Abstract. This study compares a sample of 76 male and 100 female university students with the Bahraini sample which formed part of Michalos's 1984 global study of well-being. Using MDT, temporal changes were explored in students' perceptions of their aspirations and actual living conditions after a decade of major social changes. Within sample comparisons were made between males and females and those majoring in education and business to investigate the differences on the various discrepancies. Regression results were at variance with those of 1984. The Self/Needs gap (person-environment fit theory) had the greatest influence on Life Satisfaction, followed by Self/Wants and Self/Progress discrepancies. The Self/Deserves gap (equity theory) had the greatest influence on Happiness followed by Self/Wants and Self/Progress. The strong influence of social comparison (Self/Others gap) has been presently overtaken by needs and equity. A socio-historical explanation was offered for these temporal changes in students' perceived gaps between what they have and aspire to. This and other results regarding the effect of gender and specialization on perceived gaps suggest a useful link between wide gaps and objective social indicators. The subjective meaning of Satisfaction and Happiness to a female sample was qualitatively explored. Results highlight the centrality of religion as an ethical, social and cultural idiom. Using the life meaning construct of Zika and Chamberlin (1992), religion seems to provide personal meaning, which in turn mediates to well-being.

The concept of well-being has been closely associated with a number of other related concepts such as happiness, life satisfaction, quality of life and positive affect. In the literature of well-being, such terms, although not synonymous, have often been used interchangeably.

Rigorous scientific debate by social scientists of such concepts as life satisfaction, happiness, and well-being have been relatively recent, because the terms were considered too elusive, unexplainable and subjective to be validly measured (Veenhoven, 1984; Fordyce, 1986). How-
ever, in the sixties, when studies on social indicators of the Quality of Life were promoted by policy makers in western countries, the concepts began appearing in public writings, and in the seventies, were adopted by the related social sciences of sociology, psychology, economics and political science. From then on, attempts to assess the standard of people’s well-being, its variation in time and place, in the social, political and economic domain, increased in scope and range. Concepts closely related to the Quality of Life concept, such as development, progress, betterment, satisfaction of needs, as well as poverty, became from then on part and parcel of the ongoing investigation and search for human welfare.

One of the basic characteristics of the Quality of Life concept, that is often emphasized, is the continuous interplay between its subjective and objective aspects. Hence in attempting to validly measure aspects of well-being, one is faced with a question of subjectivity in relation to areas that are considered desirable or undesirable for the Quality of Life. International as well as national studies on social and economic indicators of well-being have shown low correlations between objective indicators of well-being and the respondents’ subjective perception of their level of satisfaction (Farganni, 1992). Michalos (1985) reported studies that point out that material level of living and reported satisfaction are independent; people living in countries with dissimilar scores on a developmental index reported similar levels of perceived Quality of Life.

These findings led much of the current research on well-being to focus on subjective or “perceptual social indicators” (Michalos, 1980) of satisfaction and happiness. The subjective perspective, in contrast to normative definitions which focus on what is desirable from the value framework of the observer, consider that well-being resides within the individual and relies on the standards of the respondent to determine what is the good life. Research questions thus focus on the factors that lead people to evaluate their lives positively, such as demographic variables, activity, biological influences, and personality characteristics (Diener, 1984).

However, an important consideration that tends to be relatively ignored within the subjective perspective, concerns the objective mea-