



POLI 1301 Introduction to Law
Political Science Department
Fall 2025
Online, Asynchronous

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

Email: cmathie@lakeheadu.ca

Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom.

Course Description

In this Introduction to Law course, we will study the foundational principles and theories of legal systems and constitutions in general before turning to an examination of Canadian law and the Supreme Court's reasoning in many important legal decisions that have shaped the Canadian regime. In the first part of the course, we will consider theoretical and legal texts addressing the ways that modern constitutions like our own have been structured to protect freedom, equality and justice as well as the considerable difficulties involved in achieving this. The remaining two parts of the course will increasingly focus on the function and power of the Canadian judiciary as it interprets the Constitution in a range of areas: The second part will feature an examination of separation of powers and federalism according to Canada's written laws and conventions, and especially through the lens of Supreme Court arguments. The final part of the course will be a 10 week long survey of landmark Supreme Court decisions in areas of *Charter* rights, criminal law, and civil torts. Students will develop a broad understanding of defining concepts in Canadian law and begin to hone their ability to read and comprehend legal decisions. At the same time, they will have the opportunity to engage independently, and with their peers, in critical and careful reflection on the serious dilemmas and questions that Canadian law must confront.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide students with a solid introduction to the legal topics and concepts outlined above, but also to enhance their abilities to (a) engage well with their peers through thoughtful online discussions about very important and sometimes controversial human questions; (b) write clearly and insightfully about complex and important legal questions, (c) and read and analyze legal texts and other complex political writings with care.

Course Requirements, Procedures and Policies

Grade Distribution:

Perusall Weekly Assignments & Participation: 30%

Short Written Works: $5\% \times 2 = 10\%$

Exam 1: 15%

Exam 2: 15%

Final Exam: 30%

Required Texts: All class materials (videos and readings) will be found on the [Perusall.com](https://perusall.com) course website under Assignments. You will be required to complete your readings from the Assignments tab. You will not be required to purchase any texts; you are required to create a free Perusall account (see below for more details).

Required Costs: None.

Perusall Weekly Assignments and Participation:

Perusall Account Set-Up: Students are required to create a Perusall account on [Perusall.com](https://perusall.com). You will have to enter a specific code to join our Perusall class once you've registered. **I have posted the necessary code on our d2l site under "Content".**

Weekly Assignments:

Weekly assignments will be posted to Perusall, and will require students to read, annotate and comment on the readings while also engaging in written discussion about the readings with their classmates. I have designed these assignments to encourage, develop and measure students' engagement with the major themes, concepts and questions of the course. On Mondays, I will also post a short lecture (typically a video; approx. 30 minutes) providing needed clarifications or introductory concepts for that week's assignment (and/or sometimes addressing lingering questions from the previous week.)

Assignment Deadlines:

Each weekly assignment will be posted before the corresponding week begins. Each assignment has its own deadline (typically Sunday night before the next weekly assignment begins.) For full credit, you must meet this deadline). However, partial credit can still be earned for comments submitted after the deadline date until 11:59 pm on the final day of the course (April 7, 2026). Partial credit declines linearly (each day late = less credit) from the due date of each assignment.

All posted assignments for the course involve complicated ideas and difficult arguments. Reading legal decisions for the first time involves immersing yourself in a new and unfamiliar kind of language. Therefore, you should be prepared to prepare your readings slowly and you should expect that it may take reading several times before you will fully grasp their content.

Assignment Marking: Each Perusall assignment is equally weighted. All assignments are required and should be done in order.

To achieve high marks, students need to demonstrate a careful and thorough reading of the assigned texts. In doing so, they should

- 1) Engage one another and the readings through thoughtful, charitable and reasoned discussion.
- 2) Read and analyze important texts with care and insight, considering the questions raised and how arguments and concepts pertain to their own lives and experience.
- 3) Do the above in a way that primarily responds to the readings, while keeping in mind any reading questions I have provided at the introduction to each assignment. **You should not be limited by the reading questions, or attempt to answer them directly – they are merely some general questions meant to help you organize the particular parts of the readings in your mind.**

Perusall Mark Display

To give students some initial feedback on how they are doing on the assignments, I have enabled the Perusall feature which displays students' preliminary marks in real time based on the work already completed. These preliminary marks come from basic course settings I have designed that Perusall uses to calculate a preliminary mark. Since it is possible to trick Perusall's system into thinking your comments are more insightful/thoughtful/relevant than they really are, **your true mark is not the preliminary calculation given by Perusall**; I will be reviewing all preliminary marks and comments to make adjustments as needed. If you try to game the system, you should expect a reduction from the preliminary mark to your real mark. **Adjustments to the real mark will be made by 11:59 pm on the Saturday following the deadline for each assignment.**

Short Written Works: These special written submissions will be 2-3 pages in length, responding to prompts and instructions that I will provide you several weeks before they are due. **The first assignment will be due October 5th at 11:59 pm. The second will be due February 22nd at 11:59 pm.** Late submissions will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested well in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Exams: Weeks for the first two exams are given in the outline below. The final exam is yet to be scheduled; Lakehead's exam timetable will provide this date when it is available. Exams are not cumulative; each covers the material that has been assigned since the previous exam. Each will be administered through d2l, and will include some combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true or false, or short answer questions (different students will not receive the same question sets).

Other Important Policies

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. You should familiarize yourself with the Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity – and, in particular, sections 26 and 83 through 85. All of these policies will be enforced in full in this course, and the Code will be adhered to in terms of disciplinary action. It is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.
- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.

GenAI Use Prohibited:

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 variants Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. Other Generative AI models include artificial intelligence art systems such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E.

Any use of GenAI systems to produce assignments for this course is not permitted. All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be the student's original work. The submission of any work containing AI generated content will be considered a violation of academic integrity ("Use of Unauthorized Materials").

Academic Accommodations: Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities/medical conditions. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities/medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability/medical condition and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please email sas@lakeheadu.ca or visit <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>.

Course Outline

NOTE: Readings and schedule may be adjusted as necessary at my discretion.

CCLOAC refers to *The Canadian Constitutional Law Open Access Casebook*, 2nd Ed;
CRF refers to *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, 17th Ed.

Sept. 2-5 Week 1 Course Introduction: Syllabus & Perusall Set-up/Assignment

PART I: Introduction to Constitutionalism, Law and Political Science

Sept. 15-19 Week 3 Ancient Constitutions and Law
Excerpts from Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*

Sept. 22-26 Week 4 Modern Constitutionalism and Law
Excerpts from Hobbes' *Leviathan*

Sept. 29-Oct. 3 Week 5 Writing a Constitution: The United States Constitution
Federalist Papers 9,51, 78
Recommended: *U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights*

Oct. 6-10 Week 6 The Written Constitution: Canada's Constitution Acts
 Robert Danay: Excerpts from "Chapter 1: Introduction" in *CCLOAC*
 The Charter of Rights and Freedoms
 Recommended: *Canadian Constitution*

Oct. 13-17 FALL STUDY WEEK - No Class

Oct. 20-24 Week 7 Unwritten Constitutions: Indigenous Oral Histories
Delgamuukw v. BC (1997)

Oct. 27-31 Week 8 EXAM 1 - available for 24 hour period beginning Thursday, October 30 at 10 am.

PART II: Separation of Powers and Federalism in Canadian Law

Nov. 3-7	Week 9	Legislative and Executive Powers under the Constitution Bedard-Rubin: Excerpts from “Chapter 2: Parliament and Crown” in <i>CCLOAC</i>
Nov. 10-14	Week 10	An Expanded Judicial Role under the Charter Ken Loach: “The Legitimacy of Judicial Review” from <i>CRF</i>
Nov. 17-21	Week 11	Interpreting the Charter: <i>R. v. Oakes</i> (1986)
Nov. 24-28	Week 12	Executive Power & Cabinet Secrecy: <i>Canada (Prime Minister) v. Khadr</i> (2010); <i>Ontario (AG) v. Ontario (Information and Privacy Commissioner)</i> (2024)
Dec. 1-2	Week 13	Limits to Parliamentary Sovereignty: <i>Bacon v. Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corp.</i> (1990)
Jan. 5-9	Week 14	Federalism: Reference re: Firearms Act (Can)
Jan. 12-16	Week 15	Exam 2 - available for 24 hour period beginning Thursday, January 15 at 10 am.

PART III: Landmark Cases in Canadian Law

Jan. 19-23	Week 16	Charter Rights: Freedom of Expression <i>R. v Keegstra</i> (1988)
Jan. 26-30	Week 17	Charter Rights: Religious Freedom <i>Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys</i> (2006)
Feb. 2-6	Week 18	Charter Rights: Section 7 and Assisted Suicide <i>Carter v. Canada (AG)</i> (2015)
Feb. 9-13	Week 19	Charter Rights: Equality & Affirmative Action <i>R. v. Kapp</i> (2008)

Feb. 16-20 WINTER STUDY WEEK - No Class

Feb. 23-27	Week 20	Criminal Law: Assault and Consent <i>R. v. Jobidon</i> (1991)
Mar. 2-6	Week 21	Criminal Law: Culpability for Murder <i>R. v. Martineau</i> (1996)
Mar. 9-13	Week 22	Criminal Law: Provocation as a Defense

R. v. Thibert (1996)

Mar. 16-20	Week 23	Criminal Law: Principles of Sentencing <i>R. v. Gladue</i> (1999)
Mar. 23-27	Week 24	Torts: Negligence <i>Mustapha v. Culligan of Canada, Ltd.</i> (2008) <i>Crocker v. Sundance Northwest Resorts, Ltd.</i> (1988)
Mar. 30-Apr. 7	Week 25	Torts: Defamation <i>Hill v. Church of Scientology of Toronto</i> (1995); <i>WIC Radio v. Simpson</i> (2008)
TBD		Final Exam (to cover Part III material)