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# Long Now Foundation and long-term futurism

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\*For instance, one might posit a scenario in which the emanations of the Long Now Foundation become the only surviving remnants of mankind's entire cultural corpus. Like, a layer of isotopes in the seabed, some leftover satellites in Clarke orbits, and Long Now Foundation t-shirts, toy clocks and Eno recordings.

University Program Challenges Students to Forecast Decades, Centuries in the Future  
Goal is to Spur Critical and Creative Thinking, Especially among Disadvantaged Populations  
(Hayward, CA) Borrowing a page from Leonardo Da Vinci's sketchbooks, California State University, East Bay – in partnership with The Long Now Foundation – is challenging its students to imagine future solutions for social, environmental and business challenges decades and centuries in the future. They will unveil their visions at a special event on campus from 4-6 p.m. on Thursday, April 25.

“We are trying to get students to think differently about what they are learning,” said Lonny Brooks, professor of five communication courses piloting the University's new Long Term/Futures Thinking Project in 2012-13. “When students work in teams to solve challenges using long-term and futures thinking, it forces them to think critically and creatively about the subject matter, and it illustrates to them that the decisions we make today have consequences for the future.”

“Long Now is proud to partner with Cal State East Bay in establishing this Project,” said Alexander Rose, Executive Director of the Long Now Foundation. “If the shift in mindset from short- to long-term thinking is to be successful, it must happen at a young age, when students' personal and professional lives are still taking shape.”

The Project, funded through a three-year, \$412,000 gift from an individual donor, was designed with three outcomes in mind: (1) help diverse students from underserved or economically disadvantaged backgrounds to envision futures outside the struggles they encounter in everyday life; (2) harness long-term thinking skills to improve the quality of students' education; and (3) develop an academic framework for long-term thinking that can produce forward-thinking leaders to meet the grand challenges faced by our society and planet. It was created through a partnership between the University and the San Francisco-based Long Now Foundation, which encourages people to think long-term.

“The Project is perfectly aligned with Cal State East Bay's innovative spirit because it encourages students to consider long-term consequences and interactions in problem-solving,

an area that higher education is largely overlooking today,” said University Provost James Houpis. “Our students must be able not just to solve a problem – they must be able to define the deeper challenges underneath it, and to use critical thinking to navigate across multiple disciplines to address it.”

Just as Da Vinci foresaw inventions that were not developed until hundreds of years later, the University courses challenge students to use their course content to work in project-based teams to conceive viable solutions to large-scale social and environmental challenges. For example, in a public relations course, students are asked to conceive of green tech/clean tech energy innovation for 2037 (after the power grid has failed) and develop a plan to market it. In a gender identity class, students describe how they would alter or design aspects of their physical bodies to enhance function and performance following a biopharmaceutical revolution 100 years from now.

In an organizational development course, students must come up with a plan to create an organization able to last 5,000 years and devoted to the preservation, sustenance and expansion of ancient redwood forests and ecosystems. In another class, students viewed videos by global long-term thinkers filmed at the Long Now Foundation and then researched and interviewed San Francisco Bay Area organizations to determine how they defined long-term thinking and incorporated it into their operations.

Paul Saffo, a futurist who is on the board of directors for The Long Now Foundation, will serve on the advisory board of the new Project and offer remarks at the April 25 event. “When managed properly, bringing the futurist’s toolbox into the classroom – predictive modeling, forecasting, scenario constructs and the like – can provide a powerful way for students to learn more deeply and make their own discoveries along the way. Education is less about the statements we make, than the questions we ask.”

The Project is designed to help students discover ways to recalibrate those questions, according to Project Director Stephanie Couch. “One of the common characteristics of many of the great leaders is that they had taken time to understand how things have evolved historically, and where things may be headed. Then they made strategic decisions in the short-run that took the bigger picture into account.

“As an institution committed to producing the diverse leaders for our future, this exciting new partnership with the Long Now Foundation and others will help students develop a long perspective in which the last 5,000 years is thought of as ‘last week’ and the next 5,000 years is thought of as ‘next week’. Such perspectives are helpful in numerous industries with heavy research and development efforts. In the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, for example, decision makers must make decisions today for products and revenues that won’t be realized until many years into the future.”

Future plans for the project include: permanently documenting students’ course projects through video, digital artifacts and physical modeling; testing and developing reliable assessment models to measure long-term thinking; infusing long-term thinking across multiple disciplines and into K-12 education to support the new Common Core State Standards; and making long-term thinking education content available online via Open Education Resources (OER).

For more information, please visit the project’s website at [www.longtermandfuturesthinking.org](http://www.longtermandfuturesthinking.org)

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