Student Performance Q&A:

2010 AP® Human Geography Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Human Geography were written by the Chief Reader, David A. Lanegran of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn. 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 was designed to enable students to show the degree to which they understood and were able to apply Weber's theory of industrial location. The question prompted them with the name of the theory's creator so answers did not depend on the students' remembering a specific individual's name. In addition to applying the theory to industries they knew something about, students were asked to apply the theory to the location of ethanol plants in the United States.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.89 out of a possible 6 points. Approximately 35 percent of students received no points for this question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common error was confusing the Von Thünen model of agricultural land use around a city with the Weber model of industrial location. This confusion prevented students from developing a logical answer to the question. A small number of students appeared to have no knowledge of the purpose of ethanol plants — they could not answer the portion of the question that required using the map that showed the spatial relationship between corn production per acre and location of ethanol plants.

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 must cover all the models listed in the AP Human Geography Course Description. They also must make sure their students know how to apply the models in new contexts and how to use

them to resolve geographic problems. In addition, teachers should constantly use maps to analyze as well as describe.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question was designed to enable students to show how well they understood the implications of geopolitical state-building strategies and the linkages between economic development and state building.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.66 out of a possible 8 points. Approximately 25 percent of students received no points for this question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

There were two common errors. One resulted from students not reading the question carefully and confusing the states of the United States with states at the national level. The second general error was a lack of understanding of how moving a national capital would promote state development. Some students showed an incomplete knowledge of centripetal and centrifugal forces on the development and stability of national states.

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?

AP Human Geography teachers must be sure to cover all portions of the Course Description, especially the political geography section. In addition, the poor performance on this question indicates that many students need help with basic terminology and using fundamental concepts to answer questions that ask them to synthesize information. Finally, because the word "state" is used two ways in the United States, teachers must make sure that students are aware of the difference and place the word in context.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question was designed to enable students to show how well they understood the demographic transition and the implications of a population's demographic characteristics for economic and social conditions and economic change.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.45 out of a possible 6 points. Approximately 17 percent of students received no points for this question.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most students could answer the part of the question that concerned demographic transition, but many had trouble connecting the demographic characteristics of a population to its economy and

economic development. Students seemed to have the most difficulty understanding the positive impact of a stable or declining population.

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 need to make every effort to help their students understand the connections among the different sections of the AP Human Geography course. Although this year's exam results seem to indicate that students have a basic understanding of the demographic transition and how to interpret population pyramids, they were not really able to draw conclusions from the model and the representations of demographic characteristics. The population unit of the course should not be taught in isolation.