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## What is Geography?

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### Instructions

- Read the documents carefully and be prepared to discuss in class.
  - Based on the documents and class discussion write a 2 to 3 page-typed paper on the subject; “What is Geography?”.
  - Your paper must show evidence of the use of most of the documents.
  - Refer to the documents and use short appropriate quotes to validate your statements.
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### Document # 1

**Gottman, Jean.**  
**A Geography of**  
**Europe.** New  
York: Holt,  
Rinehart and  
Winston. 1969

Geography is dedicated to the description and analysis of constantly changing facts and situations. It looks for the relationship governing change, for the elements of stability and the factors of diversity....  
...Geography emphasizes people, their ways of life, their divisions, and their endeavors to solve their problems and to adapt the regional environmental conditions to their ways and means...

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### Document #2

**Clark, Audrey**  
**N. The Penguin**  
**Dictionary of**  
**Geography.**  
**1998. P. 166.**

Geography the study that deals with the material and human phenomena in the space accessible to human beings and their instruments especially the patterns of, and variations in, their distribution in that space, on all scales, in the past or present.

Human geography is concerned with human activities (of individuals and groups) and organizations in so far as these relate to the interaction (past or present) of people with their environments created by human beings themselves. And the consequences of these interrelationships.

Physical geography is concerned with the physical characteristics and processes of the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere.

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Document #3

**Sherer, Thomas  
E. Jr. The  
Complete  
Idiot's Guide to  
Geography.  
New York:  
Macmillan, Inc.  
1997.**

Geography has been called “the mother of all sciences” and the “science of places.” However you describe geography, it involves the examination of the physical and cultural factors that interact to make up the diversity of the earth.

Is this scope broad? Yes, it is. Almost anything can fall into the realm of geographic study. If you want to learn about the earth, its peoples, and why they two interact as they do, you have the makings of a geographer.

Geography is a *spatial* discipline, which means that geographers are concerned not only with what something is but also with the way it is distributed in space. Although geographers don't yet have the medical expertise to develop a cure for cancer, for example, they can still study the distribution of cancer cases and suggest possible causes based on that spatial distribution.

My favorite definition of geography is “anything that can be mapped.” I use this definition again later in this book because it gets at the heart of geography. If something can be mapped, it has a spatial component. Maps are the tools of geographers: If something can be mapped, its geography.

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## Document #4

**Demko, George J.** Why in the World: Adventures in Geography. New York: Anchor Books.

Geography--*real*-world geography—is the art and science of location, or place. It is about spatial patterns and spatial processes. It is about which way the wind blows from Chernobyl, the Pacific “ring of fire”, AIDS, terrorists, and refugees. It is about acid rain, El Nino, ocean dumping, cultural censorship, droughts and famines, and it is about MiTTs. (MiTTs are pure geography, the measured *minutes of telecommunication traffic*—voice, facsimile, and data transmission on public circuits—information flows between places internationally. MiTTs compute what places are connected geographically in what proportion to other places, creating a critically important map of economic and social interdependence. In terms of MiTTs per 1,000 people, Hong Kong leads the growing spatial process of globalism with 56,296, one third of them to the People’s Republic of China, which took over the British crown colony in 1997.)

Real world geography also explores things in locations: why something is where it is and what processes change its distribution. Geography is the why of where of an ever-changing universe. Its surpassing objective is to discover the processes that move over space and connect places and continually transform the location and character of everything.

As a matter of fact, confining knowledge of geography to certain circumscribed areas of factual knowledge is like restricting mathematics to adding, multiplying, subtracting, and dividing. It is like trying to gain a facility with language by memorizing a dictionary. A person confined to the ABCs of geography—K2 is the world’s second-tallest mountain, Greenland is the world’s largest island (surpassed in size only by Australia)—can never progress to knowledge of global phenomenon...

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Document #5

**East, Gordon  
W. The  
Geography  
Behind History.  
New York:  
W.W. Norton  
& Company,  
1965**

...If we assume that, however its province, geography includes above all the study of physical environment, our central problem is to discover in what ways and to what extent this environment affected history. For the environmentalists who, following the lead given by certain philosophers of ancient Greece, sought to explain the manifold complexities of historical phenomenon in terms of a single factor—geography, this question is easily solved. This geographical determinism, so-called, which found in the differences in geographical endowment from place to place a visible master key to history, has not for some time found authoritative support, and A. J. Toynbee, who restated its case in the course of a general discussion of historical causation, had no difficulty in showing its inadequacy...

The claim of geography to be heard in the councils of history rests on the firm basis that it alone studies comprehensively and scientifically, by its own methods and technique, the setting of human activity, and further, that the particular characteristics of this setting serve not only to localise but also to influence part at least of the action. The familiar analogy between geography and history as the stage and the drama is in several respects misleading, for whereas a play can be acted on any stage regardless of its particular features, the course of history can never be entirely unaffected by the varieties and changes of its setting...

The conception of the region forms the main citadel of geography. A region, whether it is large or small, consists of an area of country, not arbitrarily defined as on a sheet of a large-scale map, but distinguished by a certain uniformity in either physical or a human sense. The geographical elements which are compounded in any area of land, which can be analyzed separately but are in fact interdependent, range from climate, position, structure, land forms (including relief and drainage), soils, and vegetation, to human societies themselves and all that they have engraved upon the soil.

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Document #6

**Corbin, Barry,  
John Trites and  
Jim Taylor.**  
**Global  
Connections:  
Geography for  
the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century.**  
**Oxford  
University  
Press. 2000.**

We can define **geography** as the study of the physical and human environments of the world and the way in which these environments interact with each other. The word *geography* comes from two Greek words: *ge*, which means “earth,” and *graphia*, which means “writings.” So in its root sense geography means “writings about (or the study of) Earth.” Think of the subject matter of geography as literally the whole planet Earth, the people who live there, and the connections these people establish with different places on Earth.

Global geography, in particular, emphasizes the two-way interactions between the human and natural worlds. Especially the processes that affect both these worlds and reveal their interconnectedness...

... Geography is one of the most ancient of sciences. Since the times of the earliest human communities, people have developed information systems to record the locations where they could find food and water, protect themselves from danger, and find a way of making a living. Written language developed first as a series of symbols to describe this sort of information and to help people remember and communicate to other people where these advantageous places could be found. In ancient times, just as today, geography was literally a matter of life and death....

...On an intellectual level, geography stimulates our imaginations and satisfies our curiosity about the many exciting people and places in the world. On a practical level, geography develops our sense of responsibility for the health of the planet on which we live.

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**Document #7**

**Rubenstein,  
James. An  
Introduction to  
Human  
Geography.  
New Jersey.  
Prentice Hall.  
1999.**

What is geography? Geography is the study of where things are located on Earth's surface and the reasons for the location. The word geography, invented by the ancient Greek scholar Eratosthenes, is based on two Greek words. Geo means "Earth," and graphy means "to write." Geographers ask two simple questions: where and why. Where are people and activities located across Earth's surface? Why are they located in particular places?

Recent world events lend a sense of urgency to geographic inquiry. Geography's spatial perspectives help to relate economic changes in Europe, the Middle East, and other regions to the spatial distributions of cultural features such as languages and religions, demographic patterns such as population growth and migration, and natural resources such as energy and food supply.

Geography is both a physical and a social science. When geography concentrates on the distribution of physical features, such as climate, soil, and vegetation, it is a natural science. When it studies cultural features, such as language, industries, and cities, geography is a social science. This division is reflected in some colleges, where physical geography courses may carry natural science credit and human and cultural geography courses social science credit.

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**Document #8**

**Knox, Paul L.  
and Sallie  
Marston.  
Places and  
Regions in  
Global Context:  
Human  
Geography.  
New Jersey.  
Prentice Hall.  
2001.**

Human geography is about recognizing and understanding the interdependence among places and regions, without losing sight of the individuality and uniqueness of specific places. Basic tools and fundamental concepts enable geographers to study the world in this way. Geographers learn about the world by finding out where things are and why they are there. Maps and mapping, of course, play a key role in how geographers analyze and portray the world. They are also key in introducing to others geographers' ideas about the way that places and regions are made and altered.

The importance of geography as a subject of study is becoming more widely recognized, however, as people everywhere struggle to understand a world that is increasingly characterized by instant global communications, unfamiliar international relationships, unexpected local changes, and growing evidence of environmental degradation. Many more schools now require courses in geography than just a decade ago, and the College Board has added the subject to its Advanced Placement program. Between 1985-1986 and 1995-96, the number of bachelor's degrees in geography increased from 3,056 to 4,145. Meanwhile, many employers are coming to realize the value of employees with expertise in geographical analysis and an understanding of the uniqueness, influence, and interdependence of place.

## Document #9

**Bergman,  
Edward and  
William  
Renwick.**  
**Introduction to  
Geography:  
People, Places  
and  
Environments.**  
New Jersey.  
Prentice Hall.  
1999.

Geography is the study of the interaction of all physical and human phenomenon at individual places and of how interactions among places form patterns and organize space. **Physical geography** studies the characteristics of the physical environment. When geography concentrates on topics such as climate, soil and vegetation, it is a natural science. **Human geography** studies human groups and activities, such as languages, industries, and cities, and human geography is a social science. **Cultural geography**, a subfield of human geography, focuses specifically on the role of human cultures. Physical and human geography share both their approach and a great deal of information, and their analyses of the landscape always weave their understandings together. Thus, geography bridges the physical sciences and the social sciences...

Geography offers a way of thinking about problems, and geographers are particularly equipped to understand interactions among different forces affecting a place. For example, to understand hunger in Africa, geographers examine relationships among climate, soils, agricultural practices, population growth, food prices, environmental degradation, political unrest, and still other relevant factors.

## Document # 10

**Ptolemy, Greek  
scholar**  
**Geographia.**  
Alexandria.  
c. AD 127-150

Geography is a representation of the whole known world together with the phenomena which are contained therein.

In Geography one must contemplate the extent of the entire Earth, as well as its shape, and its position under the heavens...the length of its days and nights, the stars which are fixed overhead, the stars which move above the horizon, and the stars which never rise above the horizon at all...

It is the great and exquisite accomplishment of mathematics to show all these things to human intelligence.

## Document # 11

**Hanson, Susan.**  
Ten  
**Geographic  
Ideas That  
Changed the  
World.** New  
Brunswick,  
New Jersey.  
Rutgers  
University  
Press. 1997.

...This example illustrates how a geographic turn of mind, in posing different questions (what some have referred to as the "why of where"), leads us to consider different explanations. Something about the geographic turn of mind wants to see the big picture, is not content with unrelated fragments, and wants to grasp how the pieces fit together in place. The map can provide this synthesizing framework—a touchstone of geography. Show any geographer a map, and she is immediately immersed in relationships and connections—connections between people and the environment, connections between and among places, connections between people and places. These are core concerns of geography.

**Document # 12**  
**De Blij, Harm.**  
**Why**  
**Geography**  
**Matters.** New  
**York. Oxford**  
**University**  
**Press. 2005.**

...geography deals with the natural as well as the human world. It is, therefore, not just a “social” science. Geographers do research on glaciations and coastlines, on desert dunes and limestone caves, on weather and climate, even on plants and animals. We also study human activities, from city planning to boundary making, from wine growing to churchgoing. To me, that’s the best part of geography: there’s almost nothing in this wide, wonderful world of ours that can’t be studied geographically...

...Geography tends to come up with unexpected linkages—between climate change and historical events, between natural phenomena and political developments, between environment and behavior—that are unmatched in other fields. And geography tends also to look at the here and now, and perceptively into the future.

**Document #13**  
**Gersmehl, Phil.**  
**Teaching**  
**Geography.**  
**New York. The**  
**Guildford**  
**Press. 2005**

The subject we call geography emerged because people need ways to organize, teach and learn what is appropriate in a give place. Geography tells you how to dress—for the climate, the company, or the culture. Like a language guide or a book of etiquette, it can deal with topics that are trivial or extremely important, depending on what specific content is chosen and how it is taught.