



HWC Social Sciences Assessment (Fall 2010)

Written by the HWC Assessment Committee

In efforts to continue assessing Harold Washington College's General Education Goals, the HWC Assessment Committee created this assessment tool to measure specific student learning outcomes for the Social Sciences. The assessment contains three parts.

Part I includes matching social science disciplines to related terms and concepts as presented in hypothetical conversations. Part II includes demographic questions to determine whether the sample of students who take this assessment are a representative sample of the student body at large in order to check the reliability of the data obtained. Secondly, Part II asks you to comment on your interests, values, and opinions related to the social sciences. There are no right or wrong answers for this section, only your opinions, so please be honest. Part III asks you to examine how two different social scientists might differ in their approach to studying a specific social phenomena.

Please take your time to complete this assessment; there is no time limit. You will not be graded on this assessment, but your responses will be collected and analyzed in aggregate form and the statistical findings will be made available to the HWC community. Therefore, applying your honesty and a serious attitude toward completing this assessment is appreciated.

PART I. Differentiating Between the Social Sciences

Below you will find nine fabricated casual conversations between two social scientists (SS). The social scientists in each conversation work within the same social science discipline. Your task is to identify the **key terms** and **concepts** addressed in each conversation and select the social science discipline that is most closely represented. **Only ONE discipline should be chosen for EACH conversation.**

Question 1

SS1: I saw Obama on television last night, and he appeared quite composed considering the stressful situation he's facing.

SS2: What do you think is responsible for his high level of self-composure? Do you think he learned it through his strong family upbringing or at law school?

SS1: Obviously, he has a high degree of emotional intelligence, which I think is an innate personality trait.

SS2: I wonder how much of his cool can be attributed to his enculturation in Indonesia and Hawaii.

SS1: It would be good if it would rub off on the rest of Washington DC. It seems like a lot of politicians could use help dealing with stress!

Completely fill in one choice only:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Anthropology | <input type="radio"/> Economics | <input type="radio"/> Geography | <input type="radio"/> History |
| <input type="radio"/> Political Science | <input type="radio"/> Psychology | <input type="radio"/> Sociology | |

Question 2

SS1: President Obama is such a fine example of a humanitarian. I was amazed at the amount of support he committed to Haiti after the earthquake. But I'm concerned that resources spent there are resources that could be better used in America.

SS2: I think your concern is legitimate. We are currently in the worst recession since the Great Depression, so our physical capital is not expanding. Even if it is a moral imperative, shouldn't our government base its decisions on the discretionary budget?

SS1: I agree. I think the President should concentrate on domestic issues, such as unemployment, especially in areas where people have suffered the greatest hardship.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Anthropology | <input type="radio"/> Economics | <input type="radio"/> Geography | <input type="radio"/> History |
| <input type="radio"/> Political Science | <input type="radio"/> Psychology | <input type="radio"/> Sociology | |

Question 3

SS1 The hardest aspect of being the President must be dealing with so many conflicting state issues.

SS2 I know! How can one devise a national environmental policy that considers the needs and issues of all 50 states? Just take the different political attitudes that California and Alaska have on alternative energy.

SS1 It's true. California is densely populated and characterized by major conurbations. Its citizens have been trying to proactively address their pollution problem through progressive alternative energy policies with the goal to reduce greenhouse gases in their atmosphere. At the same time, Alaska is largely rural with a tundra climate and has major oil reserves which they are willing to extract to improve their trade surplus. Last summer, my team was in Alaska fieldsketching drillable oil fields, recording geologic information relative to natural resource supply, and developing virtual maps of industrial development.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Anthropology | <input type="radio"/> Economics | <input type="radio"/> Geography | <input type="radio"/> History |
| <input type="radio"/> Political Science | <input type="radio"/> Psychology | <input type="radio"/> Sociology | |

Question 4

- SS1 Many people who voted for Barack Obama expected him to initiate much more liberal policies that he actually has. He has retained several Bush-era appointees, and he has continued many Bush-era policies related to the War on Terror relatively unchanged.
- SS2 That is true. He has not been nearly as liberal as many people expected. It would be fascinating to see how Americans in 2110 would view his record as compared to George W. Bush. They would read about how similar both presidents were in some ways, but future generations would also see great differences between them. Obama put moderates on the Supreme Court, and he initiated health care reform. Bush did neither of those things.
- SS3 Perhaps people will find him closer to JFK. I think there are a number of parallels to consider, such as their comparable oratory styles.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Question 5

- SS1 It's hard to tell whether Obama will be a strong president. He's certainly not a diehard Democrat given his willingness to compromise so much to bring Republicans to the table.
- SS2 I am not sure if that should be considered a weakness. As the head of the executive branch, he has to find a way to balance the legislature while moving his ideas forward.
- SS1 I have not seen the polls yet, but I think all these compromises will be seen as weakness and lack of conviction.
- SS2 We'll have to agree to disagree. I think Obama's strength will be to work around party lines, especially given how far the country has shifted to the right in the last 40 years.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Question 6

- SS1 I am hoping to see Obama's experience as a community organizer inform his presidential decisions. He should understand better than most how groups of people with something in common can be organized to affect change in public policy.
- SS2 I agree. It is important to be able to understand how the different groups have different needs regarding policy, and Obama can hopefully use this understanding to work for policies that appropriately balance the needs of different groups.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Question 7

- SS1 When do you anticipate the Obama administration taking on the challenge of immigration reform? It's about time that our archaic immigration laws conform to a modern idea of cultural relativism. They desperately need to be aligned with the level of globalization we are experiencing.
- SS2 I agree. If more funding were provided to expand our efforts in ethnographic research, then the US would be better prepared to implement evidence-based policies, even in the area of linguistics. This is especially important now because of our fast changing culture and demographics. After all, just look at our current President!
- SS1 I can't believe it took so long to have a president of African-American descent.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Question 8

- SS1 I think it's terrific that President Obama has his extended family living in the White House. I imagine his mother-in-law provides great support to the First Lady as well as to the Obama children. It would be nice to think that the President's commitment to family values might inspire all Americans to place greater emphasis on their own parenting and family dynamics.
- SS2 Sure, but how do you think his policies will reflect his family values?
- SS1 Well, with the creation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, he's placed a greater focus on the living standards of middle-class working families across America.
- SS2 I suppose you are correct. If the bill expands educational opportunities and provides more affordable health care, it can only be a boon to families everywhere.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Question 9

- SS1 Last year, people were saying that Barack Obama's election was going to bring real change to the country, but his goals have been met with bitter resistance. How do you think future generations will view this administration's effectiveness?
- SS2 I don't have a crystal ball, but many presidents who confronted great difficulties have been viewed more favorably in later years. For example, Abraham Lincoln faced a huge amount of political opposition even from members of his own cabinet. Many people doubted whether he would be elected to a second term in 1864. The popular perception of him now, however, is that he was one of America's most important presidents.

Completely fill in one choice only:

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology

Part II: Demographic and Affective Responses

Please fill in marks like this:



not like this: ☐ ☐

Question 10

Please indicate the total number of college level credit hours earned **at Harold Washington College** with a grade of C or better.

- ☐ 0 ☐ 1-15 ☐ 16-30 ☐ 31+

Question 11

Please indicate the total number of college level credit hours earned **at OTHER colleges** with a grade of C or better.

- ☐ 0 ☐ 1-15 ☐ 16-30 ☐ 31+

Question 12

Not including this semester, how many **social science courses** have you successfully completed **at Harold Washington College?**

- ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3+

Question 13

Not including this semester, how many **social science courses** have you successfully completed **at OTHER colleges?**

- ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3+

Question 14

In which of the social sciences have you taken a college class (*at HWC or elsewhere*).
Select all that apply

- ☐ Anthropology ☐ Economics ☐ Geography ☐ History
- ☐ Political Science ☐ Psychology ☐ Sociology
- ☐ Social Science 101 or 102 (or an equivalent course taken elsewhere)

Question 15

Please indicate your gender:

- ☐ Female ☐ Male

Question 16

Please indicate your race and/or ethnicity:

- ☐ Black/African American ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ☐ White
- ☐ Asian ☐ American Indian/Alaska Native ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic

Question 17

Please indicate your age:

- ☐ 20 or under ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-40 ☐ 41-60 ☐ 61 or over

Question 18

Please indicate your current academic status:

- ☐ Full time ☐ Part time

The following questions ask you about your interests, values, and opinions related to Social Science. Please mark ONE answer for each question by filling the bubble completely.

Please indicate your comfort level with:	Highly Comfortable	Comfortable	Uncomfortable	Highly Uncomfortable
19. The Natural Sciences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. Math.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Reading.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. Arts and Humanities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. Anthropology.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Economics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. Geography.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. History.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. Political science.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. Psychology.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. Sociology.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicator 41 Our level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Be as honest as possible. There are interesting answers about the world. Please mark ONE answer for each question by filling the bubble completely.				
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Question 31 Social Science helps me understand the world around me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 32 There are often many ways to look at a social phenomenon.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 33 For me, social science involves exploration, investigation, or experimentation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 34 I need a good understanding of the Social Sciences to achieve my career goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 35 Social Science has been an important tool to help me learn other subjects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 36 The social sciences allow me to be creative and discover things for myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 37 Thinking like a social scientist helps me make intelligent decisions about my life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 38 Social Science is useful not only to people who do specialized work but also to everyday life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 39 There may be more than one correct interpretation of a real life phenomenon.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 40 Learning the social sciences involves more than simply memorizing (e.g. dates, facts, theories, formulas, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Question 41 Social Science raises interesting new questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part III – Looking through the Lens of a Social Scientist

Social Scientists play a critical investigative role in understanding the relationship between social phenomena (e.g. current events) and society's quality of life. A key research task of the social scientist is to ask critical questions that will more clearly define, describe and explain the phenomena. Their questioning initiates scientific research that results in theories and practices that ultimately contribute toward social control and stability.

Instructions:

Your task in Part III is to examine through the lens of the Social Scientist the social phenomena of the discovery of a cure for cancer. Before reading the fictional scenario below, review in your mind, the focus and emphasis of each of the 7 social science disciplines. As you read the scenario, consider the discovery's social implications and determine how social scientists might differently research the situation based on their specific discipline. *Note: you may find it helpful to underline phrases or make notes as you read through the scenario.*

After reading the scenario you are asked to:

(A.) Choose a specific type of social scientist to reference,

(B.) List the concepts or characteristics revealed in the scenario that would be of most interest to the social scientist you've chosen,

(C.) Explain how an investigation of those concepts/characteristics might contribute to establishing social ability and control, and

(D.) Explain how an investigation of those concepts/characteristics might affect your personal quality of life.

Note: Your explanation in parts C and D should consist of 4-6 sentences each. Be specific and thorough in order to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the discipline.

Evaluation: The following rubric will be used to evaluate the accuracy and strength of your response in parts B, C and D. The ratings are as follows:

- **Strong** (lists *MULTIPLE* use of accurate and detailed concepts or characteristics of the discipline with *excellent clarity*; and accounts with *100% accuracy* their relevancy toward maintaining social control/stability AND a quality of life)
- **Fair/Moderate** (lists *MULTIPLE* use of accurate and detailed concepts or characteristics of the discipline with *moderate clarity*; and accounts with *limited accuracy* their relevancy toward maintaining social control/stability AND a quality of life)
- **Weak** (Identifies *ONLY ONE* accurate concept or characteristic of the discipline; and accounts with *questionable clarity* its relevancy toward maintaining social control/stability AND a quality of life)
- **Incorrect application** (application of concepts and/or characteristics is inaccurate)
- **Unclear response** – cannot be determined
- **Unanswered** -- no response

SCENARIO:

In the Amazon River Basin, a tribe known as the Unagawa lived in complete isolation from the modern world for over a century. Missionary groups, concerned with the preservation of indigenous societies, eventually became successful in making routine visits to the tribal community in efforts to study their culture to ensure the safety and security of the Unagawa society. Groups of medical personnel and social scientists studied such things as the Unagawa communication and language patterns, their social institutions, diet and nutrition.

During one particular expedition, a team of missionaries stumbled upon a group of rare trees growing amongst the Unagawa's sacred burial ground. The trees produced an unusual sap. After having the sap collected and analyzed, a team of North American scientists eventually speculated that the chemical makeup of the sap appears to hold a cure for certain kinds of cancer.

Naturally, the news of this discovery spread globally. It created a commodity that every member of the medical and political community wanted control over. For the Unagawa people, however, the discovery brought much unwelcomed attention. Their special sap-filled trees were an integral part of the Unagawa culture, and therefore, regardless of the value of the trees to others, they were disinclined to exploit them as a resource.

Across the globe, politicians made speeches either calling for respect for the indigenous peoples of the world or demanding that they be removed from their land so that the world may benefit from the trees. The sensational rhetoric made the situation very volatile. Mercenaries, aware of the trees' potential value, staged raids on the land, leading to extensive bloodshed. The Unagawa people have resisted discussion because the raids have created a climate of distrust.

Due to the considerable international tension, the United Nations has established a team of social scientists to make recommendations as to how the situation should be handled. In doing so, the social scientists must ask critical questions that will elicit clear and accurate data.

The Behavioral Social Sciences

Look through the lens of an **anthropologist, psychologist OR sociologist.**

42. Choose only one discipline from these behavioral sciences:

Completely fill in one choice only:

☐ Anthropologist

☐ Psychologist

☐ Sociologist

43. Looking through the lens of the social scientist you chose above, what concepts or characteristics of the Unagawa scenario would he or she most likely investigate?

44. Explain how the results of that investigation might **contribute to social stability and control**. NOTE: Your explanation should consist of 4-6 sentences. Include key terms and concepts that are frequently associated with the discipline.

45. Explain how the concepts/characteristics might **affect your personal quality of life**.
NOTE: Your explanation should consist of 4-6 sentences. Include key terms and concepts that are frequently associated with the discipline.

The Non-Behavioral Social Sciences

Look through the lens of an **economist, geographer, historian OR political scientist**.

46. Choose only one discipline from these non- behavioral sciences:

Completely fill in one choice only:

☐ Economist ☐ Geographer ☐ Historian ☐ Political Scientist

47. What characteristics or aspects of the Unagawa scenario described above might he or she most likely investigate? (list them here)

48. Explain how the results of that investigation might **contribute to social stability and control**. NOTE: Your explanation should consist of 4-6 sentences. Include key terms and concepts that are frequently associated with the discipline.

49. Explain how the concepts/characteristics might **affect your personal quality of life**.
NOTE: Your explanation should consist of 4-6 sentences. Include key terms and concepts that are frequently associated with the discipline.

This concludes the Social Science Assessment. Thank you from the Harold
Washington College Assessment Committee.

Social Science Assessment Grading Rubric

Rubric for Part III, Item B, Questions **#43 & #47**

Identifying Key Terms and Concepts

No Answer = (-)	INCORRECT Application = 0 Points	WEAK = 1 point	FAIR/MODERATE = 2 points	STRONG = 3 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blank Cell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear response or Inaccurate application of concepts and characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies ONLY 1 accurate term/concept Response is extremely vague, general unspecific. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies 1 or MORE accurate terms/concept Response offers little or no explanation or elaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies 1 or MORE accurate terms/concepts Response represents excellent clarity and understanding of the discipline.

Rubric for Part III, Item B, Questions **#44 & #48**

Identifying Relevance to Social Control/Stability

No Answer = (-)	INCORRECT Application = 0 Points	WEAK = 1 point	FAIR/MODERATE = 2 points	STRONG = 3 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blank Cell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear response or Inaccurate application of concepts and characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Answers with <i>questionable</i> clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Demonstrates <i>moderate clarity</i> Limited elaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Demonstrates 100% clarity Sufficient elaboration

Rubric for Part III, Item B, Questions **#45 & #49**

Identifying Relevance to One's Personal Quality of Life

No Answer = (-)	INCORRECT Application = 0 Points	WEAK = 1 point	FAIR/MODERATE = 2 points	STRONG = 3 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blank Cell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear response or Inaccurate application of concepts and characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Answers with <i>questionable</i> clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Demonstrates <i>moderate clarity</i> Limited elaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate response Demonstrates 100% clarity Sufficient elaboration

Social Science Narratives for Essay Graders

The following more deeply describes the social sciences in a narrative fashion. This material was extracted from a social science manuscript written by myself and Laura Chambers (past Sociology professor, HWC). Please recognize that a “Maria” may be referenced. We presented her as a pregnant teenage girl and applied each of the social sciences to her situation.

Lynnel

Anthropology

The word *anthropology* is derived from the Greek word *anthropos* ("human") and *logia* ("study"). It is the social science discipline that examines humankind, from its early origins millions of years ago to the current day. Its aim is to understand the whole panorama of human existence through geographic space and evolutionary time (Robbins, 1932).

Anthropologists strive to determine why, when and where humans first appeared on the planet earth. They ask questions such as: How have humans changed since then and how do they compare with the current characteristics of modern populations today? Anthropologists seek to understand the important elements influencing human existence such as our biology, culture, social and physical environment, political and economic systems, etc.

While anthropology is not complicated to define, its complexity and diversity within the discipline makes it challenging to explain. Anthropology focuses on material that is both cultural and physical. For example, anthropologists may study religious symbols within an Indian culture, the teeth of an indigenous Brazilian tribe, the evolution of language in a preliterate society, the biological gene pool of an Eskimo society or the organizational culture of a Fortune 500 company.

Divisions of Anthropology

Anthropology primarily includes two major classifications of subject matter: Biological or physical anthropology and cultural anthropology. Figure 1.1 shows that each of these classifications can be subdivided into specific areas of focus.

Biological Anthropology

Biological anthropology is often referred to as *physical anthropology*. One of the primary divisions of biological anthropology is **human paleontology**. Human paleontologists ask questions such as “How did humans emerge?” and “How did humans evolve?” In their attempts to reconstruct human evolution, human paleontologists search for and study the buried, hardened remains or impressions (fossils) of humans, pre-humans, and related animals. They strive to identify characteristics distinct to humans. Paleontologists study **primates** both in natural and laboratory settings. Primates are humans’ closest relative. Therefore, some biological

paleontologists study primates and compare them to early human fossil records. This information is later constructed into theories on the progression of humans dating back from prehistoric times. Human origins will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

The second division of Biological Anthropology is **human variation**. This division focuses on questions such as “How do contemporary populations vary biologically and physically?” and “Why do they vary?” For example, have you ever wondered why Caucasians are typically taller than Asians? Do you know the reasons why African Americans have better bone health than white Americans? Or why white Americans have higher rates of osteoporosis compared with all other ethnic groups in the U.S.? Have you considered why certain eye colors are more prevalent in particular ethnic groups? To obtain answers to such questions, biological anthropologists carefully study such areas as genetics (inherited traits), geographical demographics and epidemiology – the study of disease on specified populations.

Cultural Anthropology

The other broad classification of anthropology is cultural anthropology. Cultural anthropology is the study of cultural variance among populations and societies. Cultural variance refers to the differences in customary belief and behavior among a group. Think about the groups of which you are a part. What forms the common bond among its members? In every society or population, learned and shared ways of behaving and thinking exist. These elements make up the **culture** of the group. and include language, religious beliefs, work habits, gender roles, family practices, political and educational structures, values, traditions and dress. All elements play key roles in the groups’ existence. Cultural anthropologists study cultures of the past and present and they attempt to discover when, where, why and how these cultures differ.

There are three major divisions of cultural anthropology: archaeology, linguistics and ethnology.

Archaeology

Archaeologists trace cultural transformation and provide explanations for these changes. To achieve this, archaeologists attempt to reconstruct the daily practices and customs of people who lived in the past, even for human societies that existed over 5000 years ago and which have no written historical record. Archaeologists collect and investigate any form of physical remains from sites of human occupation. Often times, their investigations require “archaeology digs” and ground excavations. Archaeologists rely on the assistance of historians, geographers, sociologists, chemists and geographers in their investigations.

Linguistics

Like biological anthropologists and archeologists, **linguistic anthropologists** study the changes that have taken place but they focus on language. They tend to do fieldwork in places where the written language was not developed, so they are faced with reconstructing the history of societies and working backward, from the present. Examining language is important due to the role it plays with socialization and the reflection it provides on the attitudes and interests of the

people. Linguistic anthropology began in the United States at a time when Native American languages were rapidly disappearing as a result of population decline and their cultural traditions were being lost due to the influx of Euro-American culture. Through careful analysis of the recorded sounds, myths and rituals of these fading cultures, scientists exposed the inadequacy of the Western alphabets to represent their language. This discovery stimulated a move to explore both written and hieroglyphic (symbolic) recordings in order to understand the early origins of culture. Fieldwork in linguistic anthropology typically involves the collection of data in natural settings through means of video or audio tape recordings. Transcription analysis of the recordings helps anthropologists to gain an understanding of the culture from a biological, social and psychological context.

Ethnology

The ethnological focus of cultural anthropology is concerned with the *patterns* of thought and behavior of a group or society and the dynamics of how they develop and change. The work of the **ethnologist** is similar to the archaeologist except that he or she uses data collected from observing, surveying and interviewing living people. It is common for an ethnographer to spend several months to a year living with a group of people whose culture he or she is studying. The ethnographer would observe and then attempt to thoroughly describe the customary behaviors and thoughts of the people. In past years, ethnographers strived to examine culture from a broad or holistic perspective. More recently, the work of the ethnographer has become increasingly specific in nature and focuses on selected cultural elements, such as marital relationships and rituals, effects of modernization, and social life among the children.

One of the specialized types of ethnologists is the **ethnohistorian**. The ethnohistorian studies how the culture of a group has changed over time by investigating written documents produced by the government, traders, explorers, or anyone or anything that may account for a record of the past. The challenge is to piece together the many aspects of human existence, from one period to another, from society to society, and from one part of the world to another.

Psychology

Many students think of psychology as the simple study of the mind, when in fact, it is much more complex. The formal definition of **psychology** is commonly stated as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Now, if you dissect that definition, several components emerge. Psychology is not only “a study,” but a *scientific* one, which means that it is based on observation and experiment, otherwise known as empirical evidence, where the scientific methods of research are used. Secondly, psychology does not simply explore the structure of the mind, but includes its many *mental processes* of thinking, motivation, perception, memory, learning, emotion, etc. Lastly, psychology studies *behaviors* influenced by one’s internal mental functioning, biological makeup and social environment. Often, psychologists informally refer to this as the *biopsychosocial model*. Keep in mind, that when scientifically studying the mental processes and behavior of both animals and humans, researchers have to carefully observe them and systematically measure their observations. That presents a difficult task, particularly with

human subjects since the variation among them may be enormous. In order to investigate and unravel the mysteries behind how and why humans think, act and feel, psychologists, like other social scientists, strive to accomplish four goals:

- **Describe** what is happening. This involves giving a name to what is happening, where it is happening, to whom it happens and under what circumstances it happens.
- **Explain** why it is happening. Discovering explanations for different behavior and thinking patterns requires the formulating of **theories**. A theory is a general explanation based on careful scientific research.
- **Predict** when it will occur again. Based on previous research and established theories, psychologists are able to forecast who may be susceptible to particular thinking or behavioral patterns based on a set of biological, psychological or social conditions.
- **Control** how it can change. Psychologists strive to modify the way humans think, act or feel when these become harmful to a person's well-being. They attempt to create and provide interventions that will allow humans to gain greater mental and emotional stability.

Contemporary Approaches to Psychology

The goals of psychology have not changed drastically over the years, but certainly the research methods and theories have. Today, there are primarily seven contemporary psychological approaches or theoretical perspectives. Two of these date back to the turn of the nineteenth century. Perhaps an easy way to conceptualize these perspectives is to consider the different thought and behavior patterns that exist among your friends and family, males and females, the young and the old and those from different ethnic backgrounds. Who or what is responsible for the vast array of differences among them?

Psychodynamic Perspective

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is recognized as the founder of *psychoanalysis* (the named theory based on his beliefs). He was a neurologist who worked during the end of the "Victorian Age" – a period often noted for constraining women's sexual behaviors and expressions. Dr. Freud observed a large number of women suffering from nervous disorders, but frequently could not diagnose physical reasons for their dysfunctions. This experience led him to believe that their anxieties were triggered by something within their minds. He theorized that humans possess an *unconscious* (unaware) division in the mind where we push, *or repress*, our unmet anxiety-causing needs and desires. The anxieties that we face emerge from sexual and aggressive instincts likely to have evolved from our childhood and personality development (infant to six years of age). Consequently, it becomes the job of the psychotherapist to discover the early childhood years of the client and to explore mental territory, such as dreams, in an effort to *surface* the psychological anxiety and tensions hidden within the client. At this point, the psychotherapist can *interpret* the details revealed, and lastly, provide interventions, such as "talk therapy" that will remedy the neurological or behavioral dysfunction.

Behavioral Perspective

James B. Watson (1879-1958) challenged Freud's idea of unconscious motivation and set out to prove that the thinking and behavior patterns of humans are driven by their *learning experiences*. James Watson, followed by B. F. Skinner (1904-1990), believed that human actions and thoughts resulted from *voluntary* learning. Based on either the positive or negative consequences applied, or the punishment administered during an experience, humans are *conditioned* to act, think and feel certain ways. Positive reinforcement, like rewarding someone with money or verbal recognition, motivates one to repeat the behavior or thinking pattern associated with it. Punishment, on the other hand, such as spanking or verbal scolding, is likely to deter a person from repeating the behavior or thought. Hence, behavioral psychologists attempt to help clients "unlearn" their dysfunctional thoughts, actions or feelings and "teach" clients new ways to adapt.

The careful observation of the overt behaviors of the client becomes very important to the work of the behavioral psychologist.

Humanistic Perspective

In the early-to-mid 1900's, psychologists viewed behavior and thinking patterns either in terms of hidden motivations (psychoanalysis) or mechanical learning (behaviorism). Two pioneers in psychology Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) transformed psychology by suggesting that humans have the potential, or "free will", to direct their own lives. Both Maslow and Rogers emphasized the ability of each person to become the best person he or she could be (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961). This perspective is called *humanism* and suggests that psychological problems can be attributed to inconsistencies between your realistic self, your idealistic self and your perception of how others view you. In humanism a great deal of emphasis is placed on one's self-image and self-worth and the task of consciously identifying the realistic needs to reach one's actual self.

Biopsychological Perspective

Every thought, action and feeling is a response to an internal or external stimulus. Our brain and body biologically interpret the stimulus and dictates how we are to respond to it. These biological events, such as chemical reactions in the brain, hormone secretion through the body, the influence of our genetic DNA and the general structure and functioning of our brain and nervous systems naturally play an integral part in our behavior and mental processes. The biopsychological perspective of psychology studies the functioning of the body and brain beginning with the network of neurons in the brain.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss scientist, studied the process of thought and its role in our behavior and mental processes. He, along with other **developmental psychologists**, focused their research on intelligence, perception, memory, problem solving, decision making, language and learning. In simple terms, the cognitive psychologist attempts to identify how, when, where, and why faulty thinking develops, and researches approaches that can ultimately change faulty thinking to more realistic, logical, healthy thinking. Cognitive psychologists are heavily

involved in assessing and structuring intelligence. They attempt to understand what comprises our intelligence and what cognitive changes take place from the pre-natal stages through late adulthood.

Socialcultural Perspective

Socialcultural psychology is a contemporary perspective and is becoming more important as communities transform into multi-cultural environments. Socialcultural psychology is two-sided. It combines the study of groups and social norms (society's acceptable standards or expected behaviors) with the study of cultural norms. Ask yourself this question: "Do you think and act differently when you are alone, compared to when you are among a group of people?" The answer is most certainly, "Yes!" The presence of other people around us drives us to modify our actions and thoughts. Social psychology investigates why this occurs and to what degree it affects our well-being.

You have probably heard the comment, "You are a product of your environment." Essentially, the socialcultural perspective of psychology theorizes that our behaviors and thinking patterns are heavily influenced by the cultural beliefs, values and actions surrounding us. Cultural standards dictate to us what acceptable and unacceptable behavior is. They teach us how we should think, act and behave. Because cultures vary to a high extreme, it becomes important for psychologists to gain a knowledge and appreciation for their differences and not to exclude this vital component in all facets of their work, whether it is research, therapy, education and administration.

Evolutionary Perspective

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) theorized that the mind of human beings could be seen as an information-processing machine that is designed for survival. In other words, he believed that over the years, animals and humans developed into their present forms through a series of survival responses to potentially life-threatening elements within their environments. A common example of this is the consideration of why men seem to be more aggressive than women and women tend to be more nurturing than men. Evolutionary theory proposes that in the early days of the hunters and gathers (preliterate societies), men needed to be strong and aggressive to fight off predators and hunt for food. Women, on the other hand, needed to be the "nurturers," for it was women who gave birth and breast fed the offspring.

The evolutionary psychologist considers these "natural" phenomenon as explanations why humans and animals think, act and feel as they do today. Consider your sleeping patterns. Why do you think humans typically sleep in the evening hours as opposed to during daylight hours? Evolutionary theory indicates that humans tend to sleep in the nighttime because it is too dangerous to move about with obstructed or limited vision in the darkness.

Genetics, biological and anatomical characteristics, personality traits, and physical, mental and social development are all elements that are closely researched in evolutionary psychology.

Sociology

Sociology is recognized as the newest of the social science disciplines. Sociology is the study of human interactions and human group behavior. Sociologists may study how membership in a particular group impacts an individual person's life outcome or life chances. Group membership may be identified in a variety of ways. For instance, a sociologist may study the following topics:

- How being a member of the group called *male* affects that person's chances of earning an income of \$100,000.
- How being a member of the group called *Republican* may impact a person's likelihood of supporting abortion rights.
- How being a member of a particular family may influence a person's dietary habits.

While psychologists and anthropologists explore the intersection of the natural and social sciences, sociologists are mainly concerned with the influence that human social and cultural interactions have on life experience. Sociologists do take into account variables such as age, gender and race, but they look more at how these variables are impacted by social versus biological factors. Sociologists explore individual thoughts and behaviors but put these thoughts and actions within the context of larger institutions, such as the family, media and the educational system. Additionally, the sociological perspective encourages the social scientist to consider the variances in human behavior that are caused by geographic location and historical timeframe. In regards to adolescent pregnancy, a sociologist might be interested in exploring the social factors that impacted an individual's pregnancy. For instance, the sociologist might look at the effect that present day internet media messages had on teenagers' sexual behaviors and attitudes.

Development of Sociology

The study of human group behavior can be traced back to ancient Greece. Yet, over the last two hundred years many scholars have contributed to developing the scientific discipline known as sociology. August Comte (1798-1857) is recognized by most modern day sociologists as the founder of the discipline. Comte felt that the social world had to be studied in the same scientific manner as was used to study the natural world. Hence, he was one of the first advocates for using a scientific method in sociological studies. Comte, a French scholar, is also credited with coining the term "sociologie"—translated in English as sociology. Sociology arose around the period of Industrialization (development of mechanized means of production) and many of the early sociologists were rooted in France and Germany. Most sociological studies focus on societies from the period of Industrialization onward and this is another means by which sociology differs from anthropology and psychology. The first academic department of sociology was formed at the University of Chicago in 1895 and remains today as one of the strongest departments in existence. Also in 1895, *The American Journal of Sociology* was created and produced an important forum for sociologists to print their findings

Similar to anthropology and psychology, sociology can be broken down into three major perspectives: symbolic interactionism, structural-functionalism and conflict theory. Theoretical

perspectives are broad views on a particular topic. Think of three different people looking at the same tree. If these people were wearing glasses with different colored lenses, they may each report that the tree is a different color. Theoretical perspectives used in sociology all view the same topics, but use different lenses to view these topics. Much like the psychological perspectives previously described, the sociologist comes up with multiple unique explanations for the same phenomenon.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on direct interaction between people and it looks at how people use symbols (including verbal and non-verbal language) to communicate and impact social experiences. For instance, when your teacher smiles at you, what is he saying through his facial expression? How does his smile affect your behavior and performance in the course? What if your teacher frowned at you? Would that have a different impact? (Chapters Three and Five will discuss language in greater depth). Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) were American sociologists who developed this sociological perspective. Both explored how individuals, and their manners of thinking work in cooperation with the larger society.

Symbolic interactionism is considered a **micro-level theory** since it focuses on small scale interactions. This type of sociologist might study sex education videos and explore the words and body language used to convey messages to the audience. Working from the symbolic interactionist perspective, the sociologist could explore the impact that these symbols have on adolescent viewers' perceptions of sexual behavior, pregnancy and parenting.

Structural-Functionalism

Structural-functionalism, also known as functionalism, is the sociological perspective that looks at relationship between the many different parts of a society. Structural functionalism explores the roles these various parts play for the entire society. Working from this perspective, society can be likened to a living organism (such as a human being) and this living organism has many parts (such as eyes, heart, legs) all that play a vital role in the overall functioning of the organism. While this form of sociology focuses order, harmony and solidarity in society, it does look at the impact that dysfunctions of specific elements may have on the society. This perspective can be loosely equated with traditional or conservative thinking. Structural functionalism focuses on the importance of order, harmony and solidarity in society. The sociologists who support this perspective acknowledge that problems exist in society, and that life is not equal for all people. But they also assert that differences, or inequalities, are necessary for the good of the entire group. Structural functionalism is considered a **macro-level theory** because it looks at large-scale patterns.

One well-known structural functional sociologist is Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). He was a French sociologist who was a strong follower of August Comte. Durkheim used the scientific method of inquiry promoted by Comte and applied it to studying society. Durkheim truly believed that society was a well-integrated system that was made up of more than just mere individuals. Durkheim is best known for developing the concept of **anomie**. Anomie refers to a

general feeling of disconnect that results from a society's lack of rules and practices that everyone acknowledges and embraces. In 1895, Durkheim created the first academic department of sociology in Europe at the University of Bordeaux in France.

When considering adolescent pregnancy rates, a structural functionalist might examine if and how schools, religious groups, families and media might have played a role or impacted the situation. This group of sociologists might suggest that higher teenage pregnancy rates can be attributed to some dysfunction in one or more of the larger social institutions.

Conflict Theory

The **Conflict perspective** studies social patterns as a result of struggles over desirable social assets such as money, power or education. It outlines how people in different groups struggle with one another as the empowered members of society seek to maintain their social standing and the disempowered groups strive to improve their positions in society. Conflict theorists often look at social class, race, sex/gender, age and nationality. Most conflict theorists seek to advocate for some type of restructuring of society. Like structural functionalism, conflict theory is considered a macro-level perspective.

One of the most well-known conflict theorists is Karl Marx (1818-1883) who was a German political and economic philosopher. During Marx's early adult life, Germany experienced academic repression; consequently, speaking out about social problems was strongly discouraged. Marx held rather radical views on the negative impact of industrial society and capitalism. His socialist ideas, such as those represented in his works including *Capital* and *Communist Manifesto*, were important for supporting labor movements both during Marx's era and those of the present.

Another conflict theorist is Max Weber (1864-1920) who was a German sociologist widely recognized during his time and ours as an outstanding scholar in his field. Weber is most well-known for his work in the areas of religion and capitalism. He built off of Marx's work and theorized that the new systems in a very conservative Germany created a sense of confinement for many of the people. Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a widely read text in the social sciences.

Economics

What are some things that you need to survive in this world? Would your list include food, water, healthcare or shelter? Would you add money onto your list? The ability and the tools to secure human needs is an essential focus for the social scientists that study economics.

The publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) is recognized as the advent of the discipline of economics. Contemporary economics is often defined in the terms of economist Lionel Robbins, who explained the field as, "Economics is a science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses." Another way of explaining economics is the study of how humans obtain and exchange the resources that are necessary to sustain themselves both on individual and group levels. A resource is any form

of natural, human or manufactured wealth that is used to meet a human's need. In other words resources can be actual money or it can be the labor that is used to earn money. Resources can also be found in nature. For instance, land, trees, minerals all translate into desirable goods that can produce materials and monetary resources to meet human need.

Why do social scientists study resources? Is there an infinite amount of them available? Does everyone have equal access to the resources? Do countries produce equal amounts of material goods and services? The answer to these questions is no. In most cases there is a scarcity of desirable resources. Hence, there is a competition between individual humans and between larger human groups (such as nations) to meet their needs for survival.

Economics can be divided into two broad areas of study: microeconomics and macroeconomics. **Microeconomics** examines how social choices affect the supply and demand for goods and services. This, in turn, impacts prices we pay for specific goods. While microeconomics looks at individual level effects, **macroeconomics** explores the sum total of many economic considerations as an aggregate. In other words, macroeconomics explores all economic activity in a particular society and may consider the multiple concerns of growth, inflation, and unemployment.

What might an economist explore about Maria's situation (a pregnant teenager)? An economist may look at how healthcare resources are administered and the economist may describe their impact upon the healthcare choices that pregnant teenagers make. How do you think location of abortion providers (a resource) may impact a pregnant teen's decision to abort or maintain her pregnancy? Brown, Jewell and Roust (2001) investigated this very issue to determine how location and availability of abortion providers impacts the probability of a woman obtaining an abortion. According to these authors, many factors impact a person's decision about abortion including preferences, household income, opportunity costs of another child and the full cost of abortion services. What factors may affect the total cost of abortion services? Do you think price of gas may play a role? If so, how?

Brown, Jewell and Roust (2001) studied pregnancy decisions made by women in Texas and concluded that women, of all races, are more likely to maintain their pregnancy when they live in rural areas where the distance to the abortion provider is greater. Consider now for a moment, the current cost of fuel in our country. At the time this book was written, the average price per gallon of gas in the United States was \$2.524 (U.S Energy Information Administration, 2009). Fuel costs are a consistent concern in our modern day society and do impact the places that people may travel. What other economic costs exist to travel to an abortion provider? Might a person need a car? That could cost money. What about time away from work? This is an indirect cost. Taking a day or even an afternoon away from employment may mean a reduction in a pregnant women's needed income. A study such as this one could be used to explore how the distance between Maria and the nearest abortion provider may place resource constraints upon Maria's pregnancy choices.

An economist may look at how Maria's earning power as a teenager in one geographical area compares to the earning power of a teenage in another one. Let's imagine that Maria works as a fast food cook to help support herself. How could living in the city of Chicago impact Maria's

earning power? What about if Maria lived in Kankakee, Illinois? According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008a), a fast food cook in the Chicago metropolitan area makes an average hourly wage of \$8.79. Yet, fast food cooks in Kankakee, Illinois make on average \$9.18 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008b). This average wage for Kankakee is much higher than both the average for Chicago and for the nation as a whole. How might Maria's earning power impact her ability to choose between continuing or ending her pregnancy? If Maria chooses to maintain her pregnancy, how could this difference in earning impact the quality of life that she and her child may have?

Finally, economists could explore other factors that seem to have no relationship to pregnancy decisions. Do you think there is any relationship between beer taxes and teen pregnancy? In

Geography

To gain an understanding of geography, we might look at the Geography Summit II, held at Southwest Texas State University in 1996, where a comparative study was done to determine the definition of geography. Among the findings were the following (Strong, n.d):

- a social science that focuses on the spatial distribution of human and physical phenomena;
- the study of the physical world and earth, its inhabitants, the interaction between the two, and the patterns and systems involved;
- the study of humans interacting with their environment including the physical environment, the built environment and socially constructed spaces.

One can easily see that the concept of physical space/location appears in these definitions or is implied in all of them. Geography, then, is concerned with where and why things are located as they are and with the patterns of phenomena and the processes that created them. (n.d., Strong) It is a social science discipline that continues to grow more complex due to the constant change in our physical and social environment.

The following are only a small sample of the specialty areas organized by the American Association of Geographers. Which of the following appeals to you or perhaps surprises you?

The Aging and the Aged	Architectural Geography
Coastal and Marine Cryosphere	Economic Geography
Forensic Historical Geography	Geographic Perspectives on Women
Geography of Religions	Hazards
Medical Geography	Sexuality and Space
Socialist Geography	

Geography is typically described as two parts which make up a whole. That is, geography is divided into Regional Geography and Topical Geography (“Topical” may also be referred to as “Systematic”). **Regional geography** focuses on areas of Earth space that have some degree of similar structure and quality. A region is the basic unit of study in geography. It may be physical, human or some combination of both and may vary in size from continents to small ecosystems. **Topical geography** focuses on systematic studies of such things as climate, landforms, economics, and culture (Strong, n.d). Let’s examine some practical applications to both types.

Regional Geography

Think about the region you live in. How does it display a cohesive unity in terms of government, language, economics, physical boundaries or social aspects? What impact do the region’s characteristics have on your daily life? *Formal regions* are specifically defined by legislative or executive boundaries (i.e. states and countries) and do not lend themselves to negotiation; therefore, physical regions fall under this category (i.e. The Appalachian Mountain region). *Functional regions* are regions defined by function (i.e. school districts or phone service areas). If the function ceases to exist, the region no longer exists. The third type of region is the vernacular region. *Vernacular regions* are those loosely defined by people’s perception (i.e. The Midwest, The Caribbean). Regardless of their type, regions heavily influence who we are, how we act and what we value.

Regions are not constant, but are vulnerable to change. Consider the struggles for power over space (terrestrial, oceanic or atmospheric) and resources (natural or human) that emerged as key themes throughout our history. These struggles, of past and present, carry with them many social, political and cultural factors that are the icons of geographical regions. Consequently, geographical regions such as states, countries and religion-based territories have gone to war to preserve or expand the “space” that gives them their identity.

The economic, political and cultural processes throughout certain states, regions and countries in the world are being tied together in a global system known as **globalization**. Today, globalization is alive in every modernized country in the world. Globalization, which will be discussed numerous times throughout the textbook, remains a controversial issue. Some people suggest that globalization allows goods, services, workers, money and ideas to migrate to increase efficiency, flexibility, security and profitability. On the other hand, globalization is criticized for increasing economic, cultural and political differences between people. In reference to the field of geography, globalization originates with regional geography and expands into topical geography.

National Geographical Standards

In the United States, October 20, 1994 was a key date for the field of geography. An official document *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards 1994* was published which standardized and expanded the study of geography around the country. The document was produced under the sponsorship of four major geography organizations: the American Geographical Society, the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for

Geographic Education, and the National Geographic Society. As a result of the newly defined National Geography Standards for 1994, the mandate for the study of geography in American schools was realigned, as well as the priorities for research grants offered in the field. Included in the National Geography Standards was the expressed need to study both visual and mental maps of people, places and environments; to explore characteristics, distribution and migration of all humans on earth; to understand the effects of humans on the physical environment and the physical environment on humans; and using geography to help interpret the past, present and plan for the future.

Geography Expanded

Because geography is a social science that focuses on the spatial interaction of human beings with their physical environment, the people dimension is often separately examined and carefully analyzed. **Demography** is the name given to the study of the characteristics of a population. It concerns itself with not only the number of people occupying a particular region, but more specifically, statistically reports on the sex, age, race, nationality, socio-economic and marital status ratios. Other characteristics such as household size, household income levels, migration movements, health care statistics, birth rates, death rates and fertility rates are among other items commonly reported. Collecting this kind of data reveals a lot about the social, economic and cultural aspects of a region, past and present. More importantly, demographic information allows for more effective planning of the future. For example, monitoring birth and death rates and sanitation and health rates, may reveal to social scientists potential problems in meeting the needs of a growing or diminishing population. By properly recognizing demographic trends, scientists can identify what resources are needed in order to maintain or restore social stability and social order. Food supplies, housing, education, economic and socialization opportunities and health care are among the most important resources needed to sustain a good quality of life.

Consider the population challenges in China. The Chinese government is so concerned in meeting the economic, social and physiological needs of their vastly growing population, that it has placed sanctions against couples giving birth to more than one child. Financial penalties, economic restrictions and social ostracizing make up the strong governmental pressures placed on families.

If we examine the interaction of geography and demography with the environment, then we arrive at a third science called ecology. **Ecology** concerns itself with the interactions between all living things, human and nonhuman (e.g., plants, animals, microorganisms, etc.) and their environment (social and natural). The environment may be construed as the collection of all external influences—stimuli produced by the sights, sounds, feel, taste and smell of other humans or other natural entities such as the weather, climate, plants, water resources, the earth's terrain, etc. *Human ecology* concentrates primarily on the manner in which human societies adjust to their environments. The adjustment takes into consideration both materialistic and nonmaterialistic entities and is based on successful survival of the species. To live in a stable, balanced environment, where one species does not compete for survival with another, or one does not excel at the expense of another is representative of what is known as *ecological balance*. Ecological balance may be viewed as a holistic approach that allows all life forms to

live in harmony with one another within the same environment. Today, the biggest threats to our ecological balance are voiced through the media and many political arenas. Global warming, the depletion of water tables and other natural resources, automobile emissions, and hazardous waste disposal occupy the list of ecological concerns.

History

According to the American Historical Association, “History is the never-ending process whereby people seek to understand the past and its many meanings.” History is a very broad discipline that has been classified by some under the humanities and by others as a social science. We address history as a social science because historians do utilize the scientific method in their research processes.

Historians study a vast array of topics ranging from the ancient times to specific regions of the world. Traditionally, historians have attempted to answer historical questions through the study of *primary sources* or written documents. Primary sources contain first-hand information in the form of documents, speeches or other written information that were created during the time period being studied. What are some examples of primary sources? Some examples include the Constitution of the United States, letters written between John and Abigail Adams, the diary of Anne Franke and President Lincoln’s famous “A House Divided” speech.

Why do social scientists care about the past? The past helps to explain why human societies exist in their current forms today. Historians use information to explain how present day family structures, public policies and leisure time activities came to exist in their current forms. Also, history can assist us in understanding patterns or processes that may reoccur in human societies. For instance, even if a nation is not experiencing an economic depression or war at the present time, a historian can shed light on factors that contribute to the creation of such occurrences by exploring depressions or wars in the past. There are other benefits to studying history such as gaining a sense of connection with our culture or nation via development of personal identity. In other words, we can understand who we are as individual members of the larger group. For instance, by exploring the Constitution of the United States, we may come to further identify ourselves with the principles that are considered American and hence, form a greater connection with our country.

Although history can be very interesting, what could a graduate do with a history degree? Well, according to the American Historical Association, historians can be employed as educators (teaching history), as researchers (working at museums), as communicators (working as a journalists or documentary editors), as advocates (doing political or legal work) or in business or other associations.

Political Science

Political science is one of the most recent additions to the social sciences. Political structures have existed and been a source of exploration since 300 years BCE when thinkers in the early Indian society began wrestling with these topics. Others contend that the founding patriarchs of western political thought were Aristotle and Plato. Yet, the formal, scientific study of politics

only became recognized as a social science field in the 1860s with the emergence of university departments and finally the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1903. According to APSA, political science is, “the study of governments, public policies and political processes, systems, and political behavior.” While historians study the past, political scientists are more interested in studying the present. Most political science research focus on topics that are being debated in the present day, including presidential elections, welfare reform policies, international relations, immigration reform, and yes, laws governing reproductive rights.

To understand political science, one might look at the words that begin the Preamble to the United States Constitution. Written in 1787, this document has guided our country, its government and politics, structure and organization and livelihood. The Preamble to the Constitution designates what the citizens of the United States can expect from their government. The “Framers” or writers of the Constitution were aimed at establishing mechanisms that allowed for problem solving, conflict management and the maintenance of peace. The Preamble to the Constitution begins:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America.

“Establishing justice” meant establishing a common set of principles for people to follow. Creation of a judicial system and more specifically, The Bill of Rights accomplished this. “Ensuring domestic tranquility” meant establishing armed forces such as police departments and the National Guard and more recently, the Department of Homeland Security, to protect people and offer the sense of safety and security. “Providing for the common defense” allowed for the President of the United States to be commander of the armed forces and provide for the defense of its citizens. “Promoting the general welfare,” meant doing what was necessary to keep people healthy and emotionally secure. The establishment of social service agencies, health care programs, education, etc. became examples of accomplishing this goal. Today, there is much controversy as to how much power or exactly what entities the government should control. Socialized medicine, stem-cell research, charter schools and the control over business enterprises such as banking and mortgage lending are all examples of heavily debated issues surrounding government control. The last aim cited in the Preamble is “securing the blessings of liberty.” Allowing for a free society with freedoms such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion is another goal of American governance.

To understand the political system of a state or nation is to recognize how the governmental systems evolved and changed through time. Government is often referred to as a social contract between the people and their rulers. The social contract extends across domestic and national affairs, and permeates into every aspect of daily life. Understanding political science and the government structure of a society, allows one to be an inquisitive citizen. In other words, to knowledgeably challenge the status quo and avoid the acceptance of things at face value, allows people to become active citizens and valued contributors to the political process.

In America, our system of government is known as a **democracy**. The word is derived from the Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratia* (power of authority). It is a political system that gives power to the people either directly or through elected representatives. The opposite of a democracy would be a **totalitarian** system of government. This is a type of government ruled by one individual in the interest of all the people. During the fall of the Roman Empire, in the third century, totalitarian governance was common. Kings claimed that their right to solely govern was God's will, so their monarchy rule was not questioned or challenged. It was not until the Reformation and Enlightenment periods beginning in the late sixteenth century that people began to seek out alternative systems of governance.

The Enlightenment period is recognized as a time when many philosophers and scientists began to argue that fate and religion did not control one's destiny and that kings did not possess a divine right to rule. At this time, radical Protestants were leaving the (Roman Catholic) Church of England and were facing religious persecution by the English monarchy. These Protestants believed in their ability to establish their own personal relationships with God and favored self-governing congregations. Consequently, many fled to America and settled in self-governing American colonies. This was the birth of American democracy.

Today, our political culture is very alive and heavily projected through the media. Because we are a global society, our views and expectations of government and democracy expand beyond our borders. Regardless if you are a conservative—one that believes that a government is best that governs least—or a liberal—one favoring extensive governmental involvement, most Americans set high expectations on government officials. Often times, the American public accentuates the negative actions of the government and fails to appreciate the positive impact it bears on our lives. Unfortunately, many politicians carry a reputation of mistrust which results in voter apathy, but the reality is that politicians, much like normal American citizens, consistently strive to improve the quality of life in the United States. If we expect political leaders to do their part effectively, then we must do ours. To become politically savvy, is to become an active citizen and contributor to society.