



MHIS115

An Introduction to Big History

S1 External 2019

Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

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Disclaimer

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

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Convenor

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Credit points

3

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 - from the Big Bang to the death of the Universe - in 13 weeks. Macquarie is the international home of Big History, and this is its flagship unit. While most history units look at a particular country, theme, or period, this unit examines history at the largest possible scale. It begins with the origins of the universe and goes on to tell connected stories about stars and planets, the earth and its life, human beings, and diverse human societies from the deep past, through the present day, and into the future. Students in this unit explore interactions between the physical world, life, and people. They are encouraged to think about the evidence available to historians and the role that history can play in understanding the past at the largest scales. Finally, the unit invites students to think about any themes that may characterise large-scale 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
<u>Short Essays (3 x 500 words)</u>	30%	No	Weeks 4, 7, 10
<u>Peer Assessment</u>	10%	No	Week 12
<u>Synoptic Essay (2000 words)</u>	35%	No	Week 13
<u>Online Performance</u>	25%	No	Weekly

Short Essays (3 x 500 words)

Due: **Weeks 4, 7, 10**

Weighting: **30%**

Three short (500-word) essays investigating specific questions about each phase of Big History: Cosmos, Biology, and Humanity. 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 12**

Weighting: **10%**

For the third essay, your opportunity to sit at the marker's end of essay writing. A short and easy exercise that can boost your overall grade.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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

Synoptic Essay (2000 words)

Due: **Week 13**

Weighting: **35%**

A longer form essay on a topic that you feel is the most important theme or pattern of 13.8 billion years of 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.

Online Performance

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **25%**

You will undertake a consistent series of weekly online activities to ensure engagement with the class:

- Quizzes on the weekly videos and readings
- Individual and/or (asynchronous) group exercises that engage a 'Big History conundrum'

and help you prepare your essays

- Reflective writing

All weekly activities will contribute to your online performance mark, including your individual participation in group exercises. Note: All quizzes are considered 'timed assessment' and no late submissions will be accepted.

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

Lecture content is available online and can be accessed through the iLearn site: <http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>.

Lectures and Online Performance

This unit is a 'flipped' class. Weekly lectures are on iLearn along with the posted readings for that week. Online performance will be conducted via iLearn with quizzes and postings.

Each week the student will have to do a quiz and will make some postings (as per weekly instructions) regarding their exercises.

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.	
4	LIFE & EVOLUTION	Origins and evolution of life.	1st Short Essay due
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.	2nd Short Essay 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.	3rd Short Essay 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.	Peer assessment due
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.*)

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 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 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>

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.

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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)
- Online 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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)

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

- Short Essays (3 x 500 words)
- Peer Assessment
- Synoptic Essay (2000 words)

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.

Example Short Essay questions (actual questions may vary)

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: The universe before life

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. Why is the Big Bang theory the most widely accepted explanation for the origin of the universe?
2. What do you regard as the most important turning point in the geological history of our Earth?

NB: Key concepts (e.g., 'Big Bang') must be defined. Evidence supporting your arguments must be provided in all cases.

Short Essay 2: Life before humans

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. Which theory for the origins of life is most convincing?
2. What do you regard as the most important turning point in the history of life?

Short Essay 3: Human history

Pick one of the following Questions:

1. What is the most important turning point in human evolution?
2. Why did humans adopt agriculture?
3. How did the transition from foraging to agriculture change human lifeways?
4. Are there any predictable patterns or "laws of history" in 5000 years of agrarian civilisations?

5. Why did the Industrial Revolution happen in Europe and not in China?
6. Why is collective learning such an important generator of complexity?

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.