Greetings to all our advisory board members, funders and affiliates! We are writing to inform you about the progress of the John Templeton Foundation-funded Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Spirituality at Tufts University and to let you know about some upcoming events regarding the project.

The first bit of news concerns the status of the pilot study. **Many data have been collected and are now ready to be analyzed.** Others are still being collected and cleaned and will be available soon. In this newsletter, we describe the seven modules that comprise the pilot study. After reading this newsletter and familiarizing yourself with these modules, we hope that each of you will consider ways that you might collaborate with us on exploring particular research questions with particular aspects of the pilot data.

The second piece of news concerns the acceptance of the first edited book of the project: *Positive Youth Development and Spirituality: From Theory to Research* by the Templeton Foundation Press. This book is slated for publication in early 2008, so please complete your chapters soon!

Finally, we want to invite you to our **Second Conference on Positive Youth Development and Spirituality to be held at Tufts University on April 10-12, 2008**. At this conference, we will share findings from the pilot study, outline a proposal for a second edited book that highlights project findings, and discuss the creation of a grant proposal for a national longitudinal study of PYD and spirituality during the second decade of life. So, please save the date and join us!

We look forward to engaging in collaborative science and field building with all of you over the coming year!
Module 1. Religious Populations Survey and Focus Group Study

Module 1 was designed to assess youth-centered perspectives on positive youth development ↔ spirituality relations during the second decade of life among those who were attending a religious school or a religious youth program in the Boston, Massachusetts area or a single private, international girls' school in upstate New York. Youth were mostly Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or Unitarian Universalist. The module was designed to explore the following research questions: How do these youth define “positive development” and do these definitions vary by age, sex and religious tradition? How do they define “being a spiritual person” and whether or not someone can “become more spiritual over time”? Do they see themselves as “spiritual?” Who are the people who have been most influential in their spiritual development? What is the relation between PYD and spirituality among these youth?

We administered surveys to 370 youth from approximately 20 different research sites. Individuals ranged in age from 10 to 23 years. The survey included open-ended items assessing youth perspectives on positive development, being a spiritual person and spiritual development; and closed-ended, established items assessing PYD, contribution, spiritual practices and transcendence. After the surveys, we conducted 44 focus groups comprised of 5-7 individuals each. Focus groups were designed to collect more verbal data from youth concerning their conceptions of PYD and spirituality. Data are cleaned and ready for qualitative and quantitative analyses.
Module 2. Profiles in Contribution Life Narrative and Interview Study

Module 2 was designed to assess contribution (generosity) ↔ spirituality relations among youth who were highly engaged in service activities in their communities in the Boston, Massachusetts area. Our hypothesis was that for some unknown percentage of young people who were highly involved in service activities, spirituality would be an important underlying system of meaning and motivation.

In an effort to test this idea, we purposively sampled individuals who were actively involved in organizations whose missions were to engage youth in community service. The module was designed to assess how much, if at all, these young people would spontaneously talk about the role of spirituality in their lives in general, and in their service activities in particular. The sample includes 62 ethnically and religiously diverse high school- and college-aged youth. A 2-hour research protocol was designed. Youth were asked to produce a spontaneous life narrative, followed by a structured interview and a survey. Interviews inquired about youths’ sense of community, whether they had a sense of purpose, the role of service and spirituality in their lives, and other unique life events they mentioned during the life narrative. Self-reported assessments of open-mindedness, ego-development, spirituality, contribution, well-being, attachment style, and other constructs were collected.

This module is now complete. Data are cleaned and ready for analysis.

Module 3. Positive Youth Development and Spirituality Survey Studies

This module was designed to assess positive youth development ↔ spirituality relations during the second decade of life using surveys with samples of youth drawn from public schools, youth development programs, community colleges, colleges and universities in the Boston, Massachusetts area. The primary research question was this: What are the relations among various indicators of positive youth development and spirituality in these samples? Are these relations conditioned by age, sex, and religious tradition?

Two versions of a survey consisting of closed-ended items drawn from established measures of PYD and spirituality were constructed. The first version was developed for and delivered on a small hand-held computer called a PDA (personal-digital assistant). The PDA survey was voice-enhanced such that it included an audio track which “read the items” to the participant through headphones (see left). Responses were then tapped on the screen. The use of the PDA seemed to enhance motivation to participate insofar as it was an activity that “fit” with the daily activities of this technologically savvy generation. It also eliminated the need for human data entry. Data were collected from 411 individuals aged 10 to 22 years in Module 3 using this unique kind of survey methodology.

The second version was developed on and for the web using Survey Monkey. We recruited our college sample by word of mouth and by placing advertisements on Facebook as it appeared within specifically chosen community colleges, colleges, and universities in the Boston, Massachusetts area. Data were collected from 253 individuals aged 16 to 22 years using this survey methodology. The module is complete. Data are cleaned and ready for analysis.
Module 4. Validity & Exploratory Case Studies

This module was designed to explore methodological issues in the assessment of positive youth development \leftrightarrow spirituality relations during the second decade of life. We commissioned or conducted several interview studies to address specific methodological issues and to gather information from theoretically interesting cases in order to inform future research. In one sub-study, we collaborated with Dr. Guerda Nicolas and her graduate students at Boston College and conducted interviews with 58 individuals aged 14 to 18 years of age concerning their responses to, and understanding of, the items on Piedmont’s scale of “transcendence.” The goal of this sub-study was to assess the validity of this particular measure with middle and high school-aged individuals. In a second sub-study, interviews were conducted with 12 youth who took both a paper and pencil version (time = 1.5 hours) and a PDA-based version (time = .75-1 hour) of the same survey. What were these youths’ perceptions of the differences in method? In a third sub-study, 7 youth from one Christian school were interviewed about a piece of artwork in which they were asked to represent some aspect of their spirituality.

These interviews were meant to explore how art and verbal description of that art might form a novel way of assessing youths’ 1st-person perspectives on “spirituality.” Finally, ten case studies were done of individuals who were self-identified atheists, converts, or who reported on a survey that they believed their religion was true and other religions were false. All interviews have been transcribed and checked, and are ready for analysis.

Positive role models in adolescent spiritual development

![Diagram of most influential spiritual role models]

From Poster Presented at ECDP, August 2007
Module 5. PYD and Spirituality Psychophysiology Study

Dr. Heather Urry

This module, conducted in close collaboration with Dr. Heather Urry in the Psychology Department at Tufts University, aims to investigate the behavioral and physiological consequences of emotion and attention regulation, as well as the relation of these regulatory capacities to indicators of spirituality and problematic and positive development during late adolescence and early adulthood. What is the relation between emotion and attention regulatory capacities and positive youth development? What is the relation between such regulatory capacities and youths’ (self-reported) engagement in particular kinds of structured activities, including spiritual practices like meditation and selfless service. Multiple methods and measures were used in Module 5, including the same web-based survey used in Module 3, as well as behavioral (subjective ratings, task performance) and physiological measures (heart rate, respiration, facial muscle activity, and sweat gland activity) that are collected while participants complete three experimental lab tasks. The attention task we used was designed to assess participants’ exercise of executive cognitive control by testing their reaction time and accuracy in the face of irrelevant distracters. In the emotion and emotion regulation tasks, participants are shown standardized pictures with either emotionally negative, positive or neutral content. They are then asked to rate their emotional reactions to the pictures, in some cases after being instructed to actively change the intensity of their emotional experience in response to these pictures by using self-generated reappraisal strategies or the practice of “just breathing.” Thus, a rich set of survey, behavioral, and physiological measures have been gathered and can be examined in relation to one another.

At this point, data collection for the psychophysiology module is complete. Data were collected from 52 college-aged students (50% female). Data are still being cleaned and will be ready for analysis in the coming months.

Module 1

Parents’ Countries of Origin

Algeria
Aruba
Australia
Bangladesh
Bermuda
Brazil
Burma
Canada
Cape Verde
Caracao
China & Hong Kong
Colombia
Cuba
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
England
Eritrea
Ethiopia
France
Germany
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Haiti
India
Iran
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Lebanon
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nigeria
North Africa
North Korea
Pakistan
Palestine
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Puerto Rico
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Somalia
South Korea
St. Lucia
Sudan
Sweden
Syria
Taiwan
Trinidad
Ukraine
United States
Venezuela
Vietnam
Yemen
Zambia

On the day of liberation you will laugh and laugh,
And what is on the day of laughter, is also now.

Jal’aluddin Rumi
Module 6. PYD and Spirituality Brain Imaging Study

Module 6 extends the questions being addressed in Module 5 to the brain. Dr. Sara Lazar from Harvard / MGH has joined Dr. Heather Urry and ourselves in collaborating on this module. Module 6 uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to investigate the brain bases of emotion regulation (the same tasks used in Module 5) and their relation to indicators of spiritual practices and positive youth development (measured with the same survey used in Modules 3 and 5). From structural scans taken of each participant’s brain, we will be able to identify the thickness of cortical regions like the prefrontal cortex, which has been shown in past studies to be associated with increased thickness in experienced meditators. This region has also been shown to be important to emotion regulation, apparently playing a functional role in down-regulating the activity of subcortical structures like the amygdala that are implicated in emotional behavior. Thus, in addition to acquiring structural scans, participants will also be completing two tasks in the scanner that assess emotion reactivity and regulation so we can estimate the functional activity of these regions. Estimates of cortical thickness and functional brain activation will then be correlated with self-report data from the surveys to examine their associations with engagement in certain practices and positive youth development.

The full sample will include 24 college-aged participants (50% female). Data are being collected at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). To date we have collected data from 18 individuals and plan to conclude the module this Fall.

Module 7. Adult Interview Study

This final module is designed to assess adult conceptions and ways of fostering positive development and spiritual development during adolescence. Religious educators working in the religious schools and youth programs studied in Module 1 will form the sample for this study. This module will begin soon and will address issues of spiritual mentorship and the role that significant others play in the spiritual development of young people during the second decade of life.
Overall Pilot Study Characteristics

Total Sample Size

N = 1258

Number of Youth

Survey and Focus-Group Studies
Interview and Case Studies
Psychophysiology & Brain Studies

Sex and Age Composition

[PERCENTAGES]

Percentage

Females
Males
Middle School
High School
College

n = 1112
n = 1114
Racial / Ethnic Composition
[PERCENTAGES]

- European-American: 47%
- African-American: 12%
- Asian-American: 8%
- Latin-American: 7%
- Asian Indian-American: 3%
- Arab-American: 2%
- Multiple Ethnicities: 17%
- Other Ethnicities: 3%
- No Ethnicity: n = 1040

Religious Composition
[PERCENTAGES]

- Catholic & Orthodox Christian: 24%
- Protestant Christian: 23%
- Jewish: 10%
- Muslim: 9%
- Agnostic: 7%
- No Religion: 10%
- Atheist: 5%
- Multiple Religions: 4%
- Other Religions: 6%
- Unitarian Universalist: 3%

n = 1086
### Scientific Advisory Board Members and Email Addresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University/Institution</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jeff Jensen Arnett</td>
<td>Clark University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:arnett@jeffreyarnett.com">arnett@jeffreyarnett.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Marina Bers</td>
<td>Tufts University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:marina.bers@tufts.edu">marina.bers@tufts.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. William Damon</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wdamon@stanford.edu">wdamon@stanford.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jacque Eccles</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jeccles@isr.umich.edu">jeccles@isr.umich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. David Henry Feldman</td>
<td>Tufts University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:davidhenry.feldman@tufts.edu">davidhenry.feldman@tufts.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Elena Grigorenko</td>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:elena.grigorenko@yale.edu">elena.grigorenko@yale.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lene Arnett Jensen</td>
<td>Clark University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:LJensen@clarku.edu">LJensen@clarku.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Carl Johnson</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh</td>
<td><a href="mailto:johnson+@pitt.edu">johnson+@pitt.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Linda Juang</td>
<td>San Francisco State University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ljuang@sfsu.edu">ljuang@sfsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Dan Keating</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td><a href="mailto:keatingd@umich.edu">keatingd@umich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Pam King</td>
<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pamking@fuller.edu">pamking@fuller.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sara Lazar</td>
<td>Harvard / Mass. General Hospital</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lazar@nmr.mgh.harvard.edu">lazar@nmr.mgh.harvard.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jenni Menon Mariano</td>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jmmariano@sar.usf.edu">jmmariano@sar.usf.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nai'lah Nasir</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nasir@stanford.edu">nasir@stanford.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Denise Newman</td>
<td>Tulane University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dlnewman@tulane.edu">dlnewman@tulane.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Guerda Nicolas</td>
<td>Boston College</td>
<td><a href="mailto:guerda.nicholas@bc.edu">guerda.nicholas@bc.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Tomas Paus</td>
<td>University of Nottingham, UK</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tomas.paus@nottingham.ac.uk">tomas.paus@nottingham.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. George Scarlett</td>
<td>Tufts University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:george.scarlett@tufts.edu">george.scarlett@tufts.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lonnie Sherrod</td>
<td>Fordham University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sherrod@fordham.edu">sherrod@fordham.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Margaret Spencer</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania</td>
<td><a href="mailto:marges@gse.upenn.edu">marges@gse.upenn.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Heather Urry</td>
<td>Tufts University</td>
<td><a href="mailto:heather.urry@tufts.edu">heather.urry@tufts.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. John Wallace</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh</td>
<td><a href="mailto:johnw+@pitt.edu">johnw+@pitt.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Thank You!**
**Project People and Roles**

- Richard M. Lerner, Principal Investigator
- Robert W. Roeser, Scientific Director and Co-Investigator
- Erin Phelps, Co-Investigator
- Heather Urry, Co-Investigator
- Sara Lazar, Co-Investigator
- Sonia Issac, Graduate student research assistant
- Mona Abo-Zena, Graduate student research assistant
- Amy Alberts, Graduate student research assistant
- Dan Du, Graduate student research assistant
- Alan Poey, Research assistant

Contact us:  
http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/

See you soon!