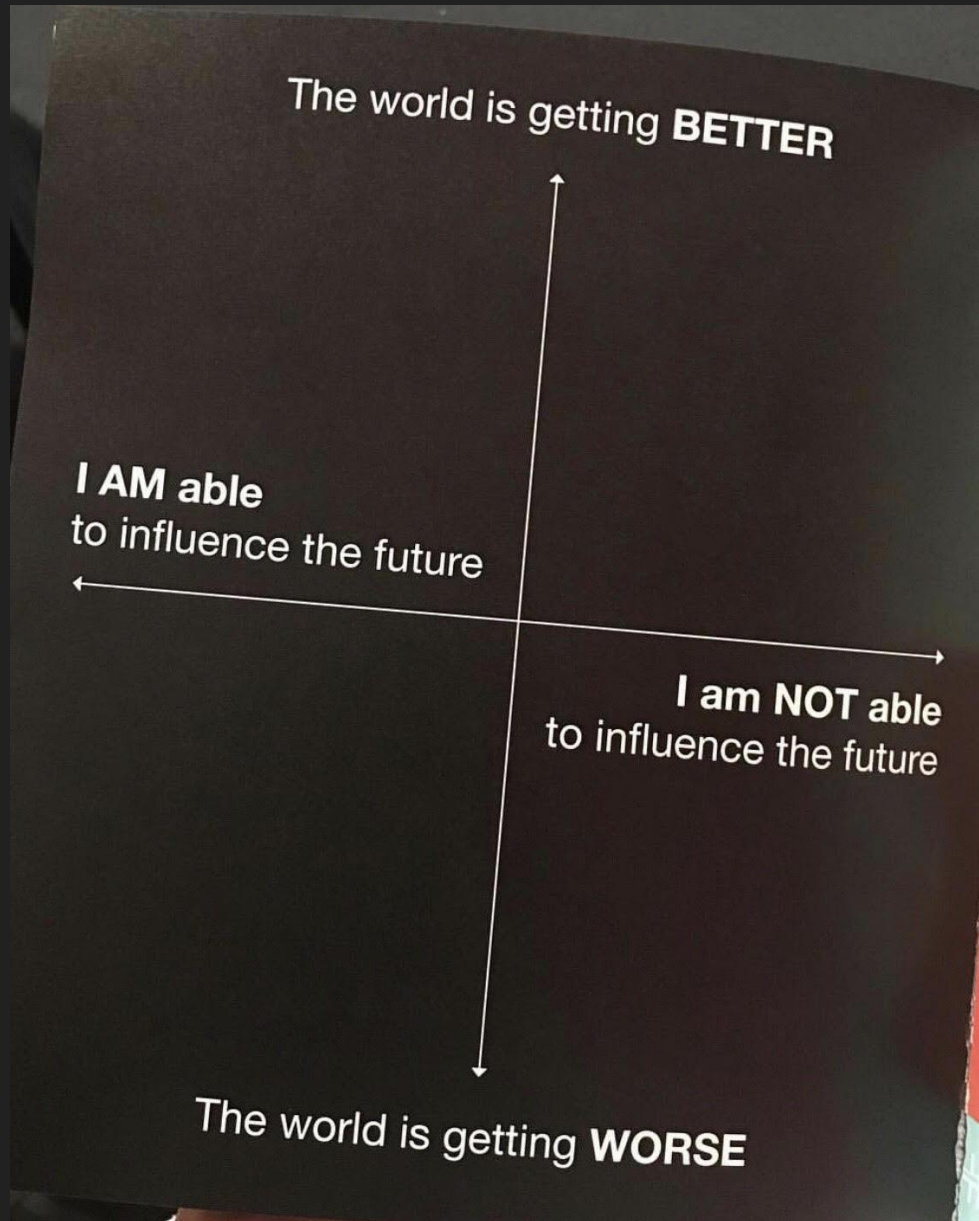
# A Walk in the Future

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Portland State University

Board of Trustees Meeting  
Portland State University, January 2020

# Who am I?

- Laura Nissen, Ph.D., LMSW, CADC III
- Professor at Portland State for almost 20 years (in May 2020!)
- Multiple jobs at PSU! (Guess this makes me an academic utility player!). National Program Director for a 30-million dollar RWJF addictions/juvenile justice reform project housed at PSU, Scholar and Professor (tenure track), Dean (2014-2019), Futurist (leading PSU's Futures Collaboratory and First Presidential Futures Fellow), and a Research Fellow at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto.
- Now PI on a new RWJF to bring futures thinking to the social work profession – starting NOW.
- Calligrapher, bookbinder and lover of waterfalls – devoted PNWesterner!



What are the best ways of thinking about the future?

# What is a “Futures Lens”

- Philosophy
- Set of skills and techniques
- Both intervention and “way of being”
- Used by communities internationally
- Creative, courageous, disruptive thinkers and active in sharing, making and connecting with each other
- ▮ **Indigenous lens** though not widely acknowledged this way (we need to correct that)
- More than 50 year history of theory, research and practice globally
- Challenges our sensibilities that an orderly flow from now to the future will occur - the future is messy. Futures work helps to sort it out and develop a sense of collective agency through analytic, creative thinking and engagement techniques.



# The Future of Higher Education

- "National crisis" language, mergers and closures, graduate school shrinkage, partisan and bipartisan political pressure, increasing expectations – with generally decreasing funding
- Context of higher education grappling with increasing complexity
- Technology and higher education create new "requirements" and also additional kinds of risks, opportunities and costs
- New "knowledge" coming faster and more intensely than at any time in recorded history.
- Technology and climate change themselves in our larger community play a role in how we think about what will happen next. (Bryan Alexander, 2020 – see additional chart.)

# What Comes Next in Higher Education?

- New forms
- New formats
- New players
- New credentials
- New tools
- New risks
- New skills
- HOW WILL WE PREPARE?
- The answer is we dive in together and we learn, explore, build and challenge ourselves to “get ready” and participate in creating the kind of future we want. Dealing with extraordinary change is not optional.

# Using tools to stretch our thinking

- How do we become “foresightful” as a sector (and specifically as a university)?
- How do we use our collective intelligence and imagination to “think beyond” the way things are now? May or may not inform the way we want them to be.
- How do we broaden our dialogue about current conflicts, and use futures thinking to develop new narratives, and consequently, new plans to help us get where we want to go as a university?



# 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.”

# 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.





Things are  
getting better  
and better and  
worse and worse,  
faster and faster.

Tom Atlee

