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Futures Students and the Association of Professional Futurists

The worldwide professional organization for futurists is the Association of Professional Futurists, better known simply as “APF.” APF was formed in 2002, largely because of the efforts of students, alumni, and faculty in Studies of the Future at the University of Houston Clear Lake, and the University of Hawaii Manoa. All were concerned that there were no real standards at that time for professional futurists—anyone could claim to be a futurist.

One of the first tasks of the organizers was to define qualifications for membership in APF that would recognize the legitimate work of existing practitioners while also recognizing the academic work of graduates of university programs offering graduate degrees in foresight and futures studies. The group arrived at a consensus that required an applicant for full membership:

1. To be nominated by an existing APF member.
2. To provide a complete resume, bio, or CV.
3. To complete an application form (www.profuturists.org/join).

The application established six criteria for full membership, and required applicants to meet at least two. The six included:

- Consulting experience in foresight and futures studies

- A position (full-time) applying futures perspectives and methods in a non-futurist organization.
- Postgraduate degree in foresight and futures studies (Since amended to include certain certificate programs).
- Public speaking about foresight and futures studies
- Teaching foresight and futures studies theory or methodology
- Writing about foresight and futures studies.

Some applicants, recent graduates for example, who cannot yet meet all the requirements, are eligible for a provisional membership. This provision allows recent graduates and others to enjoy most of the benefits of belonging to the professional organization while still gaining experience in the field.

Student members APF (who are enrolled in an accredited program in futures studies) also enjoy the benefits of the professional association, and at a lower membership fee. There is more for students, but first consider the benefits of membership in APF.

If you ask an APF member about benefits, the first response is usually “the listserv!” The APF listserv keeps members in touch with each other, brings new information daily, raises questions (that receive lot’s of answers), and always reminds members that there is someone on the list that is willing and able to help with nearly any problem.

That sense of camaraderie is reinforced at professional “Gatherings” (usually held in late winter/early spring); Professional Development Seminars (usually held the day prior to World Future Society conferences each summer); Twitter #futrchat sessions each month (topics and times are announced on the listserv), and occasional webinars. In October 2011, APF held their first “Virtual Gathering,” which started at 11:00AM in Europe and the UK, moved to the United States, then on to Australia, ending the next day at 3:00 PM Australian time. The event went a total of eighteen hours with a large number (20+) of high profile speakers and excellent presentations by APF members (details at

www.profuturists.org/. This virtual, worldwide conference was very well received, and may lead to other virtual conferences. In addition to the excellent presentations, members were attracted by the minimal costs. Registration was US\$25.00 for members and free for student members. No airplanes, no hotels, and no time lost to travel. In fact, many members attended in their offices or homes, and at least one admitted to being in her “bunny slippers” very late at night in Europe.

There is one event that is held every year that is not for APF members, but for graduate students in foresight and futures studies at universities around the world. That event is the Student Recognition Project, which invites graduate schools with Masters or PhD. programs in foresight and futures studies to submit student papers for awards each year. In 2011, twenty-six university programs were invited to participate (up from eleven in 2008). Papers are limited to twenty pages, and are usually papers that were submitted as classroom work, although PhD. students must submit published work.

The judges for these student papers are APF members, deliberately selected to represent all regions of the world. The judges follow a uniform format, but have complete freedom for their opinions, and state them frequently. Every paper is read, compared, and rated by multiple judges, then submitted to committee where the judging reports for all the papers are analyze, ranked and winners declared in each category.

The students who submit winning papers are awarded memberships in APF, and receive certificates recognizing their achievements. Details of the Student Recognition Program are available at www.profuturists.com/studentrecognition.

Why is APF interested in the work of students? It’s very simple. Students who are now in universities and studying foresight and futures studies will soon be our colleagues, employees, or competitors. Many will become members of APF, and all will probably by members of the futurist profession for many years

to come. The Student Recognition Program introduces students and their work to the members of the profession, raising their visibility and their career opportunities.

Since each university is limited to submitting three student papers each year, not all students are going to have the opportunity to win an award. For those students who are interested in professional careers in foresight and futures studies, student membership in APF is an attractive option. Student membership provides students with most of the benefits of full membership, which includes the listserv, gatherings, a subscription to *Compass*, the APF quarterly, and opportunities to engage in conversation with professional futurists worldwide.

One of the first things you will find about joining futures organizations, and is particularly true in the APF, is that these professionals are real people. Most are friendly and ready to help or encourage newcomers. You will probably see postings on the APF listserv by futurists whose books you have read, or whose works you have read about, including some of the best know academics in the field. You will also find these same people at APF gatherings, Twitter chats, and APF webinars, offering ideas, methods, approaches, and challenges.

Many APF members write newsletters, blog, and maintain websites, all of which are shared with other members. A recent series of newsletters from an APF member in the UK has spelled out 100 highly probable future events that he anticipates will occur over the next few years.

In summary, APF membership offers substantial benefit to members and particularly to students who plan to become professional futurists. The credential of membership in itself is valuable, because it conveys to potential employers and clients that the individual has valuable education and experience and is recognized by fellow professionals as qualified in the field of foresight and futures studies. Just as important, APF offers continuing education by and for professional futurists. Finally, there is great value in friendship and regular communication with other professional futurists in all parts of the world.

Foresight and futures studies is still a young profession, but the increasing number of universities that offer graduate programs insures that substantial growth of the profession is ahead. Despite the challenges of current world events, today's students of futures studies may well be entering the profession at an auspicious time.