



MHIS115

An Introduction to Big History

S1 External 2015

Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

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Disclaimer

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General Information

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Credit points

3

Prerequisites

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

Macquarie is the international home of big history, and this is its flagship unit. While most history units look in detail at a particular country, theme or period, this unit surveys history on the biggest possible scale. It begins with the origins of the Universe and goes on to tell a series of linked stories about the origins of the stars and planets; the earth and its inhabitants; human beings; various types of human societies; and global interactions to the present day. Students in the unit explore the changing interactions between people, and people and the environment. In so doing, they are encouraged to think about the kinds of evidence available to historians and the role that history can play in understanding the local and global communities that people belong to today. In the final week we will ask what this large story may have to tell us about the future. Finally, the unit invites students to think about what they regard as the central themes of world histories and big history. No prior knowledge of science or history is required

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;
- Plan, revise and submit written work according to schedule;
- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.
- Understand the relationship between human history and the natural sciences

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Due |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| <u>Participation</u> | 10% | Weekly |
| <u>5 Short Essays (10% each)</u> | 50% | Weeks 3,5,7,9,11 |
| <u>Synoptic Paper</u> | 40% | Week 13 |

Participation

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **10%**

Tutorial Participation (Internal) and Online Participation (External). First, there will be a **10% participation mark** that reflects your attendance and also your *active* participation in discussions either in tutorials or online. Learning is an active process and this mark is intended to encourage you to take an active part in class discussions and, hopefully, to encourage you to discuss the course content with other students. There is plenty of evidence that you learn as much in discussions with your peers as you do in interactions with your teachers, so do discuss course content with your friends and family and with other students.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;

- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;

5 Short Essays (10% each)

Due: **Weeks 3,5,7,9,11**

Weighting: **50%**

You will be asked to write 5 short (500 word) essays during the semester, on topics from different parts of the course. For each essay you will be able to choose from between 3 and 5 assigned questions. **Each essay will count for 10% of the final grade. You will be required to submit a self-assessment with each essay, using the short essay rubric**, and you will be penalized if the self-assessment is missing or perfunctory. Writing these short essays will give you regular practice in writing, research and correct citation and formatting of scholarly work. (To help you understand the marking process, we will mark the second essay by peer review in the 6th week of class, asking students to swap essays in class, to grade each others' work, and offer suggestions about how it might be improved.) Despite the shortness of these essays, we will expect them to be well written, thoroughly researched, and correctly formatted. As you work on the short essays, make sure you are aware of the rubrics that we will use as we mark them. **(The questions from which you can choose your topics for the Short Essays are listed at the end of this study guide.)** The short essays will prepare you for the final assessment component ...

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;
- Plan, revise and submit written work according to schedule;
- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Understand the relationship between human history and the natural sciences

Synoptic Paper

Due: **Week 13**

Weighting: **40%**

The final, synoptic essay, takes the place of an exam, so it will not be returned with comments (unless students explicitly ask for them). The essay should be submitted during the last week of the semester. The synoptic essay requires you to attempt an overview of the entire course, because what makes big history distinctive is not the details, but rather the way it can help you see interconnections between many different areas of knowledge. So the synoptic essay will encourage you to develop your ability to see connections between different areas of the course. Everyone will be asked to answer the same question: **“What, in your view, was the most important single theme of MHIS 115: An Introduction to Big History? Give examples from different parts of the course to support your view.”** As you work on the synoptic essay, make sure you touch on several different parts of the course, and also that you are aware of the rubrics that we will use as we mark the essay.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;
- Plan, revise and submit written work according to schedule;
- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';
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- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.
- Understand the relationship between human history and the natural sciences

Delivery and Resources

Delivery

Day, External.

Most of the content of MHIS115 is available online and can be accessed through the iLearn site: <http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>

Times and Locations for Lectures and Tutorials

Lectures: 2 x 1 Hour per week.

- Lecture No. 1 is on **Monday at 9 am in X5BT1**
- Lecture No. 2 is on **Tuesday at 3 pm in X5BT1**

The lectures for this unit will be recorded using the ECHO system. The recordings can be accessed through your iLearn unit. The link to ECHO is to the right of the screen. For more information on using ECHO, please refer to the ECHO student guide: http://www.mq.edu.au/iLearn/student_info/lecture_recordings.htm

Tutorial times and classrooms: For current updates please consult the MQ Timetables website: <https://timetables.mq.edu.au/2015/> . If you are an external student and visit the campus during one of these times, you are welcome to attend.

Required and Optional Texts

Required text: David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown and Craig Benjamin, *Big History: Between Nothing and Everything*, New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.

Optional texts:

- David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).
- For the second half of the course you may find David Christian, *This Fleeting World: A Short History of Humanity* (2008), helpful as a short overview of human history.
- Particularly useful for the synoptic essay will be Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (2010, 2nd ed., 2015).

Where to Get Texts: Required and Optional texts will be available for purchase at the Co-Op bookstore on campus. External students can also contact the Co-Op via phone at (02) 8986 4000, fax at (02) 8986 4099 and the internet at <http://www.coop-bookshop.com.au> and arrange for texts to be sent to them.

In all, you have 3 options for purchasing '*Big History: Between Nothing & Everything*'. Please read the options carefully before choosing which to purchase!

1. PRINTED TEXTBOOK

RRP **\$87.95 AUD**. ISBN 9780073385617. Purchase from the Co-op Bookshop:

<http://www.coop.com.au/bookshop/show/big-history-between-nothing-and-everything-christian-benjamin-brown/9780073385617/>

2. SMARTBOOK

An adaptive online eBook. SmartBook facilitates the reading process by identifying what you know and don't know. As you read, the material continuously adapts to ensure you are focused on the content you need most to close specific knowledge gaps. Learn more about SmartBook here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auaHNO9A2Es>

\$47.95 AUD. 1 year access. Purchase from McGraw-Hill Education at:

<http://www.mheducation.com.au/9781259324604-aus-smartbook-online-access-for-big-history/>

3. EBOOK

A downloadable eBook. Allows you to search, highlight and add notes.

\$46 USD. (This transaction will likely be converted back to AUD by your bank and this will be at the currency rate of the day.) Purchase from McGraw-Hill Education at:

<https://create.mheducation.com/shop/#/catalog/details/?isbn=9781121743687>

You will need to download the VitalSource bookshelf. Please read separate eBook download instructions before purchasing

If you have any queries regarding these options, please visit <https://www.mheducation.com.au/contact-us> to contact McGraw-Hill Education.

SUPPORT: If you need any technical support when buying or using SmartBook or the eBook please take a screenshot of the issue and visit <http://mpss.mhhe.com/contact.php> to contact McGraw-Hill's Customer Experience Group.

Unit Schedule

| Week | Lecture | Tutorial | Assessment |
|------|--|--|--|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION TO BIG HISTORY (Week beginning Feb 23) 1. Welcome to MHIS 115 2. Origins of the Universe | Introduction to MHIS 115 | |
| 2 | THE UNIVERSE & STARS (Week beginning Mar 2) 3. Origins of Galaxies, Stars and Chemicals 4. Formation of the Solar System and Earth | Origins of the Universe and Stars | |
| 3 | THE EARTH & ITS HISTORY (Week beginning Mar 9) 5. Geophysical history of the Earth 6. Life and Evolution | Origins of the Solar System and Earth | 1 st Short Essay due Wed Mar 11 |
| 4 | LIFE & EVOLUTION (Week beginning Mar 16) 7. Origin of Life on Earth 8. Evolution of Life on Earth | Origins and Evolution of Life on Earth | |

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| 5 | <p>EVOLUTION OF OUR ANCESTORS</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 23: ALL STUDENTS MUST BRING A HARD COPY DRAFT OF THEIR 2nd SHORT ESSAY TO THE LECTURE)</p> <p>9. Peer Review of Short Essay 2</p> <p>10. Evolution of <i>Homo sapiens</i> & Collective Learning</p> | The Evolution of humans | 2 nd Short Essay due Wed Mar 25 |
| 6 | <p>WHAT MADE HUMANS DIFFERENT</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 30)</p> <p>11. Kin-ordered Societies</p> <p>12. Origins of Agriculture</p> | The earliest human societies | |
| | <p>MID-SEMESTER BREAK</p> <p>(Apr 3-19)</p> | | (Mid-semester break) Easter Fri Apr 3 |
| 7 | <p>AGRICULTURE & ITS IMPACT</p> <p>(Week beginning Apr 20)</p> <p>13. Early Agrarian era</p> <p>14. Origins of Power, Hierarchy and the 1st States</p> | Agriculture and its importance in human history | 3 rd Short Essay due Wed Apr 22 |
| 8 | <p>CITIES, STATES & EMPIRES</p> <p>(Week beginning Apr 27)</p> <p>15. Agrarian Civilizations (1)</p> <p>16. Agrarian Civilizations (2)</p> | The origins of Power and States | |
| 9 | <p>EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN CIVILIZATIONS</p> <p>(Week beginning May 4)</p> <p>17. Connecting Civilizations: The Silk Roads</p> <p>18. The Agrarian Era in the Americas and Australasia</p> | Evolution of Agrarian Civilisations | 4 th Short Essay due Wed May 6 |
| 10 | <p>TOWARDS MODERNITY</p> <p>(Week beginning May 11)</p> <p>19. Thinking about the Modern Revolution</p> <p>20. Why Europe? Roots of the Industrial Revolution</p> | Global Ecological Exchanges (Outdoor Tutorial) | |

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| 11 | <p>BREAK-THROUGH TO MODERNITY</p> <p>(Week beginning May 18)</p> <p>21. The Industrial Revolution</p> <p>22. The Spread of Industrialization</p> | Towards Modernity | 5 th Short Essay due Wed May 20 |
| 12 | <p>THE ANTHROPOCENE</p> <p>(Week beginning `May 25)</p> <p>23. The Twentieth Century in the lens of Big History</p> <p>24. The Anthropocene: Humans and the Biosphere</p> | The Industrial Revolution and Industrialisation | |
| 13 | <p>WHERE IS IT ALL GOING?</p> <p>(Week beginning June 1)</p> <p>25. Patterns of the Past, Present and Future</p> <p>26. Questions?</p> | The Twentieth Century and Beyond | Synoptic Paper due Wed June 3 |

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your

student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit [ask.mq.edu.au](#).

Note that essays containing any plagiarism may be given a grade of zero. If you have any doubt about the meaning of plagiarism, check the University's policies on Academic honesty at: http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis

of a major historical phenomenon in big history;

- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.

Assessment tasks

- 5 Short Essays (10% each)
- Synoptic Paper

Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and

written form;

- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.

Assessment tasks

- 5 Short Essays (10% each)
- Synoptic Paper

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Self assess your work against pre-selected criteria;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.

Assessment tasks

- Participation
- 5 Short Essays (10% each)
- Synoptic Paper

Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Read literature from different historical disciplines and interpret written and material evidence with appreciation and understanding;
- Plan, revise and submit written work according to schedule;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;

Assessment tasks

- 5 Short Essays (10% each)
- Synoptic Paper

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Analyse and express your judgement about a range of historical phenomena in oral and written form;
- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;
- Outline a major scientific theory of change and express your judgement about whether it is 'history';

- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.

Assessment tasks

- Participation
- 5 Short Essays (10% each)
- Synoptic Paper

Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens

As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation's historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Work with and respond to the views of staff and other students in the unit in both oral and written form;
- Draw together and judge pre-selected and self-located evidence to provide an analysis of a major historical phenomenon in big history;
- Construct a synopsis of big history, highlighting a self-selected theme.
- Understand the relationship between human history and the natural sciences

Assessment task

- Participation

Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible

We want our graduates to be aware of and have respect for self and others; to be able to work with others as a leader and a team player; to have a sense of connectedness with others and country; and to have a sense of mutual obligation. Our graduates should be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Understand the relationship between human history and the natural sciences

How to submit your work

All work will be submitted and marked electronically. For information about how to submit your work please refer to your iLearn unit.

Questions for the Short Essays

Short Essay 1: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 3rd week (March 11):

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. What is complexity and how is it possible for complexity to increase despite the second law of thermodynamics?
2. What is the 'Big Bang' theory? What evidence does this theory rest upon and what do you see as the most significant problems facing the Big Bang theory?
3. What is the link between the formation of new chemical elements and the formation of solar systems? What are the key forms of evidence that help us understand how solar systems form and evolve?

Short Essay 2: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 5th week (March 25):

Pick one of the following Questions:

4. What do you regard as the main turning points in the geological history of our Earth, and what are the main forms of evidence that support your account?
5. How much do biologists understand about the origins of life and what do they not yet understand? What are the main forms of evidence used to try to explain the origins of life?
6. What do you regard as the four most important turning points in the history of life and do you see a 'directionality' to the history of life on earth? Give evidence to support your answers.

Short Essay 3: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 7th week (Apr 22):

Pick one of the following Questions:

7. How well do we understand the evolution of our own species, and what do you regard as the main turning points in that story? What are the most important types of evidence on which this story is based and what is the significance of 'collective learning'?
8. When does human history begin? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?
9. What do we know about human life in the Paleolithic era? What are the main forms of evidence used to study this era?

Short Essay 4: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 9th week (May 6):

Pick one of the following Questions:

10. Why did the emergence of agriculture introduce new forms of inequality and power in human societies? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

11. Using two to three examples from different parts of the world, examine and compare the reasons why people did or did not adopt agriculture. What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account and what role did 'collective learning' play in these processes?

12. Using two to three examples from different parts of the world, examine and compare the key features of agrarian 'civilizations'. What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

13. Why are the 'silk roads' important in world history? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

14. What were the major differences between the histories of the main 'world zones' before modern times; and how can the notion of 'world zones' help us understand the history of our species? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

Short Essay 5: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 11th week (May 20):

Pick one of the following Questions:

15. Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

16. How important was the role of new energy flows in explaining the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch? What key forms of evidence can be used to support your account?

17. How have new technologies transformed the role of 'collective learning' in the Anthropocene epoch?