

A global voice for a common future

## IFCU'S FORESIGHT UNIT

The International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) is an association of Catholic universities and institutions of higher education spanning all five continents. It was founded in 1924, approved by the Holy See in 1949, and recognized as an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) by the United Nations system in 1952. IFCU collaborates with the Holy See's Secretariat of State, the Congregation for Catholic Education, AVEPRO and various dicasteries, including the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. IFCU's aim is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and foster a more just and humane world, in the dual light of reason and faith. In particular, IFCU promotes the development of Catholic higher education and works to enhance the quality of its member universities' mission, as well as ensure the balanced distribution of Catholic institutions of higher learning across the world.



### Developing trends

IFCU's Foresight Unit provides Futures Studies contents primarily aimed at member universities in all relevant areas of global higher education. It engages in various forward-looking activities that supply information and innovative thinking on the transformations of the global educational context. Through horizon scanning techniques, it aims to observe developing trends across institutions of higher learning worldwide and assess where challenges and opportunities will arise in the near-to-medium term future.



### Technology watch

IFCU's Foresight Unit devotes particular attention to the development of technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and to their transformative impact on higher education. As colleges and universities across the world enroll students whose learning behavior is increasingly shaped by these technologies, there is no escaping the fact that only those institutions that are able to adapt to the needs and expectations of changing cohorts will have a chance to remain relevant and, hopefully, thrive in the higher-education sector of tomorrow. By keeping a close watch on the latest evolving trends in technology use on and off campus and on how technology is affecting both pedagogical approaches and curricula, the Foresight Unit aims to provide support and guidance to member institutions as they strive to adjust to an environment that is changing at an ever-faster pace. Because the penetration of technology in the tertiary-education sector is dramatically redefining the very mission of universities across the world in unprecedented ways, this dimension of the Foresight Unit's work can be of particular strategic value to IFCU members and beyond, in particular through the circulation of contents that aim not only to inform on latest TechEd trends but also to foster debate on the possible consequences of TechEd use for all stakeholders.

# MULTIPLE FUTURE CHALLENGES



## The workplaces of tomorrow

Another strong area of concentration at IFCU's Foresight Unit is the fast-transforming landscape of the labor market under the impact of artificial intelligence, automation and robotization. As institutions of higher learning are under increasing pressure to offer programs that are certifiably labor-market oriented, keeping abreast of the changing needs in skills and competencies in economic sectors where college graduates are in demand is nowadays of paramount importance. One of the most significant consequences of the penetration of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies on the labor market has been the emergent truth that most of today's students will no longer spend their entire working life in a single field of occupation, where mobility would be vertical, but will presumably have to transfer through different fields in the course of their career. Yet due to the fast pace of technological evolution, the window of foreseeability regarding jobs and skills in demand keeps getting narrower. The Foresight Unit's focus on evolving labor trends thus allows member institutions to retain a margin of visibility on ways in which programs, curricula and modes of teaching may best evolve to adapt to the constantly changing needs of the job market.

## Evolving university governance

IFCU's Foresight Unit also monitors the evolving challenges that governance bodies of colleges and universities are increasingly faced with. As many institutions of higher learning across the world have had to adopt a business model over the past two decades (and more will have to in the future), strategic planning informed by the most up-to-date data on evolving trends in and out of the higher education market is becoming *a sine qua non* of university management. The Foresight Unit therefore aims to supply member institutions with a wide spectrum of factual information and perspectives that can support strategic decision-making at a particularly crucial time, in which traditional assumptions about fundamental principles of university governance are being shaken.

## Raising the key questions

As it surveys evolving trends in and out of the tertiary education market, IFCU's Foresight Unit generates broad ideas for thought-provoking debates, which IFCU believes should be fostered within the higher-education community at large. What will be the future impact of the growing use of educational technologies on learners, both in terms of *what* is learned and *how* it is learned? What will become of the university's traditional role as a locus of creation and transmission of knowledge that strives to foster critical and abstract thinking? Developing awareness of the significance of these debates among members and beyond is one of the Foresight Unit's objectives.



# REPORTS AND TRAINING

## The annual reports



One of the highlights of the work carried out by IFCU's Foresight Unit is the publication of an annual report, which started in 2018. The primary aim of the report is to peruse evolving global trends in higher education and the labor market and provide an analytical angle on how these trends are bound to change what studying and working will come to mean. While each issue focuses on a selected area of investigation deemed of particular interest in today's global context of unprecedented disruption, these reports share a common objective:

seek to raise the question of where the Fourth Industrial Revolution, through its multiple points of impact in the marketplaces of labor and education, is taking us, and how it will change our world and our humanity by reshaping generations to come. The broad query that drives these reports is of particular significance today because, with the advent of Information and Communication Technologies, the pace of change has been growing exponentially. Virtually every day, new technologies, new uses of data, new algorithms, new developments in machine learning are appearing and many of them are sure to either radically transform or eliminate altogether tasks that have been associated with learning and working from time immemorial. As these innovations keep surfacing faster, our sense of our own capability to grasp the magnitude of change keeps dimming. With these reports, IFCU sees it therefore as one of its important missions to not only supply members with the information and analysis that will allow them to remain aware of tech-led challenges, but also contribute to shaping the societal debate about these daunting transformations. In this respect, IFCU's intention is always to disseminate these volumes among as broad an audience as possible and to facilitate in any practical format debate, intellectual curiosity, forward thinking and training on these subjects. This urge is predicated on the belief that as a human community, we stand on the threshold of epoch-making shifts in fundamental paradigms. The momentum thus defined warrants the participation of academic institutions across the world in the debate on the broader economic, social, ethical, philosophical and spiritual transformations under way. Given the magnitude of what is occurring, this momentum also offers the opportunity for Catholic institutions of higher learning to play a unique role in leading the humanistic approach to this debate.

## Forward-looking events and training programs

IFCU's Foresight Unit participates in the organization of academic events that gather representatives of member institutions and other guests for the purpose of reflecting on the direction of ongoing and future trends, and on how to best prepare for the transformations they are yet to bring. These fora provide an opportunity for members and representatives of multiple sectors in the society at large to engage in exchanges that shed light on contemporary debates, thus bringing benefits to all participants. In addition, the Foresight Unit develops a range of training programs, both face to face and on line, whose aim is to provide relevant staff and stakeholders from member colleges and universities with an introduction to the tools and techniques of futures studies and guide them in applying their use to the particular challenges that their institutions are facing.



# Support us



Giving to IFCU means supporting the worldwide mission of Catholic universities, which place people at the center of society through their economic, social and cultural role. It is also a way of strengthening the social impact of knowledge in a world where knowledge can emancipate and free human beings from prejudice, poverty and conflict. IFCU's community of over 230 members includes universities located in regions of geopolitical risk (Cambodia, Lebanon, Iraq, Haiti and Mozambique), to which IFCU strives to provide support through the mobilization of its network and range of partners (e.g. patrons, companies). For over 30 years, IFCU has also initiated and conducted projects with a strong social dimension that rely on a deep sense of ethics, the sharing of experiences and the drive to innovate – all through a pragmatic approach guided by the following objectives:

- Improve social inclusion on campuses worldwide through programs aimed at supporting and fostering professional integration for students with disabilities.
- Promote gender equality through Women Leadership Programs.
- Promote solidarity between Catholic universities to train local elites through partnership policies and institutional strengthening for the support of universities that are the most vulnerable (Africa Program).
- Develop awareness of the importance of higher education as a means to foster responsible societies rather than as a market tool.
- Train students toward responsible citizenship and civic participation.

**Do you wish to know more about IFCU?**

**Contact us! Join us! Support us!**



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