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**UNESCO Chairs**  
International  
Symposium  
in  
Futures Studies  
and Futures Literacy

SECOND SYMPOSIUM OF UNESCO  
CHAIRS IN FUTURES STUDIES  
AND FUTURES LITERACY

**PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN FAHD UNIVERSITY**

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EVENT REPORT  
DECEMBER 2021



## INTRODUCTION

Prince Mohammad bin Fahd University (PMU), in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), concluded the Second International Symposium of UNESCO Chairs in Futures Studies and Futures Literacy held from December 6<sup>th</sup> to December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021.



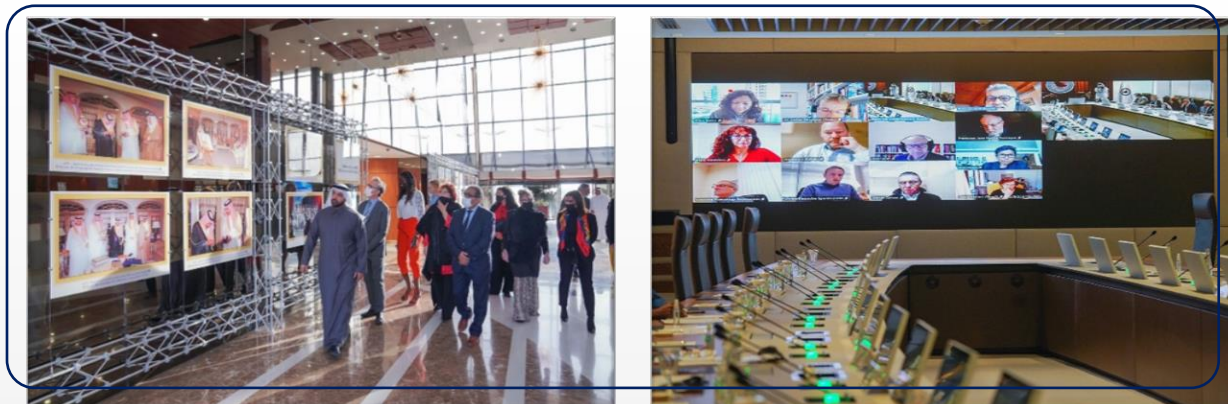
The event involved over one hundred participants, including UNESCO Chairs in Futures Studies, specialists, researchers and scholars from around the world, academic Deans and faculty members, futuristic experts and students.

On its first day was the ceremony of the establishment of the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University UNESCO Chair in "Transitional and Inter-generational Anticipation".

The four-day symposium offered a rich agenda that included multiple sessions, workshops and lectures that addressed and discussed various topics related to Futures Studies and ways of cooperation between UNESCO Chairs. On the sidelines of the symposium, the third Futures Literacy Lab "The Futures of Cities 2050" for PMU students commenced in collaboration with the UNESCO experts.

This global gathering emphasized the importance of the work of Futures Studies, while offering a chance to enrich networking across interested individuals and institutions, bearing the ground for more intellectual and imaginative futures anticipation, demonstrated by participants' engagement and collaboration to plan for the futures.





## SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

### *Symposium Opening Session*

The Symposium started with its official opening on Dec 6<sup>th</sup> 2021. PMU President, Dr. Issa Alansari, opened the session by welcoming everyone, and extended the greetings of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Al Saud, Chairman of PMU Board of Trustees. Dr. Alansari further expressed his thanks to Ms. Audrey Azoulay, the Director General of UNESCO, Dr. Riel Miller, Head of Futures Literacy Unit at UNESCO and Dr. Erik Overland, President of the World Futures Studies Federation. In his speech, Dr. Alansari highlighted the significance of the field of Futures Studies, and how PMU is taking the responsibility to promote for it in this part of the world to ensure prosperity of futures generation. He talked about the global project that PMU launched during the WFSF 2021 Conference to draw the scenarios for “The University of the Future 2030”. “We are expanding the scope of the project to transform it to a comprehensive initiative that draws scenarios of our world in the most vital fields in the next thirty years” Says Dr. Alansari. In conclusion, he announced that PMU will fund the full project, and invited the participants of the symposium to join the work in an attempt to move the Futures Studies field from theory to application.



Following PMU President’s welcoming speech was Madam Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director General of UNESCO Social and Human Science Sector. Madam Ramos initiated her speech by thanking His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Al Saud, Chairman of PMU Board of Trustees, and Dr. Issa Alansari, PMU President, for the immense contribution to the advancement of human knowledge and the pioneering work in the field by hosting the Second International Symposium of UNESCO Chairs in Futures Studies and Futures Literacy.

Madam Ramos expressed her congratulations to Dr. Alansari for the establishment of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University UNESCO Chair in “Transitional and Inter-generational Anticipation”, and how this represents a landmark in research and teaching for

Futures Literacy across generations, in addition to the positive impact it will have on the field. She further elaborated on the important role of PMU as a global leader in advancing the field of Futures Studies, improving research and collaboration in the Gulf Region and worldwide. Madam Ramos concluded her speech by stressing on how the outcomes of this symposium will ensure delivery of crucial ingredients for addressing the challenges that humanity faces today.



Dr. Riel Miller, Head of Futures Literacy Unit at UNESCO, started his speech by highlighting the efforts in the context of Futures Studies to cultivate a network of Chairs, and how it's been needing further work to be established in the academic world. Dr. Miller explained how the UNESCO sees the Chairs program to be something crucial for diffusing and disseminating academic excellence, and making it accessible for everyone to be part of a global laboratory of ideas. He stated that there are 900 UNESCO Chairs around the world, and how UNESCO seeks candidate Chairs to play a part in the network of Futures Studies. In addition, Dr. Miller overviewed the means of delivering Futures Studies, whether through educational departments or sub-fields, and the expansion to official fields for doctorate programs, involving research councils. After all, *“we are pushing the frontiers of human knowledge together”* says Dr. Miller.

Next was an opening speech by Dr. Faisal Al Anezi, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University. Dr. Al Anezi explained the importance of establishing Futures Studies and Futures Literacy filed in general, and specifically in the region, and how this field is playing a major role in enhancing academia from an educational point of view, and disseminating knowledge than can benefit the society as a whole. He further shared with the attendees about a few futuristic projects that PMU developed for governmental bodies, especially in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia, one to mention is “The Futures of Cities” proposed to Alkhobar City Municipality. In conclusion, and following the considerable efforts by PMU and PMFCFS and its WFSF MENA Chapter, Dr. Al Anezi stressed on PMU’s desire to become the hub of Futures Studies at a local and international level.

A hybrid round of UNESCO Chairs in Futures Literacy and renowned figures shared their views on the significance of this symposium and their outcome expectations, including the recognition that Futures Literacy is an important skill that everyone must obtain, the development of Futures departments and to focus more on pedagogical approaches, recognition of Futures Studies within formal classification of science, institutional novelties, Futures Studies funding and how futurists can support each other, complexity world and conceptual merging VS methodological history in defining complexity, the shift to transformative pedagogy, and UNESCO's role in supporting these directions.





### ***1.1. Introductory Plenary Session***

Introduction & symposium overview: Opening speeches by PMU and UNESCO, and a round of individual introductions.

### ***1.2. Breakout Groups Session***

Review of ‘strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats’ (SWOT) of mainstreaming Futures Studies as the study of anticipatory systems and processes in each jurisdiction. The discussions covered a few aspects from HEI view; whereas high ranked HEI can influence other HEI by implementing mandatory Futures Studies education in their programs, hence, accreditation bodies can also pave the way by initiating standards reflective of futuristic thinking.



### ***1.3. Follow-Up Plenary Session for Day 1***

Presentation of the highlights from each breakout group and general discussion of the similarities and differences that set the stage for a discussion of the strategic and tactical issues facing efforts to mainstream Futures Studies.

### ***2.1. Breakout Groups Session***

Facilitated discussion of relationship between Futures Studies and Futures Literacy: Small-groups explore the connections between efforts to mainstream Futures Studies as the ‘discipline of anticipation’ and the diffusion of Futures Literacy as a universal competency.



### ***2.2. Follow-Up Plenary Session for Day 2***

Discussion of group presentations.



### ***3.1. Breakout Groups Session***

Strategic/tactical brainstorming: Each group works on elaborating a set of strategic and tactical directions for the UNESCO Chairs to champion in order to mainstream Futures Studies and proposals for next steps.

### 3.2. Closing Plenary Session for all 3 Days

Harvesting observations, conclusions, and commitments: Each participant was invited to share their views. The Symposium concluded with reflections by both PMU and UNESCO. Some of the reflection were focused on the academic aspect of Futures Studies, and how it remains an unidentified discipline of study, while others focused on the credibility of the field, and what can be offered as proof of concept, especially in international contexts and accreditations.



Furthermore, the final discussions included capacity building and networking mobilization and expansion. A few participants presented about Futures Studies centers and departments in universities, explaining their activities, projects, roles and level of involvement in the field. The closing statement was performed by Dr. Miller and Dr. Al Anezi, embracing the multiple suggestions, talks and efforts to think about the next steps, the role of the UNESCO and PMU, and how we, all together, are working hand-in-hand and relentlessly to support, enrich and expand the field of Futures Studies.

### PMU UNESCO CHAIR

PMU's UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies titled "UNESCO Chair in Transitional and Inter-generational Anticipation" is the first of its kind in the Gulf Region, and is directed and guided by PMU's president Dr. Issa Alansari.

In essence, the proposed PMU UNESCO Chair is intended to foster a community of lifelong learners of anticipatory systems and processes as the sources of the imagined futures that shape what people see and do. The proposed Chair will contribute to applied and theoretical research, innovative pedagogy, and outreach activities to policy-makers, scholars, and practitioners. The intent of this Chair is to inspire a culture of informed 'use-of-the-future' throughout society. The Chair's work will be informed by the extant literature on cognitive science, social sciences, statistical modeling, and education, and by a wealth of experience in scholarly, educational, and policy-making activities.

## **FUTURES STUDIES EDUCATION & RESEARCH**

Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University is keen on implementing futures education and embracing this emerging field among its academic courses and degrees. From the inception of its Futuristic Center, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Center for Futuristic Studies (PMFCFS), it launched an introductory course in Futures Studies, designed with the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF).

Furthermore, PMU is currently working side-by-side with the UNESCO to develop a Master's degree in Futures Studies, which will be the first graduate degree in this field within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In addition to PMU's leading role in awareness creation and expansion of the field of Futures Studies in the region, PMFCFS in collaboration with the WFSF established Futures Studies Research Grant for two consecutive years 2020 and 2021, the two grants covered an array of topics including: Educational Studies and Social Sciences; Humanities and Arts; Science; Information Technology; Artificial Intelligence; Futures of the Global Environment; Youth-Led Research; Design Engineering. Among its contribution to the knowledge base of Futures Studies, these research projects aim to investigate the way that change and future-oriented actions are taught, especially in an inter-generational learning setting.

## **FUTURES LITERACY LABS**

In collaboration with the UNESCO, PMFCFS launched its first Futures Literacy Lab (FLL) in 2020 titled "The Futures of Education in Saudi Arabia 2040", followed by the second one in spring of 2021, where the focus was on "The Futures of Technology 2046". The third lab was held during the second UNESCO Chairs Symposium in Futures Studies, and had higher numbers in participants, male and female, for the duration of 3 days. The third lab focused on "The Futures of Cities 2050".

It is worth mentioning that the FLL was held for the first time in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the PMFCFS agreement with the UNESCO. All three labs were composed of a team from UNESCO and PMU, where PMU faculty and students were trained to be facilitators and co-facilitators to ensure an organic knowledge transfer over a year long period. Since then, many institutions, governmental and private ones, locally and regionally, have expressed interest in the work of the FLL's, which can reflect the market's readiness for the Futures Literacy aspect to be introduced and implemented in the long run.







**Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd**  
Center for Futuristic Studies

**ABOUT PMU**



**ABOUT PMFCFS**

