

The Australian Foresight Institute / Masters of Strategic Foresight (1999-2017)

The story of the establishment of the AFI has been told elsewhere. What is relevant is that the first ever course on IF was taught there in 2002 as a conscious extension of what was then termed “methodological renewal.”¹ Among the key insights to emerge were that IF:

- Is not simply an alternative to more limited and partial approaches
- Offers a larger framework that opens up new options across the board
- Is a way of bringing together, and honouring, work from many different streams and traditions of enquiry
- Allows practitioners to balance external phenomena with internal ones.

It's fair to say that the establishment of the AFI provided a rare opportunity to break new ground and to offer practitioners and theorists alike a new “take” on what futures enquiry and practice was all about, or could be. In fact it led to what entrepreneurs call “proof of concept” in two specific ways that can be briefly summarised as follows:

- Foresight refreshes strategy, and
- It is depth within the practitioner that evokes depth and capability in whatever method is being used.

The latter can be seen both as threat and opportunity. It is a threat to those whose training and experience excluded the interior worlds of people and cultures. It is obviously an opportunity for those willing to explore these vital domains in pursuit of depth knowledge and understanding. Quite early on the program gained positive reviews from students and generated international interest within the field. It ran successfully for a while until the then Vice Chancellor (VC) who had supported the institute from the beginning retired. The incoming VC had no interest in it at all, at which time Peter Hayward took it over and ran it for another dozen years. During this time the university abolished all the institutes and the program was re-named as a Masters of Strategic Foresight. The program changed, evolved, was re-accredited and even expanded. Some of these changes are described by Hayward and Voros in their 2012 paper.² Over the full period several hundred post-grad students have been through the program and now constitute a lively and active Alumni group. In some ways they are perhaps the most significant “outputs” of the program as their grounding in futures-related disciplines has arguably better prepared them for the manifestly challenging tasks ahead.

The tangible products and flow-on consequences of the program are many and varied but difficult to measure. Over the last 10-15 years a variety of presentations and workshops have been offered at various conferences. A flavour of the kind of work developed at the AFI / MSF can be found in a short paper on The Polak Game. It draws on concepts in Polak's classic work on *The Image of the Future* (1961) to provide an accessible way of exploring such images as properties of cultures and individuals.³ No account of these products should omit three substantive PhD theses specifically employing Integral concepts and methods – Riedy's on “Sustainable Deveopment and Climate Change,” Hayward's on “Developing Wisdom” and Jose Ramos's “Alternative Futures of Globalisation.”⁴ Hayward has since initiated a series of monthly off-campus events wittily called “Not the MSF” inspired by Seth Goldin's altMBA initiatives and, with other colleagues, created FuturePod, an on-line series of quality podcast interviews with futures practitioners around the world. Ramos is director of the Global Swarm and originator of Mutant Futures both of which draw expressly upon the

interior development of practitioners in order to drive future-facing culture.

Time will tell what may yet emerge from the 17-year run of the AFI /MSF. What is clear, however, is that those who seek to address issues around the global emergency without accessing some form of integrally-informed work, will likely find their efforts increasingly difficult and contested. So it may well be that the breadth and depth of well-grounded, integrally-informed futures, work may be exactly what's needed by a civilisation slipping every deeper into crisis and debased, breakdown futures. While the forward view appears to darken with each passing year there are in fact powerful reasons to resist despair and see the future with fresh eyes.

¹ Slaughter, R. (2004). "Road testing a new model at the Australian Foresight Institute," *Futures*, 36, 837-852.

² Hayward, P. Voros, J. & Morrow, R.(2012). "Foresight education in Australia – time for a hybrid model?" *Futures* 43, 2, 2012. http://integralfutures.com/wordpress/?page_id=121
Also Hayward, P. & Voros, J. (2016). "The Master of Strategic Foresight at Swinburne University." Unpublished paper. https://foresightinternational.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Hay_Vor_MSF_Overview_final.pdf

³ Hayward, P. & Candy, S. (2017). "The Polak Game," *Journal of Futures Studies* 22(2): 5-14.

⁴ Riedy, C. (2007). *The Eye of the Storm. An Integral Perspective on Sustainable Development and Climate Change Response*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.
Hayward, P. (2008). *Developing Wisdom: How Foresight Develops in Individuals and Groups*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller. Ramos, J. (2010). *Alternative Futures of Globalisation*. Queensland University of Technology, Ph.D Thesis.