Student Performance Q&A:
2001 AP® Human Geography Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP Human Geography. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exam.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

General Comments on Exam Performance

Students generally scored better on those sub-parts of the questions that prompted them for specific information. They did less well when asked to make conceptual linkages, to draw upon broader contextual material from across the course, and when asked to "discuss" or "explain" particular statements.

- Many students did not read the question carefully and were unable to distinguish between the following instructions: discuss, define, explain, name, and identify. For example, students spent too much time on a question that required simple naming, but did not spend enough time developing an argument in response to an explain/discuss instruction.
- Many students provided definitions that were very imprecise and often lacked content.
- Many students did not organize their answers to multipart questions in the way prompted by the question.
- A few students did not budget their time equally between questions.
- The vast majority of students were unable to provide accurate geographical examples when prompted; a few students confused continents with countries. In general, the depth of many students' geographic vocabulary was limited.
- Very few students made the most of their overall knowledge of human geography. Most students did not step back from the specific prompt of the question, consider the broader context within which the question was framed, and then link relevant extant materials from other course sections to the question at hand.

Question 1

This question assessed the student's familiarity with the Green Revolution, a topic briefly but widely covered in the survey texts. Students seemed broadly familiar with the material. Most of the question required specific objective responses and students scored well. To receive full credit, the student had to provide an accurate definition (that referred both to yield and practices), and to show their knowledge of at least one practice by explaining its role and giving a supporting geographic example. In parts (b) and (c), full credit required both the identification of two relevant conditions/limitations and a brief but explanatory argument about how these factors affected the practices of the Green Revolution. Common errors included:

- Many students gave an imprecise definition of the Green Revolution.
- Many students confused practices of the Green Revolution (which referred to 1945-1985 as stated in the question) with more recent practices associated with genetic modification and biotechnology.
- In part (a) (iii), many students listed Europe and the U.S. as appropriate examples.
- In part (b), some students responded with factors that were not social, political, or cultural.
- In parts (b) and (c), many students were unable to provide a clear argument that explained how a relevant factor affected the practices of the Green Revolution. For example, in part (c), many students did not read the question carefully and talked about factors that affect the success of the Green Revolution in, for example, ending world hunger, rather than factors that affect the practices of the Green Revolution, including the ability to afford inputs.
- In part (c), many students did not distinguish between negative consequences of the Green Revolution and underlying limitations.

Question 2

This question focused on how a diverse set of influences gave rise to the development of suburbs in North America in the 1960s and 1970s. Calling on skills of synthesis, students could apply information from several course sections (urban, cultural, population, and economic). To receive full credit, students had to be able to *understand* the general way in which three of the four factors prompted suburbanization, demonstrate this understanding by *identifying* the major elements through which the factor affected suburbanization, and finally *discuss* how these elements contributed to the outcome. For example, the factor of transport prompted suburbanization through both the reduced cost of cars and the increased availability of good roads; taken together, these elements meant that many people had the means to live farther away from their central city jobs. Students who lacked an awareness of the relevant elements and who were unable to conceptualize the role of these elements in prompting suburbanization scored poorly on this item. Common errors included:

- Many students lacked breadth in their identification of relevant elements, picking at most one element per subsection. Full credit required the student to give a good discussion of how, for example, transportation affected suburbanization through *both* the increased availability of affordable cars and the provision of a fast, reliable road network.
- Most students had no knowledge of how innovations in the production and purchasing of housing affected suburbanization.
- Many students wrote very general essays on the suburbs that relied on stereotypical views. Such responses did not respond to the question's prompt to consider the role of three particular factors.

- In discussing "social and demographic trends," some students asserted the baby boom as a relevant element without discussing how the implied growth of population specifically gave rise to suburban growth.
- Few students saw this integrative question as an opportunity to draw upon their expertise from other course topics, and regarded it as a completely urban topic. When students did draw upon material from other course sections (for example, an understanding of landscape preferences gleaned from the culture section) they scored more highly.
- A large number of students were unable to present clear discussions that consisted of linked sentences organized into paragraphs.

Question 3

This question asked students to demonstrate their understanding of and to assess the usefulness of the Rostow model of economic development. Students were given a summary sketch of the main stages of the model and prompted to choose three of four topics through which to discuss the usefulness of the model in understanding contemporary economic and social change. To further demonstrate grasp of the material, students were also asked to illustrate their answer with examples. Although most students had a general familiarity with the model, it appeared that few students were familiar with the general way in which geographers see, and treat the model. Very few students were familiar with the geographic critiques of the model, to the extent that a limited number recognized the four topics as potential critiques. A good number of students answered this question by recapitulating the features of the model as they equated to the prompted topics (for example, a response that described how Rostow informs our understanding of colonial transport networks). As relatively few students attempted to apply Rostow to the broader question of economic and social change, and ultimately assess such applications, this question produced a very wide range of scores, with a low mean. Some specific weaknesses:

- Most students had a limited understanding of what factors affect contemporary economic and social change.
- Many students did not link the question to geographic accounts of economic and social change, including those that discuss core-periphery relations, world systems, and dependency theory.
- Many students constructed very inaccurate geographic generalizations and few had relevant country level examples beyond the U.S., Mexico, and Japan.
- A large number of students did not appreciate the purpose of the Rostow model in geographic thought (for example, to summarize, generalize, and stimulate debate and revision). As a result, these students misinterpreted the intent of the question and constructed implausible arguments.
- Few students understood how colonial transport networks affect economic and social change.
- Some students confused cultural differences and social structures in parts (c) and (d).

What Teachers Can Do To Improve Performance in Specific Problem Areas

- Have students practice written assignments that differentiate between descriptive and analytical instructions (for example, name, list, define, discuss, explain).
- Encourage students to approach a question in an integrative manner. The use of specific case studies is one strategy for communicating this important feature of the AP Human Geography course.

- Encourage students to think about conceptual models in the context of geographic thought and scholarship.
- Stimulate students to develop, and be able to defend, a good repertoire of international examples.
- Draw widely from across the major course texts to avoid an over-reliance on a particular treatment of a course topic.
- Have students develop their ability to provide succinct, but accurate definitions.