**Advance Placement Human Geography**

**Topics:**

**I. Geography: Its Nature and Perspectives**

The AP Human Geography course emphasizes the importance of geography as a field

of inquiry and briefly discusses the emergence of academic geography in nineteenth century

Europe. The course introduces students to the importance of spatial organization—the

location of places, people, and events, and the connections among places and landscapes—in the understanding of human life on Earth. Geographic concepts emphasized throughout the course are location, space, place, scale, pattern, regionalization, and globalization. These concepts are basic to students’ understanding of spatial interaction and spatial behavior, the dynamics of human population growth and movement, patterns of culture, economic activities, political organization of space, and human settlement patterns, particularly urbanization.

Students learn how to use and interpret maps. They also learn to apply mathematical formulas, models, and qualitative data to geographical concepts. The course also makes use of the concept of the region, encourages students to consider the regional organization of various phenomena, and enables students to create regions in order to illustrate process. A significant outcome of the course is students’ awareness of the relevance

of academic geography to everyday life and decision making. This combination of the

academic and the applied gives students a sophisticated

view of the world and an understanding of the manifold applications of what they have learned in the course.

**II. Population**

An understanding of the ways in which the human population is organized geographically provides AP students with the tools they need to make sense of cultural, political, economic, and urban systems. Thus, many of the concepts and theories encountered in this part of the course crosscut with other course modules. In

addition, the course themes of scale, pattern, place, and interdependence can all be illustrated with population topics. For example, students may analyze the distribution of the human population at different scales: global, continental, national, state or province, and local community. Explanations of why population is growing or declining in some places and not others center on understanding the processes of fertility, mortality, and migration. In stressing the relevance of place context, for example, students may assess why fertility rates have dropped in some parts of the developing world but not in others, and how age–sex structures vary from one country to another. Analysis of refugee flows, immigration, internal migration, and residential mobility helps students appreciate the interconnections between population phenomena and other topics. Environmental degradation may prompt rapid out-migration and urbanization, in turn creating new pressures on the environment. Refugee flows may be magnified when groups have no access to political power because of the way boundaries have been drawn. Rapid immigration to certain parts of the world fosters regional differences in industrial employment and political sentiment toward foreigners. This part of the course also aids in our understanding of contemporary growth trends by considering how models of population change, including the demographic and epidemiological (mortality) transitions. Given these kinds of understandings, students are in a position to evaluate the role, strengths, and weaknesses of major population policies. For example, how might increasing the education levels of females lead to lower fertility?

**III. Cultural Patterns and Processes**

Understanding the components and regional variations of cultural patterns and processes is critical to human geography. In this section of the course, students begin with the concept of culture. They learn how geographers assess the spatial and place dimensions of cultural groups as defined by language, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender, in the present as well as the past. A central concern is to comprehend how cultural patterns are represented at a variety of geographic scales from local to global. Diffusion is a key concept in

understanding how cultural traits (for example, agricultural practices and language) move through time and space to new locations. Students learn that the concept of region is central to the spatial distribution of cultural attributes. The course also explores cultural differences at various scales according to language, religion, ethnicity, and gender. The geographies of language and religion are studied to illustrate processes of cultural diffusion and cultural differences. For example, students learn to distinguish between languages and dialects; ethnic and universalizing religions; and popular and folk cultures, and to understand why each

has a different geographic pattern. An important emphasis of the course is the way culture shapes human–

environment relationships. For example, religion can influence environmental perception and modification.

Students also come to understand how culture is expressed in landscapes, and how landscapes in turn represent cultural identity. Built environments enable the geographer to interpret cultural values, tastes, and sets of beliefs. For example, both folk and contemporary architecture are rich and readily available means of comprehending cultures and changes in landscapes.

**IV. Political Organization of Space**

This section of the course introduces students to the nature and significance of the political organization of territory at different scales. Students learn that political patterns reflect ideas about how Earth’s surface should be organized and affect a wide range of activities and understandings.

The course gives primary attention to the political geography of the modern state or country. Students are introduced to the different forces that shaped the evolution of the contemporary world political map, including the rise of the nation-states in Europe and the influence of colonialism. Students also learn about the basic structure of the political map and the inconsistencies between maps of political boundaries and maps

of ethnic, economic, and environmental patterns. In addition, students consider some of the forces that are changing the role of individual countries in the modern world, including ethnic separatism, devolution, supranationalism, economic globalization, the emergence of regional economic blocs, and the need to confront environmental problems that cross national boundaries. This part of the course also focuses on political units above, below, and beyond the state. For example, at the scale above the state, attention is directed to regional

integration schemes and alliances, such as NATO, the European Union, and NAFTA. At the scale below the state, students are introduced to the ways in which electoral districts, municipal boundaries, and ethnic territories affect political, social, and economic processes. In addition, students study how particular policies affect the spatial organization of cultural and social life, as in the case of racial segregation. Through study of these matters, students understand the importance of the political organization of territory in the contemporary world.

**V. Agriculture and Rural Land Use**

This section of the course explores four themes: the origin and spread of agriculture; the characteristics of the world’s agricultural regions; reasons why these regions function the way they do; and the impact of agricultural change on the quality of life and the environment. Students first examine centers where domestication originated and study the processes by which domesticates spread. This diffusion process makes clear why distinct regional patterns of diet, energy use, and agrarian technology emerged.

The course next examines Earth’s major agricultural production regions. Extensive activity (fishing, forestry, nomadic herding, ranching, shifting cultivation) and intensive activity (plantation agriculture, mixed crop/livestock systems, market gardening, horticulture, factory farms) are examined, as are settlement patterns and landscapes typical of each major agriculture type. In addition, students learn about land survey systems, environmental conditions, and cultural values that created and sustain the patterns. Explanations for the location of agricultural activities are another major concern. Von Thünen’s land use model, agricultural change, such as the impact of factory farming on food supplies, and the distribution of crops and animals are also emphasized. The need for increased food supplies and the capacity to increase food production concludes this section.

**VI. Industrialization and Economic Development**

Economic activity has a spatial character influenced by the interaction of several factors, including natural resources, culture, politics, and history in specific places. By dividing economic activities into key sectors, students can appreciate why natural resources have different values for different societies, and how places and regions acquire comparative advantages for development. In this section of the course, students learn about the geographic elements of industrialization and development, including the Industrial Revolution. Students need

to understand how models of economic development, such as Rostow’s stages of economic growth, Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory, and Millennium Development Goals help to explain why the world is described as being divided into a more welldeveloped core and a less-developed periphery. The course also includes a comparison of location theories, such as those by Weber and von Thünen, which stress resource

and market dependence, with accounts of economic globalization, which accent time–

space compression and the new international division of labor. As an example, students study the reasons why some Asian economies achieved rapid rates of growth in the 1980s while most sub-Saharan African economies experienced decline. In addition, students need to understand patterns of economic growth and decline in

North America. This part of the course also addresses contemporary issues surrounding economic

activity. For example, countries, regions, and communities must confront new patterns of economic inequity that are linked to geographies of interdependence in the global economy. Communities also face difficult questions regarding use and conservation of resources and the impact of pollution on the environment and quality of life. Students study the impact of deindustrialization, the disaggregation of production, the

development of commodity chains, and the rise of consumption and leisure activities.

**VII. Cities and Urban Land Use**

The course divides urban geography into two subfields. The first is the study of systems of cities, focusing on where cities are located and why they are there. This involves an examination of such topics as the current and historical distribution of cities; the political, economic, and cultural functions of cities; reasons for differential

growth among cities; and types of transportation and communication linkages among cities. Theories of settlement geography, such as Christaller’s central place theory, the rank size rule, and the gravity model are also introduced. Quantitative information on such topics as population growth, migration fields, zones of influence, and job creation are used to analyze changes in the urban hierarchy. The second subfield focuses on the form, internal structure, and landscapes of cities and emphasizes what cities are like as places in which to live and work. Students are introduced to such topics as the analysis of patterns of urban land use, racial and

ethnic segregation, types of intracity transportation, architectural traditions, and cycles of uneven construction and development. Students’ understanding of cities as places is enhanced by both quantitative data from the census and qualitative information from narrative accounts and field studies. Students also study models

of internal city structure: for example, the Burgess concentric zone model, the Hoyt sector model, and the Harris–Ullman multiple nuclei model. Topics such as economic systems, culture, architectural history, and the evolution of various transportation technologies in different parts of the world can be useful in the analysis of spatial patterns and landscapes evident in cities. While much of the literature in urban geography focuses on the cities of North America, comparative urbanization is an increasingly important topic. The study of European, Islamic, East and South Asian, Latin American, and sub-Saharan African cities serves to illustrate how differing economic systems and cultural values can lead to variations in the spatial structures and landscapes of urban places. Students also examine current trends in urban development that are affecting urban places, such as the emergence of edge cities, new urbanism, and the gentrification of neighborhoods. In addition, students evaluate urban planning design initiatives and community actions, such as those that reduce energy use and protect the environment, that will shape cities in the future.

**Topic Outline**

Following is an outline of the major content areas covered by the AP Human

Geography Exam, as well as the approximate percentages of the multiple-choice

section that are devoted to each area. This outline is a guide and is not intended as an

exclusive list of topics.

**I. Geography: Its Nature and Perspectives 5–10%**

A. Geography as a field of inquiry

B. Evolution of key geographical concepts and models associated with notable geographers

C. Key concepts underlying the geographical perspective: location, space, place, scale, pattern, regionalization, and globalization

D. Key geographical skills

1. How to use and think about maps and spatial data

2. How to understand and interpret the implications of associations among phenomena in places

3. How to recognize and interpret at different scales the relationships among patterns and processes

4. How to define regions and evaluate the regionalization process

5. How to characterize and analyze changing interconnections among places

E. New geographic technologies, such as GIS, remote sensing, and GPS

F. Sources of geographical ideas and data: the field, census data, and satellite imagery

**II. Population . 13–17%**

A. Geographical analysis of population

1. Density, distribution, and scale

2. Implications of various densities and distributions

3. Patterns of composition: age, sex, race, and ethnicity

4. Population and natural hazards: past, present, and future

B. Population growth and decline over time and space

1. Historical trends and projections for the future

2. Theories of population growth, including the Demographic Transition Model

3. Patterns of fertility, mortality, and health

4. Regional variations of demographic transitions

5. Effects of population policies

C. Population movement

1. Migration selectivity

2. Major voluntary and involuntary migrations at different scales

3. Theories of migration, including push and pull factors, human capital, and life course

4. International migration and refugees

5. Socioeconomic consequences of migration

**III. Cultural Patterns and Processes 13–17%**

A. Concepts of culture

1. Traits

2. Diffusion

3. Acculturation, assimilation, and globalization

4. Cultural regions

B. Cultural differences

1. Language

2 .Religion

3. Ethnicity

4. Gender

5. Popular and folk culture

C. Cultural landscapes and cultural identity

1. Values and preferences

2. Symbolic landscapes and sense of place

3. Environmental impact of cultural attitudes and practices

**IV. Political Organization of Space . 13–17%**

A. Territorial dimensions of politics

1. The concept of territoriality

2. The nature and meaning of boundaries

3. Influences of boundaries on identity, interaction, and exchange

4. Federal and unitary states

5. Spatial relationships between political patterns and patterns of ethnicity, economy, and environment

B. Evolution of the contemporary political pattern

1. The nation-state concept

2. Colonialism and imperialism

3. Democratization

C. Changes and challenges to political–territorial arrangements

1. Changing nature of sovereignty

2. Fragmentation, unification, alliance

3. Supranationalism and devolution

4. Electoral geography, including gerrymandering

5. Terrorism

**V Use . Agriculture and Rural Land 13–17%**

A. Development and diffusion of agriculture

1. Neolithic Agricultural Revolution

2. Second Agricultural Revolution

3. Green Revolution

4. Modern Commercial Agriculture

B. Major agricultural production regions

1. Agricultural systems associated with major bioclimatic zones

2. Variations within major zones and effects of markets

3. Linkages and flows among regions of food production and consumption

C. Rural land use and settlement patterns

1. Models of agricultural land use, including von Thünen’s model

2. Settlement patterns associated with major agriculture types

3. Land use/land cover change, irrigation, conservation (desertification, deforestation)

D. Modern commercial agriculture

1. Biotechnology, including genetically modified plants and animals

2. Spatial organization and diffusion of industrial agriculture

3. Organic farming and local food production

4. Environmental impacts of agriculture

**VI. Industrialization and Economic Development 13–17%**

A. Growth and diffusion of industrialization

1. The changing roles of energy and technology

2. Industrial Revolution

3. Evolution of economic cores and peripheries

4. Geographic critiques of models of economic localization

(i.e., bid rent, comparative costs of transportation), industrial

location, economic development, and world systems

B. Contemporary patterns and impacts of industrialization and development

1. Spatial organization of the world economy

2. Variations in levels of development

3. Deindustrialization and economic restructuring

4. Globalization and international division of labor

5. Natural resources and environmental concerns

6. Sustainable development

7. Local development initiatives: government policies

8. Women in development

**VII. Cities and Urban Land Use . 13–17%**

A. Development and character of cities

1. Origin of cities

2. Rural–urban migration and urban growth

3. Global cities and megacities

4. Suburbanization and edge cities

B. Models of urban systems

1. Rank-size rule

2. Central place theory

3. Gravity model

C. Models of internal city structure

1. Concentric zone model

2. Sector model

3. Multiple-nuclei model

4. Changing employment mix

5. Changing demographic and social structures

6. Uneven development, ghettoization, and gentrification

D. Built environment and social space

1. Housing

2. Transportation and infrastructure

3. Political organization of urban areas

4. Urban planning and design

5. Patterns of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status