



WFS Learning Section
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FUTUREtakes publishes the *WFS Learning Section Bulletin* by special arrangement with the World Future Society (WFS) Learning Section Steering Team. Issues of the *WFS Learning Section Bulletin* typically include foresight education exercises, an educator spotlight column, and synopses of the annual WFS Education Summit.

Educator Spotlight

Kay E. Strong

University of Houston



Dr. Kay Strong's distinguished career began at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Ohio, in the fall of 2000. As a new Ph.D. in econometrics, she taught across the disciplines of economics and applied statistics. She was promoted to the rank of tenured associate professor in 2004.

While attending a Creative Problem-Solving National Science Foundation (NSF) short course conducted by Sidney Parnes in Seattle, Washington during the summer of 2005, she was introduced to the field of future studies by Dr. Steven Steele, Director of the Institute for the Future at Anne Arundel Community College. Steve's candid discussions about futures institutes during the session piqued her interest. In subsequent conversations, Steve provided her an overview of futuring and the possibilities for her college. Dr. Strong ventured into the seven-module courses devoted to future studies offered by AACC and became "hooked." After extensive personal research, reading, and contemplative thought, she crafted a proposal for a "like institution" to be established at BGSU Firelands. The proposal made its rounds at the Firelands campus, the Dean's Office, the Strategic Planning Committee, and among several interested individuals, after which Dean James Smith carried the proposal to the Provost office. With the acceptance of a few modifications requested by the Provost, the Initiatives for the Future (IF) at BGSU Firelands became operational in August 2006, with a stated mission to integrate the study of the future into the role and mission of BGSU Firelands.

In the same month, the IF at BGSU Firelands established an institutional membership in the World Future Society. In the succeeding months, two learning communities were formed, the IF Learning Community (20 college members enrolled) under the auspices of the Center for Teaching and Learning Technology at Bowling Green and the "e-futuring" Learning Community (48 high school members enrolled) funded by Ohio Learning Network (OLN).

Accomplishments for the faculty IF Learning Community during the academic year 2006-07 included engaging in intellectual discourses on future trends and forecasts about education, the

campus, and the community; integrating futures thinking exercises into twelve courses, the Office for Educational Outreach catalog, and the BEST Partnership Customized Training catalog; creating a Visioning strategy for the “**Shaping the Future of the Firelands**” community revitalization project; using a scenario-building exercise to produce four alternatives for the **Future of BGSU Firelands in 2025**, and developing a World Future Society conference presentation, which led to a manuscript accepted for publication in the *Futures Research Quarterly*. In addition, the IF Learning Community served as a “testing ground” for the development of the Introduction to Futuring course. FTR 200: Introduction to Futuring made its way over the hurdles of academic affairs and entered into the university course inventory for fall 2007.

Both high school teachers and students in the “e-futuring” Learning Community received instruction in futures concepts and methodologies before tackling an authentic learning project entitled “Education 2050: What will it look like?” Students were given wide latitude in the design of their respective projects. Projects from the “e-futuring” Learning Community were on display for the OLN EXPO June 2007 on the OSU-Newark campus. Other opportunities afforded by the **IF** project included community grant funding as well as numerous public presentations locally and regionally. With a colleague, Dr. Strong presented “Using Learning Communities to Foster Futuring: The BGSU Experience” at the 2007 World Future Society Conference.

After years standing in front of the classroom, Dr. Strong took a seat behind the teaching station. A sabbatical gave her the opportunity to complete an M.S. in the future studies program under the auspices of Dr. Peter Bishop at University of Houston. Says Strong, “My time at the University of Houston has been chocked full of new adventures. My thoughts whirled from new information; framework forecasting, post-modernism and critical theories, appreciative inquiry, strategic planning and leadership as transformational change. And my questions constantly challenged definition, interpretation and application.” Outside the classroom, her instruction continued as she worked alongside Dr. Bishop, the University of Houston program director, in community outreach activities.

During the 2008-09 academic year, Dr. Strong was instrumental in creating two public access teaching wikis, the Foresight Education Project and the Futures of the U.S. A prototype undergraduate course, Strategic Foresight, was developed as she and Dr. Bishop persevered to merge two divergent teaching styles, two personalities, and volumes of futures’ material into one sixteen week course. “The end product being a testimony to the best of our best!” There arose a number of ad-hoc opportunities to work alongside community groups. One particularly receptive one involved Margaret Fitzgerald, the coordinator of the gifted and talented program and coach in the Future Problem Solvers program in a local Houston school. In February, a particularly memorable event occurred with her middle school students. Ted Gordon was in-residence at the University of Houston and agreed to meet with these youngsters. A truly lively interchange transpired, and Dr. Strong envisions that Ted Gordon will be remembered by the youngest futurists as Werner von Braun was remembered by young space enthusiasts!

This fall Kay joins Dr. Bishop, the futures program director, at the University of Houston to infuse futures thinking into the undergraduate curriculum building toward a minor in futures studies, while she continues working with teachers in Houston area schools to help “futurize” their teaching practice. As she puts it, “Having the appropriate academic credentials now allows me to reach for the first of my intended goals, development and delivery of a robust accredited undergraduate futures curriculum as a complement to the current graduate programs in the field.” The Strategic Foresight course is a first step, and the summer has yielded a second opportunity to bridge the undergraduate curriculum and futures studies. A partnership has been

forged between the UScholars' College Success Program (CSP), the formal home to some 5000 undergraduate students who are yet undecided about their college major. Some fifteen hundred undergraduates will participate in a mandatory 10-week one-credit hour course identified as Core 1101 this fall. The course has integrated content across three curricular areas – college life skills, career placement, and a strong futures perspective. The course outcomes are designed to assist participating students in declaring an undergraduate college major by strengthening personal life skills and self-management, by deepening understanding of career options, and by developing a greater self-efficacy in a world of uncertainty and growing complexity. While not a futures course specifically, Dr. Strong sees the first exposure opportunities to futures thinking as tremendous. A third opportunity to test the true versatility of futures studies will be facilitated this fall as she grounds an undergraduate fashion forecasting course in the rigors of long-term foresight.

Dr. Strong's second goal parallels Dr. Bishop's ambition for the futures studies, reaching into the pre-college educational environment and exposing K-12 students to futures thinking. She has completed development of a Pre-College Workshop curriculum which they anticipate delivering to teachers in Houston's local school districts beginning this fall. And as a complement to the teachers' workshop, she hopes to create a dedicated Futures' Summer Camp for K-12 students.

In addition to her Ph.D. in economics from Southern Illinois University in 2000, Dr. Strong has a Bachelor of Science degree in education from Central Michigan University and a Master of Arts in international affairs from Ohio University. She is a member of Omicron Delta Epsilon, the International Honor Society in Economics, and has been selected for inclusion in *Who's Who of American Women 2008-09*, *Who's Who Among America's Teachers and Educators*, and *Who's Who in Collegiate Faculty*. In addition, she was named BGSU Firelands *Distinguished Creative Scholar* 2006 and the 2005 *Kappan of the Year* by Phi Delta Kappa BGSU Firelands Chapter. Her publications on international finance appear in the *Journal of Economics and Finance* and *Journal of Business and Economic Perspectives*. Articles on teaching economics appear in *College Teaching Methods & Style*, the *AURCO Journal*, and at the U.K.'s national centre of excellence in the development and use of technology-based methods in teaching, learning and research, the Institute for Learning and Research Technology at the University of Bristol. She has presented numerous papers at international, national, and regional conferences. Her non-academic positions include working as a supervisory economist for the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics and as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand. Building on her previous experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand, Dr. Strong volunteers for the Teach for Friendship Foundation (TFF) at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, China during summers.

Says Dr. Strong, "I am at the beginning of my journey as an educational futurist, a master's degree in hand and my objective is modest, integration of futures inquiry into the experience of learners across the curriculum and throughout the educational structure. And to think that all this resulted from a chance encounter at a NFS workshop devoted to creative problem-solving!"