

POLI 2339
Comparative Politics

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m.
Ryan Building 1023

Open the Navigation Pane for easy navigation (under the View menu).

I General Information

Instructor: Dr. Elsa Piersig
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
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II Course Description

The course introduces the comparative method of studying cases across time and/or space. While Canadian politics, international relations, and political theory are defined by the subject matter, comparative politics is defined by its method. Accordingly, this course focuses on asking research questions, developing a hypothesis to answer the question, and designing how to test the hypothesis and answer the research question. We will cover a selection of countries from both the Global North and Global South and topics ranging from the state, nationalism and modernization to regime types to core governing political institutions. Learners will form research groups to exchange ideas and support their individual comparative research papers.

III Course Format

The course is synchronous, in-person, and combines lectures with in-class group discussion.

IV Learning Outcomes

1. **Inquiry and Analysis:** By the end of this course, you will be able to recognize the six components of inquiry and analysis and apply them in case study research. The components are: topic selection, existing knowledge, design process, analysis, conclusions, and limitations.
2. **Research Methods:** By the end of this course, you will be able to identify the comparative method and reproduce it in case study assignment through topic selection, outlining the research design, analyzing evidence, and developing a clear conclusion.
3. **Case Study Analysis:** By the end of this course, you will be able to model a case study of a particular problem in a selected country/countries and consider the problem's underlying forces and implications.

4. **Field Survey:** By the end of this course, you will be able to describe and interpret core concepts of comparative politics (regime types, essential political institutions and processes, and political contention over power and resource distribution).
5. **Groupwork:** By the end of this course, you will be able to initiate constructive groupwork by sharing research and helping colleagues develop their individual projects.

V Texts

- Dickovick, J. Tyler, Jonathan Eastwood, and David B. MacDonald. 2020. *Comparative Politics: Integrating Theories, Methods, and Cases*. 6th Edition. Toronto: Oxford University Press. (Available online from [Vital Source](#) – \$65.99).
- If there is additional material, it will be posted to Brightspace.

VI Evaluation at a Glance

<i>Assignment/Course Component</i>	<i>Assignment Due Date</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Running Total</i>
Syllabus Quiz	Friday, September 25, 2026	1%	1%
Participation	Throughout the semester	10%	11%
Worksheets	Ten submissions, ongoing	5%	16%
Reading Surveys	Eight surveys, ongoing	5%	21%
Research Activity Journal	Five entries, six possible due dates: Submission A – Friday, October 2 Submission B – Friday, October 9 Submission C – Friday, November 6 Submission D – Friday, November 13 Submission E – Friday, November 27 Submission F – Friday, December 4	15%	36%
Country Overview	Monday, September 28, 2026	4%	40%
Research Plan	Friday, October 30, 2026	15%	55%
Comparative Research Paper	Friday, November 20, 2026	25%	80%
Fall Exam	December final exam period	20%	100%

This course is designed to foster engagement and dialogue between learners and the course instructor in four ways:

1. Learners connect with the course instructor and each other through lecture, class discussion, worksheets, and the Research Activity Journal entries.
2. Learners engage in peer learning through their research groups.
3. The worksheets, journal entries, and comparative research paper submissions build off each other, providing learners with constructive feedback for upcoming submissions.
4. Learners critically review their submissions and assess progress in their journal entries.

*** Remember, the course instructor is here to help! Please contact Elsa through email, office hours, the Course Questions discussion forum, or schedule a meeting.

VII Course Evaluation in Detail

Syllabus Quiz – 1% of Final Grade – Friday, September 25, 2026 (Week 3)

The Syllabus Quiz is a quick review of the course components and communication policies. Completing it indicates that the learner accept to undertake the course as described in the syllabus. The quiz must be completed to unlock the modules for Weeks 4 and up. Quizzes completed on time will receive 1% and all late submissions will result in a grade of 0.

- Fall Syllabus Quiz is due Monday, September 28, 2026
- Winter Syllabus Quiz is due Monday, January 11, 2027

Participation – 10% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 1-13)

Learners earn participation by attending class and engaging with the lectures, discussions, activities and worksheets. Participation also includes asking questions! Questions on course material and assignments are always welcome.

Worksheets – 5% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 1-13)

Classes will include time for completing the worksheets and peer discussion and feedback sessions. The worksheets integrate transferable skills, such as critical thinking skills and research/academic skills, with the course material and build towards the major course assignments.

- Learners must complete ten (10) worksheets each semester.
- Worksheets are available on Brightspace at the start of class. If learners are unable to attend class, the worksheet can be submitted on Brightspace.
- Completed worksheets must be submitted in class or to the related Brightspace discussion forum within 24 hours of the class in which the worksheet was completed.
- Assessment: not completed (0), partially completed (1), fully completed (2).

Reading Surveys – 5% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 2-13)

The weekly reading surveys are based on the reading material for the week. Surveys open on Thursdays and are due by Sundays at 11:59pm. The surveys ask learners for feedback on the readings, such as what was clear, what was challenging, and what was unclear or difficult to understand. Learners should have at least one example for each of the three questions.

- Learners must complete ten (10) of the weekly surveys offered over the semester.
- Assessment: not completed (0), partially completed (1), fully completed (2).
- Surveys are completed by 11:59pm the day before class. The learners, in conjunction with the instructor, may decide to alter the deadline.

Learners are encouraged to complete additional surveys and worksheets throughout the semester. Additional submissions scoring a 2 will drop previous submissions graded as a '1'.

Research Activity Journal – 15% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 4-13)

The research activity journal gives learners a chance to reflect on using the comparative method to develop a research question, brainstorm a hypothesis, design how to test the research, and conduct a comparative case study or compare a small number of cases. Learners will have a chance to share and discuss their work with peers in a research group and are also encouraged to journal about that experience. Here are the suggested journaling options and possible submission dates:

Journaling Option	Description	Recommended Submission Date(s)
Research Group Social	Get together outside of class to socialize, perhaps over coffee, then journal the experience.	Submission A – Friday, October 2 Submission B – Friday, October 9 Submission C – Friday, November 6
Problem/Question Scavenger Hunt	Journal about finding a problem and question in a selected country or countries that can be used for the research paper.	Submission B – Friday, October 9 Submission C – Friday, November 6
Project/Research Support	What ideas have you gotten from and given to members of your research group?	Submission B – Friday, October 9 Submission C – Friday, November 6 Submission D – Friday, November 13
Results	Did the findings bear out the hypothesis? Did you find anything surprising or unusual?	Submission D – Friday, November 13 Submission E – Friday, November 27
Limitations ¹	What were the limitations of the project? Explain your answer. What future research could address those limitations?	Submission E – Friday, November 27 Submission F – Friday, December 4

Learners are asked to complete five journals (3% each) and can choose to submit them on one of the six submission dates.² It is up to the learner whether they wish to complete each topic or double up on a topic – perhaps the research group gets together twice for a casual social meeting outside of class or the learner does two entries on how they supported or got support from another group member. If doubling up, it is important that the substantive content in each entry is different (different social group meetings, different ideas/advice).

In each journal entry, learners are asked to reflect on the activity or research development and what they learnt, what challenges they face, or what questions they are trying to resolve. It is always a good idea to link to course learning outcomes, which will happen naturally when discussing progress or difficulties with working towards the comparative research paper and implementing the comparative method.

Learners will receive feedback on the experiences discussed in journal entries to help them progress towards the comparative research paper (first three topics) and advance their research skills (fourth and fifth topics).

¹ This journal entry is necessary to accomplish the sixth and final Inquiry and Analysis Skills and complete the first course-level learning outcome. The other Inquiry and Analysis Skills are implemented through the Research Plan and Comparative Research Paper, as well as activities building up to those two assignments.

² Elsa recommends getting an early research group social in and journaling about it for Submission A. Next, start thinking about finding a question and submit the second journal entry for Submission B. Do one journal entry on constructive feedback for Submission C or D and then do the results and limitations entries for Submissions E and F. This will reduce the journal entries while working on the Comparative Research Paper itself and push two to reflect on the work once it is completed. Elsa recognizes that, with other courses demands and deadlines, learners may choose a different path through the Research Activity Journal.

Country Overview – 4% of Final Grade – Monday, September 28, 2026 (Week 4)

Learners will select their research group in Week 2 (likely Wednesday, September 16th) and each group will work with a set of four to five countries. To help get the ideas flowing, each group member will be responsible for introducing one of the countries to the group and take a preliminary stab at identifying a possible (comparative) research problem and question. The research group activity will take place in the research group during class on Monday, September 28th. This is an opportunity to learn more about the countries that will provide the basis for the comparative research paper, start using the comparative method, and practice topic selection (first component of inquiry and analysis skills). Learners are not tied to the work they develop for the country overview and can choose a completely different question and problem for the comparative project.

Learners will also submit the Country Overview to Brightspace. The expected length is 750 words. Learners are welcome to use a mix of paragraphs, bullet points for information, tables and headings. Evidence should be cited, including information from the textbook's country profiles.

NOTE: Good teamwork involves coming prepared! It is important to contribute your country overview during the first Research Group Meeting, even if the written document has not been submitted. Learners are also recommended to post their Country Overview to their Research Group's discussion forum to share information.

Research Plan – 10% of Final Grade – Friday, October 30, 2026 (Week 6)

The Research Plan works hand in hand with the Comparative Research Paper. Both task the learner with constructing a research question rooted in comparative politics and at least one of the countries assigned to the learner's Research Group. Learners can choose a question based on their own interests, but it must be linked to one of the substantive topics covered in Weeks 5-12. Learners are encouraged to discuss their research problem and questions in the Research Group for feedback and development.

The Research Plan outlines what the learner plans to do for the Comparative Research Paper. It should cover the following:

- What is the research problem/topic and question?
- Why the question important? (Why do we need to understand it?)
- What is the expected hypothesis? Be sure to explain the reasoning behind the hypothesis.
- What are the core concepts?
- What are the case(s) under study? Could be a specific observation in a country (comparison across time), or using two or more countries as separate cases.
- What research design will the paper use and why? (I.e., most similar or most different.)

The Research Plan asks learners to utilize the comparative method and design a simple research project. It helps learners implement basic comparative research and methodology skills for case study research and start identifying and working on inquiry and analysis skills (especially the topic selection, existing research, and design process components), all of which work towards the first three course [learning outcomes](#).

The Research Plan will be graded based on coverage of the five questions above, supporting evidence, citation and referencing of relevant sources, and writing style, spelling and grammar. The expected length is 2-3 pages, single-spaced, plus a bibliography.

Comparative Research Paper – 25% of Final Grade – Friday, November 20, 2026 (Week 10)

The Comparative Research Paper implements the Research Plan. It will reintroduce the research problem and question, the hypothesis, cases, and the research design. The paper will then bring in a new analysis section (results) to test out the hypothesis and explore whether there is evidence to prove it. Based on the analysis, the paper will state a logical conclusion – i.e., that the hypothesis was proven, turning it into a thesis, or not. The paper should also include an introduction with a thesis to avoid the problem of a ‘mystery paper.’

Working on the Comparative Research Paper is a *process* so it is possible that learners will refine their question and hypothesis, perhaps narrowing it down in scope. However, it is important not to change the hypothesis when it appears to be disproved by the evidence. This is a *null finding*, which is still important because it shows others what questions have already been asked so they do not get repeated. Having said that, integrating new information or sources found after submitting the Research Plan to help explain the research problem, question, and hypothesis is encouraged!

The Paper will be graded for covering the first five components of inquiry and analysis skills, namely topic selection, use of existing knowledge and research, design process, evidence analysis, and conclusions. It will also be evaluated for citation and referencing, writing style (clarity and formatting), and spelling and grammar. The expected length is 5-6 pages, single-spaced, plus a bibliography. Papers must include five (5) relevant academic sources beyond the textbook.

This final product works toward the first three learning outcomes by applying the first five inquiry and analysis skills³, the comparative method, and case study research at an introductory level. Learners will continue refining these skills as they proceed through their degree.

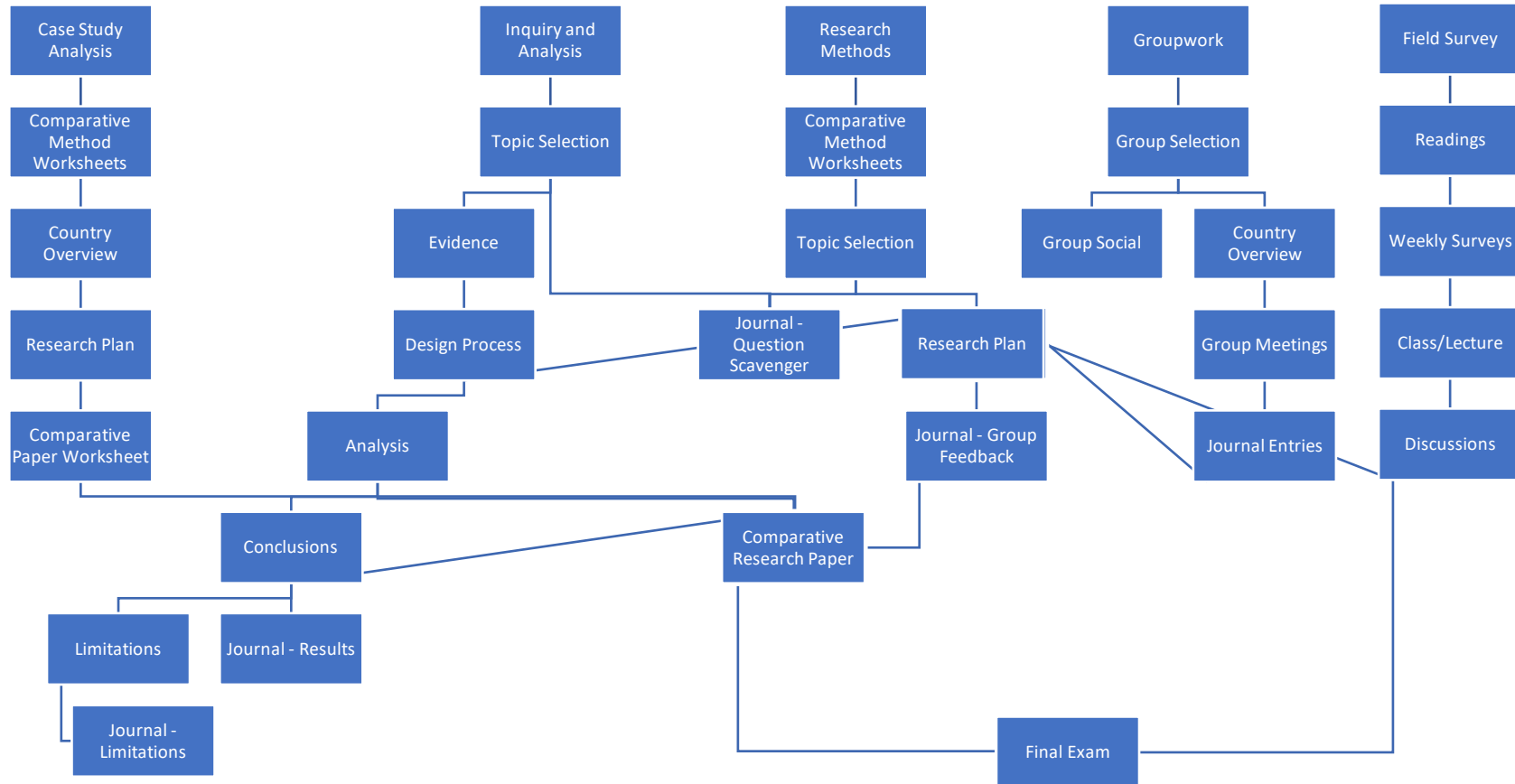
Fall Exam – 20% of Final Grade – Formal Exam Period (December 2026)

The Fall Exam is made up of a combination of multiple choice, short answer, long answer, and essay questions. Details of the exam structure will be released closer to the exam date. The exam will focus on describing, drawing connections between the substantive material from Weeks 4 to 12, and applying it to a case study.

The short answer, long answer, and essay questions will be graded on use of course content. Students will not be graded based on spelling and grammar. The essay should feature an introduction, body paragraphs (one for each supporting argument), and a conclusion. The introduction and conclusions should be streamlined and leave most of the essay for the supporting body paragraphs. A good introduction avoids general statements about the world and lays out the essay’s main question or issue followed by a thesis that answers the selected essay prompt.

³ Learners work on the sixth inquiry and analysis skill of limitations and implications in the final Research Activity Journal entry. Elsa recommends submitting the journal entry on Friday, December 4. This gives learners time to reflect on results in the Friday, November 27 submission after finishing the Comparative Research Paper.

VIII Learning Outcomes and Concept Assessments Map



IX Course Schedule and Topics

Week	Topic	Description	Readings	Worksheets and Assignments
Part I: Introduction and Comparative Political Analysis				
Week 1 Sept. 9	Course Overview	• Introduction to the course and syllabus • Inquiry and Analysis Skills Rubric • Research Groups	• Syllabus • Inquiry and Analysis Skills Rubric	• Fall Syllabus Quiz due Friday, Sept. 25
Week 2 Sept. 14, 16	The Comparative Approach	• Research questions • Concepts and conceptualization • The Comparative Method	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 1	• Research Group Selection + Meet and Greet (Wednesday, September 16)
Week 3 Sept. 21, 23	Doing Research: Theories, Hypotheses, and Evidence	• Theories and hypotheses • Correlation versus causation • Using theories and evidence to test hypotheses	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 2	• Fall Syllabus Quiz – Friday, February 25
Part II: The Nation State				
Week 4 Sept. 28	The State	• The state: conceptualization and characteristics • Research Groups • Wednesday, Sept. 30: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (LU is closed)	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 3	• Research Group Meeting 1 • Country Overview – Monday, September 28 • Journal Submission A – Friday, October 2
Week 5 Oct. 5, 7	The State, Nationalism, and ‘Modernization’	• State-society relations and state emergence • Cultural explanation: nationalism and national identity, religion • Modernity and modernization	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 12 and 15	• Journal Submission B – Friday, October 9
THANKSGIVING AND FALL READING WEEK				

Week 6 Oct. 19, 21	Political Economy	• Inequality, employment, and inflation • The market economy versus welfare states	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 4	• Research Group Meeting 2 – Share Ideas, Progress
Week 7 Oct. 26, 28	Development	• Social, cultural, economic and political development • Why does development happen?	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 5	• Research Group Meeting 3 • Research Plan – Friday, October 30
Week 8 Nov. 2, 4	Democracy versus Authoritarianism	• Democracy and democratization • Authoritarianism and democratic breakdown	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapters 6 and 7	• Journal Submission C – Friday, November 6
Part III: Institutional Design				
Week 9 Nov. 9, 11	Constitutions and Constitutional Design	• Separation of power • Regime types and constitutions • Impact of federalism	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 8	• Research Group Meeting 5 • Journal Submission D – Friday, November 13
Week 10 Nov. 16, 18	Legislatures and Elections	• Legislatures – functions and purpose • The impact of electoral systems • What explains patterns of representation?	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 9	• Research Group Meeting 6 • Comparative Research Paper, Friday, November 20
Week 11 Nov. 23, 25	Executives	• Executive structures and formal vs. informal powers • What explains regime stability?	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 10	• Journal Submission E – Friday, November 27 • Research Group Meeting 7
Week 12 Nov. 30, Dec. 2	Political Parties, Party Systems, and Interest Groups	• Political parties and party systems • Interest groups • Why do party systems emerge and what effects to they have? • Linking the institutions: Parties + Executive-Legislative Relations	• Dickovick et al. 2020. Chapter 11	• Journal Submission F – Friday, December 4
Week 13 Dec. 7	Conclusion	• Review of Weeks 4-12 • Exam outline • Concept maps	• Review readings, lecture notes, worksheets	

X Course Procedures and Policies

Assignment Submission

- All assignments are due on Brightspace. Learners are responsible for ensuring that the correct file has been uploaded. Assignments should be uploaded as Microsoft Word documents (not PDFs) to the appropriate online dropbox by 11:59 p.m. on the due date.
- The recommended length for an assignment reflects both the expected effort of the learner and the time available to the course instructional team for providing feedback. Please respect the recommended length. Assignments over or under the expected length by 10% will receive a reduction in the assigned grade.
- Lakehead offers MS Office 365 (including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, etc.) for free from the Technology Services Centre: [Office 365 | Lakehead University](#).

Citation is Required!

- Citing is important for a) giving credit where credit is due (intellectual property), b) justifying evidence, and c) avoiding plagiarism. Find more about academic integrity [here](#).
- Learners must use proper citation for all evidence and arguments derived from sources other than themselves. Citation is required for all sources beyond the course material.
- The preferred citation format is an in-text option such as MLA, Chicago Author-Date system, or the [Canadian Journal of Political Science](#) guide. Please avoid APA.

Late Penalties and Extensions

- Late assignments will lose 3% per day, inclusive of weekends and holidays.
 - Universities are professional workspaces that foster critical engagement and professional development, including time and project management. Deadlines both mimic demands in the workplace and are assigned by course instructors to help manage their own workload across all their courses and research/university responsibilities.
- Learners may find an extension necessary due to extraordinary circumstances. This is understandable, and identifying how to balance all the requirements of university life is a skill in and of itself. If an extension is needed, please email the professor and *recommend a new due date before* the deadline. The professor will accept all reasonable extension requests. Please note:
 - **Extension requests must be made by email and have a recommended new due date.**
 - Extensions requested or confirmed by the professor after the deadline must come with a [Self-Declaration Form](#). If no form is submitted, a minor penalty will be imposed.
 - Learners are asked to keep in mind that many of the assignments are linked and should consider how the extension will impact other work. An appropriate schedule can be worked out if necessary.

Communication

- Please make use of email, discussion forums, lectures, and office hours to get in touch.
- All email communication must be via official Lakehead University e-mail accounts.
- Email formatting basics:
 - Please use a formal greeting, such as 'Hi,' 'Hello,' or 'Dear' and *include the name of the person* to whom the email is addressed.

- Use multiple paragraphs to breakout the content – doing so improves readability and highlights information!
 - Emails that look like a quickly typed text message may not get a response.
- There is no expectation of email responses for *anyone* in the course after regular business hours – both for learners and the instructor.
- Suggested communication options for questions/comments:
 - Lakehead University email for technical concerns, course procedures,
 - Lectures and office hours, or scheduled meetings for substantive questions,
 - Submit general questions to the Course Questions discussion forum,
 - Schedule a meeting with the instructor for personal questions and issues.

XI Student Mental Health

As a university student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. This can happen to any of us, and everyone can benefit from support when feeling overwhelmed or struggling to cope. If you or anyone you know needs help with difficult life events, anxiety, or depression, please reach out to Student Health and Wellness. The office offers free, confidential services to Lakehead students. You can find more information here: [Health Services | Lakehead University](#).

XII Academic Accommodations

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. An accommodation could be needed for health, religious obligations, student activities pregnancy, or (dis)abilities. For an accommodation request, please contact me as soon as the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Accommodation for Students with (Dis)Abilities

Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities and/or 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 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 visit Student Accessibility here: [Support for Students with Disabilities | Lakehead University](#)

XIII Sexual Violence Policy

As a community, Lakehead University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Lakehead's Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response Policy. For more information and/or support, visit: [Sexual Violence | Lakehead University](#)

XIV Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful academic career. Lakehead's [Academic Integrity Code](#) addresses academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, misrepresentation, impersonation, withholding of records, obstruction/interference, disruption of instruction or examinations, improper access to and/or dissemination of information, or violation of test and examination rules. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the university's academic integrity rules.

Plagiarism

The Academic Integrity Code defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include, but are not limited to, the following: books, articles, papers, websites, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, research findings, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- Any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- Using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement; and
- Failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence – 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 standards (“Use of Unauthorized Materials”).

Intellectual Property

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).