Unit Information

Title: Human Action for World Futures
Level: 1
Type: Undergraduate as unattached elective in BArts
Faculty: Natural and Agricultural Sciences
Contact: Graeme Martin (graeme.martin@uwa.edu.au)
Proposed: 14/12/2011
Code alpha prefix: IHST
First year of offer: 2013
Credit points: 6
Workload hours per 6 points: 150

Broadening categories: ☑ Broadening Category A
☑ Broadening Category B
☑ Elective

Academic information

Unit Content: The decisions and actions we take over the next fifty years could impact on human wellbeing and world futures for generations. This unit examines the theory and practice of individual, organisational and community action to enhance human wellbeing within a sustainable environment. Students discuss past human activities that damaged local environments and social cohesion and current activities, such as burning of fossil fuels that threaten the environment and quality of human life at a global level. They collaborate in tutorials and forum discussions to understand and appreciate the great diversity of human lifestyles and cultures and seek common values and aspirations that could inform and unite global action. They investigate opportunities and limitations for positive action through government and non-government agencies and business and assess the influence of religious and secular allegiances and the power of the media in motivating or impeding action. They explore new opportunities in formal and informal education, the internet and social networking to shape public opinion and drive action.

The academic objective of the unit is to empower students to act for human and world futures within their chosen careers and personal lives. They achieve this through collaboration on the above activities and putting into practice what they have learnt to develop an action plan to help resolve a local, regional or global issue of their choice.

Outcomes: Students demonstrate that they:

1) Understand and can discuss examples of past and current human actions that have impacted on the environment and human wellbeing.
2) Recognise that global diversity of lifestyles, cultures values and aspirations must be incorporated in action plans for world futures.
3) Understand the interrelationship of government, non-government organisations, business and civil society and the opportunities they present for effective action.
4) Appreciate the importance of religious and secular allegiances and the power of the media in motivating and influencing action.
5) Have developed investigative and communication skills and can present well-developed arguments to motivate and influence action.
6) Can work collaboratively to develop an action plan to help resolve human or environmental issues at a local, regional or global level.

Achievement of these outcomes is facilitated by the active learning approach used which involves collaboration in tutorials, forum postings and projects. It is also achieved through the ePortfolios which encourage reflective thought, learning independence and presentation skills. Extending theory into practice is achieved through the collaborative action planning project.

Assessment items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Due dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Weekly assignments (10)</td>
<td>Assessed weekly</td>
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Teaching and Learning Practices:  

The teaching and learning practices are based on active and collaborative learning and delivered by blended learning. There are five main components, all involve lecturer or tutor interaction with students and all but the first (lecture) involve student interaction and collaboration.

1) Lectures: one per week. These are designed to enhance student engagement with and understanding of the central topic covered each week; the majority will be delivered by guest experts in the field. Students prepare for the lecture by pre-reading and interacting with materials online.

2) Tutorials: one per week (1.5 hours). Tutorials are designed to extend the topics and lectures delivered each week and to enhance student interaction and collaboration. Two tutorials are reserved for student presentation of projects.

3) Forums: one per week (approximately 1.5 hour commitment). These are based on the weekly topic. Each student is expected to post a thread for discussion and reply to at least three others. Forums are moderated by the tutors: they complement the tutorials and provide for more considered and recorded discussion of topics covered.

4) Project: Each student completes a project (20% of total assessment) based on one or more of the topics covered. They are guided by their tutor: each student is expected to collaborate with at least three others on project development and delivery. A separate project forum is allocated for this collaborative activity.

5) ePortfolio: Each student creates a tutor guided ePortfolio designed to consolidate the student’s work and provide a base for ongoing learning. It involves critical analysis and reflection and presentation and organisation skills. It includes material available to other students for comment and collaboration.

Technologies:  

The only technologies required are software programs. The two main programs are Moodle and Wikispaces. Moodle is ideally suited to our teaching approach, it was developed with active learning and a social constructivist model in mind. Wikispaces is used for the student ePortfolios. Other standard software programs are used including Word, Excel and Powerpoint or their equivalents.

Curriculum from existing units

Unit codes: This unit exists already as IHST1111. This proposal is to offer the unit as a Category A, B and elective within the BA program in 2013.

Details: Not Applicable

Assessment and grading

Supplementary Assessment at L1: Yes, supplementary assessment proposed for this level 1 unit.

Offerings

Quota: No quota proposed.

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<th>Teaching Period</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Estimated enrolment</th>
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<td>Albany</td>
<td>multimode</td>
<td>3: Based on current enquiries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 2 (2013)</td>
<td>Crawley</td>
<td>multimode</td>
<td>200: Student survey in 2010</td>
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Unit rules

Prerequisites: Nil.

Corequisites: Nil.
Incompatibilities: Nil.

Secondary Education Requirements: None

Advisable Prior Study: None

### Teaching Responsibilities

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Animal Biology</td>
<td>Proposing faculty.</td>
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### Accommodation requirements

**Summary:** No, this unit already exists and requires no transfer of resources.

**Types:** Central Teaching Spaces; Spaces currently controlled by the Faculty/School;

**Further details:** There is considerable flexibility with blended learning units: tutorial and lecture times can to some extent fit in with other calls on UWA facilities.

### Funding and resources

**Source:** Faculty/School funds

**Details:** This unit requires only modest resources that relate mostly to overall coordination of the unit and tutorial costs. The online component, once established, reduces costs of lecturing and maintenance.

### Additional information

This is an already established unit. It was originally developed to offer a broadening experience for first year students and accords closely with 1) UWA broadening unit requirements, 2) the UWA statement of Educational Principles and 3) the UWA website introduction to studies in Arts (documentation available). A small cohort of students enrolled in the unit in 2011. Their comments on the course were very positive and confirmed its value as a broadening unit (documentation available).

### Consultations

**Library:** Library Form Approved

Consultations with the University Librarian and all other groups were carried out when the unit was first accredited. No significant changes have been made.

### Committee endorsements and approvals

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30/05/2012 1:47:00 PM
IHST1XXX Humanity in the 21st Century

Please note that this unit is not yet approved.

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<td><strong>Contact:</strong> Graeme Martin (<a href="mailto:graeme.martin@uwa.edu.au">graeme.martin@uwa.edu.au</a>)</td>
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**Academic information**

**Unit Content:** This unit is concerned with the nature and future of humankind, current conditions and lifestyles of peoples across the world and prospects for change in the foreseeable future. It explores human wellbeing at local, regional and global levels and its promotion in a world of rapid change. Students discuss major challenges such as population explosion, weapons of mass destruction, pollution, endemic poverty and environmental degradation. They consider recent advances in science and technology and how these can contribute to human wellbeing in a sustainable environment. They collaborate with students from different disciplines through forums and projects and learn to integrate creative and analytical skills from the humanities, evidence from the sciences and skills from the professions in their exploration of human and world futures.

The academic objective of the unit is to prepare students to engage with global challenges and opportunities within their chosen careers and personal lives. Specifically it fosters understanding and ongoing interest in: 1) the current state of humanity and indices of human wellbeing, life styles, values and the environment, 2) what makes us human and gives us the capacity and propensity to change ourselves and the world we live in, 3) how advances in science and technology can be harnessed to benefit humanity at a global level, and 4) how all of these factors could influence not just the way we live but the very meaning of humanity in the 21st century. Emphasis is placed on critical and creative thought, collaborative skills, the ability to formulate questions and to find, evaluate and present information on human and world futures.

**Outcomes:** Students will demonstrate that they:
1) Appreciate local, regional and global differences in living standards, life styles, cultures, beliefs, values and aspirations.
2) Recognise that these differences can impact on resolution of major challenges of the 21st century and ultimately on human wellbeing and environmental sustainability.
3) Recognise that we live in a rapidly changing world and that awareness and understanding of likely changes is crucial to help shape world futures.
4) Understand that complex problems can only be resolved through integrating knowledge, methodologies and perspectives from a range of appropriate disciplines.
5) Have developed an ability for critical and creative thought and for collaborative work towards producing reports of value to others.
6) Have developed research and communication skills and an ability to independently explore new areas related to human and world futures.

Achievement of these outcomes is facilitated by the active learning approach used which involves collaboration in tutorials, forum postings and projects. It is also achieved through the ePortfolios which encourage reflective thought, learning independence and presentation skills. Students are expected to go beyond set readings and resources to further their independence and develop lifelong learning skills.
### Teaching and Learning Practices:

The teaching and learning practices are based on active and collaborative learning and delivered by blended learning. There are five main components, all involve lecturer or tutor interaction with students and all but the first (lecture) involve student interaction and collaboration.

1. **Lectures**: one per week. These are designed to enhance student engagement with and understanding of the central topic covered each week; the majority will be delivered by guest experts in the field. Students prepare for the lecture by pre-reading and interacting with materials online.

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### Assessment and Outcomes:

Assessment is based on six components:

1. Weekly assignments; these examine students understanding of weekly topic content and concepts: Tailored to outcomes 1, 2 and 3.
2. Integrative and summary reports: students integrate and reflect on topic material and its relation to their other studies and future plans: Tailored to outcomes 3, 4 and 5.
3. Collaboration on forums and tutorials. Tailored to outcomes 1, 2 and 4.
4. Project presentation: Tailored to outcomes 5 and 6.
5. Project report: Tailored to outcomes 4, 5 and 6.

### Curriculum from Existing Units:

This unit exists already as IHST1110. This proposal is to offer it as a broadening unit Category A and B and elective within the BA program in 2013.

### Assessment and Grading:

Supplementary assessment proposed for this level 1 unit.

### Offerings:

No quota proposed.
Unit rules

Prerequisites: Nil.
Corequisites: Nil.
Incompatibilities: Nil.
Secondary Education Requirements: None
Advisable Prior Study: None

Teaching Responsibilities

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Types: Spaces currently controlled by the Faculty/School;
Further details: There is considerable flexibility with blended learning units: tutorial and lecture times can to some extent fit in with other calls on UWA facilities.

Funding and resources

Source: Faculty/School funds
Details: This unit requires only modest resources that relate mostly to overall coordination of the unit and tutorial costs. The online component, once established, reduces costs of lecturing and maintenance.

Additional information

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30/05/2012 1:46:22 PM
Bachelor of Arts Board of Studies Meeting: 8th May 2012: follow up

Re New Unit Proposals: Humanity in the 21st Century and Human Action for World Futures:
A response to points raised during discussion of Item 5; Extract from Minutes.
(Neville Bruce: neville.bruce@uwa.edu.au)

Three points were raised by the board:

1) Teaching and Learning practices are not clear
2) Need to demonstrate how the proposed units fit within the knowledge paradigm of the Bachelor of Arts..........
3) Further consultations will need to take place with (at least) the following disciplines: ..........

Each is addressed below.

1) **Teaching and Learning practices are not clear** (if accepted, this will replace the current entries under Teaching and Learning in the New Unit Proposals)

The teaching and learning practices are based on active and collaborative learning and delivered by blended learning. There are five main components, all involve lecturer or tutor interaction with students and all but the first (lecture) involve student interaction and collaboration.

**Lectures:** one per week. These are designed to enhance student engagement with and understanding of the central topic covered each week; the majority will be delivered by guest experts in the field. Students prepare for the lecture by pre-reading and interacting with materials on line.

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**ePortfolio:** Each student creates a tutor guided ePortfolio designed to consolidate the student’s work and provide a base for ongoing learning. It involves critical analysis and reflection and presentation and organisation skills. It includes material available to other students for comment and collaboration.

*(Note: we have used the above practices for three years with students in our postgraduate programs and for one year with small groups of first year students. They are particularly suited to the subject of Integrated Human Studies and have been well received).*

2) **Need to demonstrate how the proposed units fit within the knowledge paradigm of the Bachelor of Arts, which is as follows: “the main focus of an Arts course is on how human beings create, recognise, and negotiate social meanings and values”**.
Within the stated main focus of an Arts course at UWA namely “how human beings create, recognise and negotiate social meanings and values” we attach: a) General comments, b) Objectives extracted from the original unit applications and c) Unit Resources and Outlines (Appendix 1).

a) General Comments: The two units; Humanity in the 21st Century (IHST1110) and Human Action for World Futures (IHST1111) in their scope, conceptual base and purpose fit closely within the Arts knowledge paradigm. Their parent field, Integrated Human Studies (IHS) is concerned with the ‘nature and future of humankind’. The two units address what it means to be human in the 21st century (IHST1110) and how human wellbeing can be promoted in a sustainable world (IHST1111). The units are interdisciplinary and future-focused and call on the understandings, attributes and skills traditionally recognised in Arts courses.

Recognise social meanings and values:
Social meanings and values can be considered a defining feature of the human species and as such are emphasised throughout the units and particularly in IHST1110, Humanity in the 21st century. They form a base for exploring and assessing human wellbeing and for visioning possible and desirable human and world futures. What makes us human? (Charles Pasternak, ed.; One World Publications, Oxford) provides a basic text for this area.

Create social meanings and values:
A futures focus is intrinsic to both units as is the use and practice of established futures methodologies such as scenario building, forecasting and back casting. In these activities students are expected to envisage (create) scenarios of possible local, regional and global changes in world views, beliefs and social organisation contingent on current and future technical, political and environmental change.

Negotiate social meanings and values:
The units, particularly IHST1111, Human Action for World Futures, are concerned with negotiating or promoting human wellbeing which necessarily incorporates social meanings and values. To achieve desired human outcomes in a rapidly changing and environmentally challenged world requires a deep understanding of current social meanings and values and the skills of integrative negotiation (joining forces to achieve something together; Wikipedia).

Extract from the New Unit Proposal Application: Humanity in the 21st Century (IHST1110)
This unit is concerned with the nature and future of humankind, current conditions and lifestyles of peoples across the world and prospects for change in the foreseeable future. It explores human wellbeing at local, regional and global levels and its promotion in a world of rapid change..................

Specifically it fosters understanding and ongoing interest in: 1) the current state of humanity and indices of human wellbeing, life styles, values and the environment, 2) what makes us human and gives us the capacity and propensity to change ourselves and the world we live in, 3) how advances in science and technology can be harnessed to benefit humanity at a global level, and 4) how all of these factors could influence not just the way we live but the very meaning of humanity in the 21st century.

Extract from the New Unit Proposal Application: Human Action for World Futures (IHST1111)
The decisions and actions we take over the next fifty years could impact on human wellbeing and world futures for generations. This unit examines the theory and practice of individual, organisational and community action to enhance human wellbeing within a sustainable environment. Students discuss past human activities that damaged local environments and social cohesion and current activities, such as burning of fossil fuels that threaten the environment and quality of human life at a global level. They collaborate in tutorials and forum discussions to understand and appreciate the great diversity of human lifestyles and cultures and seek common values and aspirations that could inform and unite global action. They investigate
opportunities and limitations for positive action through government and non-government agencies and business and assess the influence of religious and secular allegiances and the power of the media in motivating or impeding action. They explore new opportunities in formal and informal education, the internet and social networking to shape public opinion and drive action.

3) Further consultations will need to take place with (at least) the following disciplines: Anthropology and Sociology; English and Cultural Studies; Medieval and Early Modern Studies and Political Science and International Relations with respect to any potential overlap.

A number of schools and disciplines were consulted in the early development of these units to avoid inappropriate overlap. We do not believe this will be a problem for the reasons given below. However, we fully agree with the need for further consultations with the above and other disciplines to ensure this is so and more importantly to facilitate integration and collaboration across units. To do this properly we will arrange consultations with detailed examination of curricula and exploration of potential for cross teaching and other collaborative activities. We undertake to complete this and incorporate any appropriate changes and possible cross teaching into our curricula within three months, well in time for delivery of the units in 2013. We believe that this time will be well spent: a major objective of Integrated Human Studies and these units is to foster collaboration and synergies between disciplines.

Reasons why potential overlap should not be a problem.

1. Our units are integrative and need to bring all relevant disciplines, from the arts, sciences and professions together to examine the nature and future of humankind. In developing our units we identified over twenty first year units, ten from Arts, which related to our units in at least some respect. But it is the very need to integrate a wide range of disciplines that ensures that overlap with any specific discipline should be relatively minor. We set a value of around 5-15% as a reasonable degree of content overlap to allow useful integration within our units and to still be of value in complementing rather than competing with others. If after the planned consultations with other unit coordinators it is felt overlap is greater than that suggested or is otherwise inappropriate, we undertake to reduce it. This presents no problem; we already have more useful and relevant content material than we can include in these two units.

2. Relating to point 1., we point out that we currently run six postgraduate course work units which in terms of content simply expand the material presented in our two first year units. So again, although we do not expect to find much significant overlap at a first year level, we have plenty of material that can be substituted if needs be.

3. The purpose and main thrust of our units differ significantly from others offered at this university. Our units are concerned with human and world futures. This requires new content and concepts, different perspectives on common content and the introduction and understanding of relatively new skills and approaches including future studies, integral thinking, complexity and wicked problems and resilience theory. These are now well recognised methodologies and serve as a bridge between theory and practice in our units. It is this emphasis on possible and desirable and attainable human futures that we believe most distinguishes our units from others. (See also Unit Outlines and Resources; Appendix 1).
Appendix 1. Unit Resources and Outlines

Resources:

*Online resources:*

Most resources for specific topics for the two units, including readings, recorded lectures and interactive sites, are selected from reliable online sources. The area of intersection of technology, ethics, regulation, governance, public values and practice moves rapidly: the flexibility, depth and scope of online resources provide currency and academic rigour for individual topics. Students are directed to online resources from leading institutes in the field which address social issues, values, beliefs, ethics and regulatory concerns as well as the underlying technologies. To take just one example, online resources covering Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (TDCS) are included in IHST1110 (topic transhumanism). This technique, already in practice, has the potential for radically boosting mental capacities and altering behaviours at an individual and social level (students explore this site from the Oxford Martin School: [http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/news/2012-news-brainstimulation](http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/news/2012-news-brainstimulation))

*Textbooks:*

Four texts provide important perspectives on much of the content of both units; excerpts are referred to in specific topics, all are recommended reading in their entirety. One, Evolution's Edge, is the set text for both units.


James Martin is a leading futurologist. He founded the James Martin 21st Century School, now Oxford Martin School at the University of Oxford, [http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/about/](http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/about/), which links together many institutions and academics from the humanities and sciences. His book provides a technological base for the units and goes much further: it explores the very meaning of humanity in the 21st century.


This book provides a coherent overview of the current state of humanity and potential for humans to shape the future including their own societies, ways of living, values and purpose. The following review from Sohail Inayatullah, a leading futurologist, brings out the value of the book for these two units.

*Evolution's Edge is simply outstanding - easy to read, inspiring, thoughtful. Its ability to integrate environmental challenges with spiritual issues, technological possibilities and systems evolutionary theory is fantastic. Evolution's Edge shows that limitless economic expansion is impossible on a finite planet. Our growth-based global system will collapse as critical resources become scarce and major ecosystems fail. However, new ideas, values, and technologies can help us avoid disaster and create a better world. Using evolutionary systems theory, Evolution’s Edge explains how societies evolve and why rapid, nonlinear change is not only possible but inevitable. ....... Sohail Inayatullah, editor, Journal of Future Studies.*

This book includes contributions from twelve leading scholars from a broad range of disciplines.

“From maths to music, speech, imitation, soul, and the ability to read minds, What Makes us Human? considers whether we are half-ape or half-angel, and offers a sweeping exploration of humanity and of human nature”.

All of the contributions are relevant to the two units and recommended for general reading, ‘The place of ‘Deep Social Mind’ in the evolution of human nature’ (Andrew Whiten) is a major resource for two of the topics.


Paul Raskin is President of the Tellus institute [http://www.tellus.org/index.php](http://www.tellus.org/index.php) (research and action for a global civilization of sustainability, equity, and well-being). This seminal essay provides a coherent account of alternative pathways our global population could take over the 21st century and what they would mean for individuals, societies and civilisation itself.

Unit Outlines:

Note both units comprise eleven main weekly topics: two weeks are reserved for project delivery and unit overview and reflection. The topic headings are given below: embedded in the topics are a series of small modules covering general and specific skills, an introduction to the theory and practice of interdisciplinarity and the cognate disciplines that contribute to the units. Included in the modules are: skills for active learning, establishing an ePortfolio, developing a project, information: searching and evaluation, presenting information, concept mapping as a tool for integration, futures studies methodologies and consensus building and dialogue mapping.

Humanity in the 21st Century  (IHST1110)

1) The meaning of the 21st Century

This topic introduces the big questions: What does it mean to be human in the 21st century? What is the current state of the planet and what kind of lives are the Earth’s seven billion human inhabitants currently leading? How did the current situation come about? – and the need for an integrated approach that brings the arts and humanities together with the sciences and social sciences, to answer these questions.

2) The current state of humanity

We live in an age of unprecedented wealth and technological advance, but how happy are we on a global level and who are the happiest? In this topic, we look at indices of human wellbeing and values to get a sense of the diversity of human conditions, lifestyles and values across the planet

3) Past and present
How does understanding the past help us to understand the present? The cosmos originated 14 billion years ago and the earth, 4 billion years ago. Human civilisations have existed for a mere 12,000 years and in 24 hours we could destroy the world. This topic looks at our current situation as the dominant species on the planet from the point of view of deep time and big history.

4) Homo sapiens: our biological heritage

How did humans evolve as a species within the complex ecology of the earth? What can we learn about human nature and human wellbeing from our genetic and environmental heritage and our evolutionary past as hunters and gatherers? In this topic, we inquire into the human condition from an ecological and biological perspective.

5) What makes us human?

This is a much explored and debated question. How important were the prehuman conquests of fire, cooking and toolmaking and the more recent developments of art, clothing, language and religion? Understanding our pre-historical, historical and cultural heritage is essential for understanding the way we behave today. Our past together with current values, beliefs and experiences define our identities and collectively describe what it means to be human.

6) Human needs, wants and desires

All human beings have the same basic needs that determine many of our behaviours, but our needs as individuals are greatly shaped by our cultures. This topic looks at the impact of individual and group needs and desires on human social organisations and on how these may need to change in the future to adapt to new technological and environmental challenges.

7) Technology: blessing or curse?

Throughout human history technological invention has driven great cultural changes and profoundly changed human lives although the history of technology is one of both unintended consequences and unpredictable rewards. This topic examines a range of technologies in agriculture, medicine, transport, power generation and warfare that have had both beneficial and detrimental outcomes in terms of human wellbeing and sustainability.

8) The Age of Consumerism

Technology has given humanity unprecedented power to utilise the earth’s resources and increase the material wealth of individuals, but with devastating consequences for the earth’s environment. How are rates of consumption changing across the planet? How are they affecting quality of life and how do they impact on the global ecosystem?

9) The Global Network

The internet, information and communication technologies (ICT) are revolutionising human knowledge and communication and connecting individuals and cultures across the planet. This topic examines the impact of these emerging technologies on human civilisation and separates the hype from the reality to evaluate their potential as an agent of change.

10) Transhumanism

Technological advances in various areas are beginning to change what it means to be human. Advances in cybernetics and genetic technology have the potential to transform the human body, and advances in computing and artificial intelligence are greatly enhancing the human capacity to think and communicate. What is the significance of these advances for humanity as a whole?
11) Human prospects

How can 21st century civilisation be characterised? What forces are driving us as the dominant species on the planet? Are we destined to destroy the planet and ourselves through rampant consumerism and warfare or are our capacities for cooperation and altruism increasing? In this topic, we summarise the human predicament and what we have learned about human nature so that we can evaluate the prospects of humanity at this turning point in the history of our species.

12) Project delivery and unit reflection

Students present their projects in small groups and reflect on major issues covered that could impact on their future careers and personal lives and aspirations.

13) Project delivery and unit reflection

Students present their projects in small groups and reflect on major issues covered that could impact on their future careers and personal lives and aspirations.

Human Action for World Futures (IHST1111)

1) Human action: shaping the 21st Century:

What is the best possible future and how do we get there? What is the present state of the world and what would we wish to change? Science and technology have given us the power to shape not only human futures but the very nature of the planet we live in. But how can we to use this power to promote human wellbeing and environmental stability? What actions can we take as individuals, groups and as a global community?

2) Past impacts of human action

Humans have increasingly modified their environment in an attempt to maximise human wellbeing. This strategy has had remarkable successes, seeming successes and failures. In this topic we examine the effects of past human actions, sometimes deliberate, sometimes inadvertent on ourselves and on our environment. An historical viewpoint will be taken with case studies, such as Easter Island and irrigation and land degradation, as lessons for wiser direction of future human activities.

3) Scenarios for the Future

At the crossroads of human civilisation, a number of positive and negative scenarios have been suggested for possible global futures, including the 'business as usual' scenario, the 'new dark age' scenario and the 'great transformation' scenario. In this topic, we survey these scenarios and critically evaluate their likelihood as future possibilities.

4) Action, local to global

Effective action can be at the level of the individual, small or large groups, regions, nations, coalition of nations or the global community. Each level has its particular aims, strengths and weaknesses. Here, we explore examples such as installing photovoltaic cells in the home through to education of women at a global level, and consider how these activities might relate to personal and career plans.

5) Actors: the major players
In the grand scheme of improving human and world futures there are those who stimulate change, those who effect change and those who do both. In this topic we examine the nature and effectiveness of major players in each of these roles including individuals, groups, civil society, government, corporations, religions and other "activists".

6) Integration: resolving complex world problems

Many of the urgent issues facing humankind in the 21st century, such as population explosion, global warming and poverty, have been described as 'wicked problems'. Their resolution requires bringing together and integrating a mix of disciplines and viewpoints including technical, social, cultural, economic and political understandings. Here we consider some global and local problems and their resolution through successful integration and consensus building.

7) Changing hearts and minds

The actions of individuals play an essential role in determining the shape and direction of society, but what makes people act the way they do? In this topic, we examine the role of education, the media, consumer advertising, government and other purveyors of enlightenment and propaganda and consider how these can better promote human and world futures.

8) Facilitating action: new opportunities

Just as science and technology have given us massive and potentially threatening powers, they have also given us unprecedented opportunities to shape better human and world futures through education, information and communication technologies and social organisation. This topic explores how these new developments can promote action at a global and local level.

9) Directing action through futures studies

Futures studies examine possible, probable and preferable world views and outcomes. It is an emergent discipline with its own methodologies that relate to well established activities such as weather and budget forecasting. However, its scope is much wider and its potential impact on human and world futures much greater. This topic examines the current practice of futures studies as an art and a science and its potential contribution to directing human action.

10) New ideas and developments in global action:

'Globalisation' and 'sustainability', or loss of sustainability, are relatively new phenomena that require new thinking for their understanding and management. Recent developments in complexity theory, resilience thinking, systems thinking and others offer new opportunities for shaping world futures.

11) Shaping our futures:

This unit is about action; action to make a difference to human and world futures. But the challenges we face may seem overwhelming, way beyond our abilities to meet them. Many action groups have been well aware of this problem and developed 'tool kits' to assist individuals and organisations to meet these challenges, effectively and sustainably: examples will be explored in this topic.

12) Project delivery and unit reflection

Students present their projects in small groups and reflect on major issues covered that could impact on their future careers and personal lives and aspirations.

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Students present their projects in small groups and reflect on major issues covered that could impact on their future careers and personal lives and aspirations.
Appendix 2. Comments from First Year Students (2011)

In support of the above response: comments from three first year students from 2011 are included here. Though selected they bring out the distinguishing features or the two units and their potential impact on student understanding and engagement with world futures.

1) “........Through the course structure of Integrated Human studies, I was able to gain a broader way of thinking. With issues that relate directly to our generation and those that affect our world today being the topics of discussion. Being in class, at times, felt like being part of a panel, with challenging world issues questioned and discussed on the spot. I loved the level of interaction in our classes. It was great having such direct contact with a lecturer on a weekly basis. This formed growth and confidence within the group, with a noticeable difference in our ability to openly share our opinions progressively showing. All the world issues and subjects brought up by Prof. Neville, and the other members of the class where open to contrary opinion and discussion, giving us the opportunity contribute and share our view. This unit was fantastic as it expanded my knowledge of the challenges and opportunities introduced to our globe by the rapid progression of human integration, technology. With weekly issues including those one would find Politics, International Relations, Law, Psychology, Human Biology and many more, our knowledge has expanded beyond what I would’ve expected out of one unit. It’s been a fantastic journey.”

2) “.......IHST has introduced me to a new and broader way of thinking. It has not necessarily changed the things that I think and my values are still relatively the same as when I started, but the way I look at things has diversified and become stronger. I think due to the forums, and the interdisciplinary content of the course, I now can see things from many different perspectives that I was not previously aware of, which makes the conclusions I reach more intelligent and thought through. My approach to problems and society is generally now more long-term, aware of consequences, and inclusive of more facets of issues that I consider. I think this is an immeasurable gain, and none of my other units have invoked this type of change in me........”

3) “.....I look back on this semester and remember only fond memories. ........discussions we had in our once a week tutorial always seemed to pass by so quickly and I always left the room feeling like I had actually learnt something new and actively thought about and communicated new ideas and information. .......... I do think the last few tutorials really demonstrated how much all of us have progressed over the semester in the way in which we engaged in such intense, yet rational, discussions.

The topics covered in this unit have at times been confronting, I will always remember the interesting discussions had regarding nuclear power and eugenics. Topics that really are not very well posed to the general public due to media bias and the like. Being a town planner in the making, I don’t often get the chance in units to really just sit and think....and I have done a lot of that...even if my wiki has not been regularly updated I know my mind has been!

I never expected this unit to teach me as much as it has. The need to think through very nearly every aspect of daily life and consider how the simplest of activities has changed over centuries of evolution. The human species really is very very complex and my appreciation of this has increased beyond belief........”