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Teaching Scenarios of New Normals: Grounding Innovative Landscape Architectural Design in Futures Studies

"To build a future means linking the knowledge of the past and present to choice and action." Bertrand de Jouvenel, 1964

As design instructors, we continually drive our students for work that is new, inventive and, perhaps, ahead of its time. Yet how do we teach students to anticipate the future? We counsel them to research precedent studies, seeking a framework from the work of others, but how do we move their work beyond the contemporary of what they know today?

Futures studies is a systematic and rationally grounded exploration of change. It studies historical and contemporary changes, aggregating and analyzing the sources, patterns and causes of change in an attempt to understand it and influence it (Galtung & Inayatullah 1997, Ventura 1998, Isserman 1985, Staley 2007). Ideally, its methodology requires one to be both transdisciplinary as well as a systems thinker. Unlike interdisciplinary study, transdisciplinary scholars dissolve the boundaries between disciplines, tracking patterns of change across trends, events and issues (Groff and Smoker 2000, Cole 2001, Thompson Klein, Grossenbacher-Mansuy, and R. Häberli 2002).

This paper reports on the organization and results of a course developed to help freshman landscape architecture students build innovation in design and anticipate future scenarios through futures studies' methodology. Topics were examined through the lens of historical and contemporary theory and models including:

- art
- music, literature and film
- fashion and industrial design
- architectural design
- social justice and urban design
- politics and economics
- systems design of the environment
- science and technology

This transdisciplinary study revealed patterns and connections, with history providing context and empirical data for each topic. Students were taught an envisioning framework and up-dated their ideas in a course wiki and discussion boards for all to edit and append throughout the quarter. To test *how* this knowledge was physically resolved in practice, students created models reflecting possible future scenarios of landscape architecture in 2025, addressed at any scale. These models required synthesizing the principles of physical and social sciences into grounded, rational innovations, exploring possible futures. The course taught a methodology and envisioning process for developing forward thinkers as designers.

Broader value of this paper highlights a heuristic method not typically used in undergraduate landscape architecture education. The specialty of applying futures studies to landscape architecture in both

quantitative and qualitative data and ideas is a potentially underdeveloped area for new method and theory development.

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Foresight frameworks, futures studies, theory, pedagogical methodology

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