

NSYR Becomes Longitudinal: Following Teens into Young Adulthood

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is pleased to announce that preparations are underway for a second wave of data collection. The Lilly Endowment Inc. recently approved funding for Wave II of the NSYR. The Principal Investigator of Wave I, Dr. Christian Smith, will be joined by Co-Principal Investigator Dr. Lisa Pearce. Dr. Smith is Stuart Chapin Distinguished Professor and Associate Chair and Dr. Pearce is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The second wave of the study will be administered through the Carolina Population Center with continued cooperation from the Howard W. Odum Institute for Research in Social Science and the Department of Sociology, all based at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Over the next year the NSYR will conduct telephone surveys and face-to-face interviews with the same teenagers that were surveyed and interviewed in the first wave of the research project. Wave II of the NSYR begins this month and will run through December 31, 2007.

The \$1,101,092 Wave II NSYR grant will continue and expand upon the work done in the initial wave of research. Both waves of research have the following goals: (1) to investigate the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of U.S. adolescents, (2) to identify effective practices in the religious, moral, and social formation of the lives of youth, (3) to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth, (4) to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives, and (5) to encourage sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion. Wave II will seek to re-interview the 3,370 youth who participated in the original NSYR telephone

survey and to field another wave of in-depth face-to-face interviews with 150 of these adolescents. At the start of Wave I, respondents were between the ages of 13 and 17, meaning they will be between 16 and 20 when re-interviewed.

A second wave of data will be valuable for working to understand causal relationships between religion and other dimensions of life, as well as for exploring how religious beliefs and activities change over time. Given the highly dynamic and developmentally important events of adolescence, longitudinal data collection is especially essential in youth research. “Transforming the cross-sectional NSYR Wave I data into a panel study that follows our national youth sample on their journey into young adulthood will take an already invaluable study to a new level of significance and usefulness,” says Dr. Lisa Pearce. She adds, “Multi-wave, longitudinal surveys provide uniquely suited data for better understanding the causal effects of religion in social life, because they enable us to study the effects of factors measured in one wave on diverse outcomes in following waves.” Ideally, the NSYR will follow these adolescents into adulthood, providing information on respondents at various points in their religious, moral, physical, and emotional development.

The survey instrument for Wave II is currently being developed and tested. This second wave of telephone survey data collection, conducted by the H.W. Odum Institute, will begin in June of this year and run for about five months. The face-to-face interviews, with 150 of the telephone survey respondents, will also be carried out in the summer of this year. Continue to visit the National Study of Youth and Religion website (www.youthandreligion.org) for more information on Wave II of the NSYR.