



MHIS115

An Introduction to Big History

S1 External 2018

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

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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

Late Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, (a) a penalty for lateness will apply – two (2) marks out of 100 will be deducted per day for assignments submitted after the due date – and (b) no assignment will be accepted more than seven (7) days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline. No late submissions will be accepted for timed assessments – e.g. quizzes, online tests.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Synoptic Essay (2000 words)	35%	No	Week 13
Short Essays (4 x 500 words)	40%	No	Weeks 3, 5, 7, 11
Peer Assessment	10%	No	Week 9
Seminar Performance	15%	No	Weekly

Synoptic Essay (2000 words)

Due: **Week 13**

Weighting: **35%**

A longer 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;

Seminar Performance

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **15%**

Seminars (or equivalent online activities for External and OUA students) will consist of three activities:

- An Individual Readiness Assurance Test (IRAT)
- A Team Readiness Assurance Test (TRAT)
- Problem or case-study based application activities

Your seminar performance mark will be calculated from the results of your IRATs (5%) and a combination of instructor-, self-, and peer-evaluations of your performance in your group (10%). Typically, the instructor will assign a group mark, and your individual mark will be adjusted according to self- and peer-evaluation.

Online students (External and OUA) will undertake comparable individual and group activities translated to the online medium. These activities will require the same amount of time as in-class activities (preparation + two hours).

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>.

Lectures and Seminars

This unit is a 'flipped' class. You will complete assigned readings, listen to the lecture, and complete individual pre-class work before class. Classes consist of two-hour seminars, where you will engage in individual, group, and plenary activities.

A typical seminar will be organised as follows:

Hour 1

- An Individual readiness assurance test (IRAT)
- A team readiness assurance test (TRAT)
- Appeals (if you disagree with any test answers)
- Clarification session ('mini-lecture', question and answer session, or another review activity with your instructor).

Short break

Hour 2

- Application activities, where you will work in your teams to address a significant problem related to that week's theme.

If the room permits, seminars will be recorded. Recordings will likely be most useful for the 'clarification session' that will close out the first hour. The recordings can be accessed through your iLearn unit. The link to recordings will appear on the right-hand side of the iLearn page for this unit.

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:

- Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (2nd ed., 2015). An historical perspective on Big History from a different author, complementing your textbook.
- Eric Chaisson, *Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature* (2001). A scientific perspective on Big History. The Spier-Chaisson debate over the nature of complexity is a central argument in Big History.
- David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (2nd ed., 2011). A longer book that delves deeper than your textbook and provides more evidence that you can use for your assignments.

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, on campus or online.
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. Purchase from McGraw-Hill Education at: <http://www.mheducation.com.au/>. 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! <http://www.mheducation.com.au/>.

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	Topic	Themes	Assessment
1	INTRODUCTION TO BIG HISTORY	Introduction to MHIS 115. The origins of the universe.	
2	THE UNIVERSE & STARS	Origins of galaxies, stars, and solar systems. New chemical elements. Formation of the earth and our solar system.	
3	THE EARTH & ITS HISTORY	Geophysical history of the earth. Life.	1 st Short Essay due Friday at midnight
4	LIFE & EVOLUTION	Origins and evolution of life.	
5	EXPLOSIONS & EXTINCTIONS	The natural history of Earth and Evolution from the Cambrian Explosion to Permian Extinction.	2 nd Short Essay due Friday at midnight
6	DINOSAURS & PRIMATES	Natural history from the age of dinosaurs to the emergence of Homo Sapiens.	
7	HUMAN FORAGING SOCIETIES	The world of human foragers from 300,000 to 12,000 years ago.	3 rd Short Essay due Friday at midnight
	MID-SEMESTER BREAK		
8	THE DAWN OF AGRICULTURE	The transition to the Agrarian Age and the massive impact this had on complexity, the environment, and human society.	
9	AGRARIAN CIVILISATIONS	The rise of agrarian states, their impact, and their evolution in the ancient world from c.5000 to 2000 years ago.	Peer Assessments due Friday at midnight
10	THE EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN CIVILISATIONS	The spread of agrarian civilisations and the acceleration of collective learning from c.2000 to 500 years ago.	
11	THE AGE OF EXPLORATIONS	The unification of the world zones into a single global system of collective learning on the eve of the Modern Revolution.	4 th Short Essay due Friday at midnight
12	THE ANTHROPOCENE	The modern revolution and dawn of the Anthropocene; the past 200 years as seen from a Big History perspective.	

13	THE NEAR & DEEP FUTURE	What patterns of the deep past tell us about the near and deep future.	Synoptic Paper due Friday at midnight
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Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central) (<https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central>). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- [Academic Appeals Policy](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Progression Policy](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#)
- [Grade Appeal Policy](#)
- [Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#) (**Note:** *The Special Consideration Policy is effective from 4 December 2017 and replaces the Disruption to Studies Policy.*)

Undergraduate students seeking more policy resources can visit the [Student Policy Gateway](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway) (<https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway>). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

If you would like to see all the policies relevant to Learning and Teaching visit [Policy Central](https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central) (<https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/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/study/getting-started/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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)

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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Seminar Performance

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 (2000 words)
- 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 (2000 words)
- Short Essays (4 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment

Changes from Previous Offering

In 2015, assessment tasks were overhauled, introducing short essays.

In 2016, short essay topics were revised and tutorials were aligned more closely with them. The peer assessment activity was introduced, and one short essay removed.

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

In 2018, the class was 'flipped', with lecture and tutorial replaced by seminars featuring a Team-Based Learning pedagogy.

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. How is it possible for complexity to increase despite the second law of thermodynamics?
2. Why is the Big Bang theory the most widely accepted explanation for the origin of the universe? Consider problems with or alternatives to the theory in your answer.
3. Why is the creation of new chemical elements crucial to the formation of solar systems like ours?

NB: Key concepts (complexity; Big Bang) must be defined. Evidence supporting your arguments must be provided in all cases.

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?
2. Which theory for the origins of life is most convincing: panspermia, 'warm little ponds', or underwater geothermal vents?
3. What don't biologists yet understand about the origins of life?
4. What do you regard as the one or two most important turning points in the history of life?

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

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. What aspect of human evolution is best understood, and what aspect remains to be fully explained?
2. What do you regard as the one or two main turning points in the story of human evolution?
3. What is the significance of 'collective learning' in the evolution of our own species?
4. When does 'human' history begin?
5. What is the most important characteristic of human life in the Palaeolithic era?
6. Why did the emergence of agriculture introduce new forms of inequality and power in human societies?

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

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. Comparing two examples from different parts of the world, explain why people adopted (or failed to adopt) agriculture.

2. Considering at least two drivers behind the spread of agriculture, what was the most important mechanism?
3. Comparing two examples from different parts of the world, explain the key features of agrarian 'civilisations'.
4. Why are the 'silk roads' important in world history?
5. Comparing two 'world zones', explain their differing trajectories in premodern times.
6. Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China?
7. Considering at least two reasons behind the Industrial Revolution, what was the most important driver of industrialisation?
8. Do new energy flows adequately explain the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch?
9. How have new technologies transformed the role of 'collective learning' in the Anthropocene epoch?

Synoptic Essay topic

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

Everyone will be asked to answer the same question: 'What was the single most important theme you encountered in your study of the past through the lens 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 are familiar with the rubrics that we will use as we mark the essay. Also ensure that you touch on several different parts of the story. 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
16/02/2018	One of the due dates was wrong (for the synoptic essay - the major assessment - of course; day not matching date). I knew if I left it we'd get dozens of emails, a bunch of late papers, and appeals, etc. I have fixed that, and I added David Christian to unit staff since he's confirmed now. -Shawn