MHPG852
Big History and Interdisciplinary Curriculum
S1 External 2015
Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

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## General Information

### Unit convenor and teaching staff

**Unit Convenor**  
David Christian  
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**Other Staff**  
Tracy Sullivan  
[contact via tracy.sullivan@mq.edu.au](mailto:tracy.sullivan@mq.edu.au)

**Library Staff**  
Melinda Stewart  
[contact via melinda.stewart@mq.edu.au](mailto:melinda.stewart@mq.edu.au)

### Credit points

4

### Prerequisites

Admission to MA in (History or Modern History) or PGDipArts in Modern History or PGCertArts in Modern History

### Corequisites

Co-badged status

### Unit description

Big History explores the origins of the universe and humankind as an historical narrative framed at the largest possible scales, deepening our understanding of who we are and where we come from. Inherent in understanding the plethora of linked stories throughout the Big History framework is the intertwining of knowledge drawn from an array of disciplines; from astronomy to geology, sociology to anthropology. This makes Big History an interdisciplinary undertaking on the largest scale. This unit will combine the latest theory and research in Big History and interdisciplinary education. The role of interdisciplinarity in meeting the educational needs of the 21st century learner in the context of the school will be explored. With a focus on practical classroom application the unit will bridge the gap between theory and practice to provide meaningful educational experiences for educators and their students. The main focus of this unit will be secondary education, however, the themes and concepts explored will also be relevant to the primary and tertiary contexts.
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:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-disciplinary framework of Big History
- Examine the role of Big History in supporting inter-disciplinary learning and teaching
- Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
- Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning
- Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule
- Use appropriate research methods and bibliographical and referencing systems
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate with and respond to the views of other participants in the unit

General Assessment Information
Content: The course runs on two parallel tracks

TRACK 1: BIG HISTORY CONTENT

- The course will work through the big history story, a profoundly trans-disciplinary story that requires trans-disciplinary teaching. The story begins with the origins of the Universe, and tracks the slow increase in complexity as stars appeared, then new chemical elements, then planets, living organisms and ultimately, one of the most complex entities we know of, human societies.

TRACK 2: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES OF INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING

- Bouncing off the big history story, the course will begin by discussing both the possibilities and the difficulties of teaching across multiple disciplines.
- It will discuss broad general concepts and approaches that can help us connect different disciplines, such as the idea of origin stories and the theme of increasing complexity.
- It will also discuss the distinctive pedagogical concept of ‘claim testers’, a practical way of exploring the epistemological challenges of interdisciplinary study and teaching.
- Most of the course will explore the challenges of teaching and communicating particular aspects of the big history agenda, such as the origins and evolution of life on earth and the distinctive role of humans and human societies in the biosphere.
Assessment Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24 April</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Short Essay</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24 April</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz 2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5 June</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Short Essay</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5 June</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Research Project</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5 June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussions</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5 June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quiz 1**
Due: 24 April
Weighting: 10%
First short quiz

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-disciplinary framework of Big History

**First Short Essay**
Due: 24 April
Weighting: 10%
First short essay

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
- Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning
- Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule

**Quiz 2**
Due: 5 June
Weighting: 10%
Second short quiz

On successful completion you will be able to:
• Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-disciplinary framework of Big History

**Second Short Essay**

**Due:** 5 June  
**Weighting:** 10%

Second short essay

On successful completion you will be able to:

• Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding  
• Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning  
• Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule

**Action Research Project**

**Due:** 5 June  
**Weighting:** 50%

Major Project

On successful completion you will be able to:

• Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-disciplinary framework of Big History  
• Examine the role of Big History in supporting inter-disciplinary learning and teaching  
• Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding  
• Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning  
• Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule  
• Use appropriate research methods and bibliographical and referencing systems

**Online Discussions**

**Due:** 5 June  
**Weighting:** 10%

Online discussions

On successful completion you will be able to:

• Examine the role of Big History in supporting inter-disciplinary learning and teaching  
• Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding  
• Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning  
• Demonstrate the ability to communicate with and respond to the views of other participants in the unit
Delivery and Resources

Teaching Mode:
This course will be taught entirely online, using the iLearn web site. Discussions will be online, most of the course materials are available online and you will be asked to submit your work online.

Main Text:
David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown & Craig Benjamin, Big History: Between Nothing and Everything, McGraw/Hill, 2014 (available in hard back from the University Co-op bookstore, and also as an ebook)

Optional Texts:

Online materials:
The weekly readings will be available on line
Much of the material we will explore can be found at the web site of the Big history Project, http://www.bighistoryproject.com/portal
This unit has an online presence. Login is via: https://ilearn.mq.edu.au/
Students are required to have regular access to a computer and the internet. Mobile devices alone are not sufficient.

• For technical support go to: http://mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/informatics/help
• For student quick guides on the use of iLearn go to: http://mq.edu.au/iLearn/student_info/guides.htm

Unit Schedule

WEEK 1: 2 March: Introduction to this Unit: Big History & Interdisciplinarity

WEEK 2: 9 March: What is Big History & What is Interdisciplinarity?

WEEK 3: 16 March: Big Bang – interdisciplinary teaching and thinking
Submit topic for Action Research Project
WEEK 4: 23 March: Stars – Making thinking visible in Big History (claim-testing)

WEEK 5: 30 March: Chemical elements: Chronology & scale in Big History
MID SEMESTER BREAK
Thur Apr 2, last day of classes, Apr 3 Good Fri, Apr 6 Holiday

WEEK 6: 20 April: Planets, Solar System, Earth: Approaching multiple literacies for students in Big History
Complete first quiz

WEEK 7: 27 April: Life, the role of narrative in teaching Big History
Submit detailed plan for Action Research Project

WEEK 8: 4 May: Collective Learning, problem-based learning & big history

WEEK 9: 11 May: Agriculture, assessment & big history

WEEK 10: 18 May: Modern Revolution, integration big history curriculum into existing curriculum

WEEK 11: 25 May: What comes next? Developing evidence-based hypotheses - bringing it all together

WEEK 12: 5 June: Submit Action Research Project
Complete second quiz & second short essay

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


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

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

**Student Code of Conduct**

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

**Results**

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in eStudent. For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

**Student Support**

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

**Learning Skills**

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

- Workshops
- StudyWise
- Academic Integrity Module for Students
- Ask a Learning Adviser

**Student Services and Support**

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

**Student Enquiries**

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

**IT Help**

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

When using the University’s IT, you must adhere to the Acceptable Use Policy. The policy

https://unitguides.mq.edu.au/unit_offerings/52322/unit_guide/print
Graduate Capabilities

PG - Capable of Professional and Personal Judgment and Initiative

Our postgraduates will demonstrate a high standard of discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgment. They will have the ability to make informed choices and decisions that reflect both the nature of their professional work and their personal perspectives.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

• Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
• Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning

PG - Discipline Knowledge and Skills

Our postgraduates will be able to demonstrate a significantly enhanced depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content knowledge in their chosen fields.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

• Examine the role of Big History in supporting inter-disciplinary learning and teaching
• Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
• Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning
• Use appropriate research methods and bibliographical and referencing systems

Assessment tasks

• Quiz 1
• First Short Essay
• Quiz 2
• Second Short Essay
• Action Research Project
• Online Discussions

PG - Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

Our postgraduates will be capable of utilising and reflecting on prior knowledge and experience, of applying higher level critical thinking skills, and of integrating and synthesising learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments. A characteristic of this form of thinking is the generation of new, professionally oriented knowledge through personal or group-based critique of practice and theory.
This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcomes**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-disciplinary framework of Big History
- Examine the role of Big History in supporting inter-disciplinary learning and teaching
- Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
- Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning

**Assessment tasks**

- First Short Essay
- Second Short Essay
- Action Research Project

**PG - Research and Problem Solving Capability**

Our postgraduates will be capable of systematic enquiry; able to use research skills to create new knowledge that can be applied to real world issues, or contribute to a field of study or practice to enhance society. They will be capable of creative questioning, problem finding and problem solving.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcomes**

- Critically reflect on existing Big History teaching practice and understanding
- Apply Big History concepts and ideas to inter-disciplinary teaching and learning
- Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule
- Use appropriate research methods and bibliographical and referencing systems

**Assessment tasks**

- First Short Essay
- Second Short Essay
- Action Research Project

**PG - Effective Communication**

Our postgraduates will be able to communicate effectively and convey their views to different social, cultural, and professional audiences. They will be able to use a variety of technologically supported media to communicate with empathy using a range of written, spoken or visual formats.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcome**

- Demonstrate the ability to communicate with and respond to the views of other
participants in the unit

Assessment tasks

- Quiz 1
- First Short Essay
- Quiz 2
- Second Short Essay
- Action Research Project
- Online Discussions

PG - Engaged and Responsible, Active and Ethical Citizens

Our postgraduates will be ethically aware and capable of confident transformative action in relation to their professional responsibilities and the wider community. They will have a sense of connectedness with others and country and have a sense of mutual obligation. They will be able to appreciate the impact of their professional roles for social justice and inclusion related to national and global issues.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Plan, revise, self-assess and submit unit assessment activities according to schedule
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate with and respond to the views of other participants in the unit

Assessment task

- Online Discussions