



Student Performance Q&A:
2012 AP® Comparative Government and Politics
Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2012 free-response questions for AP® Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Glenn Hastedt of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. 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?

The intent of this question was for students to describe an advantage and a disadvantage associated with a one-term limit for chief executive. The skills tested were descriptive and conceptual: to identify Mexico as the country studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course that limits the chief executive to one term, to describe how a one-term limit can be an advantage for a political system, and to describe how a one-term limit can be a disadvantage for a political system.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.15 out of a possible 3 points.

Students did well on the conceptual aspect of the question. The majority were able to describe either an advantage or a disadvantage of a one-term limit for a country's chief executive. A sizable number were able to describe both an advantage and a disadvantage.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students were unable to identify Mexico as the country whose political system exhibits this trait. There seemed to be an equal number of students saying Great Britain, Russia, or Nigeria, although fewer mentioned Iran. One common problem was that students used the same factor as both an advantage and a disadvantage. The most common instance of this occurred when students said it was an advantage to a political system because bad chief executives have to leave and it was a disadvantage because good chief executives also have to leave.

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?

Identify the unique but substantial traits of the political system of each country studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course. Discuss these traits from a conceptual perspective.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to examine political socialization and to consider the ways in which Russian authorities currently socialize citizens. The skills tested were conceptual and descriptive: to define and describe. Students had three specific tasks: to define political socialization, to describe one method that Russian authorities currently use to socialize citizens, and to describe a second, distinct method that Russian authorities currently use to socialize citizens.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.10 out of a possible 3 points.

Many students could define political socialization. Students seemed to be particularly able to describe two distinct methods that Russian authorities currently use to socialize citizens.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Quite a few students had difficulty defining political socialization, saying it is political participation, education, or political awareness. Others emphasized agents of socialization rather than the process that citizens experience. In their descriptions, some students identified and did not describe a method that Russian authorities currently use to socialize citizens. Others described a general method of socializing citizens but did not indicate how Russian authorities currently use this method.

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?

Continue to emphasize to students the differences between the process of political socialization and methods that authorities use to socialize citizens. Also, continue to train students on how to write responses that require description. Finally, reiterate to students that if a question asks about a particular country, their responses should include information about that country.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to explain how Chinese economic liberalization has led to current environmental problems and to describe its effect on Chinese government policy. The skills tested were both descriptive and analytical: to describe and explain in a short conceptual response. Students had three specific tasks: to explain how one current environmental problem in China resulted from economic liberalization, which required an understanding of the concept of economic liberalization; to explain a second, distinct current environmental problem resulting from economic liberalization; and to describe one Chinese government policy that has been developed as a result of one of the environmental problems identified.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.25 out of a possible 3 points.

Many students were able to explain the current environmental problems affecting China and relate them to economic liberalization, but some students did not connect the environmental problem directly to economic liberalization. Many students were also able to describe a Chinese policy that addressed one of the environmental problems.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Some students identified an environmental problem without explaining it. Others did not relate the environmental problem to Chinese economic liberalization. In other cases students described a policy that did not correlate with either of the two problems explained in the first section of the response.

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?

This question required students to demonstrate knowledge of relatively current information that may be difficult to find in textbooks. Teachers should supplement textbooks with outside sources of current government policies of the required countries. Teachers should also develop strategies to help students relate concepts to countries' problems and political policy.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' knowledge and understanding of corporatism and pluralism and to examine their ability to apply these concepts to country-specific knowledge. The skills tested were conceptual and descriptive: to describe concepts and identify countries. Students had three specific tasks: to describe the relationship between interest groups and the state in a corporatist system, to describe the relationship between interest groups and the state in a pluralist system, and to identify which of the six countries studied in the course was corporatist but is currently pluralist.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 0.85 out of a possible 3 points.

Most students correctly identified Mexico or Great Britain as countries where the interest group system was corporatist but is now pluralist. Many students accurately described interest groups in a pluralist system, but some struggled with describing the relationship of interest groups to the state. Most students provided inaccurate descriptions of corporatist interest group systems.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students most often confused corporatist systems with authoritarian systems. Students who did not earn this point described states in corporatist systems as creating, controlling, or authorizing interest groups. Some students did not adequately address the relationship of interest groups to the state. A less common error was misidentifying Russia as a country that once was corporatist and currently has a pluralist interest group system.

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?

Emphasize the concept of corporatism as distinct from authoritarianism. Use Mexico and Great Britain as examples of a shift from corporatism to pluralism.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to examine the connection between a country's candidate selection process and electoral competition in legislative elections. The question required students to make this conceptual linkage by using the candidate selection process for the Iranian Majles. Students had three specific tasks: to identify the institution in Iran that controls which candidates can run for the Majles, to describe how this institution controls the selection process, and to explain how the candidate selection process influences electoral competition.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.25 out of a possible 3 points.

Most students accurately identified the Guardian Council as the institution in Iran that controls which candidates can run for the Majles. Fewer students could describe how the Guardian Council controls the selection process. More students could explain how this candidate selection process reduces electoral competition.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although most students could identify the Guardian Council as the institution that controls which candidates run for the Majles, other institutions mentioned were the Supreme Leader, the Assembly of Experts, and the Expediency Council. For the second task, students frequently identified that the Guardian Council evaluates candidates but did not describe how the institution controls the selection process. Students often gave incorrect information by stating that the Guardian Council administers religious tests. For the final task, students recognized that the Guardian Council limits the number of candidates but often could not explain how the candidate selection process reduces electoral competition. A number of students incorrectly stated that by limiting candidates, the Guardian Council increases electoral competition, or that there is no electoral competition in Iran.

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?

Stress linkage, in this case between a candidate selection process and electoral competition. A flow chart may help students to visualize the process and guide their writing. After students understand the linkage between concepts, emphasize the country-specific institutions and their roles in the candidate selection process and the effect on electoral competition.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the question was for students to examine both the concept of a state and the difference between a state and a nation, to consider how multination states present governments with a challenge to stability, and to consider multiple policies used by governments to respond to that challenge. The skills tested were conceptual, descriptive, and analytical: to define the state and then differentiate the concepts of nation and state, to describe a challenge to stability posed by multination states, and to discuss policies that are taken in reaction to that challenge. Students had five specific tasks: to define the concept of a state, to explain how a nation is different from a state, to describe one challenge that governments in multination states face in securing stability, to discuss one policy that governments have taken to address that challenge, and to discuss a second, distinct policy that governments have taken to address that same challenge.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.47 out of a possible 5 points.

Students were often able to explain how a nation is different from a state, though they were usually better at this task if they had correctly defined the concept of a state. Students seemed to be particularly adept at describing a challenge that governments face in securing stability in multination states. Some students described a challenge faced by governments in multination states, but not one that was in relation to securing stability. Many students were able to correctly discuss one policy taken by governments in reaction to a challenge that governments face in securing stability in multination states, and some could identify two such policies. On occasion students could identify policies taken by governments that dealt with issues in multination states but were not connected with the policy goal of securing stability.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most often students had difficulty with either the definition of a state or the difference between nation and state. Many of these students either mistook state for nation or identified states as subunits of countries and nations as countries. A few students had difficulty describing one challenge that governments face in securing stability in multination states. Many of these students described a challenge to governance, but not necessarily to securing stability. Some students had difficulty discussing policies taken by governments to meet the challenge necessitating those policies. Many of these students identified policies that dealt with governance issues in multination states but were not in reaction to a challenge to stability.

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 appear better at describing governance challenges in multination states than at fully grasping the conceptual parameters of states and nations. This suggests that teachers should emphasize the conceptual definitions of states and nations, as well as how these differ, to give students a fuller understanding of how and why these differences can lead to governance issues in multination states. Students also appear stronger at describing challenges faced by governments in multination states and identifying policies taken by governments in those states, but weaker in their ability to connect policy responses by governments to the problem they are intended to address. This suggests that teachers should emphasize the challenges that prompt policy responses when discussing government policy choices, and emphasize the connections between governance challenges and policy responses.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to engage in comparative analysis of policy impact on citizen behavior and the consequences of the policy cycle for government. Students were required to demonstrate factual knowledge of internal migration patterns and the economic policies that motivated these changes. Students needed to describe the migration patterns and the economic policies that initiated these patterns in Mexico and China. They had to link internal migration to political consequences for each country and compare the Mexican and Chinese governments' responses to migration pressures. The skills tested were descriptive and analytical. Students had four specific tasks: (a) to describe the general patterns of migration in China and Mexico, (b) to describe the economic policies that prompted migration in both countries, (c) to describe the political consequences of the internal migration, and (d) to provide a comparative analysis of the Chinese and Mexican governmental responses to migration pressures.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.46 out of a possible 7 points.

Students were able to answer the factual components of this question, such as the description of the internal migration patterns and the economic policies that prompted these migration behaviors. Students struggled to accurately describe the political consequences of internal migration. Students had the most difficulty with the comparative element of the question, which required a comparative analysis of the Chinese and Mexican governmental responses to migration pressures.

What were common student errors or omissions?

In part (b) some students identified but did not describe the economic policy that prompted migration. In part (c) the most common error was to discuss the political consequences of the economic policies described in part (b) rather than to discuss the political consequences of the migration patterns described in part (a). In part (d) very few students were able to correctly compare the Mexican and Chinese governments' responses to migration pressures.

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?

Continue to emphasize the importance of revisiting the original prompt in a multipart question. Students did an excellent job describing the political consequences of policies that prompted migration instead of describing the political consequences of the migration. Also, continue to work with students on the policy process. Students were unable to effectively communicate an accurate conceptualization of the reality that governments create policies and that these policies are implemented and have impacts — positive and negative — that require a political adjustment, response, or new policy. Based on students' factual knowledge demonstrated in parts (a) and (b), a stronger understanding of the policy process would have allowed them to more easily answer parts (c) and (d).

Question 8

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the question was for students to compare the Duma and the House of Commons. The skills tested were both descriptive and analytical: to describe two functions shared by both the Duma and the House of Commons, to identify electoral systems and examine the impact of electoral systems on party

representation in the House of Commons and the Duma, and to explain why the House of Commons is more effective than the Duma in limiting the power of the executive.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was a 2.71 out of 7 points.

The vast majority of students were able to describe lawmaking as a function of both the House of Commons and the Duma. Most students could describe first-past-the-post/single-member district and proportional representation election systems.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Although most students were able to describe lawmaking as a function of both legislative bodies, fewer were able to describe a second function common to the House of Commons and the Duma. Many students had trouble matching the correct electoral system with the country. Students who correctly described the electoral system in Great Britain as first-past-the-post/single-member district were usually able to describe its impact on party representation. Some students incorrectly stated that such a system requires a majority vote to obtain a seat in the House of Commons. Many students described the election system for the Duma as proportional, but some did not mention the threshold for obtaining seats. Others referred to the mixed system that was used prior to the 2007 election. Students had difficulty explaining the impact of the electoral system on party representation in the Duma.

Most students had difficulty explaining why the House of Commons is more effective in limiting executive power than the Duma. Most students discussed both countries but had trouble making an accurate comparison. Many students overstated the power of the Russian president. Some students discussed one country but not the other.

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?

Emphasize the functions of legislative bodies and the relationship between the legislature and the executive. Emphasize the features of electoral systems and their comparative consequences for party representation. Discuss country-specific aspects of electoral systems, such as the 7 percent threshold for the Duma. The content of this course changes frequently, and teachers must keep informed about changes in each country.