

The College Board Social Sciences Framework

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Framework for the Social Sciences

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Equity for All Students

The College Board believes that all students should be prepared for and have an opportunity to participate successfully in college, and that equitable access to higher education must be a guiding principle for teachers, counselors, administrators, and policymakers. As part of this goal, all students should receive appropriate guidance about college admissions, and the support necessary to ensure college admission and success. Teachers, counselors, and administrators should encourage students to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum through enrollment in college preparatory programs and AP courses. Schools should make every effort to ensure that AP and other college-level classes reflect the diversity of the student population. The College Board encourages the elimination of barriers that limit access to demanding courses for all students, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented groups – whether ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, or gender.

The Social Sciences

Society is a construction of social units; therefore, the study of the social sciences is critical to the understanding of how society works. The social sciences, which include but are not limited to economics, geography, political science, and psychology, develop concepts and theories that expand our understanding of the social world. The social sciences are disciplines that employ empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative, scientific methods, and other interpretive methodologies, as appropriate, to understand the dynamic nature of human behavior and human systems, as well as the complexity and ambiguity inherent in the study of society.

Students study the social sciences to learn about themselves and their place in the political, economic, spatial, and social systems that comprise individual and group life. Central to this study are the exploration of key concepts that capture the commonalities of human behaviors and actions and the examination of theories that connect these concepts. Mastery of social science concepts and theories leads to an understanding of the interconnectedness of human behaviors and activities.

Students' exploration of their role in society enhances their abilities to think critically and analytically about the world around them. In particular, students should develop an understanding of what constitutes causal relationships when possible. They should also practice effective oral and written expression.

Essential Skills of the Social Sciences

Students should be able to apply their social science knowledge to explain individual and group behavior as well as events occurring locally, nationally, and internationally, and to participate in decision-making at multiple levels. Beyond this basic understanding of social science content, students should also acquire a range of methodological skills. Regardless of the specific discipline, students should be able to:

- identify problems of concern to society;
- collect and critically evaluate data, both quantitative and qualitative;
- use appropriate technologies to gather and analyze data;
- present data in appropriate graphic or spatial formats;
- develop and evaluate theories that explain observed phenomena;
- apply models and theories to real world situations;
- propose solutions to problems based on evidence and rational thinking;
- evaluate and assess policies and their effectiveness in solving problems;
- present findings in clear written or oral expression.

Course Design

Social Science courses should:

- incorporate recent developments in each field, especially as supported by relevant scholarly publications, professional organizations, and best practices in instruction;
- emphasize use of critical and analytical thinking skills throughout the course;
- balance depth of content with breadth of coverage;
- reflect interdisciplinary connections between and among the social sciences;
- involve a variety of instructional strategies appropriate for varying learning styles;
- encourage students to be active learners who solve problems and generate their own conclusions.

Assessment in the Social Sciences

Teachers should assess students on content, critical and analytical thinking, and other essential skills of the social sciences. Teachers should also apply appropriate assessment techniques to the following:

- oral and written expression;
- research projects;
- multiple choice questions;
- essays and other narrative forms;
- data collection, presentation, and interpretation.

Professional Development for Social Science Educators

Professional development that is carefully designed and of high quality is an essential part of every successful teaching and learning program. While a “one-size-fits-all” approach is no more appropriate for teachers than it is for students, effective programs share certain characteristics, including enhancement of subject matter expertise and exposure to best practices and current pedagogy. Professional development should provide a variety of opportunities for teachers, including:

- encouragement of advanced academic study and research;
- engagement with current scholarship;
- access to library collections that enable self-guided investigations in both content and professional practices;
- partnerships with college and university faculty who can help secondary teachers become aware of expectations for student preparedness as well as best practices for teaching and learning at secondary, college, and university levels.

Successful professional development programs for secondary teachers take into account the importance of:

- content mastery as the foundation for good practice in social science education;
- training in established and emerging pedagogy;
- instructional practices that address the needs of diverse learners;
- use and interpretation of student performance data;
- vertical alignment of curriculum and social science skills development.

Finally, new models for professional development, such as those using online resources and communications technology, broaden the availability of quality professional development. Such programs frequently offer flexibility that responds to the needs of teachers by tailoring resources, time commitments, and training to individual and school circumstances while supporting standards for social science education that are consistent with the elements of successful professional development programs noted above.
