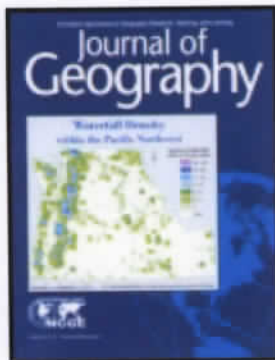


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### Writing in Undergraduate Geography Classes: Faculty Challenges and Rewards

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# Writing in Undergraduate Geography Classes: Faculty Challenges and Rewards

Lynn M. Patterson and Vanessa Slinger-Friedman

## ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have shown both anecdotal and formal evidence of the benefits students obtain from doing writing activities in classes. Little formal discussion exists about how student writing in geography classes professionally affects faculty. In this article, focus shifts from student-derived benefits of writing in classes to faculty challenges and rewards for implementing writing in their classes. Based on the experience of participating in a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Fellows program, the authors discuss how faculty overcame challenges and reaped the benefits of student writing in their teaching and scholarly pursuits.

**Key Words:** *writing in classes, innovative pedagogy, scholarship of teaching and learning, faculty development, faculty challenges and rewards*

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential skill for teaching undergraduate geography. Writing can be used as a learning tool to help clarify ideas and communicate these ideas to their instructors and classmates in order to demonstrate their comprehension of discipline-related material. In geography, there are five modes to transmit geographic information: visual, digital, cognitive, mathematical, and verbal (National Research Council 1997). Writing is essential for verbal description. While visual, digital, cognitive, and mathematical modes stand alone to communicate geographic information, writing can be used to highlight or explain data and results gleaned from these modes. Thus, helping students become better geographers not only includes teaching them cartography, GIS, cognitive mapping, and mathematical modeling, but also involves helping them to express their thoughts more clearly through the written word. With this combined impact on learning and communication, writing in the geography classroom is important to the development of students who think like geographers (Libbee and Young 1983; Maraffa 1985; Hooey and Bailey 2005; McGuinness 2009).

Employers and geography graduates both consider writing to be an important tool in preparing geography students to enter and function in a rapidly globalizing world. For instance, a survey of geography graduates determined that some of the top thirteen most valued skills for career progression were analytical, knowledge-acquisition, explanatory, problem-solving, and writing (Clark and Higgett 1997). Yet writing seems to be a skill that is often associated with composition classes and causes concern among geography faculty. For many instructors, student writing translates into a labor-intensive grading exercise that takes away from precious course material and research time. With this limited view, faculty often fail to recognize or appreciate the opportunities of using writing in their classes as a way to enhance their teaching and contribute to their scholarly pursuits.

To date, most of the research on writing activities in geography classes has focused on the impact of writing on student learning (e.g., Estaville 1988; Michalak 1989; Winchell and Elder 1992; Cook 2000; Haigh 2001; Hooey and Bailey 2005; Thompson, Pilgrim, and Oliver 2005; Chappell 2006; Dummer *et al.* 2008; McGuinness 2009; Slinger-Friedman and Patterson 2012). As Miller points out, the focus of many past studies on writing in geography and other disciplines has “been on the cognitive and affective benefits that students directly derive as a result of writing” (1992, 329). This article takes a different perspective toward writing in the geography classroom. Writing in geography classes can also contribute to faculty portfolios in the areas of teaching and scholarship. Here, we examine faculty challenges and rewards associated with incorporating writing exercises into introductory undergraduate geography courses. Specifically, we present our own experiences as to why and how we included writing in the classroom and how these efforts affected us as faculty.

## BACKGROUND

The relationship between writing in geography classes and the impact on faculty is one that merits further exploration. Almost as an afterthought, authors of studies on the impact of writing on students mentioned how implementing writing in their classes affected some aspect of their teaching (Walker 1996; Haigh 2001; Park 2003). On a positive note, Haigh (2001) remarked that the journals he used provided useful feedback on different teaching techniques. More cautiously, Walker (1996) expressed concern that faculty might be tentative

to include writing as part of geography instruction because faculty might not feel qualified to teach writing or have trouble creating appropriate writing exercises for students. Substantive discussion of how writing in the classroom impacts faculty teaching and scholarship is still lacking in the geography literature.

Slightly more detail on faculty benefits and challenges is found in the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) literature. For example, Fulwiler (1984) suggests that benefits for faculty in any discipline include new teaching methods, increased scholarly writing by faculty, the creation of a community of scholars, and tenure and promotion opportunities as associated with writing in noncomposition classes. In spite of these potential benefits, concerns by professors persist over course content, course design, grading loads, and pressure to publish. Carter (2007) contends that faculty are hesitant to include writing in their classes to the potential detriment of course content. Also, the fear of additional grading may discourage instructors from incorporating more written assignments into their courses (Howard 2002; Hedengren 2004; Young 2006).

Due to increasing demands of teaching, research, and administrative work on faculty at American colleges and universities, faculty may not be willing to experiment with innovative pedagogy (Miller 2010). This unwillingness often occurs in cases where scholarship of teaching and learning is not valued as highly as basic or applied discipline research (Walker, Baeppler, and Cohen 2008). Furthermore, promoting writing activities in classes can be a hard sell in academic environments where the faculty reward structure is heavily weighted toward publications of research versus innovative teaching.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF WRITING IN GEOGRAPHY CLASSES

In our case we were introduced to the formal pedagogical approach of writing across the curriculum through the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) at Kennesaw State University's WAC workshop in 2008. In 2009 the program evolved to include a WAC Fellows Program in which we participated from 2009 to 2011. As Fellows, we attended workshops and met regularly with a group of other Fellows who were instituting writing in their classrooms.

As an opportunity to utilize this innovative pedagogy and hopefully improve our teaching, over the past three years we incorporated writing in our introductory world regional and human geography classes. In choosing writing activities to include in the geography classroom, we considered our course goals and the intended outcome of the writing assignments. As our common teaching philosophies are based on both the acquisition of knowledge and its application, we wanted writing exercises that allowed students to understand concepts (content acquisition); identify their own potential shortcomings in terms of comprehension (reflective thinking); and demonstrate

through written communication that they could apply these concepts to real world, relatable issues and events (application of knowledge). From an effective pedagogy perspective, we also wanted students to be engaged with the class and its material (student engagement). Table 1 lists the chosen writing activities with their respective course goals.

These courses were taught in both online and classroom settings. These two different formats had their own unique opportunities for meeting the pedagogical goals of engaging students and comprehension of course content. For example, in a well-designed online course, students can be held accountable for participation through discussions and other interactive writing exercises that engage them as active learners rather than being passive participants (Swan 2001; Lapadat 2002; Mabrito 2004). In larger, lecture-style classes, students can sometimes get lost in the crowd; however, classroom interaction can be facilitated with small or large group discussions based on writing assignments. Students can feel more confident in participating because they have had opportunity to be reflective with the content (Ventis 2000). A summary of the writing activities used in these courses follows:

#### Online Discussions

Online discussions were used in both World Regional Geography and Human Geography courses. In addition to the desired content acquisition and application of knowledge, the discussions were used in online courses as a way to engage students with the course material and also with the instructor and their peers. In each module, students had to participate in an online written discussion about a current event relating to the region or topic being studied (Appendix 1). These discussions reinforced geographic concepts and demonstrated how geography has everyday meaning that can be viewed in the popular media. For these discussions, the instructor choose a topic and posted links to additional information. For their discussions, students were asked to: (1) specifically identify how geography played a role in impacting the current event; (2) reference information from the text citing geographic concepts that were applicable; and (3) encourage each other to explore geography as a new way of looking at the current event. No limits were set on the number of discussion replies a student could post; however, each student was required to post at least one response. The responses were graded based on the student's ability to directly reference and incorporate materials from the readings, lectures, and course materials in the context of the topic discussed.

#### Note Cards

In the large lecture introductory geography courses for both the World Regional Geography and Human Geography courses, note cards were distributed to students at the beginning of the class period and collected at the end. They were asked to use these cards to deliberate

**Table 1.** Writing intensive activities and course goals.

Course	Writing Activity	Course Goals Addressed
World Regional Geography	Online Discussion	Content acquisition Student engagement Application of knowledge
	Note cards	Student engagement Reflective thinking
	Wiki	Content acquisition Student engagement
Human Geography	Online Discussion	Content acquisition Student engagement Application of knowledge
	Notecards	Student engagement Reflective thinking
	Student Worksheets	Content acquisition Application of knowledge
	Research Paper	Content acquisition Student engagement Application of knowledge
	Essay	Content acquisition Reflective thinking Application of knowledge
	Online Reflective Journal	Reflective thinking

on specific topics covered in the course material and/or write down questions on topics they did not understand (Appendices 1 and 2). The purpose of the note cards, used every other week, was to allow students to think more deeply about the topics being discussed. By putting their ideas and opinions down on paper first, the hope was that students would be more articulate and more comfortable participating in discussions. The note cards were also a way to obtain immediate feedback about the class lecture: what had worked or not worked and whether or not there was material that students were having difficulty comprehending. The note cards were assigned an extra credit point for completion rather than given a formal grade. Since the note cards were distributed and collected during the same class, there was always 100 percent or close to 100 percent participation.

#### Wiki

For the in-class World Regional Geography course, at the beginning of the semester each student was assigned a country from one of the world regions to research and present information about that country within a course wiki. Using their wiki page, students presented information and conducted analysis about their country based on its political, economic, cultural, and physical geography (Appendix 2). Students were required to read each other's wiki pages and provide intraregional comparisons within the comment section. The wiki country report was designed to meet the course goals of content acquisition, application of knowledge, and student engagement. With the wiki

format, students could easily edit their work, see each other's research, give students and the instructor the ability to provide feedback and comments on the writing assignment. Though the wiki format was new to many students, it worked well as a way to engage students with the course material and also with the instructor and their peers.

#### Student Worksheets

In the Human Geography course, in-class worksheets gave students an opportunity to review and apply concepts from course lectures and audiovisual materials (Appendix 2). Used approximately three times within a semester, the worksheets enabled the instructor to garner feedback on the students' understanding of course material. The in-class worksheets were collected but not given formal grades; instead, they were assigned one extra credit point for completion.

#### Research Paper

In the in-class Human Geography course, a short research paper, broken down into two smaller prewriting activities as building blocks for the paper, was assigned. The instructor provided feedback on these prewriting assignments and a student peer review gave the writers another opportunity for comments on content and style. The purpose of the prewriting steps was to make the writing process itself, and the process of thinking like a geographer, a larger focus of instruction. Prewriting exercises for geography research papers are linked with more effectively teaching students how a geographer thinks, asks questions, and uses supporting evidence while doing research (Libbee and Young 1983). The research paper and prewriting activities were assigned a grade.

#### Essays

Short essays were assigned in the online Human Geography course as a means to assess content acquisition and application of knowledge. A nontraditional format, using the RAFT (role, audience, format, topic) model was used in lieu of a conventional essay (Appendix 2). This different style encouraged students to use their own voices to explain geographic concepts as applied to real world problems. Essays were approximately four—five pages long and were graded using a rubric with an emphasis on content and application of concepts. Only a small percentage of the grade was based on grammar and style.

Table 2. Faculty challenges and rewards to incorporating writing in the classroom.

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**Faculty challenges and rewards to incorporating writing in the classroom**


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**Challenges**

- Grading
  - Time-consuming grading associated with writing assignments
- Qualifications
  - Concern over creativity for developing appropriate writing assignments
- Tenure and promotion pressure
  - Limited institutional support or recognition for improving teaching through innovative pedagogy
  - Emphasis on basic or applied research, and not on scholarship of teaching and learning

**Rewards**

- Pedagogy
    - Improved teaching through implementing new methods
    - Received instant student feedback
    - Achieved course goals
  - Community of scholars
    - Exchange of teaching methods
    - Collaboration for research and publications
  - Scholarship
    - Increased faculty writing
    - Publication of experiences
    - Recognition of scholarship of teaching and learning in tenure and promotion review
- 

**Online Reflective Journal**

A reflective journal was assigned to students in the online Human Geography course. This journal was designed to provide regular feedback from the student to the instructor on what concepts may not have been clear or if there were problems with the effectiveness of module components. The journal required students to reflect on their experience with the course material and identify at least one aspect of the module that was clear and one that required additional study or clarification. Entries in the journal received a completion grade, rather than a grade for grammar or content.

The examples presented above were designed specifically for our courses and represent only a few of the possibilities we might have chosen to help achieve course objectives.

**FACULTY CHALLENGES AND REWARDS**

Incorporating writing into our geography classes presented both challenges and rewards to us as faculty (Table 2). While we faced challenges, consistent with the concerns expressed in the literature, the writing exercises used in these courses offered more than the opportunity to affect student learning; they also provided us with an opportunity to improve our teaching, become a member of a community of scholars with the a common purpose to increase student writing, and to produce scholarship in the area of teaching and learning in geography.

**Improved Pedagogy**

As conscientious instructors, we are interested in how to continually improve our teaching and courses. By employing writing in our geography classes, we were able to address course content goals and to gain valuable feedback from students. Through the essays, worksheets, and discussions, we were able to see if students really understood the material because they were able to use their own voices in conveying their comprehension rather than trying to impress the instructor in a formal report. Furthermore, the structure of these exercises allowed students to link geographic concepts with real-world events and issues. The RAFT model allowed students to be creative in their communications while demonstrating their understanding and ability to apply their knowledge of the material. In the online discussions, students were able to utilize the geographic

perspective to analyze their own everyday experiences. This made geography much more meaningful to them.

Student comments on the note cards and reflective journals provided us with immediate and regular feedback regarding which content and components of the course were clear and effective and those that were not. Often instructors must wait for the end-of-the-semester student evaluations to receive such feedback. By using these writing exercises, we were able to address student questions about course material or policies by the next class. In this way our teaching became much more responsive and targeted and the content was not compromised with the introduction of in-class writing exercises. For example, in the online human geography course, students read Pattison's "Four Traditions of Geography" to help frame the geographic perspective (Pattison 1964). Although an audio lecture accompanied a PowerPoint lecture to explain the traditions, remarks from the online journal clearly communicated that students were still uncomfortable with the material. So, the instructor uploaded an additional explanation to help students comprehend and distinguish between the traditions.

In modifying our courses, we were concerned about our ability to be creative in designing writing assignments. Prior to our participation in the WAC Fellows program, we used more traditional writing assignments like standard essays. Now, armed with an array of resources including books, journals, workshops, Web sites, and peer information exchange (e.g., Bean 2001; Hedengren 2004; Hooey and Bailey 2005; Young 2006; WAC Clearinghouse n.d.), we drew

inspiration from the wide variety of alternative formats and were able to think outside the box in creating our student writing assignments. With implementation of various types of writing activities, we found that the development of writing assignments is an ongoing process in which trial-and-error plays an essential role in helping faculty figure out what does or does not work and make modifications and improvements to these teaching tools. For example, in the first iteration of online discussions, the guiding questions were too broad so students were not focused on applying geographic concepts. The questions were revised, offering more detail and the rubric informed students of the value of including details for the geographic references. The key challenge was asking questions that invited the students to *discuss* and not just answer the questions posed by the instructor. Overall, however, in reviewing student work we were rewarded for this effort as the quality of student assignments increased and the submissions were far more enjoyable to read and grade. Thus, the creativity of assignments is only limited by faculty imaginations and exposure to best practices for creating such assignments.

As mentioned earlier, one challenge to incorporating more writing into the classes is the fear of additional grading that can be time-consuming. While there was certainly more student work to review, the amount of time spent grading was dependent on the type of grade given. Our workshop training also provided us with resources that gave alternative methods of grading that were more efficient (e.g., Bean 2001). Since the note cards and online journals did not require a grade per se, the time spent was worthwhile because it provided us feedback to improve the courses and identify areas where we could assist students with unclear material. We discovered that developing a rubric for grading the essays and discussion boards definitely shortened grading time (Appendix 3). We also found that the research paper and prewrites were too cumbersome for the large lecture human geography course. After the initial experience of grading that many papers, the instructor created a modified version of this writing assignment for use in subsequent semesters where the paper was shortened from ten to five pages and peer reviews were used not once as a feedback mechanism, but multiple times as encouraged by Stainer (1997).

### *Community of Scholars*

An unanticipated and very positive outcome of our experience with utilizing writing in our classes was that we were able to leverage our desire to improve our teaching with broader faculty development goals as scholars. Within the Fellows program, we became part of a community of scholars who were all interested in writing in their own disciplines. The dialogue between these scholars began at the workshops and deepened when small groups of three to eight met monthly to discuss writing techniques implemented within their classes and share positive and negative experiences. Dialogue in these meetings not only lent support to faculty for their endeavors, it also provided

them with a sounding board to bounce ideas off each other for modified or new writing techniques. As a result, many of the faculty who attended the workshops and Fellows program have gone on to introduce writing into several or all of their classes and have altered their teaching methods in some way.

### *Scholarship*

As scholars, we are expected to contribute to our discipline through research and publications. As Walker, Baepler, and Cohen (2008) point out, at the same time they expect pedagogic innovation, administrators are asking for higher standards for tenure and promotion, including publications. Incorporating more student writing into classes can be quite daunting when faced with these pressures. Initially, we were justifiably concerned that learning and implementing a new teaching technique would take precious time from our research agendas. Our participation in the WAC Fellows program actually had scholarship-related benefits associated with it. First, we were required to engage in writing exercises during the Fellows program. These exercises served the same purpose as what we intended for our students—we wrote to clarify ideas and for communication. Second, we were inspired to design an experiment testing the effectiveness of student writing on performance (Slinger-Friedman and Patterson forthcoming). Third, as we gained more confidence in testing and implementing the writing activities, we began to reflect on the impact the writing had on ourselves as faculty—this manuscript. Thus, we were able to develop our own scholarship of teaching with two studies on our experiences.

We are fortunate that at KSU and in our department the scholarship of teaching is a recognized pathway to promotion. This may be a positive sign of a trend across the United States in which “the scholarship of teaching of learning, in which faculty members examine the effects of their teaching strategies, is spreading” and “the advent of conferences and publications marks its increasing acceptance as serious scholarship” (Miller 2010).

### **CONCLUSION**

At the outset, we were interested in including writing in our geography classes to improve student learning. As mentioned earlier, writing is an essential component of the geography discipline. “To make writing a component of the teaching of geography begins with the supposition that to understand geography and communicate that understanding to others requires the skills of language and provides creative opportunities for learning” (Walker 1996, 158). While geographers do communicate using other media, writing is “the most generic skill students of geography invoke in order to share their learning with others” (Proctor, Sutton, and Michaels 1995, 571).

Our primary goals as WAC Fellows were to find innovative ways to improve our teaching by engaging students, encouraging student writing, and helping students to better

learn course material. While we accomplished those goals, an unexpected result from the implementation of the writing activities was the effect it had on us as faculty. In spite of fears of getting in over our heads with grading student writing, our experiences with these writing activities were generally positive. We found that participation in the WAC Fellows program and the incorporation of writing in the geography classroom benefited us both as instructors and as scholars.

Unfortunately, in many institutions of higher education, a student, faculty, and institutional perception that writing belongs principally in English classes still exists (Carter 2007). From this perspective, faculty commonly overlook the opportunity that writing can assist in student learning, engagement, and reflection. Equally important, it may mean that faculty may fail to realize that writing in classes can further their own development as educators and scholars by engaging them in innovative pedagogy and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

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## APPENDIX 1: DETAILED WRITING ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES FOR WORLD REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY CLASSES

### World Regional Geography Sample Writing Assignments

#### Online Discussion

1. Go to the link provided and read the story. Then, using concepts covered in the lecture, in the text, and any other sources you find, discuss the political leadership in El Salvador based on the following questions: What were the conditions in El Salvador that led to a leftist politician becoming elected as president? What are some of the other countries that have leftist governments? Where are they located relative to one another and why might this be relevant? Why might leftist governments be increasing in Latin America? Why might the United States be concerned about leftist governments in Latin America?
2. Go to the link provided and read the story. Then, using concepts covered in the lecture, in the text, and any other sources you find, discuss the economy of Saskatchewan, Canada, based on the following questions: First locate Saskatchewan—why would people be surprised its economy is growing? How does physical geography impact the economy of Saskatchewan? How do the neighboring provinces affect the local economy? What might be some reasons that people would/would not want to move there? What is the relationship of oil between the U.S. and Canada?

#### Note Cards

Answer the following two questions: (1) Describe something new or interesting that you learned in class today. State how this material changed your perspective on the topic discussed, and (2) State something that was confusing or unclear in lecture today. Provide any suggestions that you may have to improve the lecture today.

#### Wiki

Within a two-page (double-spaced) wiki report for your assigned country address the following questions or ideas: Outline briefly the major physical landforms found in your country. Provide political, economic, and demographic information about your country. Specifically answer the following questions: what is the population size, rate of natural increase, infant mortality, percentage of the population in urban or rural areas, the population density, per capita GNP, total fertility rate, and percentage of population in the different age categories? Based on this demographic information, what are the major population-related issues being dealt with by the government of your country? What are the current day events occurring in your country? Five (5) points of this assignment are earned by reading and posting relevant and substantive comments on the wikis of other students after they have posted them. In the comment section of your wiki address the following: How does your country compare with other countries in your region?



## APPENDIX 2: DETAILED WRITING ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES FOR HUMAN GEOGRAPHY CLASSES

## Human Geography Sample Writing Assignments

**Online Discussion**

Watch the video and read the provided articles on Italy's population decline. What are the contributing factors to Italy's decline? How might you use Pattison's traditions of place, space, and human-environment interaction to study Italy's population decline? As a geographer, what recommendations might you give to turn the population decline around?

**Note Cards**

- Using the note card provided draw a simple map of the local area in which you live. In particular, include and label features on the map that show locations and places that you think are significant and that hold particular importance to you. Share your map with a student next to you. Discuss the similarities and difference between your maps. Think about the idea that people living in similar locations can have different cognitive maps.
- Using the note card provided briefly discuss a social issue/problem that could be addressed by the application of GIS. State specifically the role you imagine that GIS would play in addressing this social issue.

**Student Worksheets**

- Study carefully the population distribution map of Southeast Asia. Write a couple of sentences to describe the spatial distribution of the population in Monsoon Asia.
- Suggest reasons for the spatial distribution of population that you see in Monsoon Asia.
- Calculate the natural increase rate (NIR) of Niger with a crude birth rate of 48/1,000 and a crude death rate of 15/1,000.
- Give an example of another country that might have such a NIR. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- Calculate the natural increase rate of Germany with a crude birth rate of 8/1,000 and a crude death rate of 10/1,000.
- Give an example of another country that might have such a NIR. Explain the reasons for your choice.
- Suggest some factors that might have contributed to Niger and Germany having different NIRs.
- If you were a national leader in Niger, would you be concerned that your country has such high population growth? Why or why not?
- If you were a national leader in Germany, would you be concerned that your country has reached zero/negative population growth? Why or why not?

**Research Paper**

Using the geographical perspective to examine poverty, each student will complete the following three step process during the semester.

- Proposal:** The professor will provide a list of potential topics; however, students may select their own topic related to poverty. To help focus the paper, submit a 200-word proposal on your proposed topic that also includes a relevant map and a bibliography with two sources (one must be an academic source.)
- The geographic perspective in your topic:** Submit one-page single-spaced paper in which you discuss the geographic perspective with regard to your paper project topic. You must use two or more of the four traditions of geography. Include citations and bibliography with at least four sources.
- Final paper:** Using the paper proposal and geographic perspective writing assignment as stepping-stones, submit a five-page single-spaced paper on your topic using the geographic perspective to examine poverty. Include a relevant map and bibliography with at least five sources (three must be from academic sources) and tables and graphs are needed. Use the four traditions and terms, themes, and concepts that you learned in the class.

**Essay**

Prepare one 4–5 page essay where you assume one of the following identities and complete the assignment presenting the geographic perspective by using at least two of the geographic traditions covered during the course.

- As a geographer and planner for the Atlanta Regional Commission, a developer has approached you to discuss a new residential development at the northern end of I-575. Your boss has asked you to explain to the developer how this development will affect the economic, environmental, and social cohesiveness of the Metro region. Prepare a report that outlines urban sprawl with specific examples to support your assertions of its either detrimental or positive impacts. Be sure and explicitly state which geographic tradition(s) you used to frame your report. Make recommendations to the developer on how s/he might alter the plans for the development to positively impact the region.

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**APPENDIX 2: DETAILED WRITING ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES FOR HUMAN GEOGRAPHY CLASSES (Continued)**

2. You are the mayor (with a degree in geography) of a small town near a large metropolitan area. Census 2010 has been completed and limited data are just now being released. You realize there has likely been significant undercounting in your community. Write a speech that you will deliver at the next town-hall meeting (which is well attended by the citizens in your town) as to the importance of the census. Discuss the purpose of the census, what undercounting is, and what the political, economic, social, fiscal, and environmental impacts of undercounting are. Use the geographic traditions to frame your speech. Make recommendations to your constituents about how you will overcome the undercounting problem and why they should complete the census in 2020.

3. Since the debt ceiling crisis has embroiled the United States for the last few months, it is a current and important social issue that can be studied using the geographic perspective. Write a letter to your new pen pal in [foreign country of your choice] where you explain what the issue is/has been. Since your pen pal is not an economist or American citizen, but a college student much like yourself, explain what the global/international, national, and local ramifications of the debt crisis are or could be. And, why you and your pen pal should be interested in what is going on. Note: this is not a platform for expressing partisan views—do not grandstand based on political views.

**Online Journal**

For each module, you must write a two paragraph reflection on the material covered in the course. The respective paragraphs should begin:

The most interesting thing I learned in this module was ... [explain what and why and where it was from (e.g., PowerPoint, discussion board, reading)].

The most unclear aspect of this module was ... [explain what, why, where it was covered (e.g., PowerPoint, discussion board, reading)] and provide suggestions on how to improve the module].

**APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE RUBRICS FOR GRADING ONLINE DISCUSSIONS AND ESSAYS**

Sample 1: Online Discussion Rubric (out of 3)				
	Incomplete	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Content	(0 points) Did not complete all requirements.	(1 points) Completed all requirements but lacked depth in your answer.	(2 points) Completed all requirements. Overall good answer with one or two missed points.	(3 points) Completed all requirements. Included significant detail and no omissions.
Sample 2: Essay Rubric (out of 100)				
	Incomplete	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Summary	(0 points) No summary.	(12 points) Incomplete description of issue or missing details.	(18 points) Complete description of issue with limited details.	(25 points) Complete description of issue and substantial details.
Clear and appropriate references to geographic traditions	(0 points) No references to geographic traditions.	(12 points) Did not reference all applicable traditions or provided no detail.	(18 points) Referenced all applicable traditions with little detail.	(25 points) Referenced all applicable traditions with adequate details.
Use of supporting examples or data	(0 points) No supporting examples or data.	(10 points) Provided supporting examples for some, but not all, traditions, with no explanation.	(15 points) Provided supporting examples for some, but not all, traditions and included explanation.	(20 points) Provided supporting examples with explanation for all traditions.

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**APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE RUBRICS FOR GRADING ONLINE DISCUSSIONS AND ESSAYS (Continued)**

Answered all parts of question	(0 points) Did not answer all parts of the question.	(0 points) Did not answer all parts of the question.	(0 points) Did not answer all parts of the question.	(5 points) Answered all parts of the question.
Clarity and style	(0 points) Difficult to understand.	(2 points) Majority of sections lacking clarity and flow.	(3 points) Majority of sections demonstrate clarity of thought.	(5 points) Clarity of thought throughout, good flow.
Sentence structure and mechanics	(0 points) Major problems in sentence structure and grammar. Frequent errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling.	(2 points) Problems in sentence structure and grammar. Frequent errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling.	(3 points) Mostly correct use of punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, etc.	(5 points) Correct use of punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, etc.
Recommendations	(0 points) No recommendations	(5 points) Limited recommendations with no details.	(7 points) Recommendations with some details.	(10 points) Recommendations with substantial details.
References	(0 points) No references.	(2 points) Inadequate number of references or improper formatting.	(3 points) Adequate number of references but improper formatting.	(5 points) Adequate number of references and proper formatting.

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