



Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

POLI 3337 Canadian Federalism
Political Science Department
Winter 2026
Online, Asynchronous

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Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom.

Course Description and Objectives

Since its founding, Canada has been committed to a distinctive form of federalism, and this has often contributed to the country's stability as well as its successful embrace of pluralism and diversity. However, at other times, our country has faced serious crises and problems that we have struggled to respond to due to the federal structure of our institutions. Over time, this structure itself has developed and changed. In this asynchronous course, you will learn about the theory of federalism, its application to Canada's Confederation and factors that contributed to this, difficulties that our federal system has faced, and changes to its structure, especially the impact of the *Charter* and related constitutional changes. We will proceed chronologically, and focus towards the end of the course on pressing contemporary federalism questions, and on the future prospects for our federal system.

Through careful engagement with rich and thought-provoking readings about nuanced and often disputed aspects of Canadian federalism, students will gain a clear understanding of the purposes and structures of federalism in Canada, the strengths and challenges that these structures pose, and key changes that have occurred to these structures over time. Students will also become aware of key debates about how these structures affect political and social life in Canada, and gain the capacity to evaluate these debates and important elements of the federal system itself. In this course, there will be emphasis on critical reading and writing skills, and also on thoughtful and sustained engagement in written discussion with classmates through the online discussion forum for the class.

Course Requirements, Procedures and Policies

Grade Distribution:

Perusal Weekly Assignments & Participation: 30%
Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 15%
Essay: 30%
Final Exam: 25%

Required Texts: All class lectures 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 of this site. You are not 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 free Perusall account on [Perusall.com](https://perusall.com), and enter code [REDACTED] upon registration.

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 Wednesdays, I will also post a short lecture (typically a video; 30-60 minutes in length) providing needed clarifications or introductory concepts for that week's assignment, responding to ideas and questions students have already contributed to the week's discussion, and addressing important ideas or questions raised by students concerning the previous week's reading.)

Assignment Deadlines:

Each weekly assignment will be posted on Monday and will have its own listed 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. Typically, there will be more than one reading assigned for each week that you are responsible to read and engage with. Therefore, you should be prepared to take time with your readings, and you should expect to put time into the class throughout the week, and to revisit complex readings more than once.

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 feel required to 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 Monday following the deadline for each assignment.**

Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: Due February 25th.

Students will prepare a one-page double-spaced topic proposal for their Research Paper. The proposal must feature 1) a focused research question on an issue related to Canadian federalism that is of pressing concern today, 2) a hypothesis that answers the research question directly, and 3) relevant background information describing major themes you expect to explore in your paper and clarifying their relevance to Canadian federalism. In addition, students will append to the proposal a preliminary annotated bibliography featuring no fewer than 5 scholarly sources, correctly formatted using APA or Chicago Manual style guides. Additional guidelines will be posted on D2L.

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.

Essay: Due April 7th.

- 2000 to 3000 words in length, not including bibliography.
- Minimum of 8 scholarly sources.
- The Research Paper will address in depth a question that you consider important today that relates to the subject of Canadian federalism, and that has connections to one of our class readings (to be included as a source in your essay). Additional guidelines will be posted on D2L.

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.

Final Exam: The exam will take place during the exam period, and will be administered through d2l. More details will be forthcoming.

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.

Jan. 5-9	Week 1 Course Intro: Syllabus & Perusal Set-up Introduction to Federalism: Excerpts from the <i>Federalist Papers</i> MacDonald on Avoiding Too Much Decentralization in Confederation Malcolmson, et al: "Chapter 8: Federalism," in <i>The Canadian Regime</i> (p. 163-172)
Jan. 12-16	Week 2 Introduction to Challenges in Canadian Federalism Malcolmson, et al: "Chapter 8: Federalism," in <i>The Canadian Regime</i> (p. 173-187) Smiley: "Federal-Provincial Conflict in Canada"
Jan. 19-23	Week 3 Quebec and Federalism Cameron: "Chapter 3 - Quebec and the Canadian Federation," in <i>Canadian Federalism: performance, effectiveness, and legitimacy</i> LaForest: What Canadian Federalism Means in Quebec
Jan. 26-30	Week 4 Quebec, the Charter and the Courts Cairns: "The Charter and the Constitutional Act, 1982," in <i>Charter versus Federalism: The Dilemmas of Constitutional Reform</i> Morton: "The Effect of the Charter of Rights on Canadian Federalism"
Feb. 2-6	Week 5 Federalism, Quebec and Secession Supreme Court of Canada: <i>Reference re: Secession of Quebec</i> Supplementary readings

Feb. 9-13	<p>Week 6 Cooperation in Canadian Federalism</p> <p>Brouillet: “The Supreme Court of Canada: The Concept of Cooperative Federalism and Its Effect on the Balance of Power,” from <i>Courts in Federal Countries: Federalists or Unitarists?</i></p>
Feb. 16-20	WINTER STUDY WEEK
Feb. 23-27	<p>Week 7 Cooperation in Canadian Federalism, Part II</p> <p>Cameron and Simeon: “Intergovernmental Relations in Canada: The Emergence of Collaborative Federalism.”</p> <p>Supplementary Readings</p>
March 2-6	<p>Week 8 Fiscal Federalism</p> <p>Béland and Lecours: “Federalism and Fiscal Policy: The Politics of Equalization in Canada”</p> <p>Alain Noël: “Balance and Imbalance in the Division of Financial Resources,” in <i>Contemporary Canadian Federalism: Foundations, Traditions, Institutions</i>.</p>
March 9-13	<p>Week 9 Federalism and Health Care Access</p> <p>Flood and Thomas: Conclusion - The Complex Dynamics of Canadian Medicare and the Constitution in <i>Is Two-Tier Health Care the Future?</i></p> <p>Perala and Hardcastle: “Private Health Care and the Law Part 3: Not the Anticipated Conclusion but Still Not a Loss for Public Health Care” on ABlawg.ca</p>
March 16-20	<p>Week 10 Federalism and Indigenous Self-Government</p> <p>Stacey: The Dilemma of Indigenous Self-Government in Canada: Indigenous Rights and Canadian Federalism</p> <p>Supplementary Readings</p>
March 23-27	<p>Week 11 Canadian Federalism and Indigenous Self-Rule, Part II</p> <p>Supreme Court of Canada: <i>Reference re An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families</i></p> <p>Supplementary Readings</p>
Mar 30-Apr 2	<p>Week 12 Reflections on the Morality of Federalism</p> <p>LaSelva: “Federalism as a Way of Life.”</p> <p>Leclair: “Socrates, Odysseus, and federalism.”</p>
TBA	FINAL EXAM