



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: Dr. Kurt Daw

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

Dr. Kurt Daw, Dean of the College of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University, is a nationally recognized expert on arts policy in both civic and higher education contexts. Formerly Dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts at the State University of New York - New Paltz, he was the recipient in 2001-2002 of an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellowship. Dr. Daw has directed professionally for both theater and opera companies.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: I have a foot in two worlds - higher education and the arts/entertainment industry. In both of them I've noticed a new emphasis on creativity and innovation developing. In the entertainment world this represents a slight loosening up, but in higher education it is a revolution. Until recently creativity has not been thought to be teachable. It is a great movement forward in education to realize that not only can creativity be nurtured, but it is a cognitive mode that can be studied and learned.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: Economic hard times have led to a lot of budget cuts in education - which is the single worst possible response. When the going gets tough is precisely when we need a more educated and creative work force.

Q: How will globalization (e.g. the emergence of new global powers, such as China and India) affect your professional area in the near term?

A: It has already changed both areas dramatically. Slumdog Millionaire's total domination of the Academy Awards, including the award for best picture, was proof that even in our popular entertainment choices - once culturally specific - we now live in a global society. Mass media can't be provincial anymore, knowing that more audience members for the average film now live outside than US than in it. In higher education, global awareness has been slowed by visa policies that made it far harder for foreign students to enter the US for the past five years, but that seems to be thawing now. The US cannot afford to ignore the Bologna Compact, which is bringing European universities into alignment. To stay competitive we need to participate on the level of global standards.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: I suspect that both industries in which I work will be so revolutionized in the next decade that they may emerge in almost unrecognizable forms. Entertainment is shifting toward on-demand, individualized consumership. Within a decade it may be completely personalized. Higher Education is also going to be less location- and time-based, and more individualized. It will be more about competency and less about credentials. "What can you do," not "where did you learn it?"

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: Right now, I think the hardest thing is getting an initial toehold. There are not a lot of entry level positions. They are also challenged finding significant professional development opportunities and mentoring, because industries of all kinds are trying to sub-contract their early career workforce. I advise young people to factor in growth and development opportunities as heavily as salary and location when considering job possibilities.