

POLI 3338
Comparative Federalism
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m.

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I General Information

Instructor: Dr. Elsa Piersig
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II Course Description

Comparative federalism examines the origins, development, and institutions behind federal systems. In recent years, federal studies has expanded its outlook to push beyond the traditional conception of federalism based on the division of powers between separate, territorial-based jurisdictions in a single nation-state. Federalism now encompasses different applications of multi-level governance from the traditional cases of Canada, Germany, and the United States to the supranational organization of the European Union. Learners will explore the core concepts and components of federalism through comparative case studies and investigate a single federal system (chosen as a class in Week 5) to simulate a high-level federal summit.

III Course Format

The course is synchronous, hybrid class and combines lectures and in-class discussion activities.

IV Learning Outcomes

1. **Inquiry and Analysis:** By the end of this program of study, you will be able to *demonstrate* the six components of critical thinking, namely:
 - *Identify* a manageable topic
 - *Assess* and *synthesize* existing knowledge,
 - *Apply* a theoretical framework or methodology for the research process,
 - *Generate* an analysis to reveal insightful patterns and findings,
 - *Develop* conclusions that logically flow from the analysis, and
 - *Show/recognize* the limitations and implications of the analysis.
2. **Teamwork:** By the end of this course, you will be able to practice constructive teamwork by planning and collaboratively managing a small team in preparation for a conference.

3. **Briefing Note:** By the end of this course, you will be able to *produce* a briefing note and *synthesize* relevant evidence to analyze a contemporary issue in a federal system and how it impacts a particular jurisdictions.
4. **Content 1 - Federalism:** By the end of this course, you will be able to *breakdown* and *dissect* the major components of federalism and apply them within federal systems
5. **Content 2 – Federal Intergovernmental Relations:** By the end of this course, you will be able to *determine* and *assess* the goals, problems, and solutions of competing units within a federal system.
6. **Research Skills:** By the end of this course, you will be able to find, digest, and utilize government documents and media publications for policy analysis.

V Texts

- Hueglin, Thomas and Alan Fenna. *Comparative Federalism: A Systematic Inquiry*. 2nd Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (Available online from [Vital Source](#).) \$36.76
 - NOTE: This is the same textbook used in the fall semester.
- Additional material as listed in on Brightspace/myReadings.

VI Evaluation at a Glance

<i>Assignment/Course Component</i>	<i>Assignment Due Date</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Running Total</i>
Participation	Throughout the semester	10%	10%
Syllabus Quiz	Friday, January 23, 2026	1%	1%
Pop Quizzes	Throughout the semester	15%	26%
Country Briefing	Wednesday, February 4, 2026	10%	36%
Team Plan	Friday, February 13, 2026	3%	39%
Supervisory Team Meeting I	Wednesday, March 4, 2026	3%	42%
Team Materials – Round I	Friday, March 11, 2026	15%	57%
Supervisory Team Meeting II	Wednesday, March 20, 2026	3%	60%
Team Materials – Round II	Friday, March 23, 2026	15%	75%
Federal Summit	Up until Friday, March 27, 2026	10%	85%
Federalism Reflection	During the exam period	15%	100%

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

1. Learners connect with the course instructor and each other through lecture, teamwork and the federal summit.
2. The teamwork assignments and meetings are interconnected and provide learners and teams with constructive feedback throughout the semester.
3. Learners can critically review their work from each submission and develop a summative assessment of the federal summit experience in the Federalism Reflection take home exam.

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

Teams and Responsibilities for Country Briefing and Federal Summit

Teams will be formed during Week 3 in preparation for the Country Briefing. Teams will consist of 3-4 learners. The intention is to keep the same teams for the duration of the semester. However, teams may be adjusted following the Country Briefing if needed.

Teams will work together to complete one briefing note and presentation for the Country Briefing. It is up to teams to divide the work as they see fit. One suggested option is to divide the briefing note sections between team members and assign one learner to do the presentation. For the more significant workload of the federal summit, each team member will have specific responsibilities.

This course involves significant commitment to fellow teammates and course colleagues. The presentations and federal summits will all take place during class time. Class time has been set aside for the Supervisory Team Meetings on Wednesday, March 4th, and Wednesday, March 20th. However, there is not enough time in class to meaningfully meet with all groups, so a couple of teams will need to meet with the instructor just before or after class.

VII Course Evaluation in Detail

Participation – 10% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 1-12)

Learners earn participation by attending class and engaging with the lectures, discussions, and activities. All classes will include time for completing the worksheets and peer feedback sessions. Questions on course material and assignments are also welcome during lecture and group activities.

Syllabus Quiz – 1% of Final Grade – Due Friday, January 23, 2026 (Week 3)

The syllabus is a contract between the course instructor and learners that spells out what the course will cover, assessment, and course policies. Completing the Syllabus Quiz expresses the learner's acceptance of the course contract. Quizzes completed on time will receive 1% and late submissions will result in a grade of 0.

Pop Quizzes – 15% of Final Grade – Throughout the Semester

The pop quizzes are based on the reading material for the week. They may also have a question about the previous week's reading material if there was no pop quiz that week. The quizzes will be approximately 15 minutes and feature a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. Learners are graded on their best 5 of 6 quizzes.

The quizzes are completed prior class:

- Monday Class: To respect the weekend, the pop quiz will open by 9:00am on Friday morning and be due by 5:00pm on Sunday.
- Wednesday Class: The pop quiz will open after class on Monday and be due by 5:00pm on Tuesday.

Quizzes are due prior to class to give the instructor time to review results in preparation for class. Results will help serve as a discussion point for our class; learners are encouraged to raise questions about the quiz in class.

Country Briefing – 10% of Final Grade – Wednesday, February 4, 2026

The Country Briefing serves two purposes for the course: a) to practice writing a briefing note, and b) present the class with federal system options for the federal summit. Teams will be assigned a federal system and will brief the class on its historical background, federal composition, and major contemporary political issues. As part of the presentation, teams will write a briefing note and deliver a 5-10 minute presentation to the class. The briefing note must make a recommendation on the country's potential for the federal summit and offer a rationale for the recommendation. All presentations will be completed during the Wednesday, February 4th class and learners will vote online for their country of choice by Friday, February 6th. The course instructor will present federal summit topic options for decision the following week (Week 6).

Federal Summit Team – 49% of Final Grade – Ongoing throughout the Semester

Teams are tasked with representing their jurisdiction at high-level federal summit (Week 11) featuring representatives from the central and regional governments. In preparation for the federal summit, teams will develop a team plan to divide the workload, meet with the first minister (course instructor) for feedback and advice, draft briefing and background materials for the summit, and role-play as representatives at the summit. Here is how the teamwork breaks down:

<i>Federal Summit Assignment or Role</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Percent of Final Grade</i>
Team Plan	Team	Friday, February 13, 2026	3%
Supervisory Team Meeting I	Team	Wednesday, March 4, 2026	3%
Team Materials – Round I (Must include the Jurisdiction Briefing and Presentation)	Member	Wednesday, March 11, 2026	15%
Supervisory Team Meeting II	Team	Wednesday, March 18, 2026	3%
Team Materials – Round II (Must include the Jurisdiction Minister Role)	Member	Monday, March 23, 2026	15%
Federal Summit Engagement	Member	Up until Friday, March 27, 2026	10%

Team Plan. Divide the responsibilities (and topics) listed below between group members.

Supervisory Team Meetings. Teams meet with the jurisdiction's first minister (course instructor) to discuss research and progress with the briefing materials. Meetings should be approximately 15 minutes in length. In preparation for the meeting, Teams should:

- Sign-up for a meeting time slot with the first minister,
- Schedule a Zoom meeting for the meeting and share the link with the first minister,
- Prepare an agenda with questions and progress updates and submit prior to the meeting,
- Take leadership of the meeting by guiding attendees through the agenda and keep the meeting on track.

Team Documents. In preparation for the Federal Summit, teams will prepare a selection of briefing and conference materials. All assignments should be single spaced with 12-point font and feature headings to help separate and highlight material. Bullet points can be used as needed. Each team member will be responsible for completing two (2) of following job options:

- a) ***Jurisdiction Briefing and Presentation.*** Draw up a 2-3 page briefing note on the jurisdiction and its connection to the policy issue/topic (selected in Week 6). Briefings are presented in class to give all teams an understanding of their jurisdictional partners.
- b) ***Briefing Notes.*** The Briefing Note is a 3-4 page document that covers a portion of the policy issue/topic and recommends a course of action. Teams with three members should complete two briefing notes and teams with four members should complete four briefing notes. The note should cover the following:
 - Purpose – what part of the issue it is tackling and why,
 - Background – on its portion of the policy issue,
 - Discussion – of developments and/or policy options,
 - Recommendations – recommend a course of action and explain the rationale.
- c) ***Strategy Note.*** The Strategy Note is a 3-4 page game plan for the team in preparation for the federal summit. Each document should address:
 - What is the government’s interest and what does the minister want to achieve? This can include the government’s “ideal outcome” from the summit negotiations that will be most favourable for the team’s jurisdiction and discuss the “bottom line”, i.e. the minimum demands that the government is willing to accept as part of the summit’s conclusion.
 - What might other governments be looking for on the issue?
 - Which of those governments should the minister negotiate with to achieve the team’s goals? The Strategy Note should describe how the team can achieve its goals at the federal summit.
- d) ***Overview Note.*** The Overview Note provides a summary of the political and policy context of the federal summit and should contain the following elements:
 - Political Overview – what are the key political forces or developments affecting the team’s jurisdiction and other jurisdictions going into the federal summit?
 - Context – what is the policy context of the meeting? This could include what has prompted the meeting, what has changed since the federation last addressed the issue
 - Key Issues – what are the main topics for discussion, what messages should the minister convey to the other ministers at the federal summit?
 - Desired Outcomes – What should the minister accomplish at the federal summit?
- e) ***Jurisdiction Minister.*** This is *the* major role-playing assignment. The minister is the primary representative for the jurisdiction at the federal summit. When the ministers are formally meeting at the summit, the minister is responsible for speaking on behalf of the jurisdiction’s government. The minister will prepare an opening statement that outlines the jurisdiction’s position on the policy issue under discussion and be ready to give closing remarks at the end of the summit. Ministers will be supported by the other team members during the federal summit.

Federal Summit. All team members will be involved during the federal summit. The minister will technically lead the team but should not make unilateral decisions on behalf of the team. The team should collectively decide how to act during the federal summit based on the briefing materials prepared and their jurisdiction's interests. The federal summit will be divided into five sessions:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Roles</i>
Monday, March 23	Opening Statements and Discussion	Ministers deliver opening statements and discuss their approaches to the policy issue. Ministers can ask questions of each other's positions.	Ministers publicly discuss the with the support of their teammates. Team members can support by drafting questions and comments.
	Breakout Meetings	Bilateral or multilateral meetings between teams to discuss how to proceed on the policy issue, i.e. what resolutions or options should be collectively endorsed for the federation.	Teams can choose to meet with other jurisdictions as a unit or split up to talk to multiple teams at one time.
Wednesday, March 25	Team Meetings	Team shares results of breakout session and decide what resolutions to support.	Collective decision-making.
	Open Session	Ministers report back on their positions to the group as a whole. Summit decides whether it can collectively endorse a position or if there are several camps that will make joint statements.	Ministers lead the discussion, supported by teammates.
Post class	Federal Summit Statement	Teams draft what they think should be the statement from the federal summit. Depending on the results of the federal summit, the statement will either be for the federation as a whole or a joint statement with some of the jurisdictions.	Collective teamwork to draft expected statement. Statement due for class on Monday, March 30.

Federalism Reflection (Take Home Exam) – 15% of Final Grade – Final Exam Period

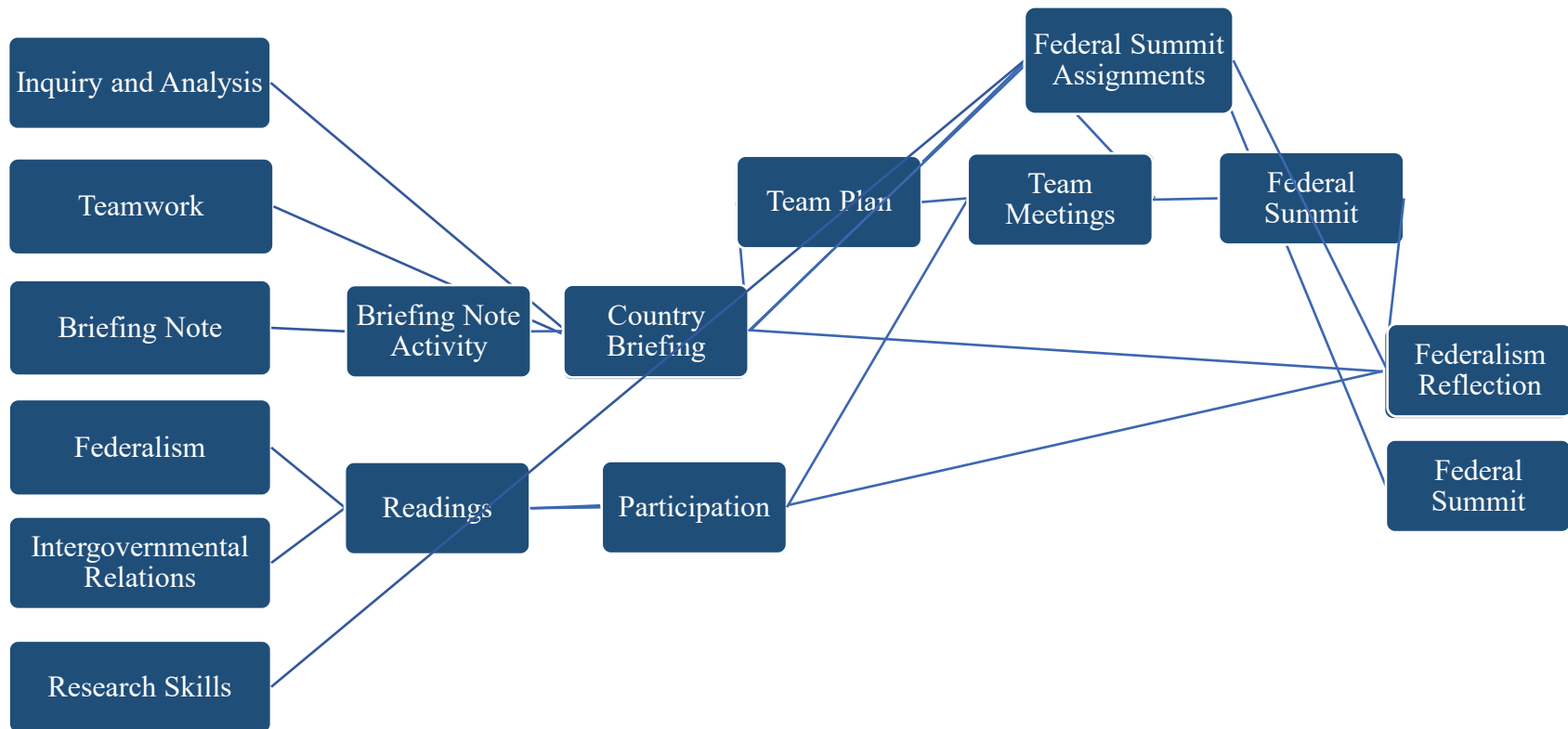
The Federalism Reflection is an opportunity to reflect on the Federal Summit simulation and connect the experience with the major concepts and components of federalism discussed in the course. The reflection should address the following topics:

- Relevance and importance of federalism
- Federalism and democratic governance in action
- How did the group function? What were the strengths? What were the challenges? What lessons can you take from the experience?

The Federalism Reflection should be 2,000 to 2,500 words. Learners can use first person when discussing the simulation. Be sure to include in-text citations for the textbook (bibliographic reference is not required) and complete citations for any sources beyond course material.

VIII Learning Outcomes and Assessments Concept Map

This concept map lists the 7 course-level learning outcomes in the left column and the connected activities and assessments. The activities and assessments move from left to right in chronological order, based on working towards the learning outcome. The dates for all of the weekly topics and assessments (minus pop quizzes) are provided in the next section ([IX Course Schedule and Topics](#)).



VIII Course Schedule and Topics

Week	Topic	Description	Readings	Activities and Assignments
Week 1 Jan. 5, 7	Course Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to course and syllabus • Why study federalism? Why study federalism in comparative context? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus • Inquiry and Analysis Skills Rubric • Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 1 (Thursday) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus Quiz due Friday, Jan. 23
Week 2 Jan. 12, 14	What is Federalism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of how federalism represents the division of power between different orders of government and b) how different orders relate to each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 2 • Brown, Bakvis, and Baier, Chapter 1, “Understanding Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations” 	
Week 3 Jan. 19, 21	Federal Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federalism is not a one-size-fits all model. Federal systems have been designed to meet contextual needs, including ethno-cultural divisions, how powers have been distributed, and the regime type. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 2 • Lijphart (2012) Chapter 10, “Division of Power: The Federal Unitary and Centralized-Decentralized Contrasts” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus Quiz due Friday, Jan. 23 • Create Teams • Briefing Note Activity
Week 4 Jan. 26, 28	Federal Origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three traditions of federal thought – consociational, republican, and socio-economic • Why do countries adopt federalism? How do federations form? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hueglin and Fenna, Chapters 4 and 5 	

Week	Topic	Description	Readings	Activities and Assignments
Week 5 Feb. 2, 4	Division of Powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are powers divided between different jurisdictions? How have historical processes influenced the division? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country Briefing – Wednesday, Feb. 4 Federal Summit Country Selection Poll – Friday, Feb. 6
Week 6 Feb. 9, 11	Inter-governmental Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The division of powers often does not address modern society. What are the informal practices that coordinate action between the orders of government? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Summit Overview and Topic Options – Monday, Feb. 9
READING WEEK (February 16-20, 2026)				
Week 7 Feb. 23, 25	Fiscal Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do governments pay for their jurisdictional responsibilities? What are the politics of redistribution? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 7 	
Week 8 Mar. 2, 4	Federalism and Dual Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are regional jurisdictions represented in central institutions? Intra-state federalism as a means to balance national and regional interests in central decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team Meeting I – Wednesday, Mar. 4
Week 9 Mar. 9, 11	Constitutional Amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can constitutions balance stability and flexibility? How do federal systems amend their constitutions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team Materials – Round I (must include Jurisdictional Briefing and Presentation) – Wednesday, Mar. 11

Week	Topic	Description	Readings	Activities and Assignments
Week 10 Mar. 16, 18	Judicial Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are jurisdictional disputes – based on the division of powers – settled in federal systems? The pre-eminence of the constitution and courts as the umpire between contending governments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team Meeting II – Wednesday, Mar. 18
Week 11 Mar. 23, 25	Federal Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-day Federal Summit of ministers, supported by senior bureaucrats Country and topic to be determined in Weeks 5 and 6 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team Materials – Round II (Must include Jurisdiction Minister Role) – Monday, Mar. 23 Federal Summit Day 1, Monday, Feb. 23 Federal Summit Day 2, Wednesday, Feb. 25
Week 12 Mar. 30, April 1	Conclusion: the Limits of Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> De-brief on the Federal Summit experience: What was the result? Where jurisdictions able to reach an agreement? How was your experience with the activity? What can you take away from the simulation? Federalism can help with conflict management... to a point. What are the limits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hueglin and Fenna, Chapter 12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federalism Reflection (Final Exam Period)

IX 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.
- 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:
 - Extensions must 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.

X 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](#)

XII 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](#)

XIII 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).