



# MHIS115

## An Introduction to Big History

S2 Day 2016

*Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations*

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#### Disclaimer

Macquarie University has taken all reasonable measures to ensure the information in this publication is accurate and up-to-date. However, the information may change or become out-dated as a result of change in University policies, procedures or rules. The University reserves the right to make changes to any information in this publication without notice. Users of this publication are advised to check the website version of this publication [or the relevant faculty or department] before acting on any information in this publication.

## General Information

### Unit convenor and teaching staff

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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:

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## General Assessment Information

**NOTE THAT TO PASS THIS COURSE YOU MUST SUBMIT ALL ASSESSMENT TASKS**

**Participation (10%):** Due: Weekly Weighting: 10%

Tutorial Participation (Internal) and Online Participation (External). First, there will be a 10% participation mark that reflects your participation in discussions either in tutorials or online activities. Learning is an active process and this mark is intended to encourage you to take an active part in discussion and, hopefully, to discuss the course content with other students in and out of class. 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.

**4 Short Essays (10% each for total of 40%):** Essays Due Weeks 3,5,7,11

You will be asked to write 4 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. 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, the Synoptic Essay.

**Peer Assessment (10%):** Due in Week 9

You will be asked to help mark the essays of other students submitted in Week 7. You will be encouraged to make use of the course marking rubrics, and examples will be available of essays at different levels. This will give you a sense of the quality of work being submitted by other students. Trying to judge the quality of the work of others will also help you get better at judging the quality of your own work.

**Synoptic Paper (40%):** 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. It should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words long. 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.

## Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Due
<u>Synoptic Essay</u>	40%	Week 13
<u>Peer Assessment</u>	10%	Week 9
<u>4 Short (500 wd) essays</u>	40%	Weeks 3,5,7,11
<u>Tutorial Participation</u>	10%	Every Week

## Synoptic Essay

Due: **Week 13**

Weighting: **40%**

The most important part of the assessment; you will be asked to write an essay reviewing the entire course.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## Peer Assessment

Due: **Week 9**

Weighting: **10%**

You will be asked to assess a short essay by other students

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;

## 4 Short (500 wd) essays

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

Weighting: **40%**

Each essay is worth 10% of the final grade.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## Tutorial Participation

Due: **Every Week**

Weighting: **10%**

Assesses your active participation in tutorials

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## 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 Wednesday at 10 am in E7B Mason Theatre and Lecture No. 2 is immediately after, from 11 am, also in E7B Mason Theatre.

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](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.

### Texts & Readings for this course

**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 or 2011).
- 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.

You have a few options for purchasing '*Big History: Between Nothing & Everything*'. Please read the options carefully before choosing which to purchase!

1. PRINTED TEXTBOOK

ISBN 9780073385617 Can be purchased from the Co-op Bookshop:

<http://www.coop.com.au/big-history-between-nothing-and-everything/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. AU\$64.96

1 year access. Purchase from McGraw-Hill Education at:

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

- be sure to select SmartBook format before adding to basket.

3. EBOOK

This is a downloadable eBook which can be viewed online for a year or students can access a perpetual downloaded copy on several devices including their mobile, laptop and desktop. Students can make notes, share notes, make highlights and of course, the search functionality makes finding relevant content much easier! AU\$57.95

<http://www.mheducation.com.au/9781121743687-aus-cust-ebook-big-history-between-everything-and-nothing>

**\*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 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	<b>INTRODUCTION TO BIG HISTORY</b> <b>(Week beginning Aug1)</b> 1. Welcome to MHIS 115 2. Origins of the Universe	Introduction to MHIS 115	
2	<b>THE UNIVERSE &amp; STARS</b> <b>(Week beginning Aug 8)</b> 3. Origins of Galaxies, Stars and Chemicals 4. Formation of the Solar System and Earth	Origins of the Universe and Stars	
3	<b>THE EARTH &amp; ITS HISTORY</b> <b>(Week beginning Aug 15)</b> 5. Geophysical history of the Earth 6. Life and Evolution	Origins of the Solar System and Earth	1 <sup>st</sup> Short Essay due Wed Aug 17
4	<b>LIFE &amp; EVOLUTION</b> <b>(Week beginning Aug 22)</b> 7. Origin of Life on Earth 8. WRITING ESSAYS IN BIG HISTORY	Origins and Evolution of Life on Earth	
5	<b>EVOLUTION OF OUR ANCESTORS</b> <b>(Week beginning Aug 29)</b> 9. Evolution of Life on Earth 10. Evolution of <i>Homo sapiens</i> & Collective Learning	The Evolution of humans	2 <sup>nd</sup> Short Essay due Wed Aug 31
6	<b>WHAT MADE HUMANS DIFFERENT</b> <b>(Week beginning Sept 5)</b> 11. Kin-ordered Societies 12. Origins of Agriculture	The earliest human societies	
7	<b>AGRICULTURE &amp; ITS IMPACT</b> <b>(Week beginning Sept 12)</b> 13. Early Agrarian era 14. Origins of Power, Hierarchy and the 1st States	Agriculture and its importance in human history	3 <sup>rd</sup> Short Essay due Wed Sept 14



	<b>MID-SEMESTER BREAK</b> (Sept 19-Oct 4)		
8	<b>CITIES, STATES &amp; EMPIRES</b> (Week beginning Oct 4)  15. Agrarian Civilizations (1) 16. Agrarian Civilizations (2)	The origins of Power and States	
9	<b>EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN CIVILIZATIONS</b> (Week beginning Oct 10)  17. Connecting Civilizations: The Silk Roads 18. The Agrarian Era in the Americas and Australasia	Evolution of Agrarian Civilisations	Peer Assessments due Wed Oct 12
10	<b>TOWARDS MODERNITY</b> (Week beginning Oct 17)  19. Thinking about the Modern Revolution 20. Why Europe? Roots of the Industrial Revolution	Global Ecological Exchanges (Outdoor Tutorial)	
11	<b>BREAK-THROUGH TO MODERNITY</b> (Week beginning Oct 24)  21. The Industrial Revolution 22. The Spread of Industrialization	Towards Modernity	4 <sup>th</sup> Short Essay due Wed Oct 26
12	<b>THE ANTHROPOCENE</b> (Week beginning Oct 31)  23. The Twentieth Century in the lens of Big History 24. The Anthropocene: Humans and the Biosphere	The Industrial Revolution and Industrialisation	
13	<b>WHERE IS IT ALL GOING?</b> (Week beginning Nov 7)  25. Patterns of the Past, Present and Future 26. Questions?	The Twentieth Century and Beyond	Synoptic Paper due Wed Nov 9

## 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](http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html)

**New Assessment Policy in effect from Session 2 2016** [http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy\\_2016.html](http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy_2016.html). For more information visit [http://students.mq.edu.au/events/2016/07/19/new\\_assessment\\_policy\\_in\\_place\\_from\\_session\\_2/](http://students.mq.edu.au/events/2016/07/19/new_assessment_policy_in_place_from_session_2/)

Assessment Policy prior to Session 2 2016 <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy prior to Session 2 2016 <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

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

Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/complaint\\_management/procedure.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/complaint_management/procedure.html)

Disruption to Studies Policy [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption\\_studies/policy.html](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/](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](http://ask.mq.edu.au).

## 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](http://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](http://ask.mq.edu.au)

## IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit [http://www.mq.edu.au/about\\_us/offices\\_and\\_units/information\\_technology/help/](http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/).

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use of IT Resources 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 outcome

- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

#### Assessment task

- 4 Short (500 wd) essays

### 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 outcomes

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;

## Assessment tasks

- Peer Assessment
- 4 Short (500 wd) essays

## 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:

### Assessment task

- Tutorial Participation

## 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

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## Assessment tasks

- Synoptic Essay
- Peer Assessment
- 4 Short (500 wd) essays

## 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**

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;
- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;
- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;

## **Assessment tasks**

- Synoptic Essay
- 4 Short (500 wd) essays
- Tutorial Participation

## **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**

- Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;
- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

## **Assessment task**

- Synoptic Essay

## **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 outcome**

- Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments.

### **Assessment tasks**

- Synoptic Essay
- 4 Short (500 wd) essays
- Tutorial Participation

## **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 outcome**

- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;

### **Assessment tasks**

- Synoptic Essay
- Tutorial 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**

- Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines;

## Assessment task

- Tutorial Participation

## Changes from Previous Offering

The assessment suite in this unit was revised in 2015, and continues to be refined.

## Questions for Short Essays & Synoptic Essay

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

### Short Essay 1: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 3rd week (Aug 17):

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 supports this theory, and what do you see as the most significant problems facing it?
3. What is the link between the formation of new chemical elements and the formation of solar systems? What are the key types of evidence that help us understand how solar systems form and evolve?

### Short Essay 2: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 5th week (Aug 31):

Pick one of the following Questions:

4. What do you regard as the one or two main turning points in the geological history of our Earth, and what key types of evidence support your choice(s)?
5. How much do biologists understand about the origins of life, and what do they not yet understand? What are the main types of evidence used to explain the origins of life?
6. What do you regard as the one or two most important turning points in the history of life, and what key types of evidence support your choice(s)? Frame your essay by arguing whether or not you see a 'directionality' to the history of life on earth?

### Short Essay 3: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 7th week (Sept 14):

Pick one of the following Questions:

7. How well do we understand the evolution of our own species? Specify one aspect of our evolution that you consider well understood, and one that remains to be explained. What types of evidence support what we know, and may illuminate what we do not?
8. What do you regard as the one or two main turning points in that story? What are the most important types of evidence that support your choice?
9. What is the significance of 'collective learning' in the evolution of our own species? What key types of evidence support your argument?

10. When does human history begin? What key types of evidence support your choice?
11. What do we know about human life in the Palaeolithic era? What are the main types of evidence used to study this era?
12. Why did the emergence of agriculture introduce new forms of inequality and power in human societies? What key types of evidence can be used to support your account?

**Short Essay 4: due by midnight on Wednesday of the 11th week (Oct 26):**

Pick one of the following Questions:

13. Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the reasons why people did or did not adopt agriculture. What key types of evidence support your account?
14. Was collective learning the most important factor in the spread of agriculture (consider at least one other factor)? What key types of evidence support your argument?
15. Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the key features of agrarian 'civilizations'. What key types of evidence support your account?
16. Why are the 'silk roads' important in world history? What key types of evidence support your account?
17. Consider two 'world zones'. What were the major differences between their histories before modern times? What key types of evidence support your account?
18. Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China? What key types of evidence support your account?
19. Was collective learning the most important factor in the advent of the Industrial Revolution (consider at least one other factor)? What key types of evidence support your argument?
20. How important was the role of new energy flows in explaining the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch? What key types of evidence support your argument?
21. How have new technologies transformed the role of 'collective learning' in the Anthropocene epoch? What key types of evidence support your argument?

**Synoptic Essay:** 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.



## Changes since First Published

Date	Description
22/07/ 2016	Minor changes to assessment description, essay list and information on course texts