**The Four Traditions of Geography**

Geography is among the oldest of disciplines. Modern geography, however, has moved beyond simple description of the earth. The field of geography today is best understood as "the study of how the physical and cultural attributes of the earth interact to form spatial or regional patterns" (Clawson 2001). In 1964, William D. Pattison outlined four traditional areas of study that aid the geographer's ability to explain what goes on in the world: the spatial or location tradition; the regional tradition; the human-environment tradition; and the earth science tradition.

**Geography Tradition #1: Spatial or Location Tradition**

The spatial or location tradition includes the spatial location or spatial distribution of cultural and physical features and activities on the earth. The following topics are part of this tradition: spatial analysis, mapping, movement and transportation, boundaries and densities, quantitative tools and techniques (such as computerized mapping and Geographic Information Systems - GIS), areal distribution, spatial patterns, and Central Place Theory.

**Geography Tradition #2: Regional Tradition**

The regional tradition includes the notion that there exists distinctive regions and areas. The tradition includes the explanation and analysis of possibilities as to how those areas or regions formed. The following topics are part of this tradition: world regional geography, international relationships and trends, description of regions or areas, and how regions are different from one another.

**Geography Tradition #3: Human-Environment Tradition (or man-land tradition)**

The human-environment tradition includes the study and explanation of the many relationships that exist between people and the land and environment that supports people. The following topics are part of this tradition: impact of nature on humans, human impact on nature, perception of environment, cultural, political, and population geography, natural hazards, and environmentalism.

**Geography Tradition #4: Earth Science Tradition**

The earth science tradition may be the oldest of the four, and includes description, analysis, and explanation of the physical characteristics of the earth. The following topics are part of this tradition: physical geography, study of the earth as the home to humans, parts of the earth including the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere. Related disciplines include geology, mineralogy, paleontology, glaciology, geomorphology, and meteorology.