



POLI 3337 Canadian Federalism
Political Science Department
Fall 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

Required Texts:

For this course, there is not a textbook for purchase. Instead, all class readings will be posted under "Assignments" (along with all lectures) on a special course website set up on Perusall.com. You will be required to complete your readings from this Assignments tab. Although you are not required to purchase any textbooks, you are required to create a FREE Perusall account (see below for more details about this).

(Cost for texts = free)

Grade Distribution:

Perusall Weekly Assignments & Participation: 30%

Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 15%

Essay: 30%

Final Exam: 25%

Perusall Weekly Assignments and Participation:

Perusall Account Set-Up: Students are required to create a free Perusall account on Perusall.com. The special code to join our Perusall site for the class can be found on the d2l site, under Content.

Weekly Assignments:

Weekly assignments will be posted to Perusall, and will require students to read, annotate and comment thoughtfully on the posted readings while also engaging in written discussion about them 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 (December 8, 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 at least two readings assigned for each week; you are responsible to read and engage with each assigned reading. 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. Your sustained engagement will be a factor in your mark for each week.

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 careful and thorough reading of the assigned texts and thoughtful reflection on their significance. As you read, and post commentary and questions on Perusall, you should

- 1) Engage one another and the readings through thoughtful, charitable and reasoned discussion.
- 2) Read and analyze the assigned texts with care and insight, considering the questions raised and how arguments and concepts pertain to your own experiences and understanding.
- 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 always attempt to answer them directly – they are general questions meant to help you organize the particular parts of the readings in your mind.**

Perusall Mark Display

To give some initial feedback on how you are doing on the assignments as you work through them, I have enabled a Perusall feature which displays students' preliminary marks in real time based on the work already completed. These preliminary marks are automatically generated by Perusall based on course settings I have designed. This is not your true mark, since it is generated by the automatic system rather than my judgment about your work for the week, and it is obviously possible for students to trick a computer into "thinking" their comments are more insightful/thoughtful/relevant than they really are. After each week, I will review and adjust these preliminary marks as needed to provide you with your real weekly assignment mark. Some weeks I will provide feedback with these marks suggesting ways that you could engage more deeply with the readings or posing questions and ideas for your further consideration. Note that if you try to game the system based on the real time scores your commentary produces, you

should expect a reduction between the preliminary mark and your real score. **My adjustments providing your real mark will be made by 11:59 pm on the Monday a week after the deadline for each assignment.**

Also, please note that Perusall will automatically generate a mark even for your engagement with my posted lectures (since they are posted as "Assignments" on the site.) You should disregard these marks. Although I expect you to view and consider each of these lectures as part of your studies in the course, you are not receiving a direct mark for doing so. I will not go back to alter the scores that appear here, but please be aware that they don't matter. Only the scores for reading assignments factor into this part of your mark.

Topic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: Due October 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. With this proposal, students will include 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 December 6th.

- 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 at my discretion.

Sept 8-11 Week 1 Course Intro:

Syllabus & Perusal Set-up (w/ optional practice assignment)

Introduction to Federalism:

Excerpts from the Federalist Papers

MacDonald on Avoiding Too Much Decentralization in Confederation

Malcolmson, et al: "Chapter 8: Federalism," in *The Canadian Regime* (p. 163-172)

Sept 14-18 Week 2 Introduction to Challenges in Canadian Federalism

Malcolmson, et al: "Chapter 8: Federalism," in *The Canadian Regime* (p. 173-187)

Smiley: "Federal-Provincial Conflict in Canada"

Sept 21-25 Week 3 Quebec and Federalism

Cameron: "Chapter 3 - Quebec and the Canadian Federation," in *Canadian Federalism: performance, effectiveness, and legitimacy*

Bouchard: "Response to the Speech from the Throne", January 19, 1994

Chretien: "Address to the Nation", October 25, 1995

Sept 28-Oct 2 Week 4 Quebec, the Charter and the Courts

Cairns: "The Charter and the Constitutional Act, 1982," in *Charter versus Federalism: The Dilemmas of Constitutional Reform*

Morton: "The Effect of the Charter of Rights on Canadian Federalism"

Oct 5-9 Week 5 Federalism, Quebec and Unilateral Secession

Supreme Court of Canada: *Reference re: Secession of Quebec*

Supplementary readings

Oct 12-16 FALL STUDY WEEK: No Classes

- Oct 19-23 Week 6 Evolving Judicial Perspectives: Dualism vs. "Cooperative" Federalism
 Brouillet: "The Supreme Court of Canada: The Concept of Cooperative Federalism and Its Effect on the Balance of Power," from *Courts in Federal Countries: Federalists or Unitarists?*
- Oct 26-30 Week 7 Attempts at Social and Economic Coordination in Canadian Federalism
 Cameron and Simeon: "Intergovernmental Relations in Canada: The Emergence of Collaborative Federalism."
 Supplementary Readings
 Skogstad and Wilder: "Federalism and Canada's Economic Union," in *Canadian Federalism: performance, effectiveness, and legitimacy*
- Nov 2-6 Week 8 Equalization, Natural Resources and Political Tension
 Béland and Lecours: "Federalism and Fiscal Policy: The Politics of Equalization in Canada"
 Jacques, Béland and Lecours: "Balance and Imbalance in the Division of Financial Resources," in *Fiscal Federalism and Equalisation Transfers*.
 Plourde: "Oil and Gas in the Canadian Federation."
- Nov 9-13 Week 9 Federalism and Health Care Access
 Flood and Thomas: Conclusion - The Complex Dynamics of Canadian Medicare and the Constitution in *Is Two-Tier Health Care the Future?*
 McIntosh: "Bilateral Federalism, Value-Based Healthcare and the Future of Canadian Intergovernmental Diplomacy on Health," in *Healthcare Policy*
 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
- Nov 16-20 Week 10 Federalism and Indigenous Self-Government
 Macklem and Sanderson: Excerpt from "Introduction: Recognition and Reconciliation in Indigenous-Settler Societies," in *From Recognition to Reconciliation*.
 Stacey: The Dilemma of Indigenous Self-Government in Canada: Indigenous Rights and Canadian Federalism
 Supplementary Readings

Nov 23-27 Week 11 Recent Jurisprudence on Indigenous Self-Rule

Supreme Court of Canada: *Reference re An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*

Nov 30-Dec 4 Week 12 Reflections on the Morality of Federalism

LaSelva: "Federalism as a Way of Life."

Leclair: "Socrates, Odysseus, and federalism."

TBD

FINAL EXAM