

University of Notre Dame
Mendoza College of Business
BA30310 Foresight in Business & Society
Abbreviated Class Syllabus

GENERAL INFORMATION AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Course Description:

Foresight in Business & Society is a course that challenges students to engage in the process of identifying and evaluating major issues and trends impacting a broad spectrum of society by exploring The Millennium Project, the UN Millennium Development Goals and issues related to sustainability and demography. A framework is then provided that includes a range of foresight tools and methods for forecasting future scenarios and analyzing implications of future change. The course challenges students to engage in the process of identifying and evaluating major issues and trends impacting society in the future and exploring potential business implications that can drive sustainable innovation. The course is designed to facilitate critical/analytical, systems, and creative thinking. Students apply these thinking skills and the foresight framework in a semester-long team project on a topic of their choosing that combines an issue facing the world today with business opportunities and impacts thereon.

The course can be divided into different modules with the following topics covered in a variety of different configurations. The following is one example:

- **Module One - Perspectives**
 - Introduction to Foresight
 - Trend Awareness
 - Global Challenges and State of the Future
 - Project Overview and Development
 - Scanning and Changes
 - Introduction to Systems Thinking
 - Systems Mapping
- **Module Two – Foresight**
 - Foresight Tools and Methods
 - Evidence Based Foresight
 - Trend Analysis and Forecasting
 - Finding Data
 - Baseline Forecasting
 - Introduction to Scenarios
 - Scenario Development Methods
- **Module Three - Insights**
 - Visioning and Backcasting
 - Implications Assessment
 - Frameworks for Strategic Response
 - Innovation Based Responses
 - CSR and Moral/Ethical Considerations
 - Leading Change
 - Presentation of Findings
 - Wrap-Up

2. **Course Objectives:** Change occurs in linear (continuous) and non-linear (disruptive) forms and creates opportunities for business through early identification of emerging societal problems and anticipation of their implications and potential solutions. The first step in defining preferred solutions is awareness; foresight can be developed into a core competency enabling leaders to plan for and create positive change in the future. Thus, the overall course objectives are as follows:

- Demonstrate an awareness of important issues and trends affecting society, including issues related to sustainability.
- Research specific responses and intervention to these issues and trends by the government, business, NGOs, think-tanks, and other organizations.
- Develop framing and scanning skills to see and understand “weak signals” of emerging change and its implications.
- Apply the methodologies and tools used by organizations to identify trends, consider the implications of change, plan for alternative futures and suggest solutions leading to preferred futures.
- Demonstrate various types of thinking skills, including critical/analytical thinking, systems thinking, creative thinking and visioning skills, which are critical in effectively addressing complex problems.
- Produce a well-reasoned foresight project that (1) addresses a major societal issue, (2) considers trends and future implications for society and business, and (3) suggests appropriate solutions, in light of moral and ethical concerns.

3. **Class Delivery:** Foresight in Business & Society is taught through a combination of classroom lectures, in-class exercises, classroom discussions, Socratic questioning, video illustrations, and guest lectures. Class plans for each class day will be posted the week prior to each class. Each assignment also has a separate elaborated posting. The reading assignments and any assigned homework should be completed prior to class, and you should be prepared to discuss the material covered in the readings on the date indicated on the syllabus.

4. **Course Requirements:** To successfully complete the course, students must:

- Complete the assigned reading assignments before each class
- Complete the assigned homework assignments and sections of the paper project
- Fully participate in classroom discussions
- Complete the scanning and current events entries as assigned
- Complete the assigned quizzes
- Complete the draft literature review paper or Situations Analysis assignment
- Complete the Team Foresight Project paper
- Present the findings in class and in the final Foresight Presentation event

5. **Team Foresight Paper Projects:** The class will be divided into teams of four or five students. Each team will write one paper and present a visual version of that paper to the class. There will also be a public presentation at the end of the semester. The paper must be twenty-five to thirty double-spaced pages in length, plus supporting exhibits. It should include the following: 1) investigate an important trend or future issue and explain the significance of the issue or problem; 2) provide the appropriate historic, theoretic and practical background of the issue or problem using published research and analysis, thereby creating a robust analysis of the current situation and the factors influencing change; 3) develop and articulate the analytical strategy you intend to employ for gathering and analyzing data in order to project trends using data from available

sources; 4) collect and analyze data related to the trend or future issue and project an expected future; 5) explore implications and describe alternative futures for business and society using visioning and scenario techniques; 6) articulate the relevant normative and moral implications, using the Catholic tradition (or other religious or secular traditions); 7) make recommendations based on your conclusions and propose potential strategic responses for business to influence and capitalize on change in a Triple Bottom Line context; and, 8) include a formal documentation list of references and use complete citations throughout the paper.

6. **Scanning and Current Events:** Students will be required to scan for relevant news or events that are occurring in the world. An online discussion thread will be available and each student will be required to make at least three new postings and three insightful comments on other students' postings over the course of the semester.
7. **Class Attendance/Preparation/Participation:** The Foresight course is intended to be highly participatory and being prepared to participate in the class discussions is an important aspect of this course.