Student Performance Q&A:
2016 AP® European History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2016 free-response questions for AP® European History were written by the Chief Reader, Paul Deslandes of the University of Vermont. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Short Answer Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question presented the student with a passage from a historian about how the Scientific Revolution changed the way scientific knowledge was produced. The student was then asked to identify two examples of discoveries made during the Scientific Revolution and explain how each reflected a change from traditional understanding of the universe or the creation of scientific knowledge. The question then asked the students to identify and explain one consequence of the Scientific Revolution on European views of society or politics in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The question tested students' ability to understand a standard interpretation of the Scientific Revolution, apply specific evidence in support of that interpretation, and explain a consequence of the Scientific Revolution beyond the areas of knowledge that it originally affected.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students performed fairly well on this question. The average score was 1.18 out of a possible 3 points. Most students were able to identify at least one scientific advance from the period and explain how it challenged traditional views. The most commonly cited discoveries were the development of the heliocentric model of the solar system, the invention of the telescope (allowed if the response discussed how it was used to make new discoveries), and the development of a theory of gravitation. Also, students frequently mentioned how improvements in navigational knowledge and technology facilitated the development of European overseas empires.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students were able to identify new discoveries but failed to explain how they challenged traditional beliefs. Some students misunderstood the second part of the prompt, failing to notice that it required them to

shift from astronomy and physics to the social sciences. Some students offered verbatim repetition of the passage or paraphrases of it in providing an explanation.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Teachers should give their students opportunities to read and respond to historical interpretations found in secondary sources. Teachers should also have their students practice writing brief responses that go beyond identification and work with them in gaining an understanding of how explanation as a historical thinking skill differs from identification. An explanation does not need to be lengthy but it should always address the analytical questions of how or why.

Short Answer Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to contrast the mid seventeenth-century views of a Dutch minister and a Dutch historian on the connection between commercial prosperity and religion. Students were then asked to contextualize both sources by connecting each of them to contemporary historical developments, intellectual or philosophical trends, or religious beliefs.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students performed fairly well on this question. The average score was 1.19 out of a possible 3 points. Most students were able to explain the main difference between the two authors' attitudes towards wealth. Many students were able to contextualize Simonides' suspicion of wealth by linking it to Protestant beliefs or the initial Protestant attacks on the wealth of the Catholic Church.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students struggled to place Fokkens in context, and some simply repeated large parts of his passage in attempting to contextualize his ideas on wealth. Some students offered very generic attempts at contextualization that lacked any reference to the actual period of the two passages.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Contextualization is a key skill in the redesigned AP® history courses. Teachers should give their students frequent exercises in which they are required not only to comprehend the <u>contents</u> of a primary source, but also to answer questions such as, "What large events are influencing the author?"; "What beliefs/ideologies is the author displaying?"; "What trends/developments/recent events is the author responding to or reacting against?" Students should be encouraged to avoid offering ahistorical generalizations as contextualization.

Short Answer Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to consider the contention that the development of railroads in the early 1800s was a significant turning point in European history. Students were asked to provide and explain two specific pieces of evidence that support the contention and one specific piece of evidence that undermines it.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students did well on this question. The average score was 1.95 out of a possible 3 points. They generally seemed to understand the tasks of part a). Most students were able to identify and explain at least one piece of evidence in support of the significance of the railroad in nineteenth-century European history and many were able to supply two. The most commonly seen pieces of evidence were the contribution of the railroad to urbanization, further industrialization, and the development of mass warfare. Many students also mentioned how railroads facilitated European imperial expansion, quickened the spread of information, and promoted the development of more cohesive national identities.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students offered factually accurate statements about the use of railroads that were nevertheless peripheral to the idea of a turning point in the nineteenth century (for instance discussing the use of railroads during the Holocaust). Many students struggled with part b), and showed an unclear grasp of what it means to logically undermine or challenge a contention or proposition. Some students attempted to undermine the idea of the railroad as a turning point by describing negative consequences of its development (e.g., pollution). Others unsuccessfully attempted to undermine the contention by offering a thematically or logically unrelated development as an alternative turning point, claiming that it was more important than the development of the railroad.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Periodization is one of the higher-order skills in the redesigned AP® history courses. Teachers should instruct students that historical periods and turning points are not settled matters of fact, but instead are constructed by historians according to their available evidence and their particular interests. As such, periodization schemes can be both supported and challenged by deploying historically and logically relevant evidence. Students should be taught that in historical interpretation, supporting a proposition is not achieved simply by agreeing with it and that undermining a proposition is not simply achieved by disagreeing, mentioning a negative aspect of a specific historical development, or changing the subject.

Short Answer Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question presented a table showing the percentage of the French workforce employed in the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors for the years 1800, 1900, 1950, and 2012. The questions asked students to explain two trends that contributed to the change in patterns of employment and to explain one effect of the changes.

How well did students perform on this question?

Student performance was weaker on this question than the other short-answer questions. The average score was 1.00 out of a possible 3 points. Most students were able to identify and explain one cause of decreasing agricultural employment, increasing service employment, or rising and then decreasing employment in manufacturing. Many students struggled to explain a second trend that contributed to the changing employment patterns.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students offered minor or, chronologically-speaking, very limited trends as explanations for the changes shown. Some students misconstrued the question and offered only explanations of the effects of the

changes. Some confused cause and effect or struggled to distinguish the task set by part a) from the task set by part b).

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Causation is one of the building-block skills in the redesigned AP® history courses. Teachers should give students practice in spotting patterns of causation at various chronological scales, from centuries-long trends such as this question offered to much more compressed periods of time.

Question 1—Document-Based Question

What was the intent of this question?

The document-based question (DBQ) is designed to evaluate the degree to which students can analyze various types of historical documents and integrate content from the course in constructing an essay that responds to the tasks required by the question. Student responses were assessed on the extent to which they met seven requirements specified in the scoring guidelines.

This particular DBQ asked students to take a position on whether Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's government represented either traditional or a new kind of conservatism. Students were provided with seven documents (including one image) on which to base their responses. They were also asked to include relevant historical context to set up their arguments and evidence beyond the documents to advance their arguments and to extend their arguments to other historical situations or topic areas.

How well did students perform on this question?

The overall mean score for this essay was 2.61 out of a possible 7 points. The mean Thesis and Development of Argument subscore for this essay was 1.23 out of a possible 2 points. The mean Document Analysis subscore for this essay was 0.67 out of a possible 2 points. The mean Use of Evidence Outside the Documents subscore for this essay was 0.63 out of a possible 2 points. The mean Synthesis subscore for this essay was 0.18 out of a possible 1 point.

Most students revealed a solid understanding of nineteenth-century political developments, such as the Congress of Vienna and the growth of nationalism, as well as the specific policies promoted by Bismarck's government. Many students were able to analyze the documents in a simple manner in developing adequate analyses of Bismarck's policies. Some, however, missed the substantial nuances of the documents, often reducing them to more narrow interpretations. Although many students provided a valid thesis in their responses to the question, they struggled with developing coherent arguments that demonstrated a higher level of complexity. Often, responses included the development of more complex sub-arguments, e.g., that Bismarck's policies both repressed the socialist movement and co-opted socialist principles.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The question assumes familiarity with ideologies, such as conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. Many of the responses, though, failed to display a clear understanding of these different political philosophies, often conflating liberalism and socialism, or misinterpreting conservatism to reflect a modern sense of laissez-faire economics. Despite the question being fairly mainstream, with numerous student responses displaying decent content knowledge, many failed to integrate even one example beyond the documents to advance their arguments. Also, many responses attempted the Synthesis point. In doing so, however, they often struggled to connect Bismarck's conservatism substantively and specifically to another period, geographic region, or topic, especially when drawing on contemporary politics or in making forced connections to

twentieth-century dictators like Hitler or Stalin. Students rarely attempted to synthesize by connecting an alternate course theme or outside discipline.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students continue to need practice on providing specific thesis statements. More importantly, they need more practice in creating and supporting Argument Development. Many responses took a position on the question and argued that position consistently, but with little or no recognition that opposing evidence required explanation. Also, in teaching these skills, instructors would be well advised to go beyond providing strategic approaches to satisfying the rubric and instead develop lessons throughout their courses to reinforce historical thinking skills, such as Contextualization, Sourcing, and Synthesis. Teachers should also instruct students to utilize all seven documents to protect against the possibility of major misinterpretations, as six are required to earn the Content Use point. When students attempted Contextualization or Evidence Beyond the Documents, they often did so using only a phrase or reference, so teachers should encourage students to provide sufficient development of both context and outside evidence.

Long Essay Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

Long Essay Question 2 asked students to describe and explain continuities and changes in the period from the Reformation to the Enlightenment. Students were asked to write an essay that contains a historically defensible thesis that makes a persuasive argument about how the attitudes toward and experiences of women changed or remained the same, using specific examples of relevant evidence to substantiate the argument, and extend the argument by making connections to related developments, course themes, or other disciplines. As the targeted skill for this question is continuity and change over time (CCOT), students must address both continuity and change to earn all the points. As is the case with all long essay questions, this question also assessed the skills of argumentation and synthesis. Additionally, this question targeted student understanding of events in Period 1 (c. 1450 to c. 1648) and Period 2 (c. 1648 to c. 1815), and the theme of the Individual and Society (IS).

How well did students perform on this question?

The overall mean score for this essay was 2.17 out of a possible 6 points. The Thesis subscore for this essay was .43 out of a possible 1 point. The Application of the Targeted Historical Thinking Skill subscore for this essay was .70 out of a possible 2 points. The Supporting the Argument with Evidence subscore for this essay was 0.75 out of a possible 2 points. The Synthesis subscore for this essay was 0.30 out of a possible 1 point.

Despite the fact that students were allowed some leeway in conflating the two categories in the prompt — "attitudes toward and experiences of"— only 43 percent of responses earned the Thesis point for addressing continuity and change effectively. This being said, the Thesis subscore was the highest among the four subscore categories. Many students only addressed change in their essays, thus compromising the Thesis point (as well as the Application of the Targeted Historical Thinking Skill point). Less common were theses that focused solely on continuity.

The Evidence subscore section was the second highest among the four subscores. Given the mainstream nature of the question — with a focus on the Reformation and the Enlightenment — students often included predictable evidence in their essays such as Martin Luther, the Scientific Revolution, the salon movement, Olympe de Gouges, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Students who used this evidence often did so superficially. Essays that clearly tied evidence back to the argument in a complex way were relatively rare.

The second lowest subscore was the Application of the Targeted Historical Thinking Skill subscore section — .69 out of 2 points. The low score is likely the result of the preponderance of essays that addressed either change or continuity, but not both.

The lowest subscore — Synthesis — was .31 out of 1 possible point. A majority of essays simply did not attempt to extend the argument in any discernible way. Readers commented that many attempts at synthesis were vague or superficial and therefore did not earn the point.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most fundamental error students made in addressing this question was in failing to address BOTH continuity and change. Students usually addressed change in their essays but often ignored or unsuccessfully developed continuity. Another key omission in a majority of the essays was synthesis. Readers commented that some of the finest essays they read contained no attempts to extend the argument.

The historical information used by students for evidence was correct more often than not, given the mainstream nature of the question. However, students usually did not develop their evidence and descriptions well enough to earn the second point in Argument Development (part B) and Use of Evidence (Part C) of the rubric.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

First and foremost, students should be taught to address all tasks in the question. That so many students only discussed one of the two tasks indicates that teachers should stress these thinking skills even more fully than they currently do. Secondly, given that a majority of students did not attempt synthesis in their essays, teachers will need to build more time into their classroom instruction to teach this skill and to make effective connections throughout the historical periods covered by the Curriculum Framework. Finally, students were more successful in describing historical content than in explaining it. This suggests that teachers may need to spend more time teaching the skills of explanation (the *how* and *why*). The better essays at the Reading tended to use cause and effect analysis and/or compare and contrast analysis to explain continuity and change and to tie evidence back to the argument.

Long Essay Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

Long Essay Question 3 asked students to describe and explain continuities and changes in the period of the First World War through the Cold War. Students had to write an essay that contains a historically defensible thesis that makes a persuasive argument about how the attitudes toward and experiences of women changed or remained the same, using specific examples of relevant, Europe-specific evidence to substantiate the argument. The essay should extend the argument by making connections to related developments in other regions or time periods, course themes, or disciplines. The targeted skill for this question is continuity and change over time (CCOT), and responses had to address both continuity and change to earn all points. As with all long essay questions, this question also assessed the skills of argumentation and synthesis. Additionally, this question targeted students' understanding of events in Period 4 (c. 1914 to the present).

How well did students perform on this question?

The overall mean score for this essay was 1.81 out of a possible 6 points. The mean Thesis subscore for this essay was 0.36 out of a possible 1 point. The mean Development of the Targeted Historical Thinking Skill

subscore for this essay was 0.81 out of a possible 2 points. The mean Evidence subscore for this essay was 0.40 out of a possible 2 points. The Synthesis subscore for this essay was 0.25 out of a possible 1 point.

Even though students were allowed to partially conflate continuity and change in developing their theses and arguments (with an understanding that nods in the direction of both of these needed to be present) many struggled with this targeted historical thinking skill. In assessing student responses, then, readers considered a wide range of vocabulary and concepts that could be used to identify continuity (rights rolled back, traditional expectations, domesticity, persistent inequality and discrimination against women, etc). Despite the application of this scoring principle, many essays simply failed to address this part of the question.

Most students attempted synthesis, using such examples as the situation of women during the Enlightenment and Reformation (LEQ 2 on this exam), the struggle for Civil Rights in 20th-century America; and prominent female politicians in both contemporary Europe and previous centuries (Margaret Thatcher and Elizabeth I). To earn this point, responses needed to extend an argument. Still, many responses simply referenced other periods, ideas, and individuals without any explanation.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common student errors and omissions concerned the use of precise evidence. Students either addressed the question using sweeping generalizations and vague references to factory work, domesticity, etc., without mentioning specific countries, contexts, or even Europe more broadly. Many responses read as if they were written for an American history course; some explicitly (and exclusively) cited American examples as evidence. Students needed to cite at least two European-specific pieces of evidence in order to earn the first Evidence point, and it was difficult for students to earn the second Evidence point if they lacked concrete, relevant examples.

Second, in both their thesis statements and throughout their responses, students often failed to address **both** continuity AND change. Students seemed to have few problems identifying and describing important changes in attitudes towards and experiences of women over the course of the 20th century. Some responses posited the entire 20th century as one of change but then failed to address continuities in any way, shape, or form.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Above all else, teachers should emphasize the use of precise, European examples. Generalizations and broad conclusions must be accompanied by specific pieces of evidence, whether in the form of historical figures (Pankhurst, Thatcher, de Beauvoir), events (women's suffrage obtained in specific countries), or groups of women (Soviet women under Lenin, German women under Hitler). Students obviously have much to say on this topic, as they are very familiar with the American context. They understand the larger trajectories of women's history, and even those students who feel less comfortable with the subject could have approached this essay (as many did) by adopting a strictly economic or military approach. However, for the purposes of this and other essays, students must be taught to identify, articulate, and explain these developments as they occurred in Europe.