



## **IDS Connections 2891-H Honors: Meaning, Flourishing, & the Good Life Spring 2026**

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**Instructor:** Dr. Robert M. Farley

**Office hours:**

M: 1:00 PM–2:00 PM & 3:15 PM–5:15 PM

Tu: 1:00 PM–2:00 PM; 6:30 PM–8:30 PM (online)

W: 1:00 PM–2:00 PM & 3:15 PM–5:15 PM

Th: 6:30 PM–8:30 PM (online)

**Section:** 13781

**Time:** MW 2:00<sub>pm</sub>–3:15<sub>pm</sub>

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### **1. IDS 2891-H Course Description**

An honors selected topics capstone interdisciplinary experience course for the AA degree curriculum. Summarizes major points in the bodies of knowledge acquired while participating in the general education experience in an applied manner. Involves research, application of theoretical models, and utilization of learned skills.

**Please note:** To be enrolled in this course, the student must apply to and be accepted into the Dr. Lydia R. Daniel Honors Program. If the student is not an official member of the Honors Program, the student will be administratively removed from this course. The removal could take place anytime during the semester; and therefore, the student would not be entitled to any refund or placement into another course.

**Prerequisite:** Completion of at least 45 credit hours in the AA program.

### **2. Course Section Description**

We all want our lives to go as well as possible. But how can we tell when things are going well for us? Perhaps the answer is to figure out what it is for *any* life to go well—to formulate standards for the good human life—and then measure our lives (and the lives of others) against

those standards. Of course, to formulate useful standards for the good human life, we'll need to have some idea of what kind of beings we are (human nature) and, given our nature, the kinds of things that contribute to our well-being at the most basic level; i.e., the basic constituents of human flourishing.

In this course, we will examine a range of influential answers—embedded in major religious and philosophical traditions and emerging from scientific investigation—to what is perhaps the most important question that confronts us: ***just what are the basic constituents of human flourishing?*** Our goal will be to think broadly, deeply, collaboratively, and pluralistically about the leading (and competing) answers to this question. Our guides will be historically and culturally significant texts and figures that have inspired living traditions of inquiry via accounts of human flourishing that continue to win adherents. The goal will not be to convince students that any one tradition or set of answers is correct, but that the question to which they are addressed is momentous, inescapable, and worthy of continuous reflection. After all, we don't want our lives to go poorly!

Readings may include selections from the Ancient Greeks (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), their Hellenistic successors (Stoics and Epicureans), Ancient Indians (the Upanishads and Tripitaka), Ancient Chinese (The Four Books/Five Classics and Tao Te Ching), the Christian tradition (the Bible, Augustine, and Aquinas), the Islamic tradition (the Koran and al-Ghazālī), the 18th century European Enlightenment (Voltaire, Rousseau, the American Founders), the 19th Century Romantics (Shelley, Schiller, Coleridge), 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Existentialists (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus) and contemporary secular humanists (positive/existential psychology, the capabilities approach to well-being).

### **3. Course Principles & Questions**

Funding for the development of this course was provided by a Life Worth Living fellowship from Yale University's Center for Faith and Culture. Courses that employ a Life Worth Living framework are modeled on four central principles:

- Pursuit of existential meaning: students will acquire the tools for the lifelong process of forming their own conception of the good life and related questions concerning human flourishing.
- Commitment to truth-seeking pluralism: students will be exposed to a diversity of philosophical perspectives concerning the good life and related issues.
- First-person engagement: students will be personally invested in the personal reflection journey required to shape their own commitments and values.
- Participation in a community of practice: students and instructors strive together in community to answer the course questions.

For more information on the Life Worth Living program, see: <https://lifeworthliving.yale.edu/>

This section of IDS 2891-H is organized around the following list of **course questions and course principles**, which are informed by the Life Worth Living framework. Readings, assignments, and conversations will aim to address them directly and indirectly.

### **Questions:**

- What is a human being?
- What makes life go well/poorly for human beings?
- Do we have any final ends or ultimate purposes?
- What is the connection between living well and meaning?
- How can we flourish in the face of (our inevitable) suffering and failure?
- What is the connection between living well and living *with and for* others?
- How does tradition inform and organize our conceptions of human nature and flourishing?
- How can we justifiably believe (or know) that we have correct answers to any of the questions above?

### **Principles:**

- **Conversation:** The central practice of our learning community will be conversation or dialogue based. This will take multiple forms, but our default mode of conversation will be the Socratic method.
- **Exploration:** We will jointly address the course questions as a community of open-minded, independent practical reasoners.
- **Pluralism:** We will consider myriad ways of addressing the course questions, drawn from many different traditions. We will assume that each has something to offer to our conversation and prompt further exploration.
- **Truth-Seeking:** Although we will explore many perspectives, we will not assume that all perspectives are equal. Rather, we will assume that our questions have definitive answers, even if it's hard to tell when and whether we've grasped them. We will thus treat reading assignments and course activities as attempts to find the truth, despite its elusiveness. This does not mean we will aim for consensus. Our questions are challenging and multifaceted. But we will use the standard of truth to evaluate competing answers to our questions, rather than standards like expediency, familiarity, or how they make us feel.
- **Respect:** We will be discussing questions, figures, and ideas that speak to our deepest human concerns. In the process, we will engage with texts that some hold to be sacred and topics that have personal and emotional valence for many people. Thus, we will commit ourselves to respectful engagement with our texts, our questions, and, most importantly, with each other. One way that we will demonstrate mutual respect is by approaching course participants with openness and compassion.

## **4. General Education Course Outcomes**

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate their ability to think clearly
- Express themselves clearly in written and oral communication
- Demonstrate understanding and appreciation for the value and significance of culture
- Demonstrate their ability to communicate in standard American English
- Think critically, showing original thought
- Read critically
- Organize a task and follow through to completion
- Apply the principles of information literacy to include finding, evaluating, synthesizing, and documenting legitimate secondary sources
- Apply logical reasoning
- Contribute to group or class discussions.

## **5. Section-Specific Course Outcomes**

Students will be able to:

- Recognize the variety of ways that human beings have attempted to understand and define the good life, with special emphasis on texts from the Western Canon.
- Describe and evaluate their own tradition of inquiry, values, and conception of the good life.
- Discuss questions of meaning, value, human nature, and flourishing across lines of enduring difference.
- Apply principles and value commitments different from their own to understand how others would answer important questions about meaning and flourishing.
- Construct a personal outline of a life worth living

## **7. Reading Assignments**

Reading assignments will be posted on Canvas in PDF form. To access them, students will need to visit the weekly course modules on Canvas.

Copies of the following books will be available at the reserve desk in the library:

1. Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*, The Open Field, 2023.
2. Stewart Goetz and Joshua Seachrist, *What is This Thing Called the Meaning of Life?*, Routledge, 2020.

The first text is not assigned reading, but it may help you orient yourself in the course and is very clearly written. It reproduces, in book form, the animating principles, concepts, and ideas of the Life Worth Living program, which serve as the inspiration for this section of IDS 2891.

The second text *is* assigned reading, but we will only cover brief excerpts. The whole text, however, is introductory in nature and aimed at beginning philosophy students. It's easy to read and may help find your footing in the course and may serve as a useful resource for completing the final assignment.

The Course Canvas page has been organized into weekly modules. The modules contain both required readings/assignments AND supplementary material (including podcasts and videos) that will help students to better understand the figures and concepts presented in the readings. Students are not required to engage with the supplementary materials, but it is **highly** recommended!

## **8. Student Assessment**

### **A. Class Attendance & Participation**

Students are expected to be present and involved in each class meeting. I will take attendance. Since this course will have only ten meetings, it is essential that students attend each meeting. Moreover, since the course is based on the principles of first-person engagement within a community of practice, students are expected to consistently engage in class activities and discussions. Students with unexcused absences will receive an unsatisfactory grade, as will those who do not meet basic participation expectations. These may include discussion participation, small group work, and other course activities.

### **B. Reflection Papers**

To prompt critical reflection on the course material and the reading assignments, students are required to write a brief response paper **for each course meeting**. Absent a good excuse, **these papers will be printed and submitted as hard copies at the end of class.**

Handwritten papers are also acceptable, if you have good handwriting! Papers will also need to be submitted on Canvas each day the class meets. You don't need to make corrections or anything, this is just for my record keeping and to ensure academic honesty.

Response papers will address at least one of the following **prompts**:

- Identify a topic/argument/idea you encountered in the readings that directly addresses one of the course questions (found above). Explain your answer
- What is the most interesting topic/argument/idea you encountered in the readings assigned for this class? Explain your answer.
- What is the most confusing topic/argument/idea you encountered in the materials assigned for this class? Explain your answer.
- Critique or present a counterpoint to one of the arguments/ideas/points of view put forward in the reading materials.

- Defend or elaborate upon one of the arguments/ideas/points of view put forward in the course materials.

Response papers must be roughly a page in length in Times New Roman 12-point font.

Each response paper will be graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory. Passing submissions will demonstrate critical engagement with the course reading(s) about which students have chosen to write.

Passing submissions will be **proofread**. Submissions that frequently violate grammatical rules and/or contain multiple misspelled/misused words will not receive credit.

**Note:** Students should be prepared to share their response papers either as part of a pair/small group or with the entire class. If a specific student's paper contains subject matter that is, for whatever reason, too personal to be shared, alternative arrangements will be made. I do not want to dissuade anyone from fully expressing themselves or interacting with the course materials in a personal way. But, in general, keep in mind, when writing, that the audience for these papers will often include classmates.

### **C. Self-Assessment Papers**

Students are required to write two self-assessment papers. The first will be due at the end of week one. The second will be due at the end of the final week of class. These papers will complement each other and chart students' journey through the course/engagement with its questions.

#### **1. Initial Worldview Self-Assessment**

In this writing assignment, students will conduct a self-assessment of their current worldview, especially as it relates to central course questions about truth, morality, value, meaning, and purpose. Papers will be written as first-person narratives.

Each paper will address the following questions:

1. What are some basic--but important--truths about the world that I am committed to?
2. How do I know these truths?
3. What are my basic values and moral principles? Are they true just for me or are some of them true universally?
4. What would a meaningful life look like for me? Does meaning in life have any universal features?

5. Is there a purpose or point to life? If so, what is it?
6. How does my overall worldview impact the life choices I make? How does it address suffering and failure?

**Due Date:** Saturday, January 17<sup>th</sup>

## **2. Concluding Worldview Self-Assessment**

In this writing assignment, students will revisit their earlier worldview self-assessment at the conclusion of the course. Although the questions asked in this assignment differ from those asked in the earlier assignment, the answers given to the questions in the first assignment should serve as a starting point for thinking about the impact of the course. Papers will, again, be written as first-person narratives.

Each paper will address the following questions:

1. How has studying and discussing the course questions influenced the way I think about the basic truths, ideas, values, and moral principles to which I am committed?
2. Has the material covered in IDS 2891 caused me to reassess, reconsider, or revise any aspect of my worldview? If so, what/why? If not, why not?
3. What is the most important thing that I have learned in IDS 2891?
4. How can I use what I have learned in IDS 2891 to think through difficult, controversial, or challenging subjects (and/or have conversations about difficult, controversial, or challenging subjects)?
5. How can I use what I have learned in IDS 2891 to process or cope with failure and suffering?
6. In light of what I have learned in IDS 2891, how should human flourishing be defined? And what is its connection to meaning, purpose, and morality.

Both self-assessment papers will be evaluated on the following basis:

1. Clarity of expression, including grammar/spelling/writing mechanics.
2. Cogency & Coherence of presentation.
3. Depth of engagement with the subject matter.
4. Creativity/originality.

Each self-assessment paper should be 1600 words (minimum). Students are invited to write more and to exercise discretion and common sense about how much is too much.

**Due Date:** Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>

**Note:** As a rule, when writing about abstract ideas and principles, such as *human flourishing* and *meaning*, it is good practice to employ illustrative examples. Students are strongly encouraged to use examples from their lives/experiences, from fiction, film, or other media, from a religious tradition, and so on. For instance, if a student claims that “authenticity is the most important of my basic values,” they ought to say something about what that means and why. In this writing about this, illustrative examples are extremely helpful!

As you are writing, if you have any questions or concerns, please email your instructor.

#### **D. Interview Paper/Video**

Students will interview one of the following people:

- A senior citizen (preferably a family member)
- A religious leader
- A friend who is not enrolled in this section of IDS 2891

The student will ask the interview subject to share their thoughts on how to find meaning in life and/or what a good human life looks like. The interview can be conducted via video and uploaded to Canvas or it can be reproduced as a transcript.

There's no specific word count or length requirement, but ask yourself: what would a genuine conversation about these issues look like? I'd guess it would be at least fifteen or twenty minutes, at a minimum, wouldn't it?

**Due Date:** Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup>

#### **E. Quantitative Reasoning Assessment**

IDS 2891 is a capstone course intended for students who are nearing completion of their degree program at HC. For this reason, in each section of IDS 2891 students are required to complete an assessment related to our institutional general education outcomes. These assessments provide the data needed to (a) gauge how well students are learning/retaining material covered in their general education courses and (b) make improvements to how our general education courses are taught.

In this section of IDS 2891, students will complete our quantitative reasoning assessment, which is meant to gauge the quantitative reasoning skills developed in our math and science Gen Ed courses. This assessment is posted on Canvas as a quiz and can be taken at any time during the



course. It will close on the last day of week five. **Students are required to complete this assessment. Failure to do so will result in an unsatisfactory grade for the course.**

**Note:** I selected the quantitative reasoning assessment because this course already requires a significant amount of writing. It seems to me that you do not need to do another paper, which is what the other Gen Ed assessments require.

**Due Date:** Any time before Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>

## **5. Course Policies**

### **A. Grading**

IDS 2891 courses are not graded using the traditional grade scale. Instead, students are assigned a grade of satisfactory or unsatisfactory. To pass the course and receive a satisfactory grade, students must receive a satisfactory for on attendance & participation, both self-assessment papers, the interview assignment, and at least seven of the ten response papers. **Final grades are non-negotiable.**

### **B. Academic Misconduct**

There will be no tolerance for plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct.

All assignments submitted for a grade in IDS 2891 must be completed by the student who submits them without any aid or assistance from others (unless the assignments call for group work and/or students are given explicit permission to collaborate).

If you are found to have plagiarized or cheated on an assignment ***you will fail the assignment and will likely fail the course.***

Plagiarism includes ***both*** word for word copying of another's work and the use of ***original ideas or research*** without proper attribution. For example, suppose you write a discussion post in which you put forward an interpretation of virtue ethics that was first advanced by Professor Jones. If you do not cite Professor Jones, then the reader is left to think that you are presenting her interpretation as your own original work. That is unacceptable.

Cheating includes (but is not limited to): collaborating with other students on assignments (absent explicit permission), sharing or receiving confidential information about quiz and exam questions, hiring people to complete your assignments, falsifying records and dates, and engaging in behaviors that undermine the academic integrity of the course.

### **\*SPECIAL NOTE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, REPHRASING &**

**TRANSLATION TOOLS:** Students are expected to write to the best of their current ability without the use of artificial intelligence, rephrasing, and translation tools. The use of artificial intelligence tools, rephrasing tools, and translation tools are explicitly PROHIBITED in this course and any use of these tools on submitted assignments can trigger the artificial intelligence detectors. Using any of these tools without prior permission and/or explicit student disclosure upon submission will be considered a form of academic misconduct and subject to the course's Academic Honesty Policy. I know it can be difficult to write in a second language or tempting to want your writing to sound more "academic", but please note that students are expected to write with their best current ability without artificial intelligence, rephrasing, and translation tools. Tools such as, but not limited to, CHATGPT, GRAMMARLY, etc. are PROHIBITED.<sup>1</sup>

### **C. Late Work**

I am usually flexible when it comes to accepting late work. However, because this is a five-week course with only eleven meetings in total, my late policies must be more rigid. In IDS 2891 I can only give extensions/accept late work only when *major life circumstances* outside a student's control prevent them from completing their work on time, e.g., unexpected hospitalization, family emergencies, natural disasters, and so forth. I reserve the right to decline any request for an extension or late submission.

### **D. Appointments**

During my office hours, please make contact by calling my cell phone or sending a text message. That's the best way to ensure that I give you immediate attention. I often spend portions of my office hours talking to colleagues down the hall or in the dean's office talking about department chair business, so it is best to make sure we have set a meeting time in advance.

I am also available outside of office hours for face-to-face meetings via Zoom or MS Teams. If you would like to have a digital meeting, please e-mail me to schedule one.

### **E. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If, to participate in this course, you require accommodations due to a physical or learning disability, you must contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. The office is in the Student Services Building, Room 102. You may also reach the office by telephone at (813) 259-6035.

### **F. College Resources and Support Services**

[Title IX and Civil Rights Compliance](#)  
[Student Services](#)

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<sup>1</sup>This statement was written by my colleague Dr. Nathan Moats. I didn't think I could come up with anything better, so I am citing him, as is good academic practice!

[Student Handbook](#)  
[Academic Advising](#)  
[Academic Success Centers \(tutoring and assistance\)](#)  
[Career Resource Center](#)  
[Financial Aid](#)  
[Libraries](#)  
[Veteran Student Affairs](#)

## **G. Technology**

**Technology Used in this Course:** Hillsborough College uses *Canvas* as its learning management system. In this course, Canvas tools—such as Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes, Announcements, and Grades—support the course and unit learning objectives by fostering student engagement and active learning. Students may also use Microsoft Word for assignments. Web-based resources and YouTube videos are included and aligned with the stated learning objectives.

### **Technical Skills and Equipment Requirements:**

Students enrolled in fully online courses must have daily access to a computer and be proficient in:

- Basic word processing
- Internet searching
- Sending email
- Following digital instructions to complete tasks

### **Tech Support Resources:**

Hillsborough College offers a variety of tech resources to support students. If you need help contact the help desk or visit the FAQ on the help desk website.

1. [College Help Desk](#)
2. College Help Desk Phone: 1-877-736-2572

## **H. Class Decorum**

Students do not have permission to post course content on websites unrelated to the administration of the course.

Students are required to be respectful of others' ideas, feelings, and contributions. Disrespectful conduct will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Severe/Multiple instances will yield a referral to the Dean of Student Services and may lead to expulsion from the course.

## **9. Reading Schedule**

### **Week One (1/12): What is Human Flourishing?**

**M: Introduction to the Course**

- Syllabus
- Excerpts from Plato's Apology
- Rainer Maria Rilke "Go To The Limits Of Your Longing"
- Mary Oliver "The Summer Day"

**W: Perspectives on Flourishing**

- Kiki Berk, "Happiness," from [1000-word philosophy](#)
- Rudyard Kipling, "If—"
- Plato, Myth of the Charioteer & Allegory of the Cave, excerpts from *Phaedrus & the Republic*
- Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"
- The Old Testament, Micah 6:8
- Qur'an 23:1–11

**Week Two (1/19): What is the connection between flourishing and meaning?**

**M: MLK DAY: No Class!**

**W: Meaning & Flourishing**

- Stew Goetz & Joshua Seachrist excerpts from *What Is This Thing Called the Meaning of Life?* (excerpts)
- P.F. Jonah Li et al., "Existential Meaningless Scale" (p. 1-5)
- Susan Wolf, "Meaning in Life"
- Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (excerpts)
- Charles Taylor, "Authenticity"
- Old Testament: Isaiah 43:7

**Week Three (1/26): Have we any final ends or ultimate purposes? What is the connection between flourishing and living with others?**

**M: Purpose & Flourishing**

- David Foster Wallace, "This Is Water"
- Qur'an 51:56
- New Testament: 1 Corinthians 10:31 & Philippians 1:21
- Majjhima Nikaya 26 – Ariyapariyesana Sutta
- George Herbert, "The Elixir"
- Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

**W: Flourishing & Responsibility to Others**

- New Testament: Matthew 22:37–39
- Bhagavad Gītā 3.19

- Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*
- St. Thomas Aquinas, “On Natural Law,”
- Onora O’Neil, “A Simplified Kantian Ethics”

**Week Four (2/2) What is the connection between flourishing and *living for others*? How can we flourish in the face of (our inevitable) failure?**

**M: Flourishing in Community**

- Denise Levertov “Making Peace”
- John Donne, “Meditation XVII”
- Martin Buber “I and Thou” (Introduction and Part I)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Birth of a New Age”
- Confucius *Analects* 1:2 & 13:23
- Metta Sutta (Sn 1.8)

**W: Failure & Flourishing**

- Plutarch, *On Contentment*
- Old Testament: Psalm 51
- New Testament: Luke 15:11–32;
- Tao Te Ching 64
- Derek Walcott, “Love After Love”
- Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 9-11; *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 8.2; *Beyond Good And Evil*, §225

**Week Five (2/9): How can we flourish in the face of our (inevitable) suffering? How can we justifiably believe (or know) our answers to questions about flourishing, meaning, morality, and purpose?**

**M: Suffering & Flourishing**

- W.H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts”
- Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion
- Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Books I-III)
- Robert Farley, “How Philosophy Consoles”
- Epictetus, *Handbook* (excerpts)

**W: Revelation & Common Sense**

- Renford Bambrough, “A Proof of the Objectivity of Morals.”
- W. K. Clifford, “Evidentialism” (excerpts)
- Old Testament, Proverbs 1:7 & Deuteronomy 29:29
- New Testament, 1 Corinthians 13:12 & 1 Corinthians 2:10–12
- Bhagavad Gītā 6.15
- Īśa Upanishad 6–7;
- Qur’an, Surah Al-Naḥl (16:89); Surah Muḥammad (47:24); Surah Al-Naḥl (16:43)

**Week Six (2/16): Tradition and faith as sources of answers to our intractable questions about flourishing, meaning, morality, and purpose**

**M: President's Day: No Class!**

**W: Choice, Tradition, and Faith**

- Quine and Ullian "Hypothesis"
- William James, "The Will to Believe"
- Christopher Lutz, "Tradition-Constituted and Tradition-Constitutive Rationality"
- Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (excerpts)