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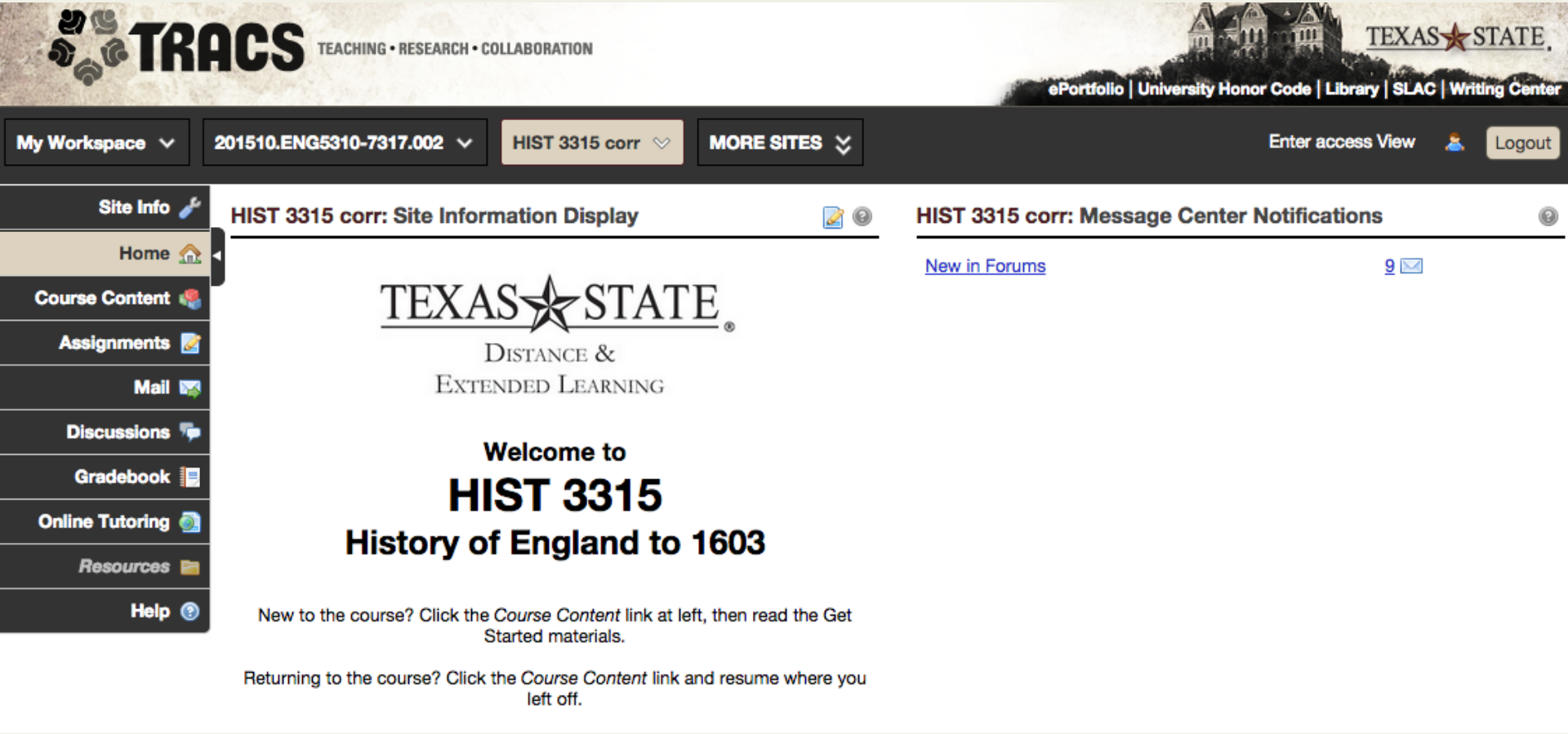
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Lesson One

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Lesson 1 - Roman Britain: The Beginnings of British History » The First Chapter in Recorded British History

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Lesson 1 - Roman Britain: The Beginnings of British History

The First Chapter in Recorded British History

As you begin this course, you are just getting used to reading and using a new book, with which you are likely unfamiliar. However, let me offer you a few assurances. Our objective here is not to become detailed experts in ancient British history. Rather, in these early sections, we are principally concerned with building a good foundation for what is to come. Of course, I do want you to read and become familiar with important information: key words, names of important individuals, and basic chronological order. However, when you begin to look at the questions in the self-help exercise and assignment, I think you will see that I have kept the burdens of this first lesson within definite limits. Studies tell us that a correspondence student who does the first lesson quickly, and receives grade feedback quickly, is much more likely to finish the whole course than one who delays getting started. That sets a goal for both you and me. You need to dive in, trust me a little, complete this first lesson, and submit the first assignment as soon as possible. I promise to have Assignment 1 graded and back to you as soon as I can. You will then have an idea of the way I grade. You will also see that subsequent lessons are manageable, and you will have specific ideas about how to complete them.

Portions of Hadrian's Wall, a defensive fortification begun in the second century A.D., still exist. The wall is one of the preeminent vestiges of Roman Britain. (source)

In this lesson, we will look at the earliest phase of the Roman occupation of Britain. Many people outside of Britain are not aware of the fact that the Romans ruled there for nearly 500 years. Yet, for five centuries from just prior to the birth of Christ to the early Middle Ages, Roman ways in law, town life and even the military dominated southern Britain. The Romans left a legacy of this rule in architecture, forts, and roads. Yet the cultural legacy of Rome in Britain is slight: English language, Germanic law and government, new place names, and new forms of community all replaced those of Rome.

Our first objective, then, is to find out just what was Roman about Roman Britain. How did the Romans come to rule there, and how did they rule? One key to these questions is the town. The Romans were particularly good at creating so-called "urban empire." We have to be careful because to our minds, the word "urban" brings up images of modern mega-cities like Los Angeles or New York. Applied to the Roman era, "urban empire" simply means that the Romans based their power on a network of towns and trade centers, rather than on dispersed agricultural settlements. Of course the Romans farmed, and of course food production was the major occupation and preoccupation of their society. But the workings of order, taxes for the government, law enforcement, the courts, and military power all centered upon settled habitations in towns, camps, and cities. Part of understanding Roman Britain is seeing where these structured communities arose and by what means the Romans kept them going. Part of understanding the end of Roman Britain is seeing the reasons these communities quit working as they once had.

At the same time, we want to remember the non-Roman peoples of Britain. After all, prior to the first arrival of Roman explorers under Julius Caesar, human beings had inhabited Britain for millennia. These varied first Britons emerged from cultures far older and radically different from that which the Romans brought to the island. Who were these first peoples? How did they relate to people on the mainland of Europe? We know for certain that in the face of Roman incursions, the first Britons reacted violently, seeking to cast out the foreigners who transgressed their shores. They certainly understood that the Romans posed a threat to their independent way of life. Such Celtic Britons maintained contact with kindred people in Gaul (modern-day France) and had heard of Roman conquest there. In fact, they had abetted the Romans' enemies in Gaul; we know the Britons offered Gaul this aid because Caesar tells us he first went to Britain to cut that aid. What began as a Roman raid to alter the balance of power in one military campaign instead opened a whole new chapter, the first chapter, in recorded British history.

Assignment One

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Reset **HIST 3315 corr: Assignments**

Assignment - In progress

Title	Assignment 1
Due	Dec 31, 2017 5:00 pm
Status	Not Started
Grade Scale	Points (max 100.0)
Modified by instructor	Mar 5, 2013 10:30 am

Instructions

Complete this assignment and attach it here as a .rtf, .doc, or .docx file. Your document should have 1-inch margins and use 12-point Times New Roman font.

This assignment marks the first time you will produce work for grading by me, meaning that we are now going to begin learning to communicate. Doing so takes time and a little trial and error. I promise to have Assignment 1 graded and back to you as soon as I can. You will then have an idea of the way I grade. You will also see that subsequent assignments are manageable, and you will have specific ideas about how to do them.

I also want to remind you that each individual assignment is only 4 percent of your total grade. You must complete all the assignments in order to take the exams and pass the course. However, if you happen to struggle, any one assignment grade by itself cannot harm you. Only a long-term pattern of low assignment grades can do so. Remember, as you progress through this course, I am available, primarily by e-mail, to answer your questions and concerns.

Part I: Short Answer Questions (30 points total)

Answer all four.

1. List at least four reasons for Boudicca's Rebellion.
2. List at least five common features of a Roman town in Britain. What functions did Roman towns in Britain fulfill?
3. List at least three examples or characteristics of Emperor Hadrian's building programs in Britain.
4. List and describe at least three changes in Roman governance in the era of Septimus Severus.

Part II: Discussion-Essay Questions (70 points total)

Answer any two. Each answer should be between 300 and 500 words (70 points total)

1. Why did Julius Caesar go to Britain? What was his legacy there?
2. By what means did the Romans finally conquer Britain? What changes did they make upon the landscape and the society of their new acquisition?
3. After the Roman conquest of Britain, how assimilated did Britons become to Roman rule? How assimilated did Romans become to their subject peoples?

When you have completed and submitted Assignment 1, you may proceed to Lesson 2.

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