UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF INFORMATION

The iSchool at Toronto

INF 1006 Information Workshop: Futures Thinking

2017 Winter Term SECTION 2

Instructor: Chun Wei Choo

Site address: uoft.me/inf1006

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please check this site regularly for updates.

At the end of the class on March 7th, students form their own groups and agree on the focal issues to work on. Sign-up page is in the course wiki.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This workshop introduces students to concepts and methods related to futures thinking - a systematic approach for organizations and their stakeholders to seek information and reflect on major future changes that can affect the growth and development of the organization. The workshop discusses the theory and techniques of environmental scanning and the development of strategic foresight that will enable organizations to navigate uncertainty and position themselves for the future. Students will have an opportunity to apply scenario planning as a structured methodology to illuminate and stimulate dialogue about complex issues that affect the futures of organizations in the public, private, or nonprofit sector.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand how organizations seek and use information to develop foresight and knowledge about the future;

- Identify and address information challenges and pitfalls that organizations face in the development of organizational foresight;

- Apply environmental scanning as an approach to seek and analyze information about major forces of change in their environment;

- Apply scenario planning as a structured methodology for organizations to think creatively about their futures.

Relationship to MI Program Learning Outcomes

This course helps students to understand the concepts and practices in the development of organizational foresight as an information-intensive activity of organizations (Program Outcome 1, 4). The knowledge and values imparted in the course enable students to exercise leadership and care in the imagination and evaluation of alternative future scenarios and how they could shape information services (Program Outcome 2). Through their scenario planning projects, students learn to carry out research and and analysis that would deepen our understanding of major issues confronting organizations and instituions (Program Outcome 3). Finally, students learn to anticipate the broader consequences of new technological developments as a key element of developing organizational foresight (Program Outcome 5).

Recommended Texts

See Readings List.

Evaluation

Students form six groups of four to work on selected focal issues. There are two assignments.

In the **first asssignment**, students conduct an environmental scan to identify major factors and forces of change in the external environment that can significantly influence how the focal issue develops and what the outcomes will be. [40%]

In the **second assignment**, students develop, write up, and present four scenarios based on the major factors and forces of change identified in the environmental scan. They analyze each scenario to derive strategic implications and leading indicators. [50%]

Participation accounts for 10% of the course assessment. Students are encouraged to participate actively during the in-class workshops, and it is important that students complete their individual and group work within the time frames defined.

Instructor Availability

Students should feel free to discuss course-related matters with the instructor at any time. Chun Wei's office is Room 628; telephone 416.978.5266; e-mail cw.choo@utoronto.ca. Office hours TBA.

ACADEMIC POLICIES

Academic integrity

Please consult the University's site on **Academic Integrity**. The iSchool has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism as defined in section B.I. 1. (d) of the University's **Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters**. You should acquaint yourself with the Code and Appendix A Section 2. Please review the material you covered in **Cite it Right** and consult the site **How Not to Plagiarize**.

Accommodation of students with disabilities

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the **Accessibility Services Office** as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and me know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Writing support

The SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support provides writing support for graduate students. The services are designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers of English and include courses, workshops, individual writing consultations, and online resources. Please avail yourself of these services.

Grading

Please consult the iSchool's official interpretation of letter grades and the University's policy on Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices. These will form the basis for grading in the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Feb 28, 2017)

- Course outline. Overview of workshop project on futures thinking.
- Introduction to futures thinking, environmental scanning, scenario planning, and organizational foresight (1).

Week 2 (Mar 7, 2017)

- Introduction to futures thinking, environmental scanning, scenario planning, and organizational foresight (2).
- Selection of focal issues.
- Groups organize for environmental scanning to identify major forces of change.

Week 3 (Mar 14, 2017)

Workshop (1): Environmental scanning

Students come to class having completed an initial environmental scan for the focal issue. Each student in a group scans in one of four environmental sectors (STEP).

During the workshop, each group:

- Discusses their initial sectoral scans and identify major factors and forces of change.
- Evaluates forces of change in terms of their impact and uncertainty on the focal issue. Construct an IMPACT table.
- Identifies predetermined elements and critical uncertainties.

Assignment 1 due Mar 21, 2017.

Week 4 (Mar 21, 2017)

Workshop (2): Scenario construction

During this workshop, each group of students:

- Reviews the findings of the environmental scan of Workshop (1).
- Selects and tests a pair of critical uncertainties for scenario development.
- Constructs four contrasting, plausible scenarios based on critical uncertainties, predetermined elements, and other drivers.
- Assigns each group member a scenario to develop.

Week 5 (Mar 28, 2017)

Workshop (3): Scenario analysis

Students come to class having developed and written up draft versions of the scenarios they have been assigned in Workshop (2).

In this workshop, each group:

- Reviews and refines individual scenarios to ensure that scenarios are diverse, plausible, and consistent.
- Discusses the strategic implications for each scenario.
- Identifies the leading indicators for each scenario.
- Plans for the scenario presentation and summary report.

Assignment 2 due Apr 3, 2017.

Week 6 (Apr 4, 2017)

Groups present and discuss their scenario analyses.

Assignment 1: Environmental Scan

The objective of this assignment is to conduct an environmental scan to identify major factors and forces of change in the external environment that can significantly influence how the focal issue develops and what the outcomes will be.

After Workshop (1), each group of students prepares an environmental scan report that:

- Identifies major factors or drivers of change in the external environment that can significantly influence how the focal issue develops and what the outcomes will be;

- Describes each factor with a short title, an account of how that factor could change in the future, and how these changes could affect the focal issue;

- Evaluates each factor according to its degree of uncertainty and impact on the focal issue; summarize the evaluation in an IMPACT table;

- Identifies predetermined elements and critical uncertainties, and explains the reasoning behind these choices.

The report should also include as appendices the *initial* scans of environmental sectors conducted by individual group members. Each appendix should include the student's name, the sector scanned, a set of 3 major factors identified in the scan, a short description of how each factor might develop and affect the focal issue, and a list of references.

The environmental scan report is to emailed to the instructor as a PDF file by the end of day, March 21, 2017.

The environmental scan report is 40% of the course grade, and will be evaluated according to these criteria:

- the report addresses all the requirements set out above;
- major environmental factors or drivers of change have been identified that are relevant to the focal issue;
- factors have been evaluated to arrive at a logical determination of predetermined elements and critical uncertainties.

Assignment 2: Scenario Planning

The objective of this assignment is to construct scenarios based on selected critical uncertainties, predetermined elements and other forces of change, and to analyze these scenarios in order to derive strategic implications and leading indicators.

After Workshop (3), each group prepares a scenario planning report as follows:

- State the focal issue that is being explored;

- Define a pair of critical uncertainties as the basis for developing scenarios; explain the choice of critical uncertainties;

- Describe the four scenarios that have been constructed by the group;

- For each scenario, provide a memorable title, a short summary of the end-state in that scenario (~50 words), and a longer narrative explaining how the scenario develops (~300 words);

- For each scenario, state the strategic implications for the organization;

- For each scenario, identify the leading indicators that should be monitored;

- Explain how the scenario analysis has deepened your understanding and perception of the focal issue.

In the Week 6 class, each group presents their scenario analysis.
The presentation should cover the following: focal issue and user organization; critical uncertainties; each scenario and its strategic implications. The presentation should take no more than 25 minutes.

The scenario planning report and presentation slides are to be emailed to the instructor as PDF files by 12 noon on April 3rd, 2017.

The scenario planning report and the presentation together is 50% of the course grade, and will be evaluated according to these criteria:

- the report addresses all the requirements set out above;
- scenarios constructed offer multiple contrasting perspectives that deepen our understanding of the focal issue;
- strategic implications and leading indicators are developed logically;
- an effective in-class presentation and discussion of key elements of the scenario analysis that has been undertaken by the group.

READINGS

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Choo, C. W. (2002). Information Management for the Intelligent Organization: The Art of Scanning the Environment (3rd ed.). Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc. [UT link]

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Konno, N., Nonaka, I., & Ogilvy, J. (2014). Scenario planning: the basics. World Futures, 70(1): 28-43. [Scholars Portal link]

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Muhammad, A., Tugrul, U. D., & Antonie, J. (2013). A review of scenario planning. Futures, 46, 23-40. [Scholars Portal link]

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Ringland, G. (2002). Scenarios in Public Policy. New York: John Wiley. [UT link]

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van der Heijden, K. (2005). Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. [UT link]

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Wade, W. (2012). Scenario Planning: A field guide to the future. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. [Wiley book site]