

Gender, Women, and Human Rights
WOME 4012/SOCJ 5017/SOCI 4113

Dr. Lori Chambers

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Fall 2025

Monday, 2:30-5:30 telepresence room

Course Description

The objective of this course is for students to develop a critical analysis of human rights law and *Charter* litigation. To what degree, and for whom, have these legal tools been successful in creating equity. Using a wide variety of sources, including legislation and legislative debates, case law, jurisprudence, and secondary literature, this course will explore the multiplicity of issues considered/protected under Human Rights Codes and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Particular attention will be paid to the western, individualist origins of human rights regimes and the problems this presents for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Please note that most subjects are not only or directly about gender. It is expected that we consider gender through an intersectional lens. You are not required to have previous knowledge of the law.

Land Acknowledgement

As participants together in this course, we acknowledge that Lakehead Thunder Bay is located on the ancestral lands of the **ᐊᓂᔑᓈᐯᐤ** (Anishinabe) people, signatories to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. Lakehead Orillia is located on the traditional territory of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Pottawatomi nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. In this class, we express our commitment to positive relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples based on the principles of mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, and collaboration. We recognize the continual commitment needed by non-Indigenous people and institutions to learn from and about Indigenous peoples, to acknowledge the enormous harms colonialism has perpetuated and continues to perpetuate, and to reconcile this relationship.

Required Texts

All readings are available through online resources via D2L.
Therefore there are no textbook costs associated with this course.

Evaluation

Participation:	20%	
Human Rights 101:	20%	Due: September 22
Unit Journal:	30%	Due: November
Human Rights in My Community:	30%	Due: December 1

Participation

Discussions require that everyone participates (speaks, writes on D2L, and listens) in a meaningful and civil way. While there will be lots of disagreement and debate, everyone is expected to be respectful of others in the class. This requires that we listen to and value ideas and political positions that are different from our own. Personal attacks, gender, religious, and racial slurs, disrespectful comments on ability or sexuality, or other such behavior is not respectful, constitutes academic misconduct, and will not be tolerated. Please keep in mind that this is a scholarly environment.

Please note that I understand some students are very shy about speaking in class. However, you must listen attentively. I will post questions about the readings each week and students may respond on D2L instead of speaking in class if they are more comfortable with this approach. You may also post questions for me on D2L or send them to me via regular email. Ideal engagement will involve BOTH participation in class and online via D2L.

I encourage you to follow the news and to bring materials that you have read or watched to class. The world is full of examples of the problems we will discuss. Read, critique, and bring issues to class for discussion.

Participation grades will reflect attendance, willingness to contribute to class discussions, and ability to listen respectfully to others. A full

mark out of 20 will be subtracted for each absence from class for which the student does not provide alternative evidence of reading and participation by posting on D2L. Marks will be delivered twice, in sections of 10% in order to provide feedback for improvement and to ensure that all students have received 25% of their final grade by the drop and add date, as per senate regulations. Disrespectful participation is worse than no participation and will be marked accordingly.

Assignment 1: Human Rights 101

All students will complete the on-line tutorial in Human Rights, created by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The module provides a certificate of completion. Submission of the certificate, by the required date, is required to receive the all-or-nothing 20% for this assignment. The on-line tutorial is available at: [Certificate Version | Ontario Human Rights Commission](#). Not only is this an excellent learning module, but also it is required for many government jobs, so completing it has practical application. It also represents 20 very easy marks. Please note that the program only works on newer computers in the certificate version. If your computer is not supported, do the non-certificate version and take a screenshot of your completion page. I understand that not everyone will have a compliant device (and in fact my own computer is too old). Do NOT fail to complete this simple assignment.

Assignment 2: Unit Response Journal

For this assignment you will select one of the units/themes for the term and write a personal paper integrating the readings/things you have watched with your own experience/thoughts about the law and social myths regarding human rights and human well-being. Because each of the units is complex/large, you will need to narrow the topic and should focus on only one or two readings. For example, under the topic of the rights of children, you could focus entirely on child welfare policy for Indigenous populations. This is just one example of an issue you could explore. You should let your interest be your guide but should discuss the focus of the paper with me in advance. The unit review journal should be 5-6 double-spaced, typed pages (12 pt

Times New Roman with 1-inch margins) and must discuss a minimum of 2 course and non-course readings.

NOTE: Graduate students must write 8-10 pages and consult a minimum of 3 to 4 course and non-course readings.

Assignment 3: Human Rights in My Community

For this assignment, you must choose, early in the term, a human rights issue about which you have significant concern, and about which there is media discussion. You must then follow this issue closely for the semester. You must collect a minimum of 5 articles or other media sources – print, online, TV, etc. - about this issue. At the end of the semester, you will submit not only the materials collected, but also a commentary on how the issue has been portrayed in media? Does media coverage encourage an understanding of human rights or demonize rights-seekers? Is the coverage varied across media/sources of news? The purpose of this assignment is to develop a critical approach to legal issues in the news/media. Students must refer to theory from class and connect theory with the media examples presented. The paper should be 5-6 double-spaced typed pages.

NOTE: Graduate students must write 7-8 pages and have 7-8 media sources about their chosen subject.

ISSUES FOR STUDENT INFORMATION

Do not use Wikipedia, mapleleafweb.com, Dictionary.com or any non-academic web source for definitions and historical/political/legal etc facts/arguments.

You must include a bibliography even if you are only using readings assigned for the course.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words and/or ideas. Not acknowledging your debt to the ideas of a secondary source, failing to use quotation marks when you are

quoting directly, buying essays from essay banks, copying another student's work, or working together on an individual assignment, all constitute plagiarism. Resubmitting material you have previously or simultaneously submitted in another course is also academic dishonesty. The minimum penalty for academic misconduct is a 0 on the assignment in question. Students may also be subject to more severe academic penalties, up to and including expulsion for multiple offences. All students are required to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Please review the university guidelines at <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/academics/academic-support/skills-for-success/responsibilities>. All cases of plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with the Code of Student Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures approved by Senate and the Board of Governors.

GenAI Use:

Generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI or GenAI) is a category of AI systems capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. These systems include ChatGPT and its variant Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. The following information and guidelines apply to the use of AI-based tools in this course:

- a) Student Responsibility – It is the responsibility of the student to understand the limitations of AI-based tools. While these tools can provide suggestions and insights, final decisions and critical thinking should come from the student's own understanding and effort.
- b) Error & Bias – AI content is created by computer algorithms that have been trained using large amounts of data. The AI learns from patterns and examples in the data to generate new content that resembles what it has been trained on. If the training data used to train the AI model is biased or limited in scope, the AI may reproduce content that is inaccurate, incomplete, offensive, and/or biased.

Students should weigh this as they consider material produced by AI.

This is particularly important in the context of this course. AI is notoriously androcentric/misogynist/racist/homophobic etc. and may not provide reliable responses to the questions generated in this course.

- c) Trustworthiness – Generative AI can be vulnerable to manipulation and misuse. It can be used to generate fake news, misinformation, or

deepfake content, which can have harmful consequences. Students should check AI generated content against reputable sources. **See above.**

d) Citation of Sources – If you use material generated by an AI program for an assignment in this course, it must be cited like any other source (with due consideration for the quality of the source, which may be judged as poor). Failure to do so will be considered a violation of academic integrity.

Accommodation: I make every effort to meet the varied needs of students. Please feel free to speak to me directly about your needs. You are also encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and to register with them as early as possible. For more information, please email sas@lakeheadu.ca or view [https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and- staff/departments/services/sas](https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas).

Assignment Due Dates: Due dates are suggestions to keep you on track for timely course completion. I am flexible and will accommodate your health/work/family obligations. I am happy to adjust dates, but you need to communicate with me. Accommodation can include incomplete standing (see below).

Incomplete Standing (from the Lakehead University Calendar): An incomplete grade may, at the discretion of the instructor and in consultation with the student, be assigned to a course when the instructor considers that for a valid reason the student has not yet completed all the requirements of the course. Please talk to me in advance if this is something we need to consider. I will not automatically provide an incomplete if you have not talked to me.

Expectations and Marking: All written work will be evaluated based on organization, presentation, grammar, and clarity as well as content. Writing is a process. It is only learned through practice and repetition. Written communication can be very powerful. However, your first draft is unlikely to be the best work you can produce. I strongly encourage you to submit rough drafts of papers for review. I will mark your paper as many times as you want to submit it. Only the final mark will count towards your grade. This is true for all assignments. Good writing does not happen the night before an assignment is due. You should

expect to spend significant time on each assignment. These are guidelines to assist:

1. Start assignments early.
2. Read the instructions for your assignment carefully and ask questions if there is anything which is unclear.
3. Seek support. You can visit the Academic Support Zone at <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/academic-success/student-success-centre/academic-support-zone> or make an appoint for assistance at mysuccess@lakeheadu.ca.
4. Submit drafts for my review.

Weekly Schedule for Lectures and Readings

Week 1 – September 8

Human Rights Codes and the *Charter*: Can “Rights” Law Based in a Sexist/Colonialist System Fix Our Social Problems?

Readings:

- *Human Rights 101*: www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/human-rights-101.
- *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*: canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1468851006026.
- Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”: https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf.

Week 2 – September 15

Gender Identity: Who is a ‘Woman’ Anyway?

Readings:

- Lori Chambers, “Unprincipled Exclusions: Transgender Jurisprudence, Feminist Theory and Kimberly Nixon”, *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 19 (2) (2007), 305-334.
- [“I Just Try to Make It Home Safe”: Violence and the Human Rights of Transgender People in the United States | HRW](https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/01/i-just-try-make-home-safe/violence-and-human-rights-transgender-people-united)
- Samuel Singer, “Trans Rights Are Not Just Human Rights: Legal Strategies for Trans Justice”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 35 (2) (2020), 293-315.

Week 3 – September 22

Religious Identity: Whose Religious Practice is Protected?

Readings:

- Lori Chambers and Jen Roth, “Prejudice Unveiled: The Niqab in Court”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 29 (3) (2014), 381-396.
- Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, “Islamophobia in Canada: Measuring the Realities of Negative Attitudes Towards Muslims and Discrimination”, *Canadian Review of Sociology* (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12180>.
- L. Levitt, “Impossible assimilations, American liberalism, and Jewish difference: Revisiting Jewish secularism”, *American Quarterly* 59 (3) (2007), 807-832.
- [Reported hate crimes in several Canadian cities higher amid Israel-Hamas war, police say | CBC News](#)

Human Rights 101 Tutorial Certificate is due today.

Week 4 – September 29

Indigenous/Settler Relations I: The *Indian Act*, Discrimination, and Genocide

Readings:

- Karen Stote, “The Coercive Sterilization of Aboriginal Women in Canada”, *American Indian Journal of Culture and Research* 36 (3) (2012), 117-150.
- Pam Palmater, “Genocide, Indian Policy, and Legislated Elimination of Indians in Canada”, *Aboriginal Policy Studies* 3 (3) (2014), 27-54.
- Lori Chambers, “Boil Water Advisories and Federal (In)Action: The Politics of Potable Water in Pikangikum First Nation”, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 51 (2) (2017), 289-310.
- [High Food Prices Impact Indigenous People - The McGill Daily](#)

Week 5 – October 6

Indigenous/Settler Relations II: Criminalization and Genocide

Readings:

- Joan Sangster, “Criminalizing the Colonized: Ontario Native Women Confront the Criminal Justice System, 1920-1960”, *Canadian Historical Review* 80 (1) (March 1999), 32-60.
- Shiri Pasternak, Sue Collins and Tia Dafnos, “Criminalization at Tyendinaga: Securing Canada’s Colonial Property Regime through Specific Land Claims”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 28 (1) (2013), 65-82.
- Michaela McGuire and Danielle Murdoch, “In-Justice: An exploration of dehumanization, victimization, criminalization and the over-incarceration of Indigenous women”, *Punishment and Society* 24 (4) (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745211001685>.

Week 6 – October 13 – READING WEEK

Week 7 – October 20

Anti-Black Racism and State Violence

Readings:

- Constance Backhouse, “Reckoning with Racism: Police, Judges, and the *RDS* Case”, *McGill Law Journal* 68 (4) (2023), 493-507.
- Duane Crichton, dir. “Justice Denied”, *Black Life: Untold Stories* (CBC GEM, 2023).
- Joseph Mensah, David Firang, Christopher Williams and Michelle Afrifah, “Racial Discrimination in the Canadian Criminal Justice System: How Anti-Black Racism by the Toronto Police Harms Us All”, *Canadian Social Work Review* 38 (2) (2021), 63-86.
- Kanika Samuels-Wortley, “The ‘Unusual’ Suspect – Race, Class and Crime: A Critical Discourse Case Study of Nova Scotia’s Mass Casualty Event”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 39 (2) (2025), 180-203.

Week 8 – October 27

Immigration and Refugee Status: What Rights for ‘Non-Citizens’?

Readings:

- Sabaa Khan, “From Labour of Love to Decent Work: Protecting the Human Rights of Migrant Caregivers in Canada”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 24 (1) (2009), 23-46.
- David Murray, “The Challenge of Home for Sexual Orientation and Gendered Identity Refugees in Toronto”, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 48 (1) (2014), 132-152.
- Jenny Francis, “Human rights violations as humanist performance: Dehumanizing criminalized refugee youth in Canada”, *The Canadian Geographer* 6 (1) (2019), 129-144.
- [New survey finds Canadians are feeling anxious about immigration | CBC News](#)

Week 9 – November 3

Wages, Social Assistance, Poverty, and Homelessness

Readings:

- Leah Hamilton and James Mulvale, “‘Human Again’: The (Unrealized) Promise of Basic Income in Ontario”, *Journal of Poverty* 23 (7) (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2019.1616242>.
- Terry Skolnik, “Homelessness and Unconstitutional Discrimination”, *Journal of Law and Equity* 15 (2019), 69-94.
- Jessica Braimoh, Erin Dej, and Carrie Sanders, “‘Somebody’s street’: Eviction of Homeless Encampments as a Reflection of Interlocking Colonial and Class Relations”, *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 36 (2023), 12-22: <https://doi.org/10.60082/0829-3929.1449>
- [Indigenous people make up over three-quarters of homeless population in Thunder Bay, Ont. | CBC News](#)

Unit Journal Assignment is due today.

Week 10 – November 10

Children: How Do We Protect and Empower Those Who Are Vulnerable?

NOTE: I will be away at a conference so this class will be on zoom. A link will be sent out before class.

Readings:

- Nia Heard-Garris, Rhea Boyd, Kristin Kan, Leishla Perez-Cardona, Nevin Heard, and Tiffani Johnson, "Structuring Poverty: How Racism Shapes Child Poverty and Child and Adolescent Health", *Academic Pediatrics* 21 (8) (2021), S108-S116: <https://doi.org/10.1016/acap.2021.05.026>.
- Doret Phillips and Gordon Pon, "Anti-Black Racism, Bio-Power and Governmentality: Deconstructing the Suffering of Black Families Involved with Child Welfare", *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 28 (1) (2018), 81-101.
- Naomi Walqwan Metallic, "A Human Right to Self-Government over First Nations Child and Family Services and Beyond", *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 28 (2) (2018), 4-42.
- Hamish Stewart, "Parents, Children and the Law of Assault", *Dalhousie Law Journal* 32 (1) (2009), 1-34.

Week 11 – November 17

Differences in Ability: How Do We Protect and Empower Those Who Are Vulnerable?

Readings:

- Human Rights Watch, "Sterilization of Women and Girls with Disabilities", November 10, 2011: <https://hrw.org/news/2011/11/10/sterilization-women-and-girls-disabilities>.
- Lori Chambers, and Kristin Burnett, "Jordan's Principle: The Struggle to Access On-Reserve Medical Care for High Needs Indigenous Children in Canada", *American Indian Quarterly* 41 (2) (2017), 101-124.
- Ambre Wilkinson and Jason Martens, "Not Overly Accessible: Accessibility Services at Universities Across Canada", *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 13 (3) (2024), 1-33.
- Katrina Milaney, Joanna Rankin and Lisa Zaretsky, "The Modern Day Asylum: A Mad Studies Approach to Understanding De-Institutionalization, Madness and Chronic Homelessness", *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 11 (1) (2022), 91-118.

Week 12 – November 24

Access to Health Care: Reproductive Autonomy

Readings:

- Power to Decide: [Power to Decide 2024](#).
- Sue Kraske, Kate Yung, Bec Jenkinson and Ann Catchlove, “Maternity Care Providers’ Perceptions of Women’s Autonomy and the Law”, *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, April 4, 2013: <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2393-13-84>.
- Lara Karaian, “Pregnant Men: Repronormativity, Critical Trans Theory and the Re(conceive)ing of Sex, Gender, and Pregnancy in Anti-Discrimination Law”, *Social and Legal Studies* 22 (2) (2013), 211-230.

Week 13 – December 1

Access to Health Care: End-of-Life Decisions and Self-Determination

Readings:

- Jocelyn Downie and Udo Schuklenk, “Social Determinants of Health and Slippery Slopes in Assisted Dying Debates”, *Journal of Medical Ethics* 47 (10) (2021), 662-669.
- Marc-Antoine Marquis and Antoine Payot, “Pediatric Palliative Care in Canada”, *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care* 54 (1) (2024): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2023.101453>.
- Adelina Iftene and Jocelyn Downie, “End of Life Care for Federally Incarcerated Individuals in Canada”, *McGill Journal of Law and Health* 14 (1) (2020), 1-50.

Human Rights in My Community assignment is due today.