

2000 HSC Notes from the Examination Centre Aboriginal Studies

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Aboriginal Studies

Introduction

449 candidates sat the Aboriginal Studies examination which is a slight decrease from 1999. The paper contained a contemporary focus largely on Reconciliation and its progress in Australia. Generally, the paper was handled well, and markers were generally impressed by the knowledge displayed by candidates, especially in the Comparative section. Similarly, the Synthesis section elicited a range of responses which indicated the understanding pertaining to Reconciliation in both a national and regional context. Markers were pleased with the broad range of examples used in the Synthesis, and with the quality of evaluation and discussion evident in many of the responses.

At the same time, a number of what could well be described a paternal or stereotypical scripts were encountered by the markers. Some responses contained gross exaggerations or inaccuracies, both in a national and regional context. Teachers are reminded of the regional-specific nature of the course, along with the particular knowledge outcomes to be attained by the students. Questions clearly asked candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the richness, diversity and strength of contemporary indigenous culture and identity in Australia.

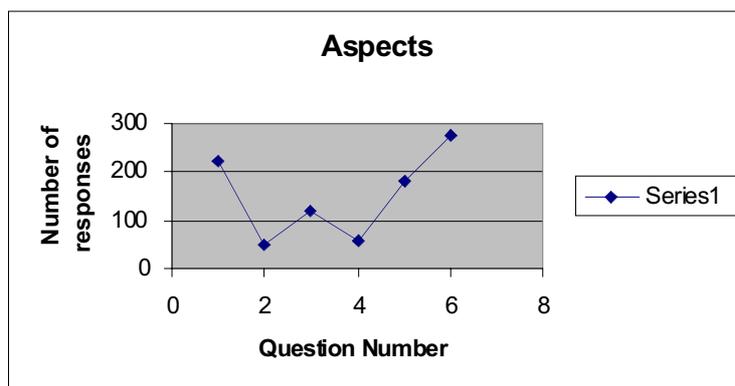
It was felt that the quality of responses had improved in this year's examination and that there was excellent community/regional studies being conducted across the State. Indeed, the depth of some candidates' responses was excellent and reflects an on-going commitment to the teaching and learning associated with such a unique course.

Context

The Context was based around the stimuli of the "Draft Declaration For Reconciliation", and a poster from the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council elections of 1999. The questions allowed candidates to provide a range of contemporary examples and draw upon their own personal experiences during the course of the year with respect to Reconciliation, as evidenced through such events as "Bridge Walk 2000", or, indeed, the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games.

The questions allowed candidates to show the scope of their understanding. Responses reflected a strong contemporary grasp of the issues facing indigenous people.

Table 2: Aspects Section. Number of responses per question.



Aspects

The Aspects questions were open and consistent in terms of their requirements in each section (a), (b), and (c). Once again, Health and Medicine was the most popular response, closely followed by Cultural Expression and Land Rights. The least popular options being, Law and Politics, and Economic Systems. Each response required students to *List, Describe and Explain*.

Markers found that students were, on the whole, able to be awarded full marks in Part (a). Part (b) asked for a description of at least two examples, and students were generally able to provide this. In some cases, Markers commented on the comprehensive nature of the responses. As in the past, Part [c] was the discriminating part of the question. Students were required to name and refer to a specific region. Teachers are alerted to the difference between merely naming a region, and making reference in the response by way of appropriate and accurate examples. Superior scripts were able to address all parts of the question.

Better responses demonstrated candidates' ability to unpack a question and address its key focus and concepts. Some students were able to make comprehensive reference to background knowledge, along with a range of regional-specific examples to substantiate their response.

Markers also commented upon the strong regional-focus in some responses and the obvious community relationships established, and contacts made over the duration of the course.

Comparative

This section contained a structured and unstructured question. The vast majority of students opted to do the structured response, which required a comparative analysis between an Australian regional study and an overseas study. The unstructured question, asking to compare and contrast two Aboriginal communities, was attempted by only a few candidates.

More able candidates presented excellent responses demonstrating concepts in self-determination, however, others who had extensive information regarding their communities, had difficulty in addressing the self-determination section of the question. Some candidates failed to refer to the specifics of their communities, and the programs or institutions that are in their communities and the region.

Students need to be vigilant in the use of appropriate terminology. Previous examination reports will assist in this. Old stereotypical language, especially in regards to International communities, needs to be expressed in a culturally appropriate way so as not to offend indigenous groups here and abroad.

Synthesis

This section contained two unstructured and one structured question, all of which used some form of stimulus material. In this section almost half of the candidates opted for the structured essay question, with Question 10 being the least popular amongst candidates.

Students need to consider the depth and extent of their knowledge of the topic rather than a certain mode of response. Students should ensure that they avoid paternalistic or stereotypical responses in the Synthesis. This was, unfortunately, evident in a number of responses to Question 12.

Markers found the stimulus material appropriate for the questions and were pleased with the manner in which candidates integrated the stimulus into their responses. Questions required candidates to consider the stimulus in the framing of their response.

Skills Displayed By Candidates

Candidates were expected, and displayed, mastery of a range of skills in the examination. These included the following:

- Comprehension: from the short response items in the Context section, and from the stimulus material in the Synthesis section.
- List: provision of content/knowledge outcomes in each section of the paper.
- Describe: provision of content/knowledge outcomes in the Aspects, Comparative and Synthesis sections of the paper. Further to this, candidates were asked in the Aspects to provide two [2] examples linked to the specific requirement of the question.
- Explain: provision of contemporary/historical content/knowledge outcomes in the Aspects, Comparative and Synthesis sections of the paper. Candidates were further asked to place the explanation in a contemporary context, and provide a form of measurement, which, essentially, had a focus on self-determination, or self-sufficiency, or self-help.
- Compare/Contrast: provision of content/knowledge outcomes in the Comparative section of the paper. Here candidates were asked to either compare two regions, or, provide comparison and/or contrast.
- Evaluation: provision of content/knowledge outcomes in the Synthesis section of the paper, and placed within a contemporary context.
- Synthesis: a consideration of an issue faced by indigenous people or communities, and its current and future implications. This skill is also directly connected to the multi-disciplinary nature of the course, and could involve synthesising: political science, law, history or sociology.

Understanding Displayed By Candidates

Candidates were able to display wide-ranging knowledge pertaining to both the issues addressed by the course, along with community-specific examples. By its very nature, the course demands a multi-disciplinary understanding by each candidate.

Candidates this year showed a comprehensive understanding of the following Aspects:

- Cultural Expression
- Education
- Land Rights
- Health and Medicine

Similarly, candidates displayed the same understanding in the Comparative section as listed above, and, at the same time, were able to place this within a comparative context.

Here candidates showed a comprehensive, comparative understanding of the following issues:

- The bond between the people and the land [Main Theme of the Course]
- Land ownership and management [Land Rights/Economic Systems]
- Diet, health practices and medicine [Health and Medicine]
- Painting, dance, drama, music, storytelling [Cultural Expression]

Values and Attitudes

Whilst Values and Attitudes outcomes cannot be directly assessed in the examination, the nature of the course implies that they are a central and critical factor to the successful teaching and learning of the course.

Markers in their piloting and briefing sessions found that the vast majority of responses reflected a sense of cultural sensitivity and understanding, in particular:

- A respect for the beliefs/practices/culture of other people
- A willingness to examine and evaluate attitudes about indigenous people and their experiences
- A respect for the diversity and richness of indigenous cultural groups