

Contemporary Australian Society GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

This second year of this study showed that students understood the main concepts and had covered relevant content in their classes. It was impressive to see that students had studied a wide range of communities, and had focused on major current issues. Some students produced excellent answers displaying their grasp of both the examination paper and the material studied, but many students produced mediocre answers. Such students usually completed all sections of the paper but needed to pay more attention to the explicit requirements of particular questions.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Question 1

This was generally well answered with an emphasis on technological change and the shift from more geographically based communities to those based on shared interests of various kinds. Examples of the ways people lived in a more face-to-face community in comparison to the interaction of a virtual community helped students to achieve well. Some students described changes illustrated with examples, for example:

Community can now apply not only to your geographical area but also to your interests and beliefs or to trying to achieve a common goal. A neighbourhood sports team, workplace and school are all examples of communities; groups of people with identifiable characteristics, similar interests, beliefs, ideas and common goals.

Some students interpreted the question more specifically and wrote of the changes involved in Australian society as a whole after the introduction of multiculturalism. This wider definition of 'community' as the national community was legitimate but made it harder for students to achieve high marks. The study design clearly emphasises communities within Australia and students need to be reminded that the study design is the basis for all examination questions.

Question 2

This was generally well answered with most students providing a case study where government had supported the community with funding and by means of particular policies. This was particularly well done when students explained how a community was affected by government actions. One student explained the impact of government funding on the CFA by describing the equipment, training, publicity bought, and the consequent morale boost. This same student identified The Year of the Volunteer as important, for example:

By seeing the government publicly thank volunteers more people wanted to join them.

Many students referred to two different communities explaining how one action strengthened the first community but another weakened the second community. Students who had studied communities that seemed to have no government involvement often answered well by stressing the lack of funding or legal protection and explaining how this weakened the community. However, some students were unable to adapt their information and just produced a prepared answer about a community they had studied and so scored poorly.

Section B

Many students responded well to the more specific nature of Questions 3 and 4 this year but others wrote briefly or showed a lack of understanding about multiculturalism or land rights, both of which are explicitly part of the study design and listed in the bullet points. Answers in Section B were expected to be more detailed than those in the first section as indicated by the marks allocated, but many students disadvantaged themselves because they wrote rather brief and overly general answers.

Question 3

This question required an understanding of multiculturalism, the idea of a national culture and the relationship of these ideas. Some students wrote well on the policy of multiculturalism as well as of the experience in Australia of immigrants from many different cultures. Most students defined national culture either as a monoculture that Australia once experienced and/or tried to impose through assimilation policies, or as a way of life of a pluralist society united by its shared location and by adherence to one legal and political system. Given the community debates related to the notion of a national culture no one definition was required but some recognition of the complexity of the ideas was expected, for example:

Multiculturalism necessitates the freedom to practise one's own religion without vilification, but should extremist opinion be allowed if it challenges the very existence of a united Australian nation?

Students scored highly when they could combine the discussion of these ideas with reference to specific recent changes and debates.

Question 4

This question elicited varied answers based on a range of issues related to 'attachment to land'. Some students explained how attachment to land could be seen from inside and outside Australia, for example:

They feel 'Australian' because they live on this island continent and have a land they can all be proud of and call home. People from around the world see Australia as a great place which in turn gives Australians a sense of pride.

Most students discussed at some level Indigenous land rights but often with too many generalisations and over emphasis on the time of first European settlement rather than discussion of recent debates over native title. References to Mabo or Wik clearly made the discussion contemporary but students needed to explain the divisions not argue their particular point of view regarding reconciliation. Very interesting comments were also made about Australians' common identification with particular landscape or landmarks, their focus on environmental issues, their unity on one continent but division into states with very different geographies, and their desire for home ownership but division according to who can own.

Section C

Question 5

Generally Parts a, b and c were well answered especially by students who responded to the prompts and made detailed references to the representation to support their interpretation. Some students were unfamiliar with the set questions and tended to repetition but most scored well because they interpreted the representation and referred to particular words and images to support their interpretation.

a.

Students recognised that the representation reflected a globalised world where 'our choices affect people we've never met'. Some students referred to the picture and explained that the fence could be interpreted to mean that the rest of the world is both close to us and 'outside our own backyard'.

b.

Changes such as the new communications or the ways everyone is interconnected were discussed with reference to the website, particular current issues such as peacekeeping or asylum seekers, and quotations such as 'has changed our lives forever'. However, many students did not interpret this question correctly, giving changes caused by globalisation rather than suggesting ways in which the representation indicated changes due to globalisation. Students must pay careful attention to the questions wording.

c.

Many students showed they understood that the card was about lobbying politicians and learning about issues, but some made unfounded statements about people from foreign countries voting in Australian elections. While a range of readings is possible, students must base their interpretation on evidence. Reference to evidence such as the filling in of the boxes or the visiting of the website enabled students to achieve full marks for this section.

d.

There were some interesting responses to this question, clearly evaluating the card's message and discussing its practicality or realism. Many students discussed the negative effects of globalism in Australia. The recognition that much relevant content is not included in the representation was an opportunity for students to refer to material studied during the year. When this was done, students could score highly. One such student wrote:

In the representation only positive changes are presented for Australians but many small businesses are likely to go bankrupt due to foreign manufacturers monopolizing industries with consumers being winners and losers at the same time.

This question was the least well answered because most students neglected to explain their views in any detail or refer to evidence from material studied. This was an opportunity for students to refer to some of the examples studied in class, but few did so and few students received high marks for this question.

Section D

Students needed to choose one of three questions and answer appropriately. While most students clearly indicated their choice by labelling their answer or by signalling in their first sentence, a number of students left their choice unclear and so lessened their chances of achieving high marks. Given the criteria for assessment, it was important for students to demonstrate that they were answering a particular question as asked.

The issue of asylum seekers was popular in all answers but needed to be related to the particular question and the emphasis on citizenship. While most students discussed this key concept of national or global citizenship, some tended to leave such understanding implicit, relying too much on the reader. Often the specific evidence provided enabled the student to explain such ideas and to demonstrate an understanding of the complexities of the issues. Whatever the viewpoint presented by the student, evidence was needed to support their argument.

a.

This was the most popular topic with many students comparing the experiences of groups such as Aborigines, asylum seekers, women and youth. More successful responses addressed all parts of the question and did not ignore the word 'growing'. All students need to be reminded to examine the wording of the question. Most students discussed fairness but few discussed 'democratic'. The words 'this statement about citizenship' should have reminded students to link their discussion to the concept of citizenship, probably by providing a definition or by discussing the various aspects of citizenship. Some students did this well, referring to the experience of Indigenous Australians:

Their political citizenship has been undeniably compromised up until the 1960s when they gained the right to vote ... To say also that the Aborigines reap the full benefits of a democratic society would be untrue. In a society that is supposedly fair and equal, Aborigines are still less educated, more likely to develop serious illnesses, die at an early age and earn less than the non-Aboriginal Australian.

A clear summary of the argument also assisted students in keeping their essay relevant to the question, for example:

It's only fair for those who are not second generation migrants, migrants, indigenous people and refugees as these people have been denied their rights and denied an equal share in a democratic society.

Some students wrote an essay about history which was not required. Most who did this tended to write very generally about a long time period rather than focus on recent history and the changing nature of Australian society.

b.

This question was less popular than Question 6a but it was answered in interesting ways. It related more obviously to the representation that was the focus for Question 5 and some students drew on that material extending their previous response. This question allowed students to discuss any human rights issue 'facing Australia'. Students most often chose issues relating to asylum seekers or Indigenous Australians for this question. Successful answers discussed the ways globalisation could operate in a range of ways, for example:

Globalisation has been the cause of many problems facing humanity and the environment worldwide, but it has also created the potential to fix these problems.

Students gave meaning to such general statements, often by references to organisations such as the United Nations or the International Court. Some cited particular recent events to support their argument, for example:

Through globalisation the Tampa images were sent in minutes to different governments and authorities ... The Australian government was labeled inhumane for putting refugees through such ordeals. A debate globally over human rights was ignited.

c.

Most students who chose this question wrote about the refugee/asylum seekers issue. Given the nature of such a current controversial issue it was important that students discuss the ideas in the study design and provide evidence for their argument. Despite the references to citizenship in the question, most students made little explicit mention of global citizenship. Successful answers clearly discussed the concepts of national and/or global citizenship and this enabled them to construct an argument about the asylum seekers. In this context, students related their definition of Australian citizenship to the issue being discussed, referring to the role of government in accepting a refugee for citizenship and the right of the citizen to move freely within Australia. They also discussed the rights of refugees to seek safety within the context of global citizenship. It was exciting to see so many students tackling such current issues and relating them to these core concepts.