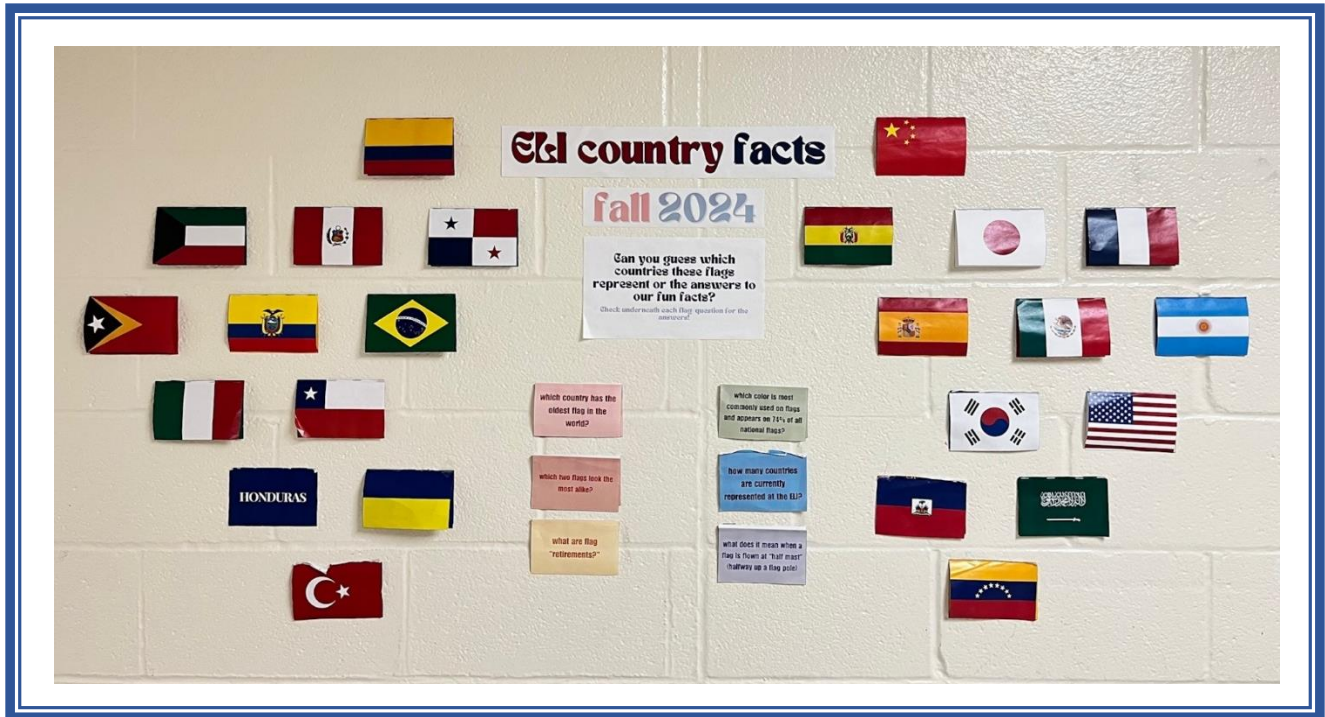


UF | UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



ELI STUDENT VOICES

A Message from the Editor



Thank you to all who contributed to this edition of the ELI Student Voices. First of all, thank you to all the students who wrote and were brave enough to share their wonderful writing pieces with us. Thank you to all the ELI teachers who encouraged, helped, and supported the students to develop and polish their writing skills.

Also, thanks to Megan Forbes and the University of Florida Bookstore for arranging prizes for the winners and to our judges: Patrick Klager, Tara Mace, and Christine Voigt who took time to read the submissions and select the winning pieces.

Have fun reading this edition and keep writing!

-Olga Moody

Winning Pieces

First Place

“The Watch” by Colin Careghi

Second Place

“I Believe...” by Luciana Modica

FIRST PLACE**RW 41****Colin Careghi**

Comfortably resting in the closet, I wait, knowing this pause is only temporary. Soon, I'll be back on Colin's wrist, my current owner. Yet my journey goes further back... to my first owner, an elderly man who chose me for my precision and elegance. I remember him well, smiling, wearing me on his wrist at dinners or during his beloved pétanque games under the southern French sun. Together, we shared simple, warm moments, each tick-tack a reflection of his full life.

But one day, he left forever. His children found me, barely giving me a second glance before placing me in a drawer, like an object of the past. So, I waited in silence, without sadness, holding on to memories of those sunny days on my old friend's wrist.

Then Colin arrived. With care, he examined me, brought life back to my tired mechanisms, and polished my dial until I shined once more. Since then, we've had adventures I never could have imagined: the beaches of Bali, the lively streets of Budapest, festivals and nightclubs where I felt every beat of the music ticking along with my hands. In the United States, however, fatigue finally caught up with me, a small issue preventing me from making my usual tick-tock. But I'm not worried — soon, I'll be back in Paris, where Colin will repair me, and we'll set off on new adventures.

For now, I wait patiently, confident that I'm in good hands.

SECOND PLACE**RW 60****Luciana Modica**

I believe in a more just world. I have often heard many times the call for a freer world, but I think expanding opportunities is the best way to achieve it. Sometimes it is easy to reproduce speeches that we hear but, what does a truly free world mean? are all people equally free?

Freedom is the ability to make your own decisions. You feel free when you move out of your parent's house, when you choose a university career, or when you buy plane tickets to enjoy a couple of weeks of travel with your friends. Can everyone make their own decisions? What happen whit all this stuff that you cannot decide? True freedom is more than just the absence of limitations, it is the presence of equal opportunities for everyone.

Opportunities is not only money. It is also knowledge, critical thinking, and creativity. You cannot make decisions if you cannot think it. It is also rules, law, and cultural norms that shape what decisions are even possible. You cannot make some decisions if your country, religion or some institutions does not allow it. And, of course, they involve access to basic necessities like food, housing and education.

A year ago, I was very worried about my professional growth. I was working as the Director of Gender Equality Office at the government of Salta, Argentina. I had many responsibilities as a public servant and at the same time I wanted to improve my academic life by starting a master's degree.

As part of my job, I traveled to the rural interior of the province, a six-hour journey on dirt roads. It was a real journey to get Olacapato, which is a small and very poverty town. Ironically, Olacapato is a mining area with huge international companies bit its local population is mostly indigenous.

When I arrived at the places I saw a woman probably of a similar age to me. She was taking care of her four children. It was clear that she was a very humble, quiet and ashamed women. With great respect I tried to approach her and talk. I did not want her to be overwhelmed by my presence, so I sat near her and handed her the food and brought from the government.

I could not stop imagining her life there, alone in this inhospitable town with her children, without any school nearby, much less a university, without ever having left that small town or even reached the city. She did not know anything other than Olacapato; she had never visit Salta city, much less Buenos Aires or New York. Surely the food would have to last until our next visit. She responded with only one word: “thank you”. Who gets to choose where they are born? Is she as free as I am? Who would be so cruel as to talk to her about freedom when she didn’t have the same luck I had?



Reference image illustrating the situation.

Her situation wasn’t a result of choices she’d made, but of the opportunities—or lack thereof—that she had. It was me who left saying “thank you” for that deep and silent conversation. Meeting her was a big learning experience in my life because it made me imagine what my life would be like if I had been born only 200 km from my city.

I deeply believe in freedom and in each person’s right to make their own choices. But it’s also clear that many conditions are beyond our control, creating a world where some can choose from an abundance of possibilities, while others have only a handful.

Lizeth Perez Román

RW 31

Nightmare or Reality?

I rushed to aunt Kristin, hugging her tightly as she playfully exclaimed “ease up!” Excited for her birthday gift, I knew she always had delightful surprise. She handed me a delicate porcelain item, warning me to tread lightly. It was a delicate but mysterious doll. When I took it, the dogs howled. I went to bed to sleep and left the doll on a rocking chair. I was sleeping when suddenly I heard footsteps in the hallway. I thought it was my aunt. I got up to see who it was, but there was no one it was all dark. Suddenly I felt a presence behind me, and I felt many chills, and between my eyes. I saw a shadow terrified me turn around. I turned back and was surprised there was a woman in the chair where the doll was. The woman was carrying the doll. I heard a chilling scream and ran out of the room. I ran out asking my aunt for help, but there was no one. While running I tripped over a chair, and I fainted from the blow. I woke up the next day and I was in my bed apparently everything was a nightmare.

RW 31

Rakan Aljuaid

In my new neighborhood, I got to know some neighbors who believed a nearby road was haunted. Although skeptical about ghosts, I didn't ask more. One day, I decided to visit a friend just a few blocks away. As I walked down the dimly lit road, a chill ran down my spine. The road was eerily quiet and dark, and there was nothing but the sound of rustling leaves. Suddenly, I heard light footsteps behind me. I turned quickly, but there was no one there. My heart started beating faster as the footsteps became louder and seemed to echo everywhere. I walked faster, but the footsteps followed me just as fast. Before I could start running, I felt a cool breeze pass by me and whisper my name. I didn't look back and ran as fast as I could until I reached my friend's house. My mind was full of questions about what had just happened. I knew that what my neighbors were saying was true and not just a belief.

RW 31**Suha Almuwayni****Scary Day**

My brother and his friends enjoy teasing me. They dared me to visit the graveyard at midnight to place garlands on each gravestone.

To avoid being seen as a coward, I accepted the challenge. I decided to go to this place at night as it was very dark. I saw many animals like owl, bat, and black cat. While I was walking, I heard a lot of voices, such as howling, a scream, and footsteps in the night. I felt afraid, but I decided to continue walking because I wanted to win this challenge.

While I was walking, I saw many ghosts and bats passing quickly in front of me. I ran towards my house quickly, and when I arrived, I felt happy because I was safe, even though I lost the challenge.



RW 20**Juliana Montealegre Ruiz****My New Family**

In the fall, I had a new family in the United States. The name of the family is Level 20. I felt very happy and nervous at the same time on my first day of school. I met fifteen people who are now my new family. The beginning at the ELI was strange because we are from different countries, languages, and cultures, but we have the same interest in learning English. My new family consists of a mother named Zoe. She is our guide to learning English. She is a beautiful and patient woman. She has 14 children whose names are: Maria, Zennure, Estefany, Basel, Waad, Norah, Nuwayir, Mejed, Assel, Mohammed, Abdullah, Fang, Maria, Juliana, Brain, and Fawaz. They are all from different countries such as Saudi Arabia, China, Venezuela, Turkey, and Colombia. We are the best family. Every day we get to know each other better, and we love each other very much. Today, we have spent three months together. Our family is learning more English every day. I feel sad because my new family is going to separate. Some brothers will return to their countries, others change universities, and a few will move up to level 30. Life is beautiful, but it is better when we have good people around us. I will miss them.

RW 41**(Alonso) Werner Nordt**

I feel that happiness comes by itself; only you decide how you can feel happy.

For example, doing what you like and being with your family and, above all, your happiness can't depend on other people.

Learn to be happy alone. That is good because you can do activities that perhaps other people don't like. Be happy with the people you love and doing what you like, and above all, enjoy the moment.

RW 41**Constance Martin**

What is Your Secret to a Happy Life?

What is Happiness?

For me, happiness is a sensation that I feel every time I am around people who I love or when I am thinking about them. I don't know if it happens to a lot of people but sometimes when I am walking alone and think about something that happened with my family or friends, you can hear my laugh on the street alone. At this time, I feel fully happy. Every moment shared with people who you love makes you happy even during bad times.

For me, the secret to a happy life is to be around good people and share moments with them. We don't have time to stay with people who don't deserve it or around whom you don't feel happiness.

For me, the secret is LOVE!

RW 31**Fernanda Doblado and Camila Ramirez**

My brother and I enjoyed summer at our grandparents lovely home, swimming in the lake and exploring the woods. However, a week of constant rain left us bored. We saw the grand house as the ideal place for an exciting game of hide-and-seek. When I started to look for my brother, I heard a scream. At this moment I knew that we weren't alone in the house. I called my brother, but he didn't answer. Then I saw a shadow and I followed them for all house until we got to the pool. It was full of blood and a bunch of bats flying around. I felt a creepy sensation that made me want to jump to the pool. It was not a good idea because someone started pulling me into the deep, and before I went down I saw my brother floating in the air, looking at me and laughing creepily. I started fighting for my life and I was able to get out of the pool and I went to my house. Since this day I haven't seen my brother, I am still looking for him.

RW 20**Alazmi, Nuwayir****My Great UF**

There are many good things in my UF. UF has beautiful parks. There are many beautiful trees and flowers in the park. My UF has a beautiful lake. My UF has nice classes. There is a good technology in the classes. My UF has friendly teachers. The students like the teachers because they support them. I love my UF.

RW 41**Alejandro Marina**

"If you know me deeply, you will know how difficult it is To see me being pessimist" - Me.

I consider myself as optimistic and realistic person. What would be considered as "Realism" and realistic person. What would be considered as "Realism"? I think that Realism is the middle-balance between pessimism and optimism. I consider myself that I am in the middle between Realism and Optimism. (If it is hard to understand, imagine an example with numbers: 0% being pessimism, 50% being realism, and 100% being optimism - I am 75%). The mentality I have, I owe it to my parents, especially my dad I always remember when my dad told me when he had an enterprise before I born, but a hard economic situation made him lose everything. Right now he's more successful than that time. He learned and grew up their mind. I always consider that failures are not really "Failures,

I prefer to call it : "Necessary events". Why? Because is the best opportunity to learn and grow up, is something that transforms you and make smarter and more able to achieve goals. However, I've never said that is easy to maintain this though. A lot of times is so easy to give up and reverse the things down because you feel that you can't. That's the value of being 75%, that is not easy all the time. Why be a 75% and not a 100%? No extreme is beneficial. Disappointment and disillusionment are possible negative consequences of being 100% optimistic. 75% allows you to be optimistic without omitting the real measures of the situations.

RW 41**Marcelo Maia Campos****One day of stray dog**

Lives on the street

Wake up When the baker come

No matters what

Always find a way

To get food

Scouring the trash or

Asking the human

Sometimes it is hard

Chased away at restaurants

No one wants to adopt

Despite everything

The life is good

No worries and

Doing what really want to do.

RW 20**Alsagri, Abdullah****English School ELI**

I learn English in FL in the USA. There is an English institute language in Gainesville. The ELI has many activities like coffee talk and volleyball, so these activities help me to improve my English because there are many students study English. Students come from different countries to study at ELI, and they have different cultures. Sometimes students feel tired because they study hard. Overall, students are happy in ELI.

RW 41**Abbas Awada**

The passion of somebody is something really important because it makes a love from a hobby, object, or a habit that provides a purpose in life. Without this purpose, probably the life will not have fun or an objective that you want to achieve. In my opinion, I believe in the fact that everybody has a passion for whatever they love. It could be a lifestyle, watches, or sports, but the most important thing is that you really have to love it. It is not necessary to only have one passion.

My passion is math and physics, and I hope one day to dominate the field. Also, I have a passion for business and sport. I love this for my dad and mom.

RW 20**Moncada Vergara, Maria****My First Semester at the ELI**

The first semester in a new school is always difficult, but the important thing is we can know new friends who are from different places. I miss my friends of my country, but now I know several friends from different countries. I am new in speaking English, and it is complicate for me, but with my new friends I am learning a say “Hello” in different languages, and it is very funny. English is sometimes difficult to learn. When we are new students in a new country, possibly the language could be difficult. If we are new in learning a language, we need to make an effort to learn and practice. It is normal that we miss our family. When we are in a strange and new country for our first time, it is common that we miss what we already know. We always miss our families and friends, but we have to take advantage new opportunities. In conclusion, it can be difficult in our first semester at the ELI and stressful, but we can do with patience and effort.

RW 31**Luis Caballero Medina****One Weekend**

One weekend, my family and I went camping and set out for a day hike. An unexpected storm hit, bringing fierce winds and heavy rain. We took shelter under some trees, waiting for it to pass. As the rain eased, we decided to head back to camp, relieved to see a rainbow stretching across the sky.

But as night fell, the atmosphere changed. The forest grew eerily quiet, and suddenly, we heard a distant crash. A low growl echoed nearby, sending chills down our spines. Out of the shadows, we glimpsed a tall figure with glowing eyes.

In a panic, we scrambled to the nearest old cabin we could find. Inside, we huddled together, hearts racing, listening to the chaos outside. Then, from the dark corner, a faint whisper reached us: "Help me..."

We knew we had to escape, but whatever had been lurking in the woods was now inside with us, and we might not leave unscathed.

RW 20**Almalki, Aseel****My City**

I live in Gainesville, and the city is in northern Florida. Gainesville is a fun place because it has the University of Florida, where many students come to study. The city has lots of nature, like parks and green spaces, where I can walk and enjoy the outdoors. There are also museums and art places to visit, which makes Gainesville interesting. The weather here is usually nice, so I can spend time outside. I like the friendly people and the local events. Gainesville is a good place to study and have a nice life.

RW 41**Marcelo Maia Campos****Disordered wildness**

When I moved out to Gainesville something here attracted my attention. It was nature, how it is easy to contact forest, parks, lakes and creek. Sometimes I ride my bike to take class, and I've observed one sad fact. I've been seeing a lot of dead wild animals at the marge of the driveways. Almost all were run over by cars. This type of fact creates ecological imbalance even in micro habitat, because breaks ecological pyramid. For example, a snake often eats an opossum, but if the opossum was run over, the snake can't feed. So, this impact other animals which will be preyed on by the snake, respectively decreasing population of these animals. Also impacts directly the snake, because if it can't feed will die or try to go to another place. The snake moving out probably will be run over too. Or can impact our homes! Yes, it is possible. It can arrive at our yards hunting small rodents like mice or squirrels. If the snake doesn't find anything it can try to fight against our pets, generating directly disorders to us.

How to reduce this impact? I have some suggestions which Brazil did at a few parks. First, build some fences, tunnels or bridges to connect areas from parks when crossed by driveways. The fences will block the animals going directly to driveways and the tunnels and bridges will be the way to transport wild animals. Second, reduce the speed limit on roads to help the driver to take enough time to break the cars. And third, update the navigator apps when the driver is crossing a park area. These apps make a specific alert sound and screen, and the driver will be alert when hears this sound.

To sum up, we are surrounded by nature and run over causes disorders to animals and to us. These solutions help to reduce the impact the city has on wildlife, but don't resolve it. Necessary the society review the way to relation with nature. The most important thing we need to remember is we belong to the same place called Earth

RW 20**Cao, Fangfang****My Growth at the ELI**

In May 2024, I came to ELI at the university of Florida to learn a language. From being nervous at the beginning to being calm now, these changes came from teachers and classmates' morning said "Hallo!" and "bye!" after school. These good sounds made me fall in love with ELI.

Every day, before class, the teacher tells interesting stories, and I always look forward to and enjoying them! In class, the teacher explains the knowledge points in details, and we listen carefully, take notes seriously, and try to actively answer questions.

I really enjoy the fulfilling campus life every day! I am looking forward to continuing my campus life next semester.

RW 41**Lia Garcia Durand****Optimist or Pessimist?**

Being an optimist or pessimist is difficult for the majority of humankind, but for me no and the answer depends. Electing one of the other is not an option, because it depends on my experience, for example for an away to a family member or a breakdown is not easy to be optimistic, but being pessimistic is an easy choice but not necessarily the correct one.

When you make a harder and bigger decision in your life being optimistic is easy at the beginning. For example, when I came to Gainesville, I was excited about moving to another country, the experience we gonna make, and the friends. But, even if those things happen, they also a sad part of moving to another country, and that's is my family, sometimes, especially in the difficult moments we want to stay close to them, and optimism feeling never comes to my mind when that moment happens. Pessimism always stays there like a bug but is not necessarily a bad thing.

That's something interesting about pessimism and optimism. They are never bad, if we don't feel constant, the balance between both is important. In some situations being an optimist can help you, like job interviews or starting new things. Also for another situation, be pessimistic, prepare for all situations and answers, like when we expect a score or a doctor's notice.

But if I can choose one of both it's gonna be pessimistic, because I want to understand how it works, usually I try to choose the correct one for the situations, but it's not a lie I am always happy and that makes me optimist. Also when I pessimist I try to become optimistic even if it's difficult

Even if you decided to be an optimist or pessimist, is how to manage in the different circumstances and experience

RW 30

Fernando Clavel Fuentes

There are many reasons why some animals die out. It's natural for some animal species to become extinct over time. First of all, humans are currently the main cause of extinction of other living beings that inhabit our planet. Consequently, the growth of the human population leads to the destruction of the habitats of some animal species. Thus, the extinction of plants and animals is the beginning of the imbalance in the food chain in ecosystems where humans are present. Other animals are also indirectly affected because they no longer find their food where they used to find it. In addition, air, water, and soil pollution has accelerated the process of extinction of fish, birds and land animals. As a result, throughout the world we can find a large number of species that are catalogued as extinct. Finally, some people have become aware of this serious problem and have developed programs for the conservation of plants and animals. In conclusion, in the last 200 years, the greatest number of extinct species of animals has occurred because human ambition is stronger than love for other living beings. We humans must remember that we aren't alone at present, but if we continue on this bad path, we will surely find ourselves alone later on and there will be no one to be with us in this world.

RW 41**Meshaal Aldousari**

Hello, I am the King of the Bugs. People nowadays are killing us for no reason. Bugs are helpful to the environment in many ways; insects like bees, butterflies, and beetles pollinate plants, which is vital for the reproduction of many flowering plants, including food crops. Moreover, insects like beetles, ants, and flies break down dead plants, animals, and waste materials. Furthermore, bugs like earthworms and beetles burrow in the soil, helping aerate it. This allows water and oxygen to reach plant roots, improving soil health and increasing crop yield. Let me talk now about butterflies. Butterflies are so beautiful, and humans enjoy watching them. The question is why humans are killing us. As a King, I want to send a letter to the people. The letter says:

"Hello, I am the King of the Bugs. I warn you people if you ever touch one of the insects, you will suffer."

Sincerely,

The Bug King

RW 10**Basel Almakhlaf****My Awesome Class**

In my class, there is a diverse group of classmates. They are something special. Mohammed is always eager to learn and understand the lessons. Majed brings fun and a cheerful atmosphere to the class. Abdullah asks smart questions that help us all think deeply. Fawaz is creative and loves participating in activities. Aseel is dedicated and serious about his studies, inspiring us all. Maria is always interested in joining discussions, and Yuliana adds a touch of positivity with her smile. Finally, Zanoura shares her ideas kindly, which boosts our interaction. Having them in class makes the experience unique and enjoyable.

Advanced RW

Fall B 2024

Jeftey SAINT FLEUR

An overview of Guede in Haiti

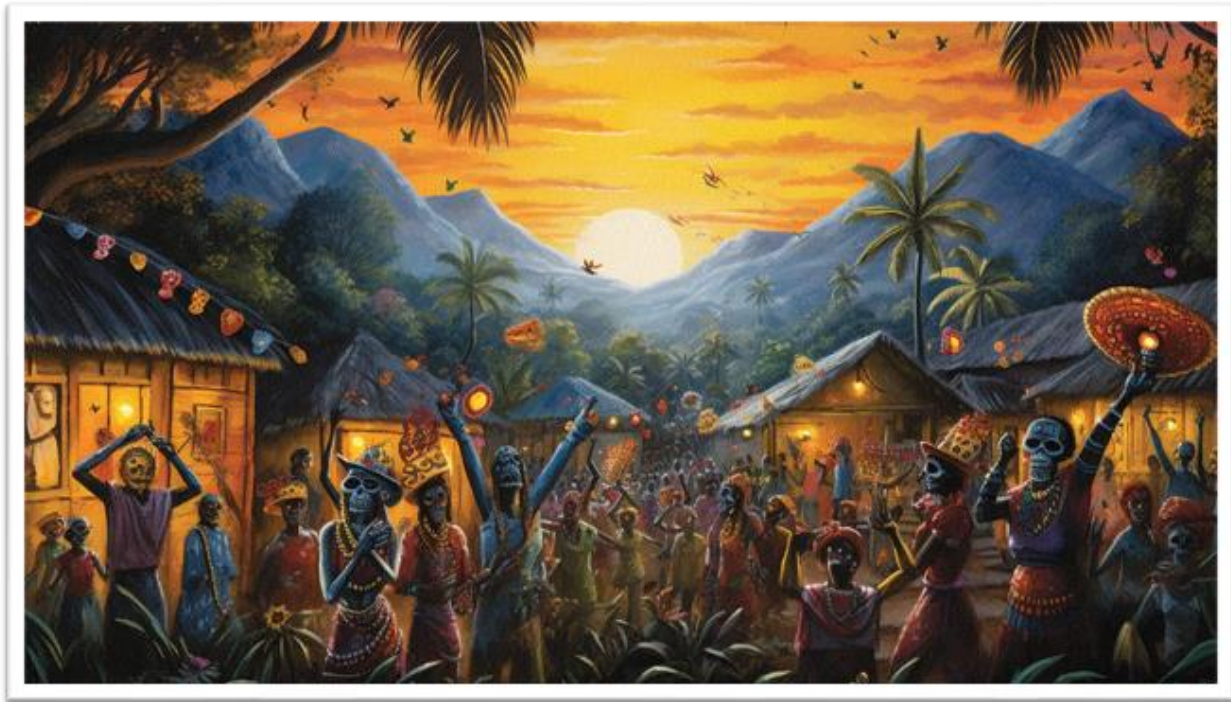


Photo credit: zafenou.com

In Haiti, one of the most popular holidays celebrated is “Guede” which means Celebration Day of the Dead. This holiday falls on November 1st and 2nd every year and is like the Catholic celebration of All Souls' Day in the United States and Dia de los Muertos in Mexico. Like these other festivals, Guede is a time to honor and communicate with the spirit of our ancestors. This celebration unites vodou practitioners and visitors at cemeteries performing rituals to protect themselves yearlong from the father of death known as “Bawon Samdi.”

In addition, during this vibrant moment people usually bring food and drink to their ancestors to strengthen their relationship with them. Rum such as Barbancourt and coffee are the main drinks, but some of the foods include spicy pickled slaw, rice and beans, fried goat,

fried plantain, and molasses cake. Traditional costumes are represented with brilliant colors like yellow, blue, green, purple, and white. Red is prohibited because it symbolizes people who are guilty of another person's death. Huge hats and black sunglasses facilitate living people's connections with spirits and their ability to see the supernatural.

During Guede, burning candles, dancing vodou rhythms and singing while smoking tobacco attract spirits into a person's body. At this stage, people who are possessed by spirits can heal, detect bad energies, and predict the future for their family. Occasionally, these possessed individuals eat pieces of glass and use knives to injure their bodies to drink blood. In these moments, people do not remember anything, but at the end of the ritual, they return to their normal lives. In your opinion, what could explain this kind of behavior?

Guede offers opportunities for both locals and visitors to connect with Haiti's spiritual heritage. In addition to its' role in allowing the living to connect with their deceased ancestors, Guede plays a significant role in our local economy. As a poor country, Haiti can rise again with its traditional culture like "Guede" to attract tourists for a sustainable development in the future.

RW 20

Alanazi Waad

The Value of Learning New Languages

Learning a new language is one of the most enriching experiences. It opens up opportunities to communicate with people and to know different cultures, and it also helps me understand diverse perspectives. As an English student, I found that language learning goes beyond memorizing vocabulary or grammar rules. It's about changing in a different way of thinking. Through studying English, I have improved my communication skills, developed patience, and gained confidence. Every step I take in mastering the language brings me closer to achieve my personal and professional goals. I am grateful for the guidance of my teachers and the encouragement. Also, I thanks to my classmates who make this journey enjoyable.

RW 41**Alejandra Florian Gonzalez**

Happiness: it's a word or feeling that we usually use and seek, but one day are we going to find it? The rich people are always wanting to be happy, so is money happiness? What happens when you have money, but you are sick? What happens when you lose a loved one?

I have always said that happiness for me is feeling peace, being in peace with who I am, who I was in the past and being in peace with the things that I am planning for the future.

Happiness means being grateful, in the present of life and being around my loved ones. It means attending a concert of your favorite band, eating a chocolate dessert and being on the beach. It means hugging your grandmother and taking advice from your Mom.

Money would be helpful for a sustainable life, for vacations, and a beautiful phone or clothes, and it contributes to it, but is it really happiness?

RW 41**Dahyoung Kim**

I am passionate about fashion. It is not about expensive clothes; it means wearing clothes that suit me. So I like fashion.

Wearing a suit makes me happy. When I wear clothes that suit me, I feel confident. When other people compliment me on my outfit, I feel confident, too.

I think wearing clothes that suit me means I take care of myself well. As a result, I love myself.

That's why I love fashion.

RW 20**Zennure Arga****Being in the United States as a Student**

Being a student in the United States is difficult but fun. Especially, it is difficult for international students because there are many difficulties, such as a new language, missing home etc., but, many teachers and Americans students help international students in the United States. It is fun because there are different cultures, people, and places. I am an international student, too. I learn many new things and know different countries, and that is why I am happy. I try to do everything by myself. For example, renting a house is very different from my country. You rent a room in the USA. I like my room because the room has a bathroom. Furthermore, the private area is very important for individual. Also, respect is important to other cultures. I don't know other departments, but ELI is helpful. I like being a student in the USA. After coming here, I believe that I can do anything. I improve myself in the USA, and my development continues. There are many opportunities for education in the USA. I believe everything will be fine.

RW 10**Alharbi, Norah****My Experience in the English Program**

I am happy to be a student in the English program. When I first started, I was very nervous about speaking English. I worried that people did not understand me. But my teacher and classmates are very kind and patient. Every day, I feel a little more confident. I enjoy learning new words and practicing speaking. I know I still make mistakes, but I am getting better. I hope that soon I can speak English easily and make new friends.

RW 20**Majed Aljameeli****My Worst Experience in the USA**

My worst experience in the USA was finding a good place to live and adjusting to the food. When I first arrived, I thought it would be easy to find a decent, affordable apartment. But I was surprised by how high the rent was, especially in safe areas. After a long search, I settled on a place that didn't feel comfortable. It was small, the neighborhood wasn't great, and I often worried about basic things like washing dishes in a kitchen that didn't feel clean. Food was another big challenge. I missed the flavors and freshness of the food from home. The American diet felt heavy, and it didn't taste the same. I tried cooking for myself, but it was hard to find the ingredients I was used to, and they were often expensive. Eating out wasn't much better because it was costly, and I couldn't always find meals I liked. These problems with housing and food made my first few months in the USA stressful. But looking back, I learned to adapt and appreciate the comforts of home even more. Now, I'm glad I went through it because it made me stronger and more independent.

RW 31**Melvin****An Experience on Halloween**

My family and I took little sister and her friend into the city for Halloween treats. After collecting candy, we headed home on the freeway when a mysterious masked car appeared beside us. The driver was watching us closely, and my daughter immediately jumped out of the seat and started screaming. While the mysterious masked car followed us, our family saw different shadows and heard howls from inside. After the family had the nightmare on the freeway we arrived home. In short, our family had a spooky experience looking for candy on Halloween.

RW 20**Bryan Vanegas Cardona****My Worst Experience in the USA**

One of my worst experiences in the USA happened during a road trip when we stopped at a rest area. My sister-in-law needed to use the restroom, so I followed her because I had to use it. She went through one door, and I entered the one next to it, assuming it was the men's restroom. However, when I walked in, I quickly noticed that there were no urinals, which seemed strange. I still didn't think much of it, so I continued inside. As I was leaving, I saw a woman in the restroom, and that's when I realized I was in the wrong place. The men's restroom was on the other side. To make things worse, my brother noticed when I went in and recorded a video of the moment. I felt so embarrassed at that moment. Now, it's a funny story to look back on, but it was definitely an uncomfortable experience at the time.

RW 41**Yeseul Han**

In my case, expansion of my world is my secret of happiness. I get energy and motivation by traveling to other countries. There are three reasons.

First, I feel happy when I experience other cultures. When I am in an exotic nature scene, I feel refreshed. When I try new foods from other countries, I enjoy new sensations from that. When I walk in the street feeling the vibe, I recognize my world getting bigger.

Second, I can watch the other lifestyle and I get motivation for my life. During a trip, we come across people who live there. Their life is different from mine, so I can get diverse points of view.

Third, I can experience adventure. I could come across some problems during the trip and when I solve them, I feel confident. It makes me stronger and more positive.

For these reasons, I think expansion of my world makes me happy and awakens my spirit.

Advanced RW**Fall B 2024****Samar Badreldeen**

Have you imagined one day that an intelligent robot may be a part of your daily life? I believe that this dream will come true in the nearby future. Having smarter world inhabitants will be possible due to the continuous scientific research on the artificial intelligence, the high cost of human labor and the need to have solutions to many problems in our world.

To begin with, On October 2024, Professor John J. Hopfield and Professor Geoffrey E. Hinton have been awarded the Nobel prize in physics due to their independent fundamental discoveries and inventions in creating artificial neural network that acts the same way our brain performs. Additionally, Professor John J. Hopfield created associated artificial memory that can store and reconstruct the images. For example, in the nearby future, an intelligent robot will have a memory to remember people and interact efficiently with them. In fact, that inconceivable idea had been discussed in an old movie called Bicentennial man when a robot developed progressive thoughts and emotions and asked for the right of equality with humans at the end of the movie.

Second, high human labor cost is considered an enormous financial burden for any company searching for skilled experienced workers. Therefore, the employers try to have different strategies to minimize the cost of labor. For instance, when any company puts a real plan for achieving a required target, the human labor expenses will appear in the resulting chart as a negative value affecting the net profit. However, In the future, it will not be necessary to hire people any more. Indeed, the intelligent robots will replace the human factor and smarter workers will be the main working staff for any company. Thus, this lucrative invention will be the reason of skyrocketing profits for any company adapting the intelligent robots.

Finally, world problems seriously increased in the past ten years without any ultimate solution. Obviously, one of the major problems is the climate change that has a negative impact

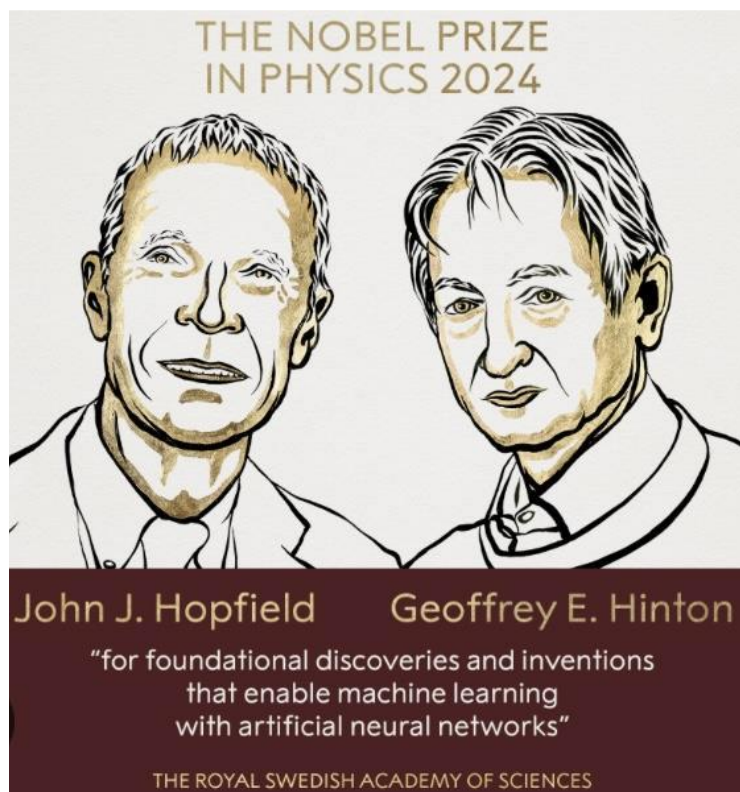
on our environment. In fact, solutions should be negotiated to find the best idea to deal with the global warming. On the other hand, in the future, intelligent robots will have the ability to create suitable decisions to be executed effectively and quickly. Therefore, there will be an ultimate solution for a real problem we face. Consequently, the new world dwellers may be decision makers in the future.

In conclusion, having smart, intelligent and creative robots is a real dream nowadays. This brainchild could be the century discovery due to its voluminous possible practical applications in our daily life. However, the main concern is how to deal with those smarter world inhabitants if they asked for equality with humans, in the nearby future.

Reference:

www.nobelprize.org/prizes/physics

www.nobelprize.org/prizes/physics/2024/hopfield/facts



RW 60**Sultan Alqahtani****I Believe If Anything Can Go Well, It Will**

I believe that if something can go well, it will. Through my experiences, I have learned that it's important to stay positive and make careful decisions, even when things feel difficult or uncertain.

Sometimes, people feel nervous and make quick decisions because they're in a rush. But in certain situations, you do need to act fast while still making the right choice. For example, if you're driving and want to pass a car in front of you, you have to make a quick decision that is safe. I believe that making the right decision at the right time can prevent problems from happening.

Other times, you need patience to make the right choice. I experienced this when I had a health problem after an accident. I was in the hospital many times and worried I might not be able to walk again because my back was hurt. The doctors told me I might not recover, which made me feel scared and upset.

Instead of giving up, I decided to be patient and listen to the doctors. They said I might be able to walk again if I followed their instructions and stayed hopeful. This was difficult, but I didn't give up.

While in the hospital, I met other patients who were also sick or injured. Some were in even worse situations than me, but they were calm and patient. One patient, in particular, showed me how important it is to stay strong and positive, which helped me become more patient, too.

In the end, I learned that it's important to make careful decisions and stay patient for a good life. This experience taught me that if anything can go well, it will—especially if we are patient and stay positive.

RW 31**Abdulrahman Murshid**

In 1998s, there was a horrible accident. 5 adults disappeared suddenly and until now no one knows what happened to them. We are in 2024. However, my brother and I love exploring, so while staying at our grandparents' house, we decided to explore the woods at midnight. We went to the woods, and everything was okay until we saw a big house with three floors and the bats were flying up, and a black cat was front in the door and her eyes were shining. We were scared to death. I asked my brother, "do you want to come in?" He said, "we will live one time. Let's go." I said why not. After we talked, the cat disappeared, and we came in. The house was very dark, and it smelled as someone died inside it. On the first floor, there was a skeleton, an old clock, and shadows of something that doesn't exist. We heard a girl crying and footsteps seemed to be coming from the second floor. We went to it and its immediately disappeared! My brother said, "what is going on?" I said, "I don't know," and we saw a door but it looks weird. I opened it and after we entered, the door closed very hard but what was surprising. We saw bodies for the people who disappeared in 1998 and what is really weird these bodies looks fresh how that's possible? In that time, we knew that everything was not normal, and we should run away from this house and call the police. We looked at each other and he knew the plan. We ran to the door. Suddenly, strong white light shin with a very hard headache unexpectedly we returned to our room. How did happen? I couldn't wake up from the bed, I was forced to sleep. The next day I looked at my brother, he knew what I meant. Also I asked our parents about what happened yesterday, but they said it was a nightmare, and I shouldn't worry. I tried to convince them to see this house for days. Finally, they came with us, but by surprise the house disappeared! They laughed at me and said we told you nothing to worry about it, but we know what we seen. Until now no one knows what happened those adults, but my brother and I know they were murdered.

RW 31**Valentina Delgado Portocarrero****Cali and Jeddah**

Cali and Jeddah are very different cities in population, weather, and food. The biggest difference is in population. The people in Cali are known for their vibrant, social culture, influenced by Latin America, while Jeddah's culture is more conservative and shaped by Islamic traditions. These two cities also have different weather. Cali has a tropical weather with warm climate year-round, whereas Jeddah experiences a much hotter, and desert climate with extreme heat, especially in the summer. Although Jeddah can get cooler during the winter months, it almost never rains, unlike Cali, where rainfall is very common during certain season. Finally, in terms of the food these two cities are different. Cali which is famous for dishes like *Sancocho* (soup). However, "*Empanadas*", are also very famous. Unlike Jeddah, typical food is fried rice with chicken, but it retains Middle Easter flavors, with staples such us *kebbas*, *hummus* and *falafel*. These differences highlight the unique identities of each city, shaped by their distinct society, climate, and food tradition.

RW 20**Mohammed Almuwayni****Gainesville: A Peaceful City**

Gainesville is a beautiful city in Florida. The weather in Gainesville is warm and nice. There are many trees and parks in Gainesville. Gainesville has a big university, the University of Florida. The people in Gainesville are friendly and helpful. There are good restaurants with tasty food. Gainesville has a lot of fun places to visit. The city is quiet and peaceful. Gainesville has many animals and birds. The sunsets in Gainesville are beautiful. Living in Gainesville is relaxing and comfortable.

RW 31**HAIFENG CAO****Horror Story**

One weekend, my family and I went camping and set out for a day hike. An unexpected storm hit, bringing fierce winds and rain that disoriented us. Determined, we tried to retrace our steps back to our campsite for safety. Although we tried to find the direction campsite, the rain became stronger and faster, we could not make sure our direction is true. Unfortunately, I walked alone because my family and I scattered. I was very terrified because everything around of me was dark. I couldn't see anything, but I could hear some black cats were crying and some footsteps in the night. At the began of my listening, I thought these footsteps were my family. However, when I looked at them in the moonlight, I found these people who looked like my family eyes all were not normal because these eyeballs were upright! I was very scared and ran fast, but whatever I



ran fast, I always could hear these footsteps. Half an hour later, I was tired and found myself in the wheat field. Just as I was recovering my strength, I saw a scarecrow in the middle of the wheat field. I watched it carefully, but next time, my heart seemed to have stopped beating, because the scarecrow was smiling with me! And then, it moved at me face to face at one time, I could see that its teeth had blood! On my god! What is happening?

I was thinking that before I died.

<https://cdn.creazilla.com/cliparts/41438/scarecrow-clipart-xl.png>

RW 31**Valentina Delgado Portocarrero**

The Haunted Clown House

On Halloween night in 1994, my friend and I walked down a deserted street and discovered an old house. There, we encountered a man in a clown costume who asked if we had see his lost puppy. When we replied uncertainly, he asked for our help in finding it. We followed the clown to the dark, broken house. First, it looked empty, but then we saw a strange light inside. On one side, we wanted to help on the other side, we felt very scared. Suddenly, we heard a quiet barking sound from the basement. The clown smile but his smile was cold and scary. He whispered, “The puppy is waiGng for you down there”. We felt a chill. Right before we went in, we saw old posters on the wall with pictures of missing kids. We stopped for a moment, but the clown’s cold smile made us go down. We slowly walked down the stairs, our hearts beaGng fast. The barking got louder. When we reached the bottom, we saw a small puppy, but something felt wrong. We turned to leave, but the door slammed shut. We were trapped. As we looked at each other, we heard the clown laughing. We understood that Halloween night wasn’t just for fun. It was hiding dark secrets.



<https://www.template.net/edit-online/437977/halloween-haunted-house-clipart>

RW 31**Gianluca Mariano Vianello**

On Halloween night in 1994, my friends and I walked down a deserted street and discovered an old house. There, we encountered a man in a clown costume who asked if we had seen his lost puppy. When we replied uncertainly, he asked for our help in finding it, but he was so very scared, and his voice was so mysterious. While we walked to the other side. We decided to run from the other road, and we shouted. However, the man started running towards us and we entered the garden of a house and the people who lived there heard the noises. The man started rustling leaves and creaking the door. However, now all people we join to fight the monster because he jumps the bars and enter inside of the house, it is so very scary. After this the monster started fighting with the guys but the guys were very prepared with knives and guns, the monster lost the fight. In the end the guys were saved and the monster died. Then we lived happily forever.

RW 60**Luciana Modica****Factors Shaping Human Happiness**

If we imagine the happiest person on Earth, where would he or she live? In a warm climate or a cold one, in a democracy or a dictatorship? Studies on happiness reveal that it is not just a momentary emotion but is a general state of well-being influenced by various factors. Happiness involves an emotional dimension, while life satisfaction is link to a long-term evaluation, highlighting the richness and diversity of the elements that affect our human well-being. **However**, there are opinions that happiness is purely a matter of genetic predisposition, which can lead to the mistaken belief that external circumstances are irrelevant. This essay will explore happiness considering that people's well-being is influenced by their culture and perception of freedom, that economic situation and the quality of institutions play a crucial role in levels of happiness, and that personal choices and mental attitude are equally determining for individual well-being.

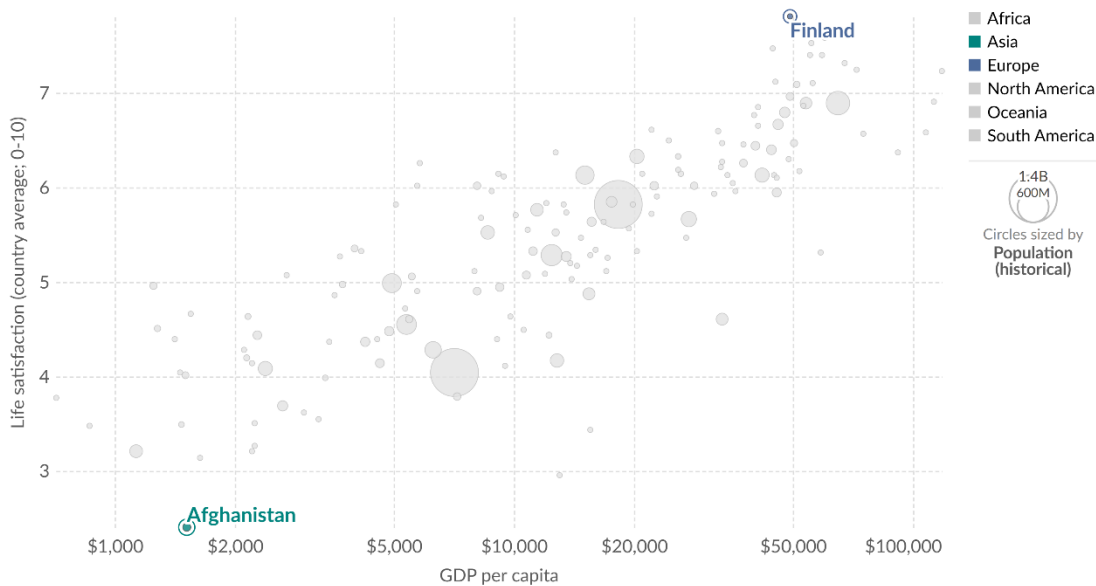
People's well-being is profoundly influenced by their culture, perception of freedom, and social context, with each society's shared history and cultural values playing an essential role in subjective well-being. In collectivist cultures, such as those of many Asian and Latin American nations, group cohesion and long-term relationships are valued over individual achievements (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2013). This fosters a sense of belonging and community support that, although sometimes requiring personal sacrifices, can enhance perceptions of happiness. In contrast, individualistic societies, like the United States and several Western European countries, emphasize personal freedom and autonomy, prioritizing independence and individual rights over group experience (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2013). Moreover, a sense of freedom and control over one's life is directly associated with higher levels of personal satisfaction. In countries where people feel they have greater autonomy to make decisions, life satisfaction tends to be higher. According to Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2013) in *Our World in Data*, there are no countries with a low perception of freedom and high life satisfaction, though there are cases, such as Rwanda, where freedom is perceived as high while satisfaction remains relatively low. **In short**, these cultural aspects and perceived levels of freedom shape expectations and concepts of happiness, serving as critical factors in human well-being.

The economic situation, the quality of institutions, and the social environment they create are factors that significantly influence the levels of happiness within a population. A prosperous economy enables governments to invest in quality public services and improve the overall well-being of citizens. Public policies and infrastructure that provide high-quality, equal-access services are also crucial, as they can reduce daily concerns and stress. A clear example of this is seen in Nordic countries, where the quality of governmental institutions contributes to high levels of satisfaction and happiness among citizens (Martela et al, 2020). These institutions ensure equitable access to resources, fostering an environment of stability and trust. As shown *Our World Data* chart (2022), the difference between the happiest country, Finland, and the unhappiest, Afghanistan, has multiple explanations. Finland is a stable democracy with strong institutions and quality public services, providing security and well-being to its citizens. Culturally, it values equality and protects human rights, allowing for a free and fulfilling life. **On the other hand**, Afghanistan has faced decades of armed conflict and, under harsh Taliban rule, suffers

from political instability, poverty, and a lack of rights, especially for women. This combination of war, poverty, and repression limits the opportunities for happiness and quality of life in Afghanistan, while peace, prosperity, and equity in Finland promote high levels of satisfaction among its citizens. **Thus**, these factors largely explain the difference in life satisfaction levels between the two countries.

Self-reported life satisfaction vs. GDP per capita, 2022

Self-reported life satisfaction is measured on a scale ranging from 0-10, where 10 is the highest possible life satisfaction. GDP per capita is adjusted for inflation and differences in the cost of living between countries.



Data source: World Happiness Report (2012-2024); World Bank (2023) OurWorldinData.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction | CC BY
 Note: GDP per capita is expressed in international-\$¹ at 2017 prices.

1. **International dollars:** International dollars are a hypothetical currency that is used to make meaningful comparisons of monetary indicators of living standards. Figures expressed in international dollars are adjusted for inflation within countries over time, and for differences in the cost of living between countries. The goal of such adjustments is to provide a unit whose purchasing power is held fixed over time and across countries, such that one international dollar can buy the same quantity and quality of goods and services no matter where or when it is spent. Read more in our article: [What are Purchasing Power Parity adjustments and why do we need them?](#)

Some people believe that happiness is genetically conditioned and determined by hereditary factors. It is true that there is a relation between serotonin levels in our body and emotional well-being; **for instance**, low serotonin levels can lead to mental health issues such as depression or anxiety (Kung, 2017). However, this does not mean that genetics is the unique determinant of our happiness. As Mady Kung explains in her TEDxLFHS talk, just as there is a genetic predisposition for obesity or diabetes, people can improve their quality of life by making conscious choices about diet and exercise. Similarly, a person with low serotonin may have genetic tendencies toward anxiety, but individual choices can significantly impact their happiness

levels. Each person has the ability to enhance their well-being through conscious decisions and adopting positive attitudes. According to Shawn Achor, renowned psychologist and author of *The Happiness Advantage*, the mental approach each individual adopts can determine their level of happiness. In his TEDx Bloomington talk, he argues that “90% of your long-term happiness is predicted not by the external world, but by the way your brain processes the world. If we change our formula for happiness and success, what we can do is change the way that we can then affect reality” (Achor, 2011, 7:50). By training the mind to focus on the positive and view adversities as opportunities for personal growth, people can experience a significant shift in their well-being, especially when they adopt an optimistic mindset, build support networks, and learn to face stress as a challenge rather than a threat. In reality, our conscious decisions and habits play a crucial role in well-being, showing that each individual has the power to shape their own happiness without waiting for it to come after success, but rather by focusing on achieving it now.

To summarize, people's well-being is profoundly influenced by a variety of interconnected factors. First, culture and the perception of freedom play a fundamental role, as they determine how happiness is valued in different societies. Second, the economic situation, the quality of institutions, and the social environment are key determinants that can facilitate or limit access to happiness, as seen in the comparison between countries with varying levels of development. Finally, personal choices and mental attitude are equally important; each individual has the power to influence their own well-being by adopting a positive perspective and making conscious decisions that promote personal satisfaction. Thus, understanding these aspects allows for a more comprehensive view of what truly contributes to human well-being. While we may never know exactly who the happiest person in the world is, they likely live in a society that values freedom, personal growth opportunities, and an optimist mindset.

References

Achor, S. (2011, May). The happy secret to better work [Video] TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work?subtitle=en&lng=es

Martela, F., Greve, B., Rothstein, B. & Saari, J. (2020). Nordic exceptionalism. *World Happiness Report*.

Ortiz-Ospina, E. & Roser, M. (2013). Happiness and life satisfaction. *Our World In Data*.
<https://ourworldindata.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction>

TEDx Talk (2017, July 17). Is happiness genetic? Mady Kung TEDxLFHS [Video]
YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= ebQK2ho-cc>



UF English Language Institute UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

PO Box 117051
223 Matherly Hall
Gainesville, FL 32611-7051
Phone: (352) 392-2070
Fax: (352) 392-3744

studyenglish@eli.ufl.edu
<http://www.eli.ufl.edu/>
<http://www.facebook.com/UFLELI>
<http://www.instagram.com/UFLELI>
<http://www.twitter.com/UFLELI>