

# A FUTURISTICS COURSE: TOWARDS INSTILLING A FUTURE-ORIENTATION IN MARKETING STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article, the authors offer a detailed description of a course designed specifically to instill a future-orientation in its participants. This is especially important due to the unprecedented rate of change experienced by the recent business environment. In the course, students have the opportunity to develop skills related to identifying key trends and uncertainties in the business environment. This course is unique in that all topics in it are examined from a future-orientation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is well established that today's business environment, especially the technological environment, is changing at an unprecedented pace. Organizations today operate in an increasingly dynamic, difficult-to-predict and uncertain environment (Hormats 1999; Hunt 2001). The ability of managers to acquire and use information about key events and trends in their firm's external environment (i.e., environmental scanning) is perhaps more important than ever (Van Doren and Smith 1999; Kourteli 2000). Indeed, it has been shown that the amount and intensity of environmental scanning is directly related to the amount and importance of perceived environmental uncertainty (Choo 1999). Clearly, environmental scanning is an extremely important skill for contemporary marketing managers to possess.

## PURPOSE OF PAPER

Nearly every introductory marketing and marketing management textbook devotes an en-

tire chapter to the marketing environment and its components (e.g., Boyd et al. 2002; Copan and Hulbert 2001; Kotler 2003). Traditionally, the focus has been on the past and current states of these environments, with only a limited and cursory discussion of future trends and projections. Arguably, the future marketing environment is for all practical purposes neglected in these texts. This is especially troubling in regards to the highly dynamic technological environment.

While authors such as McCorkle, Alexander, and Schaefer (2003) have argued for more currency in the marketing curriculum, the purpose of this paper is to address the importance of going beyond simply being current in the classroom to adopting a future-orientation. A special topics course focusing specifically on the future of marketing and its environment is described in detail. The course, entitled "futuristics," is offered as a three-hour elective course for senior level undergraduate marketing students and for masters level business students. It is has been offered each fall semester with an average enrollment of 70 students. Undergraduate students

traditionally have comprised 75 percent of the total enrollment.

## COURSE DESIGN

### Course Topics

Those accepting the challenge of teaching futuristics are faced with the task of selecting relevant topic areas for inclusion in the course. Since futuristics textbooks are virtually nonexistent, instructors are responsible for selecting course material. This sometimes requires instructors to present subject matter not normally associated with marketing (e.g., biotechnology's impact on marketing).

The relevance of various topics changes over time. For example, the Y2K scare was a very hot topic a few years ago. Today it is ancient history. Such passé topics are naturally replaced on an ongoing basis with more pertinent ones (e.g., the threat of global terrorism on American business). Environmental scanning by the instructor facilitates the selection of relevant course topics and results in a continually updated course. This scanning involves the regular perusal of selected publications and their websites such as: *Business Week*, *American Demographics*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune*, *Discover*, *Scientific American*, *Business 2.0* and *The Futurist*. Articles are sought that either update topics discussed in previous semesters, or that address entirely new issues and trends that have not been previously covered.

The course's future-orientation makes it unique and differentiates it from the current issues or topics courses typically offered at some universities. Those courses tend to focus on what is *currently* happening in the environment. All topics in futuristics are examined from a future-oriented perspective. The marketing implications of future projections on specific industries and society in general are carefully considered. For example, students consider the societal and marketing impact of generational cohorts in their *future* life stages (e.g., elderly baby boomers, middle-aged Xers, etc.), rather than simply study-

ing each in their present and past life stages. Similarly, projected *future* Internet usage patterns (e.g., the wireless Internet) are studied, rather than simply focusing on the present usage patterns. A suggested listing of topics covered in the course is offered in Table 1.

Besides choosing course topics, another challenge in conducting a futuristics course involves selecting the time frame of future projections. Put metaphorically, one must ask whether it is sufficient to familiarize students with what is *on* the horizon, or rather, what experts are predicting to be *over* the horizon?

When the author first considered teaching a course about the future, visions of interplanetary space travel, underwater cities, humanoid robots, and the implantation of memory chips into the human brain immediately came to mind. While these are highly intriguing and fascinating topics, arguably many decades will pass before any of these become a reality, bringing into question the relevancy of such topics to future business strategists (i.e., the students in the class). This, coupled with the fact that the level of accuracy of such long-range projections tends to be inversely related to the time frame of the projection (Makridakis 1990), necessitates that the coverage of such sensational and entertaining topics be given a low priority.

### Course Materials/Technology

Naturally, technology used in futuristics should be as state-of-the-art as possible in order to give the course face validity and enhanced credibility. Microsoft PowerPoint slide presentations with web page links assist in meeting this objective. Sometimes website links offer animated demonstrations of complicated cutting-edge technologies (e.g., fuel cell automobile mechanics), which serve to enhance student understanding.

Because of small national enrollments in such courses, few, if any, textbooks exist that are specifically written for futuristics courses. Also

**TABLE 1  
COURSE TOPICS**

<b>Topic:</b>	<b>Time for Coverage:</b>	<b>Example of Topic:</b>
Adapting to change	1 week	Environmental scanning; Identifying, extrapolating and capitalizing on trends
Generational Marketing	2 weeks	Gen X, Y, Z; Baby Boomers, etc.
Demographic trends	1 week	Global and US demographic trends (e.g., aging society, ethnic diversity, etc.)
Societal trends	1 week	A review of various social and cultural trends (see trend websites in Table 3)
Cutting edge marketing	1 week	Viral marketing, buzz marketing, affiliate marketing, cool hunting
The Internet economy	1 week	The impact of the Internet on business The future of mobile e-commerce
E-Commerce: compelling issues and trends.	1 week	Future of customer service in e-commerce. personalized marketing, privacy, security
Future of advertising: the Internet and beyond	1 week	The future of internet advertising (banner ads, interstitials, floating ads, etc.)
Future of biotech and its impact on product marketing	1 week	The future impact of biotechnology on genetics, drugs, medicine, agriculture, etc.
Future of transportation and its impact on logistics	1 week	Trends in personal and business transportation; natural resource prospects
Future of computer science and its impact on marketing	1 week	Nanotechnology, robotics, artificial intelligence, voice recognition, etc.
Future of telecommunication on media and advertising	1 week	The impact of new and upcoming technologies (HDTV, satellite radio, wireless communication)
Personal and career future	1 week	Students design their personal and career future

contributing to this shortage is the difficulty that the textbook publication process presents in publishing such books in a sufficiently timely manner so as to ensure their currency (Atwong and Hugstad 1997).

One of the authors found that, while students generally appreciate the cash savings realized when a text is not utilized, a current text can ease instructor preparation as fewer assigned articles must be selected for inclusion in the course.

When a text is used, the assigned articles are relegated to more of a supplementary role and there is less pressure on the instructor to generate the course content through the selection of ideal articles for each class section.

While academic textbooks on the future marketing environment are virtually nonexistent, the trade press regularly publishes future-oriented books. The World Futurist Society (2002) website offers a large selection of such books. Some of these may potentially serve as course textbooks, assuming they are written with adequate rigor. One of the authors is planning to use the *Catalog of the Tomorrow* as the course text in future semesters. Zolli (2002) edited the book, which is actually a collection of futuristic essays by the thought leaders in a number of fields, such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, computer science, robotics, demographics, medicine, etc. The implications of these new technologies are considered. Replete with vivid photographs, this book also suggests numerous URLs at the end of each section for those interested in further reading.

The Internet enhances instruction by allowing access to pertinent information (Siegel 1996). Articles selected from recent journals or trade publications are assigned for reading on a weekly basis. As suggested by Benbunan-Fich et al. (2001), students are hyper linked to these assigned articles from the course web site. This serves to further enhance the perceived timeliness of the course. Many major publications allow direct links to archived articles (e.g., *Business Week*, *Business 2.0*). In some cases, such direct links are unavailable (e.g., *Newsweek*, *American Demographics*), which necessitates that students download the assigned articles through a library-provided service, such as *Ebsco Host*. In other cases, a subscription and/or fee for article downloads may be required (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Futurist*).

In any event, a myriad of relevant and free articles are available on the Internet. This allows students to avoid the inconvenience of locating

and copying articles in a library or copy center and/or from having to subscribe to expensive trade publications, as was the case when the course was offered in the last decade. Clearly, the Internet has greatly enhanced the manner in which the course is conducted. Students certainly appreciate the convenience of downloading articles at the time and place of their choice. Unfortunately, some opportunistic students may strain university resources (e.g., paper) by using the computer lab to print articles. This strain can be minimized by encouraging students to utilize the “printer friendly” option available for many web-based articles.

Links to assigned articles are posted on the instructor’s course web site at least three days prior to each class meeting. This allows for the inclusion of relatively late breaking news stories, which is near impossible to do when all articles are assigned at the start of the semester. It is also suggested that the instructor set a weekly deadline, beyond which no additional articles will be added for that week. This allows students sufficient time to complete the reading assignments. For example, an instructor with a Thursday evening course may commit to having articles posted for that week’s class by Monday at 5:00 p.m.

While there is an incredible store of information on the Internet, students are cautioned that the level of editorial oversight is much lower (if it exists at all) than that of print media. Therefore, the course encourages the development of critical skills for differentiating usable information from useless information.

Clearly, many useful articles can be accessed via the net. Futurists at corporations, universities, think tanks, foundations and consulting firms have constructed websites offering potentially valuable resources for futuristics students (see Table 2). Perhaps the most notable of these is the World Futurist Society’s Web site (<http://www.wfs.org>). Founded in 1966, the nonprofit society has a membership base of more than 30,000 and serves as a neutral forum and clear-

inghouse for on possible futures and current trends (Conhaim 1999).

TechTV is a cable channel that has interviews with futuristic leaders in various technology industries. It has programming about high-tech gadgets (i.e., “Fresh Gear”). These programs could be video taped instructors having access to

this channel. TechTV also has a website ([www.techtv.com](http://www.techtv.com)), which offers plenty of tech related news stories.

Quality videocassettes may also be utilized on a limited scale to supplement and reinforce lecture materials and articles. Suggested videos include: (1) *Robots Rising* (Adams 1999), an

**TABLE 2**  
**SUGGESTED FUTURISTIC WEB RESOURCES**

Name	Web Address	Description
Aspen Institute	<a href="http://www.aspeninst.org">http://www.aspeninst.org</a>	Forward thinking research
Brain Reserve	<a href="http://www.brainreserve.com">http://www.brainreserve.com</a>	Faith Popcorn trends
Buckminster Fuller Institute	<a href="http://www.bfi.org">http://www.bfi.org</a>	Access to work of famous inventor and futurist
Edge Foundation	<a href="http://www.edge.org">http://www.edge.org</a>	Profiles on futurists issues
Foresight Institute	<a href="http://www.foresight.org">http://www.foresight.org</a>	Focuses on nanotechnology
Futures Group Int.	<a href="http://www.tfg.com">http://www.tfg.com</a>	Articles on business intelligence
Global Business Net.	<a href="http://www.gbn.org">http://www.gbn.org</a>	Samples of scenario plans
Hudson Foundation	<a href="http://www.hudson.org">http://www.hudson.org</a>	American outlook anthology
Institute of Alternative Futures	<a href="http://www.altfutures.com">http://www.altfutures.com</a>	Foresight chronicle assists govt. agencies in anticipating future
Institute of the future	<a href="http://www.iftf.org">http://www.iftf.org</a>	Business trend forecasts
Ionoculture	<a href="http://www.ionoculture.com">http://www.ionoculture.com</a>	Trend watching firm
Long Now foundation	<a href="http://www.longnow.org">http://www.longnow.org</a>	The Whole earth catalog
Megatrend website	<a href="http://www.naisbitt.com">http://www.naisbitt.com</a>	Summary of latest Naisbitt trends
Santa Fe Institute	<a href="http://www.santefe.edu">http://www.santefe.edu</a>	Full text of futurist research
SRI	<a href="http://www.sri.com">http://www.sri.com</a>	Futurist group newsletter
World Futurist Society	<a href="http://www.wfs.org">http://www.wfs.org</a>	Newsletters, book list, forecasts

award winning documentary about the future of robots; (2) *Hackers* (Docherty 2001), a documentary addressing future Internet security concerns; (3) *The Merchants of Cool* (Goodman and Dretzinly 2001), a report on the creators and marketers of the popular culture of the American teenager.

As with any course, guest speakers provide a welcome break from the routine. Speakers from a variety of industries may speak on trends and forces affecting their firm and how they are dealing with these uncertainties. When seeking a guest speaker on biotechnology, one of the authors identified a professor on campus that had previously served as a consultant in the biotech industry. The speaker's industry-based insights greatly enhanced that class period's discussion. A continual scanning of local newspapers and business journals for articles about businesses involved in innovative endeavors assists in the process of identifying and locating qualified speakers.

## **COURSE GRADING**

### **Examinations**

Examinations are the most heavily weighted component of course grading (3 @ 100 points). One of the authors uses a combination of multiple-choice and short discussion questions. The use of multiple-choice questions requires instructors to author and frequently update these questions, because of the dynamic nature of the course material and the lack of an available futuristics test bank. Short discussion questions are more time consuming to grade. Regardless of their form, the questions are derived from assigned article readings, lectures and in-class discussion groups.

### **Discussion Groups**

Class sessions typically begin by dividing the students into discussion groups of four or five students. Questions are then distributed to each group. Most of these questions relate directly to

the assigned articles, while others draw primarily on the students' personal experiences and viewpoints (e.g., "In your opinion, how do members of Generation X and Y differ, and why?). This collaborative learning approach (Brookfield and Preskill 1999) allows students to more strongly relate the course material to their personal lives.

Students earn up to five points per week for their participation in each set of discussion questions. Thus, over a fifteen week semester they could earn up to 75 points. This serves to bolster class attendance as students receive full credit for the questions regardless of the quality of their input to the discussions. These discussion questions are eventually incorporated into the lecture and the small groups are asked for input. Class discussion is enhanced by allowing students to build confidence through expressing their viewpoints in the relatively risk-free environment of the small group.

Based on student feedback, one of the authors considers the discussion questions to be the most valuable futuristics course component. He has found that relative to other courses taught (e.g., personal selling and advertising), the futuristics course material is much more likely to generate lively discussion. This is almost certainly due to the perceived newness of the course content, which makes it inherently interesting to students.

### **Abstracts**

Students are required to submit three course-relevant article abstracts of their choosing. These abstracts are worth 10 points each and consist of a review of a future-oriented article pertaining to the subject matter covered in class on the abstract's due date. In these abstracts, students discuss the potential impact of projections made in the articles on the marketing strategies of various affected organizations. For example, one student wrote an abstract on an article claiming that Americans had reacted to the World Trade Center events with a renewed desire for cocooning (the stay-at-home trend). As the assignment

dictated, the student considered the positive implications of this projection in regards to Internet retailers, home improvement retailers, and high-definition television and home theatre system manufacturers and retailers.

Abstracts are valuable in that they allow students an opportunity to gain experience in environmental scanning. This requires that students independently search for and sift through futuristic web content, rather than simply being linked from the course website, as is the case with the assigned articles. Instructors benefit from the abstracts in that they typically receive a plethora of pertinent articles for use in future semesters.

### **Book Review**

Additionally, students are required to review a book relevant to the future marketing environment. As with the abstract, students summarize the book and critically evaluate its author's assertions as they relate to the knowledge they've acquired during the course. This encourages students to integrate the book content with course material. Students discuss the potential impact of these projections on strategies of various organizations that are potentially affected.

Students have responded favorably to the course's book review component. In relatively small sections (e.g., 20 or less), students deliver their reviews orally at the end of the semester. Students are typically allowed ten minutes to review the book and each student is required to review a different book in an effort to minimize redundancy. In contrast, when class size is prohibitively large, students submit their reviews in written form. In such cases, students are free to review the same book as others. Book reviews are worth 50 points, regardless of their submission form.

### **Scenario Planning Project**

Graduate students are required to complete a future studies group project worth 100 points, as

described in detail by Van Doren and Smith (1999). Participants select a particular firm at a particular point in the future (e.g., General Electric in 2010). They then prepare two to four possible futures (scenarios) based on key trends and uncertainties in the environment that they have identified. For example, two alternative scenarios might be constructed by putting all negative environmental trends into one scenario, and all positive ones into another. The actual future will most likely occur as a combination of pieces from a variety of scenarios. By using scenario planning, students consider the range of possible futures and including conceivable situations that might otherwise be ignored. This process clearly facilitates "outside-of-the-box" thinking. In the project's final phase, students consider the implications of the scenarios on the firm's marketing strategy (i.e., the vulnerability of the firm's current strategy to these events) (Schoemaker 1995). Van Doren and Smith (1999) suggest that the scenario planning exercise is especially suitable for working MBA students who can use it to apply to their current employment situation. Nonetheless, the author is considering requiring all students enrolled in the course in future semesters (graduates and undergraduates) to complete the project, since it is perhaps the strongest skill development exercise in the course.

### **Marketing Plan**

When initially designing the course, one of authors seriously considered requiring the development of a marketing plan for an original and futuristic product concept. However, this idea was quickly discarded when it was determined that very close approximations of this project were already being assigned by consumer behavior and marketing management instructors in that same department. While redundancy issues kept this project from being included as a course component at this university, such a project would be plausible in places where similar assignments are not being required in other courses.

## **BENEFITS OF THE FUTURISTICS COURSE**

### **Student Benefits**

While the course content could easily become outdated, the course's primary value lies in inspiring students to approach decision making with a future-orientation. Having a future-orientation involves understanding the factors that affect change in the business environment and developing skills for solving problems rooted in rapid change (Benbunan-Fich 2001). Futuristics seeks to instill in students an appreciation for the importance of staying abreast of changes in the marketing environment. Throughout the course, students are presented with current examples of companies suffering the consequences of failing to adequately monitor and respond to environmental change.

Students also gain an appreciation for the unpredictability of the long-term future and an acceptance of the inevitability of change in marketing decision-making. The fact that, prior to the early nineteenth century, many of today's modern conveniences (e.g., computers, airplane travel, television, etc.) were virtually unimaginable even to science fiction writers, implies that unimaginable technological advances will occur in the future with profound implications for business and society in general (Makridakis 1990).

Graduate students completing the scenario planning group project develop skills useful in the management of uncertainty. Through this semester-long project, participants become skilled at developing multiple strategies and contingencies, and thus are potentially better prepared for the crises of the future (Van Doren and Smith 1999).

Finally, Uchida, Cetron, and McKenzi (1997) identified skills essential for career success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including: (1) the ability to adapt to continual change; (2) the ability to scan large amounts of information, and integrate this information with current situations and strategies; and

(3) an orientation toward and enthusiasm for life-long learning. Clearly, futuristics is designed to assist development of each of these career skills.

### **Employer Benefits**

In today's world, the ability to adapt to environmental change is highly valued by organizations. Because students typically enroll in futuristics during their final year of course work, employers benefit by hiring individuals that are relatively current in their knowledge of basic trends and uncertainties in the general marketing environment. Above all, employers gain employees that are inspired to stay current with the future marketing trends.

### **Instructor Benefits**

As Yogi Berra once said, "The future ain't what it used to be" (Abrahamson, Meehan, and Samuel 1998). In other words, each year our society is faced with a future that is different than any previous one. This was painfully clear following the World Trade Center incident. The future's dynamic nature implies that the course content of a futuristics course changes more dramatically and more quickly than that of any other marketing course. As a result, it is an intellectually stimulating course to teach. The dynamic content enhances instructor interest and enthusiasm, which may transfer to his or her teaching in general.

The future-orientation gained by a futuristics instructor often results in more current course content for other courses taught by that instructor. For example, while lecturing to an advertising class about radio advertising, the one of the authors referred to an article found while preparing for a futuristics class session. The article discussed the new technology of car-mounted satellite dishes for radio reception. This technology was capable of receiving 100 digital radio stations, half of which were advertising free. This article was used to stimulate discussion about the potential impact of this environmental threat to local businesses utilizing radio advertising. This



discussion would have never occurred if the instructor had not also been teaching futuristics at the time.

## CHALLENGES OF THE COURSE

Preparing to teach a course on the future can be a daunting task. A substantial time commitment is normally required when preparing for the course, especially when teaching the course for the first time.

Some of the knowledge acquired through teaching a futuristics course may not be especially relevant to a business professor's research efforts. In other words, while advances in genetic engineering, robotics, and biotechnology may make for interesting conversation with colleagues, this knowledge probably isn't applicable to most marketing research endeavors. However, since the instructor has complete control over course content, topics lacking relevance to his or her research interests may be purposefully excluded. One instructor may wish to emphasize the technological aspects of the future, while another may prefer to stress the demographic aspects.

Any topic can potentially become irrelevant if not periodically updated. Thus, when faced with teaching a course about the future, instructors naturally feel an obligation to maximize the currency of course materials. Articles assigned in prior years may seem archaic; especially the more technologically-oriented ones. As a result, an instructor may feel compelled to update a substantial percentage of the articles for each course preparation. Entirely new topic areas may even be covered. All of this may prove to be a very time consuming process.

Fortunately, the task of course development becomes easier after the initial preparation. Once the instructor masters a given semester's material, preparation for subsequent semesters (or quarters) involves simply updating. For example, one of the authors set out to become familiar with the basics of biotechnology when teaching the course for the first time. Although this required a sub-

stantial time investment, the knowledge gained has since served as a solid foundation for understanding recent advances in the field, such as the mapping of the human genome and its implications for future product development and marketing strategy in the pharmaceutical industry.

While course preparation may be time consuming, it can also be financially taxing (e.g., amassing a library of futurist books). Directly experiencing (and sometimes owning) emerging technologies (e.g., Personal Digital Assistants, wireless Internet, etc.) and their applications may require a sizable monetary investment. However, there are benefits to this approach. An instructor's direct experience with a topic area naturally enhances students' interest in comments concerning those areas. For example, one of the authors found students eager to listen to an account of his test-drive of one the area's first hybrid-electric cars. Certainly, direct experience with emerging technologies allows for a more intuitive understanding of those technologies, and should serve to enhance any explanations given by the professor.

While there is clearly potential value in the addition of a futuristics course to almost any marketing curriculum, the reality is that many institutions today operate in an environment of dwindling resources. This detrimentally impacts the opportunity for new courses offerings, such as the one described here. Nonetheless, the addition of futuristic course content to marketing curriculum is clearly needed.

This paper describes a futuristics course offering in detail. However, what is crucial is that futuristic content is delivered to the marketing student, not the form of that delivery. Put another way, a more practical solution for small to medium-sized universities, as well as budget-crunched institutions in general, may involve the incorporation of futuristic content into existing marketing courses, rather than attempting to concentrate that content into a single futuristics course like the one presented here.

Institutions opting not to offer a futuristics course, but still desiring to integrate futuristics material into their curriculum, are faced with some options. One approach would be to incorporate this content into a single existing marketing course (e.g., marketing management). However, such an approach may be problematic due to the time constraints imposed by content already present in such courses. For example, in the capstone marketing management course, students typically hone their decision making skills by analyzing, writing and presenting case studies. This process arguably would allow very little time for futuristic material coverage. While a futurist-orientation in a marketing management course might be enhanced to some degree by requiring a scenario (environmental scanning) assignment, the cursory treatment of key trends necessary to complete such an exercise would detract from the meaningfulness of such an exercise.

Perhaps a more workable solution would be to integrate futuristic content into more than one existing course. Thus, rather than burdening one course and its instructor with the responsibility of delivering futuristic content, this duty would be shared by several instructors, such as those for consumer behavior, marketing management, promotion, and marketing research. Clearly, this approach would require the co-operative participation of faculty that are sufficiently motivated to seek out futuristic content, because, as mentioned earlier, textbooks generally offer little in terms of such material.

Small and/or financially strapped institutions may want to consider occasionally offering futuristics as a special topics course. These offerings would be contingent upon the availability of sufficient financial and faculty resources. However, this approach is not without its disadvantages. Certainly, teaching the course on an intermittent basis could be especially challenging for instructors, since time lapses between offerings would most likely increase the difficulty of updating course materials for each preparation,

resulting in a negative impact on faculty willingness to teach the course.

## CONCLUSION

Businesses today operate in an environment that is characterized by an unprecedented pace of change and uncertainty. This demands that managers have the skill set necessary to acquire and act on information about events and trends in the organization's external environment. It also implies an obligation for marketing educators to equip their graduates with these types of skills in the new millennium.

The futuristics course detailed in this paper takes a step beyond the level of currency normally offered in marketing education. It aims to instill a future-orientation in its participants by involving class members in a process of identifying and acquiring information relating to key environmental trends and uncertainties. Through this process, students develop skills that will position them for decision-making in the future. The reader is referred to Table 3 for a sample of student comments.

While the futuristics course discussed here has historically been offered in large and mixed-sections of graduate and undergraduate students, it has consistently rated as one of the most popular and fastest growing courses offered by the marketing department. Interestingly, it is rated equally high by graduate and undergraduate students. Teaching evaluation scores of futuristic course instructors have consistently exceeded the marketing department average. Not surprisingly, one of the authors nearly always receives his highest teaching evaluations when teaching this course.

The course has grown so popular that eventually it will cease to be offered as mixed sections of graduates and undergraduates, rather two non-mixed sections will be offered each year. When this split occurs, the author plans to emphasize presentations (group and individual) to a

**TABLE 3  
STUDENT COMMENTS**

I liked studying about future trends. Other classes use textbooks that have been around for three years. I liked how current this information was.

This course made me think about things I hadn't previously considered.

I have gained a greater interest in staying current. I now see it's vital.

The group discussions were a tremendous help by offering other viewpoints.

The class made me aware of many future environmental trends.

I have a newly found interest in marketing trends.

This class opened my eyes as to what I need to be prepared for in the future.

I now realize that about anything is possible in the future.

The course improved the decision making skills I will need as a marketing manager

greater degree, an approach that previously would not have been practical due to the excessively large class sizes. Additionally, the separation will allow for a more appropriate rigor level for course participants.

The popularity of the course may be explained by the fact that students overwhelmingly perceive its content as current, fresh and interesting. They appreciate the fact that examples are often only weeks old, rather than several years old, as is usually the case in courses using a

traditional textbook approach. Students are also pleased that the course offers an initial exposure to many new topic areas (e.g., affiliate marketing, viral marketing, buzz marketing, cool hunting, etc.). Of those topics with which they were familiar, the course offers a more in-depth and future-oriented examination (e.g., e-commerce). Regardless of whether futuristics course is implemented, this paper offers many potentially valuable suggestions for incorporating futuristic material into any marketing curriculum.

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