Positive Psychology Network Concept Paper

This is a long page. You can use the following Table of Contents to navigate quickly through this page by clicking on the section you are interested in.

Executive Summary

A. The Basic Premise
B. Structure of the Network
C. The Scientific Product and its Evaluation
D. The Nodes
   1. Node 1: Positive Experience
   2. Node 2: The Positive Individual
   3. Node 3: The Positive Community
   4. Integrating the Three Nodes
E. Tiling and Framing
F. Progress Report on Positive Psychology (through April 15, 1999)
   1. Akumal 1
   2. Grand Cayman: The Senior Scholars (February 1999)
   3. Book Series: Advances in Positive Psychology
   4. Truly Extraordinary People Meeting (March 1999)
   5. The Millennial Issue of The American Psychologist
   6. The Templeton Positive Psychology Award
   7. The Lincoln, Nebraska Meeting on Taxonomy and Measurement
   8. The Bahamas Meeting on Meaning and Purpose
   9. Akumal 2
Appendix (This is on a separate page.)

Positive Psychology Network Concept Paper

Martin E.P. Seligman
Professor of Psychology
University of Pennsylvania

1998 President
American Psychological Association

Executive Summary

Entering a new millennium, we face a historical choice. Left alone on the pinnacle of economic and political leadership, the United States can continue to increase its material
wealth while ignoring the human needs of its people and that of the rest of the planet. Such a course is likely to lead to increasing selfishness, alienation between the more and the less fortunate, and eventually to chaos and despair.

At this juncture the social and behavioral sciences can play an enormously important role. They can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well being, to positive individuals, and to flourishing community. Psychology should be able to help document what kind of families result in the healthiest children, what work environments support the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic commitment.

Yet we have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living. Psychology has come to understand quite a bit about how people survive and endure under conditions of adversity. But we know very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions. Psychology has, since World War 2, become a science largely about healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the flourishing individual and thriving community. The aim of this proposal is to create a critical mass of leading scholars who will catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also understanding and building positive qualities.

The field of “Positive Psychology” at the subjective level is about positive experience: well being, optimism, and flow. At the individual level it is about the character strengths—the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, and high talent. At the group level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, parenting, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.

We now propose to consolidate this new orientation by creating a network of its leading scholars and researchers. The network will encourage collaborations among researchers on Positive Psychology, will hold conferences and meetings, and will prime pioneering empirical research. These collaborations will fold the best younger investigators into the network and its ongoing research. The network will reach out to leading scholars and practitioners in allied social sciences whose concern is understanding and building positive institutions and positive communities.

The network will consist of three nodes: Positive Subjective Experience, The Positive Individual, and the Positive Community. We have structured the network so that scholarship at the intersection of the nodes will be prized. Over the four years of the network, it is our intention to expand from a base in positive psychology to become the seed crystal of a Positive Social Science, linking to related work in economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, philosophy, and law.

The scientific product will consist of each member finding a collaborator from within the network and together generating a major article, book, or externally funded research program within the field of Positive Psychology or Positive Social Science. We will evaluate
the success of the network by quantifying conventional funding, major conspicuous publications, citation rate, new and tenured faculty, and graduate and undergraduate course offerings in the field of Positive Psychology over the four years of the network.

A. The Basic Premise:

The field of Psychology has, since World War 2, become a science and practice of healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the flourishing individual and thriving community. As the 1998 President of the American Psychological Association, at 159,000 members the largest organization of scientists in the world, I proposed changing the focus of the science and the profession from repairing the worst things in life to understanding and building the qualities that make life worth living.

I call this new orientation “Positive Psychology.” At the subjective level, the field is about positive experience: well being, optimism, flow and the like. At the individual level it is about the character strengths—Love, vocation, courage, aesthetic sensibility, leadership, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, and genius. At the community level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, parenting, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.

I now propose to consolidate this new field by creating a network of its leading scholars and researchers. The network will encourage collaborations among researchers on Positive Psychology and will hold conferences and meetings. These collaborations will fold the best younger investigators into the network and its ongoing research. The network will reach out to leading scholars and practitioners in allied social sciences whose concern is understanding and building positive institutions and positive communities.

I intend that from this network will expand from its base in positive psychology to become the beginning of a positive social science, linking to related work in economics, sociology, political science, and other fields. The dominant social science paradigm at present views the authentic forces governing human behavior to be self-interest, aggressiveness, territoriality, class conflict and the like. Such a science, even at its best, is by necessity incomplete. Imagine that Psychology were to come to measure, understand, and heal the entire panoply of “mental illnesses” and character “defects.” Imagine a world without schizophrenia, psychopathy, sadism, dishonesty and the like. Even if this were possible, it would not be a Utopia. Humanity would merely have gone from minus 8 to zero. But a complete science would also tell us how to identify, measure, understand, and build the characteristics that will move us from plus two to plus eight.

The aim of Positive Psychology is to understand and then build those factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish. It needs emphasizing that this endeavor is descriptive, not prescriptive. At best it can describe the conditions that result in optimism or pessimism, in flow or boredom, in courage or fear, in civility or intolerance. It cannot tell a society which of these ends to value. Given such descriptive knowledge, it is then up to people to choose. But such a descriptive science does not need to start afresh. Rather it
requires for the most part a refocusing of scientific energy. In the fifty years since Psychology became a healing profession it developed a highly useful and transferable science of mental illness. It developed reliable and valid ways of measuring such fuzzy concepts as schizophrenia, anger, and depression. It developed sophisticated methods—both experimental and longitudinal—for understanding the causal pathways that lead to such undesirable outcomes. And it developed pharmacological and psychological interventions which have moved fourteen of the mental disorders from “untreatable” to “highly treatable” and in a couple of cases, “curable.” These same methods, and in many cases the same laboratories and the next generation of scientists, can be used to measure, understand, and build those characteristics that make life most worth living.

What is missing is the leadership and the structure to point the way toward a psychology that asks “What makes life worth living?” What should we strive for?” It is my hope that the network will provide the leadership and interim structure for this scientific endeavor.

B. Structure of the Network

The network will consist of a director, an associate director, one or two distinguished senior fellows, a small central staff, and three nodes. Each node will have a very senior scholar as chair, a more junior scholar as node coordinator, and about twelve colleagues from psychology and allied social sciences. The steering committee of the Network will consist of the Director, the three node Chairs, and the two Senior Fellows.

Each node will meet periodically both in person and electronically, as would the entire network. The aim of these meetings will be to create collaborations both within nodes and across the network. Meetings will also be arranged with individuals responsible for interventions that could benefit from the perspective of a positive psychology, e.g. education, social policy, urban planning, and law, in order to develop practical applications.

C. The Scientific Product and its Evaluation

The network would support meetings, infrastructure, and the training of post-doctoral fellows who would rotate among investigators. The network would also seed collaborative research on foundational, meritorious projects. Each member of the network would be expected to generate the following “product” by the end of four years: to find a collaborator from within the network and together generate a major article, book, or externally funded research program within the field of Positive Psychology or Positive Social Science. The success of the network can be evaluated by the quality and visibility of these articles, books, and grant requests as well as by the spread of the field in the education and research focus of other scientists. So we will evaluate the success of the network by explicitly quantifying increased conventional funding, major conspicuous publications, new and tenured faculty, citation rate, and graduate and undergraduate course offerings, and the like in the field of Positive Psychology over the course of the four years of the network.

D. The Nodes
Martin Seligman will serve as network chair. Each of the three nodes will be made up of a very senior chair, a more junior coordinator, and about ten colleagues from psychology and related social sciences. The three nodes are called “Positive Experience,” “The Positive Individual,” and “The Positive Community.” Robert Nozick, University Professor at Harvard and Amartya Sen, 1998 Nobelist in Economics, will be invited as Senior Fellows. Their job, along with Seligman’s, will be integration among the nodes.

The discussion of each of the three nodes below is organized into

a) its **defining concerns**,  

b) followed by the **general conceptual issues and empirical findings** that frame the node.

For each node, the defining concerns and general issues are quite global and embracing. It is necessary to select from among these issues, those which are scientifically ripest for the actual work of the network. So each description ends with

c) the **focal issues** that will organize the personnel, and the actual conference and research agenda for that node.

**Node 1: Positive Experience** (Ed Diener, University of Illinois, Node Chair).

Professor Diener is the most eminent researcher in the field of “subjective well being,” and the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, the premier journal of social psychology. Of the three nodes, this is the one with the most extensive scientific tradition already in place.

The **defining concerns** of this node are with the states related to “happiness” and the conditions under which these subjective experiences occur. They include the study of the positive states directed toward the past, e.g., well-being, contentment, satisfaction; toward the future, e.g., optimism, hope, spirituality—and toward the present, e.g., flow, joy, flexible attention, pleasure, ebullience, and communion,

A cardinal aspect of quality of life is the amount of positive subjective experience in that life – interest, pleasure, joy, affection, fulfillment, and contentment. Subjective positive experience reflects an individual’s evaluation of his or her own life, whether the appraisal is in terms of a cognitive judgment, pleasant emotions, physical pleasure, or pleasant interest. These experiences give various indications of how the individual judges his/her ongoing life. Some of these modes of appraisal, such as life satisfaction judgments, represent long-term or “big-picture” evaluations, and others such as physical pleasure represent a shorter-term, biologically based evaluation. A person’s life is replete with positive subjective experience when s/he feels frequent pleasant emotions, finds a pleasant interest in most daily activities, feels a degree of physical pleasure, judges his or her life and important domains such as work and health to be very satisfying, and finds his or her life to be meaningful and fulfilling.

**Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings**
Subjective positive experience is important for a number of reasons. First, subjective positive experiences, reflecting as they do a person’s values, indicate the degree to which an individual is achieving those outcomes that he or she believes are important. The study of subjective positive experience is democratic in that it grants recognition to a person’s own evaluations of his or her life. In this approach we do not rely solely on the opinions of experts to assess a person’s “mental health,” but instead also listen to the respondent in determining the desirability of his/her life. In addition, subjective well being is an important topic for study because it seems to have a number of very desirable outcomes for the community. Finally, subjective positive experience is a topic of psychological importance because very intriguing findings emerge in this field, thus making the topic a promising one for concerted effort in terms of scientific research.

A person’s temperament is one important predictor of the levels of positive experience he or she feels. Twin studies, adoption studies, and longitudinal studies starting in infancy clearly indicate that inborn temperament affects a person’s happiness. For this reason, the effects on subjective well being of demographic variables such as education or income are often fairly small. Nevertheless, certain demographic variables such as marriage and religiosity on average do show regular, albeit modest, relations to positive experience.

Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (Psychological Bulletin, 1999) review a host of demographic variables in relation to subjective well being. Some of the effects are intriguing.

1. Men and women avow approximately the same levels of global life satisfaction and happiness, and yet women suffer depression twice as often as men, and report greater levels of unpleasant emotions. One explanation for this paradox is that women on average also experience greater levels of pleasant emotions, and thus their overall global level of happiness is about the same as that of men.

2. Life satisfaction stays stable with age over the adult life span, but that the experience of intense emotions of both valences drifts downward.

3. People appear to adapt over time to both good and bad circumstances. After a good (e.g., winning the lottery) or bad event (e.g., becoming paraplegic), people often react strongly in the happy or unhappy direction, respectively. However, in an astonishingly brief time people often return toward their baseline. Nevertheless, we do know that people do not adapt completely to all events. For example, those suffering from severe multiple handicaps from birth do not report as high of subjective positive experience as do non-disabled individuals, and widows often take a considerable amount of time to adapt to their loss.

4. People adapt to some things quickly, to other events slowly, and to some events apparently not at all. For instance, we find that people in extremely poor countries are usually much less happy than people in nations where physical needs can be adequately met, even though poverty has existed for centuries in some societies. As yet, there is little understanding of what conditions people can adapt to, and to which they cannot adapt. It appears that individuals with certain characteristics such as optimism can adapt more quickly to bad events.

5. People achieve greater life satisfaction when they work for things they value rather than merely for things that bring immediate pleasure. Life-task activities related to people’s individual goals are now seen as crucial for obtaining positive subjective
purely physical hedonism does not maximize positive experience for most people, and the effect of wealth on subjective well-being is surprisingly small.

Knowledge about cultural differences in positive experience began to emerge in the 1990s.

1. In some societies people report considerably lower levels of well-being. In part this is due to the income levels (when societies cannot meet basic needs), but it also seems to be due to cultural differences. For instance, the Latin cultures in South America report higher levels of well-being than one might predict based on their incomes, and the Confucian based cultures of the Pacific Rim are often lower than we might expect based on their levels of wealth.

2. Different psychological variables are correlated with feelings of well-being in different cultures. Self-esteem is a much better predictor of feelings of satisfaction in individualistic cultures than in collectivist ones.

3. Even the relation between pleasant emotions and life satisfaction varies from society to society. In an individualistic nation, people’s positive emotions predict their life satisfaction better than they do in a collectivist nation, where people’s personal feelings take second seat to the evaluations of the group.

Focal Issues for Node 1

Although we have made a degree of scientific progress in this field, much remains to be accomplished. There are many stimulating questions yet to be answered; too many to enumerate here. We will concentrate our resources and energy on the following set of issues, which we judge to be most scientifically viable right now:

Positive Disposition

A major predictor of subjective well-being is temperament, but only a portion of this predisposition appears to be genetic. The other component seems to be a learned positive outlook on life, encompassing hope, trust, self-esteem, and optimism. Both individual child-rearing as well as broader cultural factors are likely to be at work. Thus, one thrust of this node will be to examine how this cognitive predisposition is learned, and how it benefits the individual and society.

The influence of values and goal progress

Having strongly held important values, and goals related to these values, appears to be another major contributor to life satisfaction. People who have clear goals, expend effort working on them, and make progress toward them report higher levels of subjective well-being. It may be that because people tend to adapt to a given set of conditions, that making continuing progress toward new goals is essential to heightened pleasant emotions. Thus, a second focus of the subjective well-being node will be to integrate how and why values and goals create feelings of well-being.
Research to date suggests that happy people often contribute more to their communities, have better relationships with others, and are more creative in some realms. Thus, a third focus of the subjective well-being node is to explore when and why feelings of well-being contribute to behavior that benefits others and the community. Are there limits to this; for example is there an optimum level of life satisfaction and happiness beyond which there is a declining positive influence of feeling good?

Not only are there many exciting conceptual questions to be undertaken, but more sophisticated methods can be used to answer them. Much of the past research, although sometimes using large probability samples, has been cross-sectional, not longitudinal. Thus, we need much more work following respondents over time to understand the causal structure of what causes optimal experience. A greater emphasis on experience sampling and multi-component measurement is also needed.

**Node 2: The Positive Individual** (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Node Chair).

Professor Csikszentmihalyi, University of Chicago, is the leading investigator of flow and its relationship to artistic, intellectual, and entrepreneurial creativity.

The defining concerns of this node are with strengths of character and with the "good life:" It includes the study of purpose, growth, productivity, self-determination, genius, legacy building, sacrifice, creativity, future-mindedness, parenting, courage, empathy, wisdom, and philanthropy.

Throughout this century, psychology (and sociology and anthropology as well) have struggled to achieve scientific status in part by exposing the complacent self-centeredness of our Victorian ancestors. The social sciences have forced us to realize that we are not as rational as we believed we were, that economic interests and not benevolence rule our actions, and that our values instead of being universal are often rooted in narrow cultural prejudices. Salutary as such "de-bunking" has been, carried too far it can blind us to reality at least as much as the earlier complacency. For instance, operating within a relativistic framework we cannot distinguish good from bad -- whether these terms are applied to actions, individuals, lives, or societies. Nor does such a perspective allow us to recognize, below countless superficial differences, the profound similarities in what human communities everywhere prize.

Consequently, the social sciences have made themselves largely incapable of dealing with issues that are at the forefront of most people's concerns. What is a good life? How does one become a good person? What purpose can give meaning to existence? These are the questions that this node will focus on, in the hope of providing answers that will improve the quality of individual and social life. It is not that these issues have been completely ignored by contemporary social science. Inspired by the thought of Aristotle, the Stoics, Kierkegaard, Kant, as well as the great world religions, a few thinkers have continued to examine these fundamental questions. Their voices, however, have been marginalized and have failed to generate a vigorous research agenda. The defining concern of this node therefore is to generate a viable empirical agenda around the notion of the Positive Individual and the Good Life.
Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings

Subjective experiences are an important component of a positive life, but not the only component. Suppose we had a hypothetical experience machine that could provide a lifetime of pleasurable virtual experiences. Would we choose to stay plugged in such a machine? Presumably we would also want to have the personal traits that make such experiences possible, to have real connections to other people and to the world, to actually engage in certain activities, and not merely to have the experience of doing these things. So what are the characteristics and ways of being that constitute the fulfilling life? This was the question that animated the meeting in Grand Cayman of potential senior members of this node (See Appendix C for the details). We proposed a tentative list of characteristics thought to be important contributors to a positive life.

I. Relationships and connections.

1. Love and Intimacy: meaningful relationships, including friendships; loving and being beloved. We know these ties improve not only longevity but also the quality of life. How do these ties develop? Given the great emphasis on individuality and competitiveness in the way we rear children, how can we do a better job inculcating relational skills?

2. Satisfying work. Next to relationships, work is perhaps the most necessary component of the quality of life. How do children learn occupational attitudes in a rapidly changing labor market? What working conditions are necessary for employee satisfaction and commitment?

3. Helping Others. There is increasing evidence suggesting that people who are altruistic, who care for others and are supportive, report significantly higher happiness and over-all quality of life. Yet popular wisdom emphasizes "Taking Care of Number One" as the end-all strategy for a good life. What are the roots of altruism? What are the best practices to support it?

4. Being a good citizen. Active participation in the public arena appears to be on the decline. Yet many would argue that taking part in the "vita activa" of the community offers the best opportunities for the development of individual potentialities. Certainly it is a prerequisite for the ongoing health of the community. What personal qualities predict and support such involvement? What conditions militate against it?

5. Spirituality: connection to a deeper meaning or reality. In all known cultures, a feeling of personal relatedness with the cosmos appears to have been necessary to mobilize the hopes and energies of the populace. Is this no longer necessary in the 21st century? What new forms might spirituality take?

6. Leadership. The recognition and support of youth with leadership potential is essential for the continued growth of a culture. Yet we have very few mechanisms in place to accomplish this purpose. What can we do to enable potential leaders across a wide spectrum of fields to show what they can do?

II. Individual Qualities
7. Principles and integrity. A good life ends with a feeling of integrity -- that the person has lived up to his or her dream. Yet many forces in our society conspire to compromise our principles in favor of the "bottom line". How do children learn to abide by principles? How do adults manage to do it?

8. Creativity. Many of our institutions -- schools, jobs -- are organized in such a way as to stifle originality and imagination. Yet these qualities not only improve individual lives, but are indispensable to the growth of society. We shall look at best practices in various institutions to develop guidelines for preserving original thinking.

9. Perseverance. The other side of the coin of originality is perseverance. Creativity requires both. It is impossible to accomplish anything important without acquiring a certain amount of self-discipline. Current child-rearing practices are woefully short on this trait. How can we best provide young people with a lifetime of tools in self-discipline?

10. Courage. Of all the qualities people admire in others, courage tends to be on top. People who can face obstacles with equanimity, who are not devastated by the fear of death, who are willing to run risks for their principles are likely to lead a good life, and serve as models for others. Is this a trait that can be learned?

III. Life Regulation

11. Purposive Future-mindedness. Great differences exist between individuals in the degree to which considerations of the future affect their present behavior. For example, Asian students are usually more happy when they are doing something they see as related to their future goals, while Caucasian students are significantly more unhappy in such circumstances. How do we learn to defer immediate gratification?

12. Individuality. Ideally, a well-lived life should lead to the unfolding of all the person's potentialities in an integrated, complex personality (provided such a person is also linked to others according to the ties specified in Section I. above). What turning points, at different stages of one's life, are most important in this process of development?

13. Self-regulation. Several models of optimal life-long development emphasize the importance of self-regulation as a key to a good life. This involves some of the issues already discussed (e.g. perseverance), but it brings to the fore the role of reasoned intelligence in guiding one's decisions.

14. Wisdom. Lately research has focused on wisdom as the capstone of a good life. Much has been learned about the pragmatics of wisdom in everyday life, but again almost nothing is known about how such a trait develops in childhood and adolescence, and how it is supported in adulthood.

Focal Issues for Node 2

1. more precisely formulate and measure these 14 characteristics
2. carry on research to discover to what extent the different characteristics go together (are correlated, group into clusters).
3. consider whether other characteristics are necessary and that should be added to the list.
4. investigate the factors that are conducive to the development of these characteristics over time how institutions such as various family types, schools, support them.

In concert the three main questions we shall consider as we select members of the node, plan the content of our meetings, and organize collaborations are the following:

1. Do these 14 dimensions provide an exhaustive inventory of the "Good Person", and the "Good Life?" If not, do they explain most of the variance? What is the state of the knowledge bearing on these traits?

2. What do we know about the developmental roots of these traits? How much of them might be inherited, how are they learned, how are they transmitted?

3. If we target 3-5 most urgently needed traits of a good life, what kind of interventions could we devise to increase the frequency of such traits? Following on these determinations, we would begin to contact partners in schools, businesses and other institutions with a view of applying knowledge to the improvement of the quality of life.

Such questions will be pursued with a view to integrate knowledge, stimulate research, and develop a conceptual framework that represents the full range of positive dimensions in the human condition. The dissemination of such knowledge should result in a major contribution to human well-being. Just as the greatest contribution of modern medicine to longevity has been the prevention of disease through advocacy of healthy physical conditions -- such as pure water, safe foods, and clean environments -- perhaps the greatest improvement the social sciences can bring about is to help define the conditions of a psychologically positive life.

**Node 3: The Positive Community** (Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Node Chair).

Professor Jamieson is Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and a leading expert on political rhetoric.

The **defining concerns** are groups and institutions that can promote or sustain, as opposed to minimize, human flourishing. The node will research and implement ways in which institutions such as legislative bodies, schools, the press, and public service can promote civility, reciprocity, tolerance of diversity, equality, and opportunity. In positive communities, individuals presumably are more likely to realize the positive individual traits investigated by Node 2. The Positive Community Node assumes that the structures institutionalized by the community affect the members within it by creating or undercutting an impulse to engage with others in the interests of the larger society. Effective and healthy communities might be tentatively defined as those that are productive, efficient, fair, and tolerant, whose members have a strong sense of personal efficacy and community engagement. Note that some of the “Connection Outward” individual traits of Node 2, such
as altruism and leadership, presuppose that the individual exists at least in part as a member of a larger community.

This node will begin as our most interdisciplinary one, and it is significant that its chair is not a psychologist—she is a classicist by training, but better described now as a political scientist, sociologist and rhetorician. (Each of the other members of the steering committee has likewise become hard to fit into one discipline.) This node builds on the sociological view that there are social facts (e.g., productivity, civility, volunteerism) that are not reducible to psychological facts about individuals. It will also integrate psychological research on how social facts and cultural forces shape, and are shaped by, individuals. It will include communication theory that specifies the importance of the ways in which social facts, the self, and society are translated and carried in symbols. The node will produce and organize research findings that would help parents, teachers, reporters, and leaders create and participate in effective and healthy schools, families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and even perhaps nations.

**Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings**

In the long run, positive experiences and good lives cannot be sustained unless they are embedded in a supportive community. Cross-cultural studies have shown that levels of personal happiness are highest in societies that are relatively prosperous, protect civil liberties, and preserve peace. However, little is known about the specific contributions of different societal conditions to individual well-being, and almost nothing about the other side of the relationship -- i.e., what personal qualities lead to specific forms of societal engagement and institutional change. For example, as environmental issues are bound to become more significant with each decade, it is essential to find answers to such questions as “What kind of education and child rearing practices best promote global awareness and to the understanding on the limits of consumption? To understanding the interdependence of human communities? Of other life-forms? These issues highlight the reciprocal causal chains between personal and societal well-being: happy people need good societies, and vice-versa.

The Positive Community node will attempt to study these causal relations at several levels. At the most micro level, the relationship between family structure on the one hand, and personal well-being on the other, is an obvious starting point. The impact of neighborhoods, communities, and metropolitan areas will be next. As several commentators have pointed out, mid-level institutions are necessary to mediate between the individual household and the planetary eco-system. If these links are endangered --and the evidence on this score is rather disturbing -- so is collective well-being. Finally, at the macro level, the focus shifts to the content of mass media, legislative bodies, and the effects of economic and political changes. Three specific domains in which the relationship of the individual to the community is played out are our focal concern: schools, legislative bodies, and the press.

**Education.** This node is predicated on the assumption that just as individuals can learn helplessness or optimism, institutions and their representatives can inculcate system-wide assumptions of failure or success that have the capacity to constrict or expand the possibilities of those in the system. Just as the scholarship in Psychology has focused on
incapacity and deficit, models of failure and deficit have characterized much of the scholarly work on our nation's schools. Scholars of education such as Ogbu have concentrated on asking why the children of "voluntary and involuntary immigrants" fail, rather than asking how some children from these groups succeed. One might summarize the history of research about education by saying that it moved from an assumption that "minority" students had no culture, to the assumption that they had an inferior culture, to the assumption that their culture was neither better nor worse than the dominant culture but was instead simply different from it. However as Minow argues "different from" contains the assumption that the person, group, or culture marked as different is different in relationship to the normative dominate and hence superior person, group, or culture. Rather than assuming that a culture is homogeneous and must be marked as dominant or minority, we assume that facets of a culture can be ennobling or enervating to the individuals within it.

**Deliberative groups such as Congress.** Members of an institution create and enforce norms or standards of behavior to make it possible for the institution to function efficiently. So, for example, political scientist Herbert Asher argues that reciprocity, courtesy, hard work, and expertise are norms of the House of Representatives. Underlying most deliberative bodies is the assumption that interaction among humans who are tasked with locating solutions to problems is best carried out in an environment in which certain rules of discourse are honored. The word civility is drawn from the Latin *civilitas*, which is in turn, derived from civic, citizen or state. Civility or comity presupposes respect for other deliberators and "acceptance of the legitimacy, if not the correctness, of opposing views. Comity enhances the ability of a collective body to hear out individual differences as part of the process for reaching consensus."

In recent years, the heightened sense of incivility in deliberative bodies has raised concerns. This node will examine the assumption that civility is a desirable norm in a deliberating body and will attempt to determine what can be done to increase individual and group satisfaction with both the process and the products of deliberation.

**The Press.** Most of what we know about the world of government and politics comes to us not through direct experience but mediated through the mass media. A large body of scholarship confirms that in the past 20 years, the news media, both broadcast and print, have increasingly focused on what is "negative" in those worlds often to the exclusion of a focus on what is "positive." Where the speeches of presidential candidates, on average, attack less than 15% of the time, news reports of those speeches feature attack more than 50% of the time. The same disproportionate coverage of "attack" characterized news about political ads and debates both at the state and federal level. When there are three attack lines in a speech or press conference, the most hyperbolic not the most representative will receive news space or time. Consequently the public perceives that campaigns are far more attack-driven and less issue-oriented than they actually are. At the same time, by focusing on attack, the press provides an incentive for candidates to increase both its amount and stridency. This node will examine the role of the press in facilitating the healthy community.

**Focal Issues for Node 3**
What kind of education and child rearing practices best promote understanding of the limits of consumption and of the interdependence of human communities?

1. What is the role of the press in facilitating healthy communities?
2. What motivates people to participate in voluntary organizations?
3. What prompts willingness to sacrifice private benefits for greater goods?
4. What can be done to increase individual and group satisfaction with both the process and the products of deliberation?

Integrating the Three Nodes

Much of the serious intellectual work will take place between and among the three nodes. After all, positive experience, the positive person, and the positive community are just three levels of analysis; in the world they depend on each other. To the extent that positive topics have been studied in the past, researchers have concentrated upon topics, such as subjective well-being, within each node. A focus also upon the interrelations will be a unique contribution of this project.

This project will encourage interactions among the people within different nodes. The network and node directors will keep each other aware of what their nodes are doing both in person and by electronic workgroups, and this information will be passed on to the members of the nodes so that they can assess its relevance to their work. The steering committee of the network, which will consist of the Director, the three node chairs and the two Senior Fellows will meet periodically for this purpose. The two Senior Fellows we intend to appoint are people who have previously worked explicitly upon the interrelationships of the nodes, and they will serve to interknit the nodes, and to suggest new questions for a node to investigate. For instance, Robert Nozick wrote on happiness and emotions (in The Examined Life), which falls within the first node. He also wrote there on love, wisdom, creativity, and enlightenment, and (in Philosophical Explanations) wrote on the meaning of life, which falls within the second node. He wrote on political philosophy (in Anarchy, State, and Utopia)–the third node. The project also hopes to include Amartya Sen, 1998 Nobelist in economics as the other Distinguished Senior Fellow. His work, like Nozick’s and Seligman’s, spans the three nodes and their interconnections, and adds an economic perspective.

Focal Issues of Node Interaction

Among the focal issues that fall at the intersection of the nodes are:

1. How are the positive subjective experiences related to the positive personal traits?
2. In what ways do positive subjective experiences result from the exercise of these positive traits?
3. How are the positive individual characteristics related to the organization of society.
4. Is a society to be judged by the extent that it produces people with these characteristics?
5. Should society attempt to maximize the level of the lowest scores along these characteristics; or the average level of achievement along them, or what?
6. Does focusing upon these characteristics, and upon human fulfillment, alter the way we look at the traditional social options, and upon distributive issues?

E. Tiling and Framing

The sections on the three nodes and their integration place the tiles into the mosaic of Positive Psychology. The nodes and their focal issues constitute the subject matter within the science. What is excluded? What frames the mosaic?

“Framing” is a mild word here. “Firewall” would be more exact. The subject matter of Positive Psychology, because of the paucity of serious science, has recently been the province largely of New Age Guru’s and feel-good hucksters. We intend a firewall between such activities and the science we are in the process of creating.

The systematic study of positive psychology presents some challenges unique to the subject. For many individuals, the quality of life is enhanced by beliefs and practices that traditionally have remained outside the pale of scientific investigation. For example, surveys have repeatedly found correlations between religious commitment and personal happiness. An increasing segment of the population is turning to a variety of "New Age" practices in an effort to reduce the stress or the boredom in their lives. And to exploit this discontent any number of hucksters have moved in to fill the void. “Three weeks to Joy” books probably outsell diet books now.

This raises the specter that the content of what positive psychology must study will lead into areas that have been considered too "soft" for scientific scrutiny, and even inimical to it’s basic assumptions. Each one of the steering committee has walked this tightrope most of their careers and we are acutely aware of the dangers involved. We believe, however, that the need to articulate and empirically research positive motivation demands that we confront the facts wherever they lead us. As long as we preserve the skeptical, self-correcting methods that have made the empirical epistemology the most trusted reflection of reality, we believe that trying to understand what makes life more meaningful and rewarding will be an essential contribution to our future well-being. The ultimate firewall is, of course, the scientific track record of the steering committee and the rigor of scholarship that they each have created over a lifetime of empirical and conceptual investigations. We intend that the products of the network live up to this standard.

F. Progress Report on Positive Psychology (through April 15, 1999)

I have spent a large part of the past two years, organizing (and trying out) senior and junior people, sponsoring various meetings, research, and publications, obtaining funding, and heating the intellectual yeast. This was my mission as APA President, and the creation of a formal network will bring the first stage of the mission to culmination.

1) Akumal 1 (January 1999)—the “Junior Scientists.” For the first week in January of this year, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Ray Fowler (CEO of APA), Don Clifton (Owner of the Gallup Corporation) and I hosted six days of conversation among eighteen of the brightest 25-40 year olds in or near the field of Positive Psychology. Here is how it came about:
In January 1998, we wrote fifty of the individuals we consider the leaders of world social science, and asked each for one nominee. We described the field of Positive Psychology and asked each nominator to bring forward the name of an “ideal young person: ages 25-40, assistant to young associate professor at a good university, well-published and with grant money in a field related to positive psychology; articulate, creative, ambitious, with academic leadership qualities (future department chairs).” We suggested that the single best student they ever had, or their current best young colleague would be appropriate nominations.

Forty-five nominations were received, along with much spontaneous, enthusiastic support for the creation of the field of Positive Psychology from the nominators. We selected, from a truly luminescent group, 18 people and invited them to attend “a gathering of young, rising academics to meet with the Drs. Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Fowler in Akumal, Mexico to brainstorm about the major intellectual issues in this field and perhaps to become the nucleus of its future.”

All of them accepted. The meeting can be described as an unqualified success. A common evaluation was “the best intellectual experience of my career.” All of them will be returning for Akumal2 (see #10 below). Half of this group met again in Swarthmore the weekend of April 9, 1999 and planned three collaborative research ventures: a longitudinal study of the outcomes of the positive traits, an intervention to produce “thoughtful living,” and an experimental study on the criteria by which we decide whom we can trust.

The names, affiliations, and research focus of the attendees give a flavor of their work:

Lisa Aspinwall Assoc. Prof Univ. of Maryland, College Park
(Beyond Hedonism)

Michael Carey Professor Syracuse Univ.
(Sexuality)

Edward Chang Assist. Prof Northern Kentucky Univ
(Optimism and Positive Affect)

Dov Cohen Assist. Prof Univ. of Illinois, Urbana
(Honor)

Barbara Fredrickson Assist. Prof. Univ. of Michigan
(Evolution of Positive Traits)

Jon Haidt Assist. Prof. Univ. of Virginia
(Moral Elevation)
Thomas Joiner Assoc. Prof Florida State Univ
(Overcoming Depression)

Corey Keyes Assist. Prof (Sociology) Emory Univ.
(Health and Well-being in Mid-life)

Laura King Assoc. Prof Southern Methodist Univ.
(Creating the Good Life under adversity)

Joachim Krueger Assoc. Prof Brown Univ.
(Self-enhancement and realism)

Sonja Lyubomirsky Assist. Prof Univ. of CA, Riverside
(The Positive Personality structure)

Bertram Malle Assist. Prof. Univ. of Oregon
(Judgement and Decision-making)

Kevin Rathunde Assoc. Prof. Univ. of Utah
(Wisdom)

Arthur Reynolds Assoc. Prof Univ. Wisconsin, Madison
(School Achievement)

David Schkade Prof.(Management) Univ. of Texas, Austin
(Negotiation and Decision)

Jonathan Schooler Assoc. Prof Univ. of Pittsburgh
(Greatness)

Ken Sheldon Assist. Prof Univ. of Missouri
(Competition and Cooperation)

Ursula Staudinger Research Scientist Max-Planck (Berlin)
(Meaning and Insight)
Several work products have already ensued (in the two months) from Akumal 1.

1. We started a listserv among this group, which is currently roaring along in intellectual exchange about the field. (Sonja Lyubomirsky is Listmeister.)
2. Several of the participants generated an annotated bibliography of the field, and this 80 page document is Appendix A. This is a living document, which will be the heart of a web site.
3. Two subgroups of the participants and others will hold weekend meetings at Swarthmore College this spring to plan substantial collaborative research grant requests.
4. The mission statement the group developed is Appendix B.

2. Grand Cayman (February 1999). The “Senior Scholars.”

With support from the Gallup Foundation, I gathered eight senior scholars to discuss the taxonomy and measurement of “The Roots of A Positive Life.”

The participants:

1. Don Clifton (Owner, Gallup),
2. Mike Csikzentmihalyi,
3. Ed Diener (Editor-in-chief, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Professor, University of Illinois),
4. Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania),
5. Robert Nozick (University Professor, Harvard)
6. Dan Robinson (Professor, Georgetown),
7. Martin E.P. Seligman,
8. George Vaillant (Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard).

The goal of the Cayman meeting was the enumeration of potential components of a good life, which would form the basis of a research agenda on positive psychology and positive social science. After discussing concerns about the culture-specificity of such an endeavor and how this project would relate to classical notions of the good life, the group devised a list of 17 characteristics that may be related to a positive life, such as love/intimacy and satisfying work. The characteristics cluster in three categories: Connections Outward, Individual Qualities, and Life Regulation. Each of the characteristics can be empirically related to outcome measures of a positive life, including subjective fulfillment (such as life satisfaction), objective fulfillment (such as number of children) and civic/societal recognition (such as the evaluations of others). Certain enabling factors, including genetic and cultural capital, were hypothesized to affect many of the characteristics.

The lists are considered local to our present time and culture, nonexclusive and non-exhaustive. The group attempted to devise preliminary questions to measure each of the 17 proposed characteristics, and agreed to call the endeavor “The Roots of a Positive Life.” The next step in the development of a positive psychology and a positive social science will be
the measurement of the 17 characteristics and 3 categories of outcome measures, and the examination of their relationships to each other.

A detailed summary of the meeting is Appendix C.

3. **Book Series: Advances in Positive Psychology.** A book series, *Advances in Positive Psychology*, edited by Lisa Aspinwall and Ursula Staudinger, is taking shape. APA books has informally offered to publish the series. The prospectus is Appendix D.

4. **Truly Extraordinary People Meeting** (March 27-28, 1999, Philadelphia). I sponsored a meeting using APA funds, which brought together the child researchers on genius with the adult researchers on Extraordinary Lives. In my view both these traditions have been fruitful, but unsatisfying. The genius tradition does fine prospective science, but by starting in childhood, fails to identify much more than good professors. The extraordinary lives tradition always hits the mark by definition, but is retrospective and anecdotal in its method. The aim of the gathering was to generate a project which combines the methodological sophistication of the prospective child work with the richness of the targets identified in the retrospective, but anecdotal, adult work. The participants

1. Howard Gardner,
2. David Feldman,
3. Mike Csikszentmihalyi,
4. Camilla Benbow,
5. Nancy Robinson,
6. Ray Fowler,
7. Rena Subotnik,
8. Charlan Nemeth,
9. Martin Seligman

The participants surprisingly looked for a broader way of studying human excellence. After expressing their concerns about the limitations of the zero-sum model of artistic and scientific genius, the participants embraced a framework that departs radically from the achievement-oriented approach to giftedness. The framework outlines five kinds of excellence, only one of which maps directly onto the well-developed achievement domain. The four new elements include the domains of:

1. Relationships
2. Responsibility
3. Spirituality
4. Life as a work of art

The participants commended this broadening of the concept of giftedness as more inclusive and inspiring than solely achievement giftedness. They agreed that the next step should be a conceptual analysis of the four new domains, starting with relationship genius. Next the nomination and study of exemplars should be done, followed by the development of prospective measurement techniques. A detailed summary of the meeting is in Appendix E.
5. The Millennial Issue of The American Psychologist. The entire January 2000 issue of this journal, the flagship journal of APA, will be devoted to Positive Psychology. Mike Csikszentmihalyi and I are the guest editors. This is intended to be a statement of our vision for the future direction of Psychology. The tentative Table of Contents is Appendix F.

Should you believe that the Millennium actually falls in January 2001, you will be satisfied to know that that issue of The American Psychologist will also contain a special supplement, “Positive Psychology” edited by Laura King and Ken Sheldon.

6. The Templeton Positive Psychology Award. The John Templeton Foundation of Radnor, Pa., has agreed to sponsor the largest cash award ever given to a psychologist, an annual $100,000 prize for outstanding research in the field of positive psychology. And, at $50,000, even its second prize will be among the highest awards now presented in psychology.

The award will be administered by APA under a three-year pilot program that will name its first winners in February 2000. Directing the program is Martin Seligman, APA’s past president, whose research in the science of positive psychology initially attracted the Templeton Foundation’s interest.

In 1997 Seligman gave the keynote address at a symposium on optimism hosted by the foundation. During his speech, Sir John Templeton, the billionaire philanthropist knighted by Queen Elizabeth, rose from the audience and asked Seligman how his foundation could help promote positive psychology. Together they decided to create this award which is intended to induce the brightest young scientists to move their research in this direction.

The prize will be open to psychologists no more than 12 years out of their PhD’s, who have attained the academic appointment of assistant professor or higher in either the United States or Canada. We are in the process of organizing the selection committee, which will begin accepting applications in early May. In addition to the first and second prizes, a third-place winner will receive $30,000 and a fourth prize will pay $20,000.

According to the agreement between the foundation and APA the award “will create a highly leveraged opportunity to associate the mission and vision of the John Templeton Foundation with the most brilliant and visionary researchers emerging in psychological research and neuroscience.

7. The Lincoln, Nebraska Meeting on Taxonomy and Measurement (September 9-12, 1999). As a follow-up to the Cayman meeting and also sponsored by Gallup, we are presently organizing a larger meeting which will bring together the leading scientists who work on the conceptualization and measurement of the “Roots of A Positive Life.” Ed Diener, Don Clifton, Corey Keyes, and Martin Seligman are the organizing committee. Included will be some subset of:

Characteristics:

* Love and Intimacy
* Satisfying work/Occupation
*Helping Others/Altruism

*Being a good citizen

*Spirituality

*Leadership

*Aesthetic appreciation/ Pleasures of the mind

*Knowledge and understanding of areas of life larger than one's self/ Depth and Breadth

*Being a person with principles and integrity/ Ethics

*Creativity/Originality

*Play

*Feeling of subjective well-being

*Courage

*Purposive Future-mindedness

*Individuality

*Self-regulation

*Wisdom

Outcome Measures – Fulfillments

*Subjective fulfillment

*Objective fulfillment

*Societal/Civic fulfillment and recognition

Professor Corey Keyes will edit a book based on the proceedings.

8. Bahamas Meeting on Meaning and Purpose. The Templeton Foundation has asked Robert Wright (“The Moral Animal”) and Martin Seligman to organize a meeting of scientists and other scholars to pursue the question of the evolutionary basis of meaning and purpose. This is tentatively scheduled for February, 2000, and will include several of the likely Network Members.
9. **Akumal 2.** The second meeting of the “junior scientists” with Drs. Csikszentmihalyi, Fowler, Clifton, and Seligman is scheduled for the 9th to the 14th of January 2000 in Akumal. The meeting will be subsidized by a donation from the James Hovey Foundation.