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## Editor's Introduction

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## Editors' Introduction

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Since its inception in 2007, the Dedicated Semester at Fontbonne has enriched our campus community each fall. Whether we explored Judaism, the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, immigration, or ideas about happiness and the good life, we have engaged in complicated and multifaceted learning, debate, and reflection. Our faculty has demonstrated their adaptability to and enthusiasm for new intellectual challenges, and our students have made exciting connections in and outside of the classroom. In class, students learn about music appreciation through Jewish tradition, study statistics by applying them to Millennium Development goals for eradicating malaria, or connect the genocide in Bosnia to life in our own Saint Louis. Outside the classroom, they participate in poverty simulations, attend a naturalization ceremony for new American citizens, or explore the nineteenth-century utopian colony at New Harmony, Indiana. All of these experiences contribute to Fontbonne's longstanding commitment to produce leaders to serve a world in need. When students make connections between academics and these questions that both enrich and challenge the world, they become deeper learners and wiser citizens.

But until now, we have had little lasting record of these exciting semesters. As a remedy to that problem, last spring, at the close of our most recent semester, we invited faculty and students to submit academic work or personal or creative reflections on the semester. We also asked several of our guest speakers for permission to reprint their work in this volume. We did not place any stipulations on length or form—we simply wanted to collect some outtakes from this semester without limiting meaningful forms of engagement. We were delighted to have responses that reached around campus and demonstrated the breadth of not only this topic, but also our community. The essays here include informal reflections as well as academic research about happiness from the vantage points of psychology, literature, computer science, philosophy, early childhood education, history, religion, and beyond. Such a robust response is a humbling reminder that, no matter how much of an expert we may be on a particular issue, it takes the contributions of scholars and individuals from a variety of perspectives to see these vibrant topics fully.

Ideas about happiness, about “the good life,” at first blush may seem so personal and individual that they do not seem to be questions that require academic insight. Yet since before Aristotle,

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philosophers, politicians, religious leaders, and educators have wrestled with this question not only for individuals but for the communities they inhabit. And in our own time, globalization, science and technology, and consumer culture complicate and enrich our understanding of what the human project is. Aristotle argued that happiness was the ultimate good, and in a sense our work at Fontbonne aims at that same good: to see our students flourish personally as they serve the common good. And, as Kevin Cloninger's essay here suggests, these have been the goals of educators throughout history.

Yet these essays illustrate how elusive the reconciliation of those two goals remains. As Joyce Starr Johnson's essay on 19th century American women reveals, the work of building the American landscape often meant intense loneliness and isolation as women sacrificed the warmth of familiar friends and family as they helped shape many of the institutions on which the United States thrives today. Likewise, although Sarah Huisman's piece encourages us to think about one of the most intimate relationships of all, the mother-child relationship, she also discusses the importance of community supports for parents to be able to provide the sort of nurturing attachments that will allow children—and thus society—to thrive. Turning to a political framework, Jack Luzkow questions whether the capitalistic values that animate American politics today can ever truly provide for the good of all. Yet Shawn Copeland's essay on African-American culture and happiness reminds us, as well, that freedom—if only a freedom of the spirit or the mind—is a prerequisite to happiness. In each of these quite wide-ranging essays, the tension between the individual and the political, cultural, social world around him or her is unmistakable.

What is happiness? How do we attain it? And how do we share it? We have perhaps raised more questions this semester than we have answered. But the dual pleasure and challenge of contemplation in this vein is exactly what makes life among a community of scholars so undoubtedly one facet of “the good life.”

Corinne Wohlford Taff, editor  
Randall S. Rosenberg, editor  
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