

Teaching AP Human Geography in 1 Semester

By Lisa Sanders

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Introduction: My name is Lisa Sanders and I am a social studies teacher at Austin High School in Austin, MN. I have been teaching AP Human Geography since 2000 and have taught AP Human Geography as a one semester class (from 2005 – 2015) in the fall of each year. From 2015 to 2025, I taught AP Human Geography and on-level Human Geography as a two-semester class, but recently returned to teaching each course as a one-semester course starting in the fall of 2025. I have been an AP Reader for the AP Human Geography exam since 2007 and have also been a table leader at the AP Human Geography exam reading. I am also a member of the Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education (MAGE), National Council for Geographic Education and have organized multiple field trips related to agriculture and urban development in southern Minnesota for MAGE in the past. I have worked with other Minnesota teachers to create lessons and assessments to assist teachers in teaching human geography. I have also presented this information to districts and teachers in Minnesota who are looking to begin teaching human geography in their districts.

Helpful Tips

1. **Fall Semester is the Ideal Time to Teach This Course:** Ideally, if teachers are going to teach this course in 1 semester, it would be best to teach it during the 1st/Fall semester as this will ensure teachers have enough time to cover the AP Human Geography concepts in preparation for the AP Exam in May.

2. **AP Human Geography Curriculum:** Teachers need to follow the AP Human Geography course description and cover the materials listed in the course exam description (CED). My advice to teachers is to make a list of the concepts that need to be covered for each of the topic and use that to guide their curriculum development. Teachers need to be focused and be sure they cover all the concepts in the course description, which may mean changing how the course is taught and will require students to complete work outside of school. Teachers may need to look at utilizing a learning management system and/or flipped classroom strategies. Teachers will find it very useful to utilize the resources posted in AP Classroom for each of the units of Human Geography. There are videos you can assign students to view on each topic as well as questions (multiple choice and free response) to assess student understanding of the concepts/information presented in each topic. These questions can be assigned as formative and summative assessments.

3. **AP Human Geography Exam Review Sessions:** While teaching the course during 1st/Fall Semester is the best for covering the concepts, it does result in a 3-month break between covering the material in class and taking the AP Human Geography exam in May. To assist my students in preparing for the AP exam, I offer review sessions for my students. These review sessions begin 6 weeks before the AP exam and include 2-hour Saturday morning review sessions. I also provide my students with a calendar of which units will be covered during each review session. I also provide my students with access to these review materials in our learning management system. (My district technology team creates a Review Course for 2nd semester, which I provide the students who are taking the AP Exam with access to). By providing my students with a calendar, they know what concepts will be discussed during each review session so they can be prepared for these sessions. It also provides my students

with the opportunity to select those review sessions and content that the students need the most help with. While I encourage my students to attend all sessions, as it will assist them in preparing for the exam, they are not required to attend review sessions in order to take the AP exam.

4. **Teacher Resources:** There are numerous resources available for AP Human Geography teachers. The resources listed below provide information and resources to assist the teachers in teaching AP Human Geography.
 - a. AP Human Geography Facebook site – This site has new information and resources on a daily basis, which geography teachers have generously shared.
 - b. AP Classroom created by College Board – This site provides you with access to videos and questions for each topic in each unit to support you and your students in this course.
 - c. Lockdown Browser – If students are NOT able to download items to their school issued devices, you will need to have your district technology team gain access to the Lockdown Browser for AP Classroom and provide your students with access to it. When utilizing AP Classroom to administer tests, you can utilize the advanced settings and use Lockdown Browser to secure your exams.

5. **Textbooks:** If possible, allow students to keep their AP Human Geography textbooks or continue having digital access to their textbooks until they take the AP Human Geography exam in May. This will provide students with the opportunity, if they choose so, to review any material in the textbook that they feel they need to review.

6. **Utilize a Learning Management System to provide students with access to classroom materials:** I have found that providing students with access to the course content (Power Points, assignments, etc.) through a learning management system is very valuable as it provides students the opportunity to access this material whenever they need to. I have found this is a great resource for students who were absent and it has decreased the number of students asking for additional copies of assignments, calendar, etc. as these items are all online. As a teacher, you need to select the format that works best for you and works with your district's technology plan. I utilize Schoology and Microsoft OneDrive for assignments, as this is what our district uses. My students were able to access it on their phones and were able to access any Power Points, assignments, etc. whenever they needed to. Teachers should contact their technology department and administration regarding which format to utilize.

7. **History Background:** My students will take AP Human Geography as 10th graders and have previously taken World History as 9th graders (either AP or on-level). Ideally this scope and sequence will provide my students with the historical background that will assist them in learning Human Geography because in order to understand some geographic concepts, students need to have an understanding of world history as well. If this is not possible, teachers will need to incorporate world history into their teaching of Human Geography in order to assist students understand the concepts being taught. Teachers may also need to incorporate aspects of United States history into their teaching of human geography in order to assist students understand the concepts being taught.

8. **Summer Assignment:** If teachers give their students a summer assignment, be sure to work with this assignment during the first week of school. Teachers will need to determine the summer assignment that works best for their students. I do not personally give my students a summer assignment, but I have done so in the past. My students will take a 100-country map test with the first 2 weeks of the school year. In the past, I have mailed a packet to all my students who will be taking AP Human Geography in the fall. This packet would include a map list of countries by continent and a packet of blank maps of the continents for the students to use in preparing for their 100-country map test which they will take the first week of school. Instead of mailing these to students, I now send students and parents a portal push through Infinite Campus (our grading system) a couple of weeks prior to the start of the school year. The portal push will include an introductory letter to the course, the map packet and map list of countries by continent. My rationale for doing this is to ensure that students know where countries are in the world as they will be working with data from countries around the world, throughout the course. I feel it is important that the students know where the countries located so they can start making connections regarding these countries and drawing conclusions regarding their similarities and differences. During the first week of school, I go through this information with the students and provide physical copies of the map lists and blank maps for the students to use in studying for this map test.

9. **Notes:** Teachers will need to establish their own requirements and format for notes. I have utilized guided reading questions (based on the topics covered in each unit of the CED) for students to use as a guide to assist them in taking notes on their textbook/article readings and/or AP Classroom videos. These questions are NOT collected or graded but can also be used by students on OPEN NOTE quizzes throughout the unit. While I do not require students to use these questions for taking notes, they can utilize whatever format they want to take notes. If students are struggling with how to take notes, teachers may need to share different note taking

strategies with students at the beginning of the semester and then allow students to use the strategy that works best for them.

10. Notebooks: My students are required to keep a 3-ring binder in which they organize all their notes, vocabulary, class activities, etc. by unit. My rationale for this is to provide students with an organized format for the content we cover in each unit and easy access to finding the material they need when it is referenced in other units. This also assists my students when it comes time to review in the spring of the year – after not having class for 3 months. They have all their materials in one location and can access them and review them in preparation for the AP Exam in May. Some teachers have utilized Interactive notebooks in which students take notes on specific aspects of the textbook on the right side of their notebook and then add in-class activities to the left side of their notebook. Teachers have also used foldables which provide students with the opportunity to be creative and crafty while gathering information about major geographic concepts such as the 3 agricultural revolutions, the different economic activities, types of agriculture, stages of the demographic transition model, etc. Students are able to display these concepts in a visual format that makes it easier to compare these concepts or aspects of these concepts.

11. Vocabulary: Vocabulary is a key component to the study of Human Geography, as many of the terms and concepts are new to students. Teachers need to determine what works best for their students regarding vocabulary. There are a variety of techniques and strategies that teachers use for vocabulary ... flashcards, vocabulary charts, definitions, vocabulary hexagons, etc. Teachers need to make sure that they work with the vocabulary with their students in class. Vocabulary is a vital aspect of this course and it needs to be worked with on a daily basis. Students need to use vocabulary terms and work with them in class to describe the patterns, distributions, etc. they see in the data being presented to them.

12. Expectations: Teaching AP Human Geography in one semester is not possible without requiring students to complete homework outside of class. Teachers need to explain to their students and parents that homework will be required in order to be successful in this class. Students will need to read their textbook and take notes outside of class. Students may also need to view videos, read articles, gather data, etc. outside of class in preparation for in-class activities.

13. Flipped Classroom: Teaching AP Human Geography in one semester requires teachers to utilize a variety of ways to teach this course. To cover all the topics and

concepts in the AP Human Geography course description, teachers will need to ask their students to complete work outside of class. Students may need to read and take notes from their textbook, view videos, read articles, gather data, etc. prior to class so they are prepared to participate in the daily activities. Students and parents need to be made aware of this and if students are not completing their activities outside of class, teachers need to have conversations with these students regarding why they are not completing their homework. This course, being taught in a semester, requires open communication between the teacher, students and parents. It is important that all people involved understand the expectations of this course.

Calendar

Listed below is a rough outline of my calendar for teaching AP Human Geography in one semester.

Topics in each unit are listed in the order in which they are presented – not in numerical order as listed in the AP Human Geography Course Exam Description.

Unit 1: Geography: Its Nature and Perspectives

- ~ 1 Week/Week 1
- Unit 1 topics from this unit are embedded through the entire course.
 - Unit 1 Topic 1.3 will be embedded into all units.
- Topics included in this unit (in order presented)
 - Unit 1 Topics: 1.1 and 1.2
- Tests: I have decided to split my tests into two days this year to ensure students have enough time to complete the test without having to come in before or after school. This process will also provide test security for the free response questions – as these will be answered on a separate day from the multiple-choice test. I utilize AP Classroom for my test questions. If you are

Unit 2: Population and Migration

- ~ 4 Weeks/Weeks 2 - 5
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3, 1.6

- Unit 2 Topics: 2.1, 2.4, 2.3, 2.5, 2.2
- Unit 7 Topics: 7.3, 7.5
- Unit 2 Topics: 2.6, 2.7, 2.9, 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Unit 3: Cultural Patterns and Processes

- ~ 2.5 Weeks/ Weeks 6 - 9
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3
- Unit 3 Topics: 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.3, 3.7
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.7
- Unit 3 Topics: 3.2, 3.8
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Unit 4: Political Organization of Space

- ~ 2.5 weeks/Weeks 9 - 11
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3
- Unit 4 Topics: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.6
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Unit 5: Agricultural and Rural Land Use

- ~ 2.5 weeks/Weeks 11 - 13
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3
- Unit 5 Topics: 5.3, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.1, 5.6, 5.8, 5.7, 5.9
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.4
- Unit 5 Topic: 5.10
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.5
- Unit 5 Topic: 5.11
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Unit 6: Industrialization and Economic Development

- ~ 2 weeks/Weeks 13 - 15
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3
- Unit 7 Topics: 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.7, 7.4
- Unit 5 Topics: 5.12

- Unit 2 Topic: 2.2
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.5
- Unit 7 Topic: 7.8
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Unit 7: Cities and Urban Land Use

- ~ 3 weeks/Weeks 16 - 18
- Unit 1 Topic: 1.3
- Unit 6 Topics: 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, 6.2, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.8, 6.10, 6.11
- Tests: Separate Multiple Choice and Free Response Tests

Final Project:

- ~ 1 Week/ Week 19
- World Food Prize – Paper Introduction and Country Demographic research
 - Students will research food security issues in a country and propose a solution
 - Students will write a 3 – 5-page paper and possibly submit it to the MN Youth Institute (in April)
 - At the MN Youth Institute in May, students will give a 3-minute presentation on their country's issues and their proposed solution.
 - This is part of the Minnesota Youth Institute which is part of the Global Youth Institute.
 - More information on this project can be found on the Global Youth Institute website:
https://www.worldfoodprize.org/en/youth_programs/global_youth_institute/

If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me at lisa.sanders@austin.k12.mn.us