

A Quarterly Review of Social Reports and Research on Social Indicators, Social Trends, and the Quality-of-Life.  
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## THE VALIDITY OF LIFE SATISFACTION MEASURES

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Global life satisfaction scales ask respondents to evaluate their lives as a whole on a scale ranging from very satisfying to very dissatisfying. These scales are now receiving interest in terms of national accounts of well-being, with the scores potentially being used to inform policy decisions. The assessment of quality of life in societies by economic and social indicators is thought by the advocates of subjective well-being measures to provide an incomplete picture (e.g., Diener, Lucas, Schimmack, & Helliwell, 2008) that can be augmented by measures of life satisfaction (LS) and other types of subjective well-being.

The life satisfaction surveys are thought to complement existing indicators by reflecting the influences of diverse facets of quality of life and allowing respondents to weight them as they wish. We review here the validity, reliability, and other psychometric properties of global LS scales that are given on a single occasion and often contain only a single item. We do not review other types of scales such as comparisons to specific standards or domain satisfaction surveys.

### Reliability of the Scales

The convergence between alternative life satisfaction items and scales reveals that people answer in a consistent manner. Correlations between different scales are in the moderate-to-high range (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener 1993b). The Cronbach alphas for multi-item scales such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale tend to be in the .80's (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), or even higher (between .90 and .96 in the field study of Eid & Diener, 2004), indicating convergence among life satisfaction items

that are worded in different ways. Factor analyses of multi-item life satisfaction scales usually reveal essentially a single underlying dimension (Slocum-Gori, Zumbo, B. D., Michalos, & Diener, 2009).

The stability of life satisfaction scores across time and situations suggests that consistent psychological processes are involved and similar information is used when people report their scores. Stability coefficients over a period of several weeks for the Satisfaction with Life Scale can be above .80 (Pavot & Diener, 1993b). Over periods of several months the coefficients remain high (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993b). Magnus, Diener, Fujita, and Pavot (1992) found a 4-year stability of .54 for the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Fujita and Diener (2005) found in a panel of respondents followed for many years that the one-year stability coefficient for LS assessed with a single item was about .56, and declined progressively to about .24 after sixteen years. Schimmack and Oishi (2005) meta-analyzed studies, which included 83 coefficients and 38 independent samples, and concluded that for single-item scales temporal stability estimates start at about .50 and decrease to the .20's after 15 years, whereas the multi-item scales start at about .70 for shorter intervals.

### Validity of Life Satisfaction Judgments

Life satisfaction self-report scores correlate moderately with other types of measures of well-being that are not based on reports by the respondents. For example, when reports on the estimated LS of target participants are collected from family and

## In this Issue...

### SOCIAL REPORTS - UPDATES & REVIEWS:

The Validity of Life Satisfaction Measures ..... 1-4

### CONFERENCES IN 2012

The 11th International Conference of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies ..... 5-10

4th Greenville Family Symposium ..... 11

### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Call For Papers Applied Research in Quality of Life, The Official Journal of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies ..12  
SINET World Wide Web Homepage ..... 11

### Editor's Note:

*This issue commences with an essay by Ed Diener and Elizabeth Gonzalez on The Validity of Life Satisfaction Measures. This is a short version of a long research paper on this topic that will be published elsewhere. The authors accepted my invitation to write a short version for this issue of SINET, because the paper addresses many common questions about the validity of the kinds of life satisfaction measures that many social indicators/quality-of-life researchers use in their research. The paper systematically surveys the methodological and evaluation literature on this topic and provides a summary that many will find useful. This essay is followed by announcements of two important conferences to be held in 2012. The first is the 11th International Conference of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies to be held in Lisbon, Portugal, June 5-9, 2012 with the theme Discovering New Frontiers in Quality of Life Research. The second is the 4th Greenville Family Symposium to be held in Greenville, South Carolina, USA, March 29-30, 2012 with the theme Children, Families, and Society: A Half-Century of Change.*

(Continued on next page.)

# SINET

Social Indicators Network News

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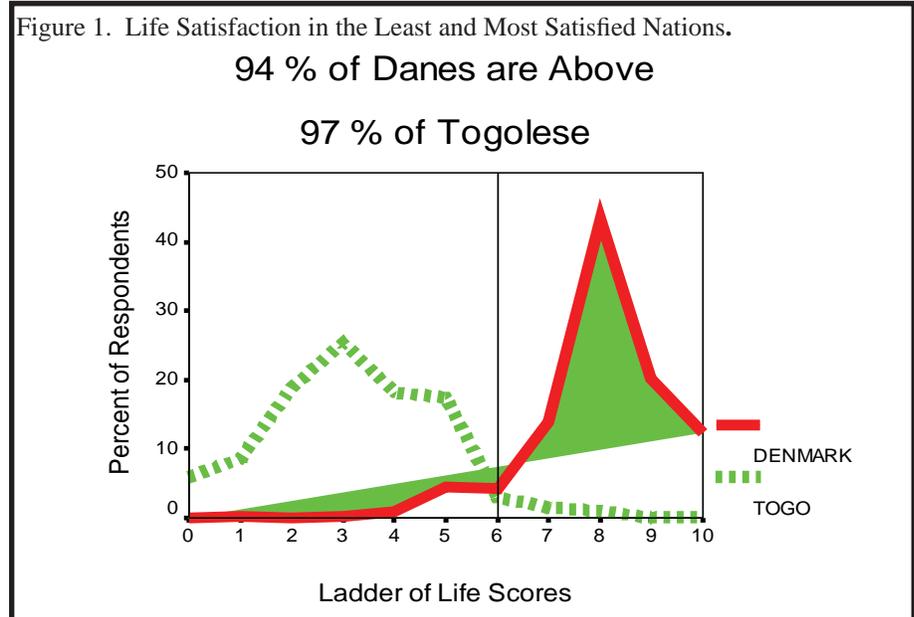
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friends, they show moderate correlations with the targets' self-reports (Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993; Pavot & Diener, 1993b; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Beyond informant reports life satisfaction scores correlate significantly with physiological variables that are thought to track positive moods (e.g., Urry et al., 2004; Steptoe, Wardle, & Marmot, 2005). Seder and Oishi (in press) found that LS reported in the final year of college correlated significantly with genuine smiles shown on students' Facebook pages during their first year in college. Self-reports of LS also converge with ratings made by trained raters after interviewing respondents (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993b; Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993).

Another line of validity evidence for the life satisfaction scales is the difference between groups of individuals who appear to have fortunate versus unfortunate life circumstances. For instance, mental inpatients (Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992), prisoners (Joy, 1990), the homeless (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2006), those suffering PTSD after brain injury (Bryant, Marosszeky, Crooks, Baguley, & Gurka, 2001), and street prostitutes (Baker, Wilson, & Winebarger, 2004) all score extremely low on LS, whereas very wealthy people score higher than nationally representative samples (Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985).

Life satisfaction also predicts future behavior. For example, Chang and Sanna (2001) found that LS predicted suicidal ideation,  $r = .44$ . Low scores on LS predicted suicide 20 years later in a large epidemiological sample from Finland (Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2001), controlling for other risk factors such as age, gender, and substance use. Low national levels of average national LS are related to higher suicide (DiTella, MacCulloch, & Oswald, 1997; Helliwell, 2007). Additionally, LS scores predict longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011).



At the level of national mean levels of life satisfaction there is strong evidence for the validity of the scales in reflecting differences in societies. For instance, the average life satisfaction in nations correlates with civil and political rights (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995), political freedom (Veenhoven, 2005), and lower levels of corruption (Oishi, 2011; Oishi & Roth, 2009). Life evaluations in nations also correlate strongly with the Gross Domestic Product per capita (Diener, Kahneman, Arora, Harter, & Tov, 2010) and average societal household income (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2011). Figure 1 presents the distribution of life evaluation scores in Togo and in Denmark, the least and most satisfied nations in the Gallup World Poll. The distributions are almost non-overlapping, demonstrating that many bad or good conditions aggregated together have a cumulative effect on life evaluations. The correlation of .83 indicates that societal income strongly influences average LS. Inglehart (1990) found that the happiness in societies is strongly related to democratic governance (see also Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000).

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### Valid Variance

Using a latent-state, latent-trait analysis of repeated measures of mood and life satisfaction over time, Eid and Diener (2004) estimated that 74% of the variance in LS is due to chronically accessible information, 16% to temporarily accessible information, and 10% to random error. The comparable figures found by Schimmack and Oishi (2005) based on their meta-analysis of reliability studies were 80%, 10%, and 10%. In addition, Lucas & Donnellan (2007) found that in a long-term panel study that about 36% of variance was due to stable trait differences and about 31% additional variance was due to a moderately stable autoregressive component that changed slowly over years. Thus, it appears that about 60% to 80% of the variability in life satisfaction scales is associated with long-term factors, some of which such as personality are quite stable and some of which change slowly over the years.

### Sensitivity of the Scales to Differing Conditions

The differences between groups and nations reviewed above are complemented by evidence from panel studies on how the scale scores respond to changing conditions within individuals and nations. Significant changes in LS have been found for those who were undergoing specific life events such as widowhood and childbirth (Yap, Anusic, and Lucas, 2011a & 2011b), or changing income (Diener, Oishi, & Tay 2011; Diener, Kahneman, Arora, Harter, & Tov, 2010; DiTella, Haisken-De New, & MacCulloch 2005; Hagerty & Veenhoven, 2003). Positive increases in LS were found over the course of treatment for those people who were in therapy (Pavot and Diener, 1993b).

Lucas and Donnellan (2007) analyzed the life satisfaction of people over time in large data sets from Germany (SOEP), the United Kingdom (BHPS), and Australia (HILDA) (see also Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003, 2004). For people experiencing changes in marital status, assault, disability, unemployment, or childbirth, people tend to react as expected to these conditions with increases or decreases in their life LS, and then they often slowly adapt back toward their former baseline over time. In sum, there is considerable evidence showing that LS scales reliably and validly reflect authentic differences in the ways people evaluate their lives, and the scores change

in expected ways to changes in people's circumstances.

### Response Styles

Social desirability refers to the tendency for respondents in surveys to give responses that are normatively desirable. People sometimes report greater SWB when interviewed in a face-to-face survey rather than in an anonymous interview (King & Buckwald, 1982; Smith, 1979; Sudman, 1967). Because of social desirability concerns it is desirable that all respondents in a survey be interviewed using the same method. The influence of social desirability on LS is further explained in Diener, 2011.

Respondents usually report their life satisfaction on a numerical scale, and questions have been raised about the reliability of these numbers. One concern is whether the scale intervals are truly equal-interval in nature. However, Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters (2004) and Frey and Stutzer (2000) found that treating data as cardinal (equal-interval) or ordinal made little difference in estimating the determinants of subjective well-being. Another issue is that different groups of respondents might use the number scale differently due to cultural differences. Finally, some respondents may use simple responding such as choosing either extremes or the midpoint of the scale. These concerns are further explored in Diener, 2011. Using consistent methods throughout the entire survey for all respondents who are to be compared with each other will substantially help in reducing measurement error. Also, the impact of measurement error can be assessed by systematically varying aspects of the survey (e.g., see Agrawal & Harter, 2011; Deaton, 2011), as well as by assessing factors such as current mood that might influence the scores, and analyzing response tendencies.

### Item Order and Framing Effects

Deaton (2011) reported an item-order effect in the Gallup Healthways Well-being Index, an ongoing daily telephone poll of the USA (see also Agrawal & Harter, 2011). In this study political questions sometimes came before the LS question. People's LS scores were substantially lower when they followed the political questions. The political questions at the beginning of the interview may have induced respondents to think the survey was about people's lives embedded in the context of societal and political affairs. Interspersing a buffer or transition

question between the political questions and LS largely eliminated the item-order effect. Thus, item order effects might be due to altering respondents' interpretation of the questions.

### Mood Influences

A concern regarding temporary information used for life satisfaction is a person's current mood. Schwarz et al. (1987) found that the outcome of German soccer game influenced people's LS after the game, and also that people completing the life satisfaction survey in a pleasant room scored higher than those who completed it in an unpleasant setting.

It is important to note that the overlap of mood and LS is substantial for long-term average moods of the person, but usually there is a relatively weak effect for current mood predicting LS (Pavot & Diener, 1993a). However, long-term average mood and LS were strongly associated (.74), suggesting that similar factors influence both. At the same time, it might make psychological sense to include mood in satisfaction judgments. Schimmack, Diener, and Oishi (2002) found that some respondents report using their current mood, and see it as relevant. Current mood and LS were more associated for these participants than for those who reported not using it. Thus, individuals may access their moods in addition to important life domains when making LS judgments. The goal for survey researchers is to avoid collecting LS scores in such a way that current mood would add constant variance across respondents, but instead should collect mood on average days over time so that moods will at most add random error.

### Societal Versus Personal Information

People's life satisfaction includes factors over which policy makers have little influence, such as personality or the quality of an individual's marriage. Do community and societal factors influence LS enough that measures of it can be used to inform policy? The differences between the lowest and highest nations in LS cover about half of the range of the scale. The *d* effect size here is 2.16. This indicates that society-wide conditions can have an enormous impact on LS. Deaton (2011) found that during the recession year of 2008, when there was great uncertainty and problems with many economies, life evaluations in the USA fell about 10 percent of the full range of the scale.

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### Policy Use of the Scales Value Added

What does life satisfaction add to current indicators? Some societal circumstances are known to affect LS but are not captured well by economic indicators. Economic indicators often omit environmental factors which can impact LS. For instance, Luechinger (2009) found in a quasi-experimental study that respondents' LS improved when smokestack pollution in their area decreased. Life satisfaction data can aid in giving a more complete picture of economic development and the desirability of ecological interventions.

In the health area, life satisfaction scores can help estimate the burden of illnesses and quality adjusted life years (Dolan, 2007). Further, they can help estimate caregiver burden and the resources that are reasonable to alleviate this. Thus, LS scores of illness groups and their caregivers can help in the allocation of health and research resources.

Even if the life satisfaction scales were to overlap strongly or completely with other measures, there are good reasons to employ them. First, they show that certain conditions do indeed affect well-being. For instance, some economists might assume that unemployment is voluntary because people could find a job if they truly wanted to and were willing to accept an available job, even though we know unemployment often has a strong negative effect on people's LS. Life satisfaction scores can reveal the weights that people give to various circumstances and aspects of life.

The life satisfaction scores also can provide information to the public and to policy makers that might not be clear to them. For instance, long and difficult commuting appears to lead to lower LS (see Diener, Lucas, Schimmack, and Helliwell, 2009, for a review). People might think of commuting as a necessity that allows them and their families to live in a much more desirable location. What might not be self-evident to them is that commuting has a substantial social cost that may not be readily apparent—increased risk of divorce (Sandow, 2011), lower LS, as well as increased stress and loneliness. Thus, LS scores can serve an educational purpose.

In sum, the life satisfaction scores add information that other measures often do not provide. Furthermore, even if the LS scores can be predicted by other measures there are very good reasons to include them. They do not replace other indicators but usefully supplement them.

### Conclusions

There is now a large literature pointing to the validity of life satisfaction measures and the fact that they contain substantial information about how respondents evaluate their lives. Although there are instances of artifacts that create error of measurement in LS scales, these can usually be controlled in well-conducted surveys.

Life satisfaction scores are influenced both by personal factors in people's lives such as their marriage and work, and by community and societal circumstances. Thus, LS can provide an added window on what is going well or badly in a society, as experienced by the citizens themselves. Importantly, there are specific instances where life satisfaction scores can help illuminate current policy debates. Therefore, it is desirable that societies adopt measures of life satisfaction to supplement current economic and social indicators.

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## SINET WORLD WIDE WEB HOMEPAGE

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# THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR QUALITY-OF-LIFE STUDIES

## LISBON, JUNE 5-9, 2012

*Editor's Note: ISQOLS President Heinz-Herbert Noll and President-Elect Filomena Maggino have announced the location (Lisbon, Portugal), date (June 5-9, 2012) of the 11th International Conference of the Society, and theme (Discovering New Frontiers in Quality of Life Research). In conjunction with the Local Organizing Committee (see below), they have drafted the following statement on the Theme and Call for Papers.*

### **Discovering New Frontiers in Quality of Life Research**

Lisbon was once the world leading nation both in promoting the joint of new peoples and cultures and in extending the knowledge frontiers from Europe to Africa, Asia and the Americas. The Discoveries of new territories by exploring the unknown sea that happened from the 15th Century onwards revealed new worlds to the European medieval society and allowed for the start of a process we know today as "Globalization".

Today's challenges worldwide aren't less difficult. They require a deep reflection on how did we get here and where do we want to go in the future. As the "Globalization" process is imposing new pressures on the way people live their life and, as a consequence, on their quality of life, we need to make this balance and decide which actions to take, in order to make people happier and living a life truly worth living.

The "long march" done by the ISQOLS pioneers in the study of quality of life and on measuring its progress through reliable and meaningful social indicators has, for our happiness and joy, made a major contribution to understand what counts to enhance people's quality of life, as well as to its consequences for society. But as new challenges are being faced in these entailing days, scholars and practitioners in the critical domain of quality of life studies need to search for new terrains and frontiers in the defying world of the beginning of the 21st Century.

In a world characterized by increasing levels of uncertainty, insecurity and mobility, quality of life models need to discover new concepts and theories that best help us to keep the pace in understanding how can people keep the pace and increase their personal and social

well-being through new adaptation strategies.

Just like the 15th Century Portuguese sailors adventured in an unknown, uncertain and insecure dangerous sea with their innovative (although rudimentary) sailing tools, so do quality of life specialists need to face today's challenges with the necessary optimism, self-confidence and new knowledge. For all of this, Lisbon is for sure the best place to discover these new insights in QOL research and practice.

### **Local Organizing Committee (LOC)**

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Patrícia Palma (ISCSP-UTL)

Maria de Lurdes Fonseca (ISCSP-UTL)

Guy de Macedo (ISCSP-UTL)

For any information concerning the Conference organization, please contact: [isqols2012@iscsp.utl.pt](mailto:isqols2012@iscsp.utl.pt).

### **Conference Dates**

The main Conference dates are:

Opening for submissions of Abstracts:  
November 15 2011

Deadline for submissions of Abstracts:  
February 15 2012

Deadline for notifications: March 15  
2012

### **Registration**

Registration for the 11th Conference of ISQOLS will open soon. For convenience, you will be able to complete the entire process through the ISQOLS website [www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org), payment included.

### **Call for Papers**

The major changes that the world is going through concerning environmental, social, economic, financial, demographic and technological issues are

raising far reaching questions of how to keep improving people's quality of life. The so-called "financial crisis" is putting people's quality of life at risk in many countries, cutting their jobs and threatening their welfare, including deteriorations in access to healthcare, culture, education and training.

At the same time, some regions and countries worldwide are improving in a quite visible way in terms of both economic and financial terms as well as in their quality of life in general. For these societies, though, the task at hands is no easier in some sense, as they face quality of life challenges not anticipated previously, such as crowding and other environmental hazards. In some of these countries, there are additional quality of life barriers, as inequality may have been rising for the past decade. Civic participation and democratic rights are also issues that jeopardize the improvement of quality of life in some of the "emergent" economies.

The ISQOLS Conference 2012 thus aims to provide a forum to explore and discuss "new frontiers in quality of life research" The conference will allow social scientists and practitioners to get together and to debate the meanings, causes and consequences of human progress and well-being in the turbulent and uncertain times we are living. It also provides opportunities to involve other stakeholders in this reflection, such as political makers, policy developers, interest groups, and the society as a whole.

Given this context, we call all those interested in participating in this debate to reflect on critical issues such as:

*(Continued on next page.)*

## Call For Papers Applied Research in Quality of Life

The Official Journal of the International  
Society for Quality-of-Life Studies

The aim of this journal is to publish conceptual, methodological and empirical papers dealing with quality-of-life studies in the applied areas of the natural and social sciences. As the official journal of ISQOLS, it is designed to attract papers that have some direct implications for or impact on practical applications of research on the quality-of-life. We welcome papers crafted from inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and international perspectives. This research should guide decision making in a variety of professions, industries, nonprofit, and government sectors such as healthcare, travel and tourism, marketing, corporate management, community planning, social work, public administration, human resource management, among others. The goal is to help decision makers apply performance measures and outcome assessment techniques based on concepts such as well-being, human satisfaction, human development, happiness, wellness and quality of life. The Editorial Review Board is divided into specific sections indicating the broad scope of practice covered by the journal, and the section editors are distinguished scholars from many countries across the globe.

Authors interested in submitting manuscripts for publication should consult the website <http://ariq.edmgr.com>. Manuscripts should be directed to the relevant Section Editor of the Editorial Review Board. If an appropriate Section Editor can not be identified, direct the manuscript to the current Editor in Chief, Alex Michalos.

## 4th Greenville Family Symposium Children, Families, and Society: A Half-Century of Change

### CALL FOR PAPERS AND INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

An International Symposium for Practitioners, Policy Makers,  
and Students in Social and Health Sciences

Dates: March 29-30, 2012

Location: University Center, Greenville, South Carolina  
Liberty Bridge, Falls Park, Greenville, South Carolina  
Student Pre-Conference, March 28, 2012  
The Changing Concerns of Young Adults

Student scholarships available on a competitive basis

Deadline for submission of Abstracts for Panels, Papers, and Posters and for applications for student scholarships: December 15, 2011  
For details about the call for papers and for registration information visit:  
[www.familysymposium.com](http://www.familysymposium.com)

Reduced fees available for participants from developing and transitional countries and from public and non-profit human service agencies in South Carolina.

Plenary Speakers and Discussion Leaders Include:

Asher Ben-Arieh, Haruv Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and  
Clemson University  
Donald J. Hernandez, Hunter College, City University of New York  
Kenneth C. Land, Duke University  
Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Harvard University Graduate School of Education  
Adeline Levine and Murray Levine, University at Buffalo  
Gary Melton, University of Colorado and University of the Free State  
(South Africa)  
Donald Wertlieb, Tufts University

### (Cont.) *The 11th International Conference of the ISQOLS*

- What is the meaning of quality of life and societal progress in a rapidly changing world?
- How can the current worldwide diversity in terms of quality of life become a threat or an opportunity to improve the human condition?
- How are the so-called international economic and financial crises impacting people's quality of life? What can we do to prevent its negative consequences? And how can we seize these crises as opportunities to deeply change our patterns of life?
- What are the major quality of life problems and opportunities that emergent economies in Asia, Africa and South America are facing? How can they profit from other more developed countries in predicting and overcoming quality of life barriers? What totally new issues are they founding?
- What can social scientists and practitioners do to call the attention of policy-makers and political decision-makers into the well-being matters? Which should be their agenda for the next decade?

To respond to this call, please refer to the ISQOLS website ([www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org)) and use the Online Abstract Submission Form. Abstracts should have a maximum of 1,500 characters, including spaces. The submission deadline for abstracts is February 15 2012.

**THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR  
QUALITY-OF-LIFE STUDIES:  
HEADQUARTERS AND WWW HOMEPAGE**

The International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS) was formed in the mid-1990s. The objectives of ISQOLS are: 1) to stimulate interdisciplinary research in quality-of-life (QOL) studies within the managerial (policy), behavioral, social, medical, and environmental sciences; 2) to provide an organization which all academic, business, nonprofit, and government researchers who are interested in QOL studies can coordinate their efforts to advance the knowledge base and to create positive social change; and 3) to encourage closer cooperation among scholars engaged in QOL research to develop better theory, methods, measures, and intervention programs.

As reported in ISQOLS President H-H Noll's report, Denis Huschka recently has taken over the Executive Director and Treasurer for ISQOLS from Joe Sirgy, and the ISQOLS Central Office has moved from Blacksburg, Virginia, USA to Berlin, Germany. An update on the new office will be reported in the November 2011 issue of SINET.

The year 2012 membership fees are US\$75 for regular members and \$50 for students or retired persons. Anyone interested in knowing more about ISQOLS should contact Denis at the central office.

E-mail: [isqols@vt.edu](mailto:isqols@vt.edu)  
Website: [www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org)

# SINET

## Subscription Information

As a service to the world-wide social indicators community, SINET is issued quarterly (February, May, August, November). Subscribers and network participants are invited to report news of their social indicator activity, research, policy development, etc., to the Editor for publication. Deadlines are the 20th of the month prior to each issue.

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# SINET

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