



MHIS115

An Introduction to Big History

S3 External 2019

Dept of Modern History, Politics & International Relations

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor

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AHH

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
Essay Outline	20%	No	Week 3
Research Plan	20%	No	Week 4
Synoptic Essay (2000 words)	35%	No	Week 6
Online Performance	25%	No	Weekly

Essay Outline

Due: **Week 3**

Weighting: **20%**

Craft a concrete outline for the final Big History essay based on the essay exercises conducted in the course. Essay question is: *What in your view is the most important theme or pattern in 13.8 billion years of history?* Essay outline should include a clear thesis statement that directly answers the essay question, a list of principle topics/arguments, and notes about the types of supporting evidence that will be used in each paragraph.

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;

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

Research Plan

Due: **Week 4**

Weighting: **20%**

Provide an annotated bibliography where you list the sources you are going to use for the final essay and explain why they are useful (each essay should have a minimum of 10 sources). Building on your essay outline, provide a refined thesis statement, and refined set of arguments supporting it with a topic sentence for each.

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.

Synoptic Essay (2000 words)

Due: **Week 6**

Weighting: **35%**

A Big History essay on a topic that you deem the most important theme or pattern of 13.8 billion years of history. The chosen theme can be one that is indicated in the course or one of original design. Assessment should utilise the essay writing skills provided in the course.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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- 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%**

Online performance will consist of three regular activities:

- A multiple choice quiz on weekly lecture & reading content
- A skill-building exercise on essay-writing to raise your performance on the written assignments
- A discussion post on interesting questions & conundrums in Big History

On successful completion you will be able to:

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- 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.

Delivery and Resources

Delivery

The content of MHIS115/MHIX115 is available online and can be accessed through the iLearn site: <http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>.

Lectures and Online Activities

This unit is a 'flipped' class. Students will watch the video lectures on iLearn and do the assigned textbook readings. Each week, online students will answer a short quiz on the content, and do an online posting that builds essay skills and explores deeper content questions.

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

W	Topic	Themes	Assessment
1	The Big Bang and the Cosmos	Introduction to Big History, the origins of the Universe, stars, and galaxies	
2	Planets and Life	The origins of the solar system, Earth, and life	
3	Evolution and Humanity	The natural history of life on Earth and the evolution of humanity	Essay Outline due Friday at midnight
	Mid-semester break (TWO WEEKS)		
4	The Agrarian Era	The rise of agriculture and the era of agrarian states	Research Plan due Friday at midnight
5	Breakthrough to Modernity	The evolution of agrarian states to the onset of the Industrial Revolution	
6	The Anthropocene and Future	Modernity through the lens of Big History and what the trends of 13.8 billion years tell us about the near and deep future	Synoptic Essay due Friday at midnight.

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](http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central) (<http://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

- Research Plan
- 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

- Essay Outline
- Research Plan
- 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;

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

- Essay Outline
- 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

- Essay Outline
- 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

- Research Plan
- 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

- Research Plan
- 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 task

- 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 task

- 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.

In 2019, the assessment structure has been revised according to suggestions from Learning and Teaching.

Synoptic Essay topic

Synoptic Essay (2,000 words; due by midnight on Friday of Week 6):

Everyone will be asked to answer the same question: *'What in your view is the most important theme or pattern in 13.8 billion years of 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
26/11/2019	Addition of Lorna Barrow to list of course staff, amendments to delivery and resources