CollegeBoard
Advanced Placement Program

Student Performance Q&A:
2005 AP® Human Geography Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2005 free-response questions for AP® Human Geography were written by the Chief Reader, Tim Strauss of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. 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.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question concerned fundamental concepts related to political organization. Specifically, the question focused on political forces working above the level of the modern state, related to supranationalism, and on forces working below the state level, related to devolution. In part A students were asked to define the concepts of supranationalism and devolution and to cite a relevant geographic example of each. In parts B and C they were then asked to discuss three outcomes within the European context related to each concept. This question tested knowledge of material from the "Political Organization of Space" section of the AP Human Geography topic outline, specifically the concepts of "political units above, below, and beyond the state" (as discussed on page 8 of the May 2006, May 2007 *AP Human Geography Course Description*) and "Challenges to inherited political–territorial arrangements" in the topic outline. In addition, material from the other sections of the course (notably those on economic and cultural geography) could be integrated into discussions of the outcomes of supranationalism and devolution.

How well did students perform on this question?

Students had the most success with part A, defining supranationalism and devolution and providing two examples. Of the two concepts, students had a better understanding of devolution. Students who understood the concepts were generally able to provide appropriate definitions and geographic examples. Parts B and C were more challenging and tended to distinguish between students of medium to higher ability.

The question differentiated between three groups of students. Students who were unfamiliar with the concepts generally earned 0 or 1 point. Students who were able to provide relevant definitions and often gave appropriate geographic examples earned 2, 3, or 4 points. Students who provided varying degrees of discussion of the outcomes of supranationalism and devolution earned 5 or more points; within this last group, responses receiving 8–10 points addressed most or all parts of the question and were usually more organized, section by section. Overall, students did moderately well on this question. The mean score was 3.15 out of a possible 10 points, or 31.5 percent of the maximum.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Many students were unfamiliar with the concepts of supranationalism and devolution.

- Several students confused the concept of supranationalism with supernationalism, ultranationalism, and extreme nationalism. Readers saw this especially in responses that discussed expansionism and Nazism as examples of supranationalism.

- Some students confused the concepts of supranationalism and devolution with each other.

- Responses often mistakenly defined devolution as "the opposite of evolution" or "deteriorating living conditions."

- Parts B and C required a brief discussion of changes in the context of the political and economic geography of Europe. Some students responded with additional geographic examples, similar to what was already provided in part A, rather than with changes.

- Many students who seemed to understand the key concepts failed to provide three changes each in parts B and C. Some responses went into great detail but for only one change.

- In parts B and C some students discussed causes of supranationalism and devolution rather than their outcomes.

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?

See suggestions at the end of the discussion of question 3.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question was on immigration to the United States during the twentieth century. Although it dealt with historical trends, the question fundamentally related to processes of spatial interaction, the importance of migrants' decision-making frameworks in specific geographic contexts, and the influence of broader economic forces. The question tested depth of knowledge and analytical ability related to the "Population" section of the course (especially the items under "Population movement" in the topic outline). In addition, material from the "Industrialization and Economic Development" section of the outline (e.g., on industrialization and deindustrialization) could be

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integrated into discussions of the effect of economic structure on global immigration patterns. The question included a graph depicting immigration flows to the United States for the years 1900–1998. Parts A and B focused on the peaks of immigration flow in the early twentieth century. Part A required students to provide the main source areas associated with this movement, along with two key push factors, i.e., negative characteristics of the appropriate source areas promoting outmigration. Part B asked students to link this movement to fundamental changes in the structure of the U.S. economy. Parts C and D required similar information, but for the immigration peak in the late twentieth century; that is, part C asked for source areas and push factors, while part D required students to link more recent flows with changes in the structure of the U.S. economy.

How well did students perform on this question?

In general, students found the early twentieth-century immigration flows (parts A and B) easier to discuss than the late twentieth-century flows (parts C and D). In addition, students were more able to identify source areas and push factors (parts A and C) than to discuss linkages between immigration flows and economic factors in the destination country (parts B and D). Most students were able to identify Europe as a main source area, and many of these students linked immigration to sectoral shifts from agriculture to industry. Latin America and Asia were often appropriately identified as key source areas in the late twentieth century (Latin America more so than Asia). Part D was the most difficult. Relatively few students linked recent changes in the U.S. economic structure to international immigration.

The question thus differentiated between several student ability levels. The lowest-scoring group (0–3 points) normally identified the appropriate source areas for one or both periods and, perhaps, a push factor. The middle-scoring group (4–7 points) had a good understanding of source areas, push factors, and, perhaps, economic change in the early twentieth century. Students in the highest-scoring group (8–10 points) had a good understanding of economic structure and were able to integrate this knowledge with historical migration trends. Overall, students did moderately well on this question. The mean score was 3.78 out of a possible 10 points, or 37.8 percent of the maximum.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students seemed to have a better understanding of historical (early twentieth-century) changes in the economic structure of the United States and their effect on immigration than they did of recent changes. This was especially the case in part D, where students commonly either skipped the section or referred to "technology" or the strength of the U.S. economy without further discussion. Readers also noted the following problems.

- Many students confused push factors with pull factors (e.g., identifying job opportunities in the United States as a push factor).

- In parts B and D several responses provided generic discussions about the strength of the U.S. economy without reference to changes in economic structure.

- Many responses discussed push factors out of their appropriate historical context (e.g., bubonic plague, slavery, Irish potato famine).

- A few students simply described the graph; some of these students seemed to focus on "source eras" rather than "source areas."

- Some students were able to identify changes in the structure of the U.S. economy but did not explicitly discuss how such changes are related to immigration, so they did not receive full credit.

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?

See suggestions at the end of the discussion of question 3.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to synthesize material from a variety of topics to discuss factors contributing to urban revitalization. Specifically, the question asked for factors related to economics, demographics, urban policy, and sense of place (parts A, B, C, and D, respectively). A complete answer required the integration of material from several parts of the topic outline. Several topics within the "Cities and Urban Land Use" section of the outline were relevant (e.g., "Changing demographic and social structures," "Urban planning and design," "gentrification"), as was material from the sections on "Industrialization and Economic Development," "Population," and "Cultural Patterns and Processes." The question thus required sophisticated levels of analysis and integration across the discipline of human geography.

How well did students perform on this question?

Overall, students found this question to be challenging. In general, they seemed most able to link the process of urban revitalization to urban policy (part C) and somewhat to sense of place (part D). They were less comfortable discussing how economic and demographic factors have contributed to the process of urban revitalization.

The question differentiated between three groups of students. Those of modest-to-average ability earned 0–2 points, generally from part C (often by referencing the importance of zoning) and part D (often by noting the increased importance of cultural amenities). Students of higher ability earned 3–6 points, normally by incorporating additional discussion of economic or demographic factors. Very well-qualified students, earning 7 or 8 points, were able to integrate a diverse range of material from the topic outline in a sophisticated manner. There were few scores at this higher level, but they were from students who seemed very well prepared. The mean score was 1.43 out of a possible 8 points, or 17.9 percent of the maximum.

What were common student errors or omissions?

- Several students discussed recent economic trends in general terms (e.g., by referencing strong or weak economies) but did not link this discussion specifically to the revitalization of urban areas.

- The prompt in part B that told students to discuss the role of "demographic composition" led some to write off-task discussions of the demographic transition.

- In many responses the process of cause and effect was reversed. Students were asked to consider the urban revitalization process as an outcome of the four categories of causes outlined in the question. Some students, however, focused on revitalization as a cause of various changes in urban environments, rather than examining the forces contributing to this process.

- Several responses addressed urban problems in general, sometimes within an urban versus rural framework, rather than focusing on the intra-urban scale of analysis.

- Several responses provided generic descriptions of suburbanization, ghettoization, and commuting patterns without specific reference to the revitalization of central areas within cities. Many of these responses discussed the creation of new suburbs rather than the revitalization of existing residential areas.

- Some students focused on urban movements (e.g., the "city beautiful" movement) and processes occurring before the historical context of the question.

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?

The following is a summary of ideas that were generated in discussion and collaboration with the 78 Readers and Table and Question Leaders of the 2005 AP Human Geography Exam. They reflect the wisdom of the members of this group, who have firsthand experiences with both teaching the course and scoring the exam, using scoring guidelines developed especially for these questions.

- Focus on the topic outline in the *AP Human Geography Course Description* and, to ensure comprehensive coverage, consult a wide variety of related materials when preparing to teach the course.

- Encourage students to use the extra five minutes per question (first given on the 2005 exam) to outline their responses in a manner that is consistent with the structure of the question. The additional time was not intended to generate longer responses than before; rather, students should use the time to organize their responses. (In general, responses to question 2 were more structured than those for the other two questions on this exam.)

- Teach students to read questions carefully. In particular, teach students to use the structure of a question to guide their responses. For question 1, it was useful to answer the different sections (i.e., parts A, B, and C) in turn, paying close attention to key prompts (e.g., "define," "briefly discuss three changes"). The stem of the question also provided guidance. In this case, a "struggle" between opposing forces was noted in the question, which implied contrasting concepts; this seemed to assist some students who were familiar with one concept but not the other.

- Encourage students to be analytical and prepare them to integrate concepts from different areas of the topic outline. For example, more complete responses to question 1 tended to incorporate elements of political, economic, and sometimes cultural, geography. When responding to question 2, better-prepared students could link the geography of migration trends to fundamental changes occurring in the U.S. economy.

- Stress the use of geographic terminology when discussing geographic concepts.

- Help students become familiar with analyzing spatial processes and linkages across multiple geographic contexts and at a variety of scales, focusing on the inherently geographic aspects of the question.

- Teach students to organize their responses into sections, using the structure of the question as a guide, and to begin each question on a new page.

- Urge students to use examples, even local examples, to illustrate their points, and stress the importance of being precise in their responses. For instance, when responding to question 2, references to "poor living conditions" as push factors were less likely to earn points than appropriate, context-specific discussions of the negative characteristics of the immigrants' origins. Likewise, general references to "war" were less likely to earn points than references to specific conflicts.

- Offer students practice exams that give them an opportunity to respond to a structured, 20-minute free-response question. Have them identify and write responses to such command words as "explain," "define," and "discuss." Involve students in discussions about the scoring guidelines—or have them score their own or each others' papers—to familiarize them with the exam-scoring process.

- Use the resources on AP Central® (http://apcentral.collegeboard.com) to access contemporary teaching materials, case studies, teaching tips, and questions from past exams. College and high school faculty use the AP Human Geography Electronic Discussion Group as an active forum for the exchange of ideas about teaching the course.