



MHIS115

An Introduction to Big History

S1 External 2017

Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| <u>General Information</u> | 2 |
| <u>Learning Outcomes</u> | 2 |
| <u>Assessment Tasks</u> | 3 |
| <u>Delivery and Resources</u> | 4 |
| <u>Unit Schedule</u> | 6 |
| <u>Policies and Procedures</u> | 9 |
| <u>Graduate Capabilities</u> | 10 |
| <u>Changes from Previous Offering</u> | 14 |
| <u>List of Short Essay questions</u> | 14 |
| <u>Synoptic Essay topic</u> | 16 |
| <u>Changes since First Published</u> | 16 |

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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.

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Hurdle | Due |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-------------------|
| <u>Synoptic Essay</u> | 40% | No | Week 13 |
| <u>Short essays (4 x 500 words)</u> | 40% | No | Weeks 3, 5, 7, 11 |
| <u>Peer Assessment</u> | 10% | No | Week 9 |
| <u>Tutorial Participation</u> | 10% | No | Weekly |

Synoptic Essay

Due: **Week 13**

Weighting: **40%**

The most important assessment, in which you will write an essay about a theme of your choice that unifies Big History.

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.

Short essays (4 x 500 words)

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

Weighting: **40%**

Four short (500-word) essays investigating specific questions about unit content. Each is worth 10% of your final mark.

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.

Peer Assessment

Due: **Week 9**

Weighting: **10%**

Assessment and marking of other students' essays (based on third short essay).

On successful completion you will be able to:

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

Tutorial Participation

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **10%**

Active participation in on-line discussions.

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 Monday at 2 pm in E7B Mason Theatre and Lecture No. 2 is immediately after, from 3 pm, 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

Tutorial times and classrooms: For current updates please consult the MQ Timetables website: <https://timetables.mq.edu.au/2017/> .

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://unitguides.mq.edu.au/unit_offerings/77261/unit_guide/print

<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 | <p>INTRODUCTION TO BIG HISTORY</p> <p>(Week beginning Feb 27)</p> <p>1. Welcome to MHIS 115</p> <p>2. Origins of the Universe</p> | Introduction to MHIS 115 | |
| 2 | <p>THE UNIVERSE & STARS</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 6)</p> <p>3. Origins of Galaxies, Stars and Chemicals</p> <p>4. Formation of the Solar System and Earth</p> | Origins of the Universe and Stars: What is the ‘Big Bang’ theory? What evidence supports this theory, and what are the most significant problems with it? | |
| 3 | <p>THE EARTH & ITS HISTORY</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 13)</p> <p>5. Geophysical history of the Earth</p> <p>6. Life and Evolution</p> | Origins of the Solar System and Earth: What is the link between the creation of new chemical elements and the formation of solar systems? What types of evidence help us understand how solar systems form and evolve? | 1 st Short Essay due Fri Mar 17 |
| 4 | <p>LIFE & EVOLUTION</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 20)</p> <p>7. Origin of Life on Earth</p> <p>8. WRITING ESSAYS IN BIG HISTORY</p> | Origins and Evolution of Life on Earth: What do biologists understand about the origins of life, and what do they not yet understand? What types of evidence shed light on the origins of life? | |

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| <p>5</p> | <p>EVOLUTION OF OUR ANCESTORS</p> <p>(Week beginning Mar 27)</p> <p>9. Evolution of Life on Earth</p> <p>10. Evolution of <i>Homo sapiens</i> & Collective Learning</p> | <p>The Evolution of humans: 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 fully explained. What types of evidence support what we know, and may illuminate what we do not yet understand?</p> | <p>2nd Short Essay due Fri Mar 31</p> |
| <p>6</p> | <p>WHAT MADE HUMANS DIFFERENT</p> <p>(Week beginning Apr 3)</p> <p>11. Kin-ordered Societies</p> <p>12. Origins of Agriculture</p> | <p>The earliest human societies: What do we know about human life in the Palaeolithic era? What types of evidence are most useful to the study of this era?</p> | |
| <p>7</p> | <p>AGRICULTURE & ITS IMPACT</p> <p>(Week beginning Apr 10)</p> <p>13. Early Agrarian era</p> <p>14. Origins of Power, Hierarchy and the 1st States</p> | <p>Agriculture and its importance in human history: Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the reasons why people did or did not adopt agriculture. What types of evidence support your account?</p> | <p>3rd Short Essay due Fri Apr 14</p> |
| | <p>MID-SEMESTER BREAK</p> <p>(Apr 17-Apr 28)</p> | | |
| <p>8</p> | <p>CITIES, STATES & EMPIRES</p> <p>(Week beginning May 1)</p> <p>15. Agrarian Civilizations (1)</p> <p>16. Agrarian Civilizations (2)</p> | <p>The origins of Power and States: Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the key features of agrarian 'civilisations'. What types of evidence support your account?</p> | |

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| <p>9</p> | <p>EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN CIVILIZATIONS</p> <p>(Week beginning May 8)</p> <p>17. Connecting Civilizations: The Silk Roads</p> <p>18. The Agrarian Era in the Americas and Australasia</p> | <p>Evolution of Agrarian Civilisations: Why are the 'silk roads' important in world history? What types of evidence support your account?</p> | <p>Peer Assessments due Fri May 12</p> |
| <p>10</p> | <p>TOWARDS MODERNITY</p> <p>(Week beginning May 15)</p> <p>19. Thinking about the Modern Revolution</p> <p>20. Why Europe? Roots of the Industrial Revolution</p> | <p>Global Ecological Exchanges: Consider two 'world zones'. What were the major differences between their histories before modern times? What types of evidence support your account?</p> | |
| <p>11</p> | <p>BREAK-THROUGH TO MODERNITY</p> <p>(Week beginning May 22)</p> <p>21. The Industrial Revolution</p> <p>22. The Spread of Industrialization</p> | <p>Towards Modernity: Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China? What types of evidence support your account?</p> | <p>4th Short Essay due Fri May 26</p> |
| <p>12</p> | <p>THE ANTHROPOCENE</p> <p>(Week beginning May 29)</p> <p>23. The Twentieth Century in the lens of Big History</p> <p>24. The Anthropocene: Humans and the Biosphere</p> | <p>The Industrial Revolution and Industrialisation: How important was the role of new energy flows in explaining the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch? What types of evidence support your argument?</p> | |

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| 13 | WHERE IS IT ALL GOING? (Week beginning June 5) 25. Patterns of the Past, Present and Future 26. Questions? | The Twentieth Century and Beyond: How have new technologies transformed the role of 'collective learning' in the Anthropocene epoch? What types of evidence support your argument? | Synoptic Paper due Fri June 9 |
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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_2016.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

Disruption to Studies Policy (in effect until Dec 4th, 2017): http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html

Special Consideration Policy (in effect from Dec 4th, 2017): <https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policies/special-consideration>

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.

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://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 tasks

- Synoptic Essay
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Tutorial Participation

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

- Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time;

Assessment tasks

- Synoptic Essay
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Tutorial Participation

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

- Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds;

Assessment task

- Synoptic Essay

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
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Tutorial Participation

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
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- 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 tasks

- Synoptic Essay
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Tutorial Participation

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
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- 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
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment

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 tasks

- Synoptic Essay
- Short essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment

Changes from Previous Offering

In 2017, assessment and weekly tutorial activities have been reviewed and modified in light of student feedback.

List of Short Essay questions

REMEMBER: The short essays are 500 words long (not including references and bibliography)

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 Friday of the 3rd week:

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. What is complexity? 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 are the most significant problems with it?
3. What is the link between the creation of new chemical elements and the formation of solar systems? What types of evidence help us understand how solar systems form and evolve?

Short Essay 2: due by midnight on Friday of the 5th week:

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. What do you regard as the one or two main turning points in the geological history of our Earth? What types of evidence support your choice(s)?
2. What do biologists understand about the origins of life, and what do they not yet understand? What types of evidence shed light on the origins of life?
3. What do you regard as the one or two most important turning points in the history of life, and what types of evidence support your choice(s)? Frame your answer by arguing whether or not you see any 'directionality' to the history of life on earth.

Short Essay 3: due by midnight on Friday of the 7th week:

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. 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 fully explained. What types of evidence support what we know, and may illuminate what we do not yet understand?
2. What do you regard as the one or two main turning points in the story of human evolution? What types of evidence lead you to that decision?
3. What is the significance of 'collective learning' in the evolution of our own species? What key types of evidence support your argument?
4. When does 'human' history begin? What evidence supports your choice of a threshold?
5. What do we know about human life in the Palaeolithic era? What types of evidence are most useful to the study of this era?
6. Why did the emergence of agriculture introduce new forms of inequality and power in human societies? What types of evidence can be used to support your account?

Short Essay 4: due by midnight on Friday of the 11th week:

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the reasons why people did or did not adopt agriculture. What types of evidence support your

- account?
2. Was collective learning the most important factor in the spread of agriculture? (Explicitly consider at least one other factor in your answer). What types of evidence support your argument?
 3. Using two examples from different parts of the world, explain and compare the key features of agrarian 'civilisations'. What types of evidence support your account?
 4. Why are the 'silk roads' important in world history? What types of evidence support your account?
 5. Consider two 'world zones'. What were the major differences between their histories before modern times? What types of evidence support your account?
 6. Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China? What types of evidence support your account?
 7. Was collective learning the most important factor in the advent of the Industrial Revolution? (Explicitly consider at least one other factor in your answer). What key types of evidence support your argument?
 8. How important was the role of new energy flows in explaining the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch? What types of evidence support your argument?
 9. How have new technologies transformed the role of 'collective learning' in the Anthropocene epoch? What types of evidence support your argument?

Synoptic Essay topic

Synoptic Essay (2,000-2,500 words; due by midnight on Friday of Week 13):

Everyone will be asked to answer the same question: 'What, in your view, was the most important single theme you encountered in your study of Big History? Give examples from different parts of the Big History story to support your view'. As you work on the synoptic essay, make sure you touch on several different parts of the story, and also that you are aware of the rubrics that we will use as we mark the essay. By 'parts of the story', we mean the thresholds you have studied. In particular, the best answers consider themes that incorporate (1) the universe before life, (2) the Earth after the emergence of life, but before humans, and (3) the human world.

Changes since First Published

| Date | Description |
|------------|--|
| 22/02/2017 | Updates to textbook purchase information |