



MHIS1015

A Big History of the Universe to the Present

Session 1, Weekday attendance, North Ryde 2020

Department of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

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Credit points

10

Prerequisites

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

Big History is a revolutionary new way to study the past, in which students will travel across billions of years in 13 weeks - from the Big Bang, to the formation of Earth, the origin of life, and the 300,000 year history of Homo sapiens. By looking at the broad trends and patterns of the deep past, Big History can also explore what they imply about the future prospects of humans in the 21st century and even shed light on the ultimate fate of the Universe itself. Macquarie is the international home of Big History, a dynamic and growing transdisciplinary field. The historical chronology of Big History is vast, but easy to study, because of the overarching trends of historical change that unite stars and civilisations, dogs and dinosaurs, apes and artificial intelligence, into one historical continuum. This allows students to glide swiftly through 13.8 billion years. Students are encouraged to think about the multi-disciplinary evidence for our history of the deep past and the role that history can play in understanding the past at the largest scales. Finally, the unit invites students to consider humanity's relationship to the natural world, what this implies about the immense complexity of the 21st century, and where we fit in the story of the cosmos. Open to students of all majors and disciplines, 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:

ULO1: Recognise and explain key historical phenomena, patterns, and themes across time

ULO2: Summarise the large-scale chronology of the past, identifying important thresholds

ULO3: Locate and interpret evidence about the past from a variety of disciplines

ULO4: Assess and apply selected approaches to the study of the past from a variety of disciplines

ULO5: Synthesise diverse primary and secondary evidence, from a variety of disciplines, to compose original written and oral arguments

Assessment Tasks

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Assessment details are no longer provided here as a result of changes due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Students should consult [iLearn](#) for revised unit information.

[Find out more about the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and potential impacts on staff and students](#)

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.

Delivery and Resources

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19.

Please check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

Delivery

Lecture content 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. Weekly lectures are on iLearn along with the posted readings for that week.

Seminars are two hours and will review the lectures, readings, and help students prepare the necessary skills for writing essays, with the aim of improving their marks and preparing them for future essays in their academic careers.

A typical seminar will be organised as follows:

Hour 1

- Individual Quiz
- Team Quiz
- Discussion of content

Short break

Hour 2

- Work on an essay skill-building exercise or a scientific/historical/philosophical conundrum in some aspect of Big History

Classrooms: For current updates please consult the MQ Timetables website

Texts & Readings for this course

Required text: David Baker, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Big History*, Seattle: Diabolical Press, 2019. A short, sweet (and sometimes humorous) summary of Big History, containing all the pertinent information you need to pass the course. Designed to work with the videos posted on iLearn, which supplement the more in-depth detail of the book. Link to the ebook: <https://www.amazon.com.au/Hitchhikers-Guide-Big-History-ebook/dp/B081XJZWDQ> Link to the hard copy: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1711025623>

This can also be purchased via links provided on <http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>

Optional texts:

- David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown and Craig Benjamin, *Big History: Between Nothing and Everything*, New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014, accessible book that delivers the outlines of Big History, with an emphasis on World History. (Some dates and information out of date)
- 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. (Some dates and information out of date)
- 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. (Some dates and information out of date)

- 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. (Some dates and information out of date)

Unit Schedule

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

The unit schedule/topics and any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19. Please consult [iLearn](#) for latest details, and check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

Week	Topic	Themes	Assessment
1	INTRODUCTION TO BIG HISTORY	Introduction to MHIS1015. 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.	
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.	
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.	Essay Outline Due
	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.	
10	THE EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN CIVILISATIONS	The spread of agrarian civilisations and the acceleration of collective learning from c.2000 to 500 years ago.	Research Plan Due

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.	
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

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.*)

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 published on platform other than [eStudent](#), (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) 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 or if you are a Global MBA

student contact globalmba.support@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 help you improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Getting help with your assignment](#)
- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module](#)

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- [Subject and Research Guides](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)

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

If you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@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.

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.

In 2020, the assessment structure was modified according to advice from Learning & Teaching.

Synoptic Essay Question

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.