# Unit 1: What does our society tell us about the good life?

## Overview

Welcome to FNDN 201: Ideas that Inspire!  This class is going to be a very different learning experience. You do not have any tests or exams. There are no right or wrong answers. This class is all about engaging in the process of inquiry into the big question, "What is the good life?" In this first unit, we begin the course by exploring the messages that bombard us in our daily lives – from social media and pop culture to the norms of our communities.

## Topics and Prompts

Unit 1 is divided into two main prompts to guide your inquiry and discussion:

Introduction: What kind of course is this anyway?

Prompt 1: “Can’t get no satisfaction…”

Prompt 2: “The unexamined life is not worth living”

## Learning Outcomes

Through practicing inquiry in this unit, you will:

* Examine the meaning of “the good life” within the context of social messages
* Compare and contrast social messages to your own initial thoughts
* Respond critically to questions about the meaning of “good”
* Listen with respect to your classmates who may have diverse experiences
* Experiment with inquiry-based learning through the different prompts

## Activity Checklist

Here is a checklist of learning activities you will benefit from in completing this unit. You may find it useful for planning your work.

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| 🗹 | **Activities** |
|  | Activity 1.1: Watch the Powtoons overview of this course and then post any questions you might have. |
|  | Activity 1.2: Introduce yourself briefly so that your classmates and instructor can get to know you better. |
|  | Activity 1.3: Read the introduction to the song, “Can’t get no satisfaction,” and listen to it or watch the video. |
|  | Activity 1.4: Journal in response to the song. |
|  | Activity 1.5: What does advertising tell us? Search online to answer this question. |
|  | Activity 1.6: What does social media tell us? |
|  | Activity 1.7: What does social science tell us? Watch the TedTalk, “What makes a good life?” |
|  | Activity 1.8: Watch the TedTalk on what makes a good life. |
|  | Activity 1.9: Read the introduction and watch the video, “Crash Course Philosophy.” Then discuss with your group. |

**Assessment**

Here is the assessment for Unit 1.

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| --- | --- |
| **Group Discussion 1**: From the group discussion, write a summary that records the main themes of your group and how you (individually) respond to your classmates’ ideas. | 2% |

## Introduction: What kind of course is this anyway?

Before we get right into the course, take a short time to orient yourself and introduce yourself. This course is quite different from typical courses in that it is based entirely on interacting and discussing, so it is important that you feel comfortable offering your opinions, challenging yourself and others, and asking questions.

#### Activity 1.1: Overview

Be sure to carefully read the overview of what to expect from this course. Feel free to post your questions about the course or assignments to the forum – if it’s a question that may benefit others.

#### Activity 1.2: Introductions

Share a bit about yourself, such as where you live, what you are studying, the kind of things that interest you, and the kinds of things that give you happiness.

## Prompt 1: “Can’t get no satisfaction”

When we think about our hopes for ourselves and those we love, we tend to focus on health, happiness, prosperity, safety, and success. Perhaps you imagine smiles, laughter, and fun. As we get going in this course, we will wrestle with complex issues that may intersect with our concept of “the good life.” However, we should not dismiss pleasure and fun. These are valid human experiences. At the same time, if we focus on our own pleasure as the meaning of life, we may have trouble finding satisfaction. Here, we will look at several media prompts to lead us into our exploration of happiness.

#### Activity 1.3: “Can’t Get No Satisfaction”



Figure 1.1: "I Can't Get No (Job) Satisfaction" flickr photo by dullhunk https://flickr.com/photos/dullhunk/6171405289 shared under a Creative Commons (BY) license

Although the Rolling Stones in the 1960s were asking the age-old question (like Solomon asked in Ecclesiastes), part of the answer, at least as seen in the 1960’s rock and roll culture, is finding the “good life” in finding pleasurable experiences (e.g., rock concerts, or the experiences that rock concerts promote), as seen in the video of this song where the fan reaction to the Rolling Stones was the opposite of the song…but is it true satisfaction?

Listen to the song (or watch the music video): Rolling Stones, [“Can’t get no satisfaction.”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzYWTIHqutA)  Look up the lyrics to study the message of this song in more detail.

#### Activity 1.4: Journal Reflection

Spend five minutes writing in your journal in response to these questions:

* Can we ever find satisfaction in this life?
* What is the role of satisfaction in “a good life?”

#### Activity 1.5: Commercial Search

Go to YouTube or any online source and look up “best commercials” or a similar search. You should be able to find videos featuring the year’s popular advertising. View the ads and consider these questions: What does advertising promote as “the good life?” What is their message about wants and needs? What messages do they show about ideal lifestyles? When you meet with your group this week, discuss your thoughts with your group.

*\*Note that for all of the prompts in Prompt 1, you will* ***not be graded*** *on these discussions. When you meet with your group this week, your focus will be on recording your discussion on the Prompt 2 questions. However, the Prompt 1 questions will help you explore the topics and will be instrumental in completing the final project.*

#### Activity 1.6: Social Media Messages

Take about five minutes to browse your social media feed (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc). From quickly glancing at the photos and stories that your friends have shared, what themes arise? What messages do you get about “the good life?” How does social media affect your satisfaction? Feel free to share with your group when you meet this week.

#### Activity 1.7: TedTalk

Read the following background on Waldinger and the TedTalk:

Robert Waldinger is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and Zen priest, as well as the clinical professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He is the Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, one of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies in history- tracking the lives of two groups of men for over 75 years, and their Baby Boomer children to understand how childhood experience reaches across decades to affect health and wellbeing in middle age. (from [https](file:///C:\Users\MelindaD\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\XHD7IQR4\https)[://www.ted.com/speakers/robert\_waldinger](https://www.ted.com/speakers/robert_waldinger))

This Ted Talk (running time 12:46 minutes) presents the results from a long-running Harvard study on what makes people happy or not so happy. Although the presenter, Robert Waldinger does give “an answer” according to the study results (i.e., “relationships”), the value of the presentation also is in how it introduces so many possibilities of what the good life is, and profiles people over their whole lifetime. Waldinger asks that age old question, when I look back on my life, what elements will have produced lasting fulfillment, “good,” vs. what elements have really been a waste of time and energy, and unfulfilling.

Watch the following video in which Waldinger shares his study on happiness: [What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI).

#### Activity 1.8: Reflection and Discussion

Record your thoughts on the questions below in your personal learning journal. When you meet with your group this week, you may want to include some of your ideas in your discussion.

Waldinger begins his talk with these questions, offered for your discussion as well.

* What keeps us healthy and happy as we go through life?
* If you were going to invest now in your future best self, where would you put your time and your energy?

Further questions to discuss:

* Waldinger says that Millennials prioritize wealth and fame as their hope for the years to come. What kind of life goals are you or your peers striving for?
* The survey found that relationships seem the key to a good life. Do you agree? What have you learned so far in your life about the protective power of relationship?
* Waldinger asks, “What might leaning in to relationships even look like?” What do you think?
* Why is this question about the meaning of the good life so important?

## Prompt 2: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Philosophy helps us to consider the meaning of the good life from different perspectives compared to social sciences. Here, we will watch a short overview of philosophy from a popular video source, the “Crash Course” series. The speaker leads us to contemplate which philosophical view we tend to take and challenges us to be open and willing to examine life.

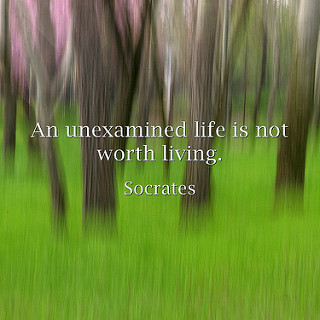


Figure 1.1: "An-unexamined-life-is" flickr photo by Bull Gator https://flickr.com/photos/bullgator0892/11370925405 shared under a Creative Commons (BY) license

#### Activity 1.9: Crash Course Philosophy

**William Henry** "**Hank**" **Green II** (born May 5, 1980) is an American entrepreneur, musician, educator, producer, vlogger, and author.  Although the Waldinger study on happiness provides a good overview of the question from Psychology, this short (9 minute) video provides an even more comprehensive overview from a philosophical point of view, pointing out at the end that we all are philosophers (people who ask “why?”).

Watch the video, “[Crash Course Philosophy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra1Dmz-5HjU).” Then, consider the following questions:

* Do you see elements of these various philosophies in your own life?
* Do you agree or disagree with some of the ways of thinking about “the good life?”
* Why is this question of what the good life is so important?
* What do you think of the famous statement from Socrates that “the unexamined life is not worth living?”

Write down some of your thoughts in your journal. This may help you in your assignments for this course, including your first assignment, the group discussion.

# Assessment

**Group Discussion 1:** What does our society tell us about the good life?

From the group discussion, write a summary that records the main themes of your group and how you respond to your classmates’ ideas. Use the following Google Template **[link to template]** for all group discussions, responding to the prompts in approximately **200 words**.

Note also that throughout the course, the group discussions will focus on the questions from Prompt 2 in each unit. The Prompt 1 questions in the units are ungraded but will certainly inform your discussions and other course assignments.

## Unit 1 Summary

In this first unit, you have had the opportunity to consider the meaning of “happiness” and “the good life.” As we continue in FNDN 201, we will look at these questions through all kinds of prompts, such as music, art, film, primary documents, articles, and speeches, and we will hear from multiple voices across time and place.

## Checking Your Learning

Before you move on to the next unit, check your understanding of the following.

Can you:

* Examine the meaning of “the good life” within the context of social messages?
* Compare and contrast social messages to your own initial thoughts?
* Respond critically to questions about the meaning of “good”?
* Listen with respect to your classmates who may have diverse experiences?
* Experiment with inquiry-based learning through the different prompts?