

POLI 4311 FDE
Selected Problems in Comparative Politics
Tuesdays, 2:30-4:50 p.m.

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I General Information

Instructor: Dr. Elsa Piersig
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II Course Description

This course focuses on the chain (or process) of democratic delegation and accountability in parliamentary systems and its connection to political parties, political institutions, and the public policy-making process. We cover the three main links of the chain: a) between citizens and parliaments, b) parliaments and cabinets, and c) cabinets and the bureaucracy. The course explores how delegation and accountability functions, external constraints, and the contention between the theories of parliamentary democracy and electoral democracy/populism. As a class, we investigate the three links by comparing across established parliamentary systems and conducting a counterfactual thought experiment where we design our own chain of democratic delegation and accountability. Learners will also explore how the chain functions in an established, but understudied, parliamentary system of their choice.

III Course Format

The course is synchronous, online seminar based primarily on class discussion with some supporting lectures.

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 inquiry and analysis, 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. **Delegation and Accountability:** By the end of this course, you will be able to explain the chain of democratic delegation and accountability and analyze the key links between the electorate and parliament, parliament and cabinet, and cabinet and the bureaucracy.
3. **Parliamentary Systems:** By the end of this course, you will be able to compare and contrast different parliamentary systems and their chains of democratic delegation and accountability.
4. **Background Research Paper:** By the end of the full year course, you will be able to produce a background research paper that explains, synthesizes, and evaluates evidence on the chain of democratic delegation and accountability in a parliamentary system.
5. **Discussion Leadership:** By the end of this course, you will be able to present insights and invite constructive discussion on course readings and materials.
6. **Research Skills:** By the end of this course, you will be able to break down, review, and appraise a research publication (article, report, or chapter in an anthology).

V Textbook

- Støm, Kaare, Wolfgang Müller, and Torbjörn Bergman. 2003. *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Available online through the Library [Omni - Strøm, Kaare](#). Or see Brightspace and myReadings.)
- Additional material as listed in on Brightspace.

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	20%	20%
Syllabus Quiz	Friday, September 19, 2025	1%	21%
Reading Responses	Mondays at 5pm (see Brightspace)	15%	36%
Bilateral Meeting I	Friday, October 10, 2025	2%	38%
Research Proposal	Friday, October 24, 2025	5%	43%
Draft Hypothetical Rules	Monday at 5pm, November 4, 2025	2.5%	45.5%
Background Research Paper	Friday, November 28, 2025	35%	80.5%
Thought Experiment Post	Monday at 5pm, December 1, 2025	2.5%	83%
Bilateral Meeting II	Friday, December 5, 2025	2%	85%
Take Home Exam	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 the reading discussion forum and class discussion.
2. Learners get feedback on the Background Research Proposal in preparation for the Paper and on areas of their choice through the bilateral meetings.
3. Learners can critically review and reflect on their work in the Thought Experiment through the Take Home Exam.

VII Course Evaluation in Detail

Participation – 20% of Final Grade – Ongoing (Weeks 1-12)

In a seminar format, participation is essential to creating an engaging learning environment. Regular attendance and preparation for each seminar is important for all learners. Attendance in seminars is mandatory – *learners who miss more than two seminars will not pass the course.*

Learners will be evaluated based on regular, active, informed, and thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Quality contributions will demonstrate an understanding of the weekly assigned readings by being able to identify and evaluate the core argument(s), synthesize the readings, critically comment on the method or approach, and assess the evidence and analysis. Every participant in the seminar must engage with each other's ideas constructively and respectfully.

Syllabus Quiz – 1% of Final Grade – Due Friday, September 19, 2025 (Week 3)

The Syllabus Quiz is a quick review of the course components and communication policies. 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 0.¹

Reading Responses – 15% of Final Grade – 10 submissions throughout the Semester

The reading responses are based on the weekly readings. The responses should analyze the individual readings and draw connections between them. Ways to do this include, but are not limited to: determine the main arguments of the readings, how arguments are justified, what assumptions or perspectives underpin the author's work (either explicitly or implicitly), similarities and differences between the readings (compare and contrast), themes across the readings, and questions about/from the readings/items for clarification.

Reading responses are due by 5:00 p.m. to provide time for review (by learners and instructor). Responses should be approximately 300 words to a maximum of 500 words. Please submit responses on Brightspace to the weekly reading responses discussion forum.

Reading responses will be graded out of 2: 0 for non-submission, 1 for partially complete, and 2 for substantially completed. The lowest two responses are dropped from the final grade calculation.

Bilateral Meetings – 2% Each of Final Grade – Due end of Weeks 6 and 13

Learners are required to schedule and attend **two bilateral meetings** (2% each) with the professor. The first should be before Fall Break and the second before the end of classes. These meetings are for introductions and discuss course material and *upcoming* assignments. *Meetings to review an assignment grade do not count* towards these meetings.

Learners are expected to lead the bilateral meeting by a) drawing up a brief agenda for the meeting, b) submitting it to Brightspace prior to the meeting, and c) ensuring all agenda items are covered in a timely fashion.

¹ The last day to register in a course is September 16, 2025. All learners, regardless of registration date, will have until the end of the week to complete the Syllabus Quiz.

Draft Hypothetical Set of Rules – 2.5% of Final Grade – Due Monday, November 4, 2025

The classes on November 11th and December 2nd are counterfactual thought experiments on constitutional and parliamentary design. Together, we will act as a mini-constitutional forum for a fictional polity and design a hypothetical set of rules for that polity's parliamentary system and chain of democratic delegation and accountability. The discussion post is an opportunity to draft up some ideas or recommendations in preparation for the November 11th class. Be sure to add in some justification for the recommendations.

Background Research Paper – 35% of Final Grade – Proposal Due Friday, October 24, 2025, Paper Due Friday, November 28, 2025

The backgrounder is a briefing document that explains a relevant issue or event, delves into its background or historical roots, connects it to a political organization, institution, or polity, and discusses the consequences flowing from the issue. Backgrounders can be prepared for an internal audience, such management or other teams, to prepare them for future work. Or backgrounders can be external facing and meant to facilitate understanding on a given topic.

For this assignment, learners are asked to write a paper on the chain of democratic delegation and accountability in a parliamentary system of their choice, provided that the country is not already examined by the [Strøm et al anthology](#). Choices include, but are not limited to, the following parliamentary systems:

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------|----------------|------------------|
| • Australia | • Hungary | • Mauritius | • A sub-national |
| • Bahamas | • India | • New Zealand | jurisdiction |
| • Barbados | • Israel | • Papua New | (province or |
| • Bermuda | • Jamaica | Guinea | state, e.g. |
| • Botswana | • Japan | • Poland | Ontario or |
| • Bulgaria | • Latvia | • Slovakia | Tasmania) |
| • Canada | • Lesotho | • Slovenia | |
| • Czech Republic | • Mongolia | • Trinidad and | |
| • Estonia | • Malaysia | Tobago | |

Learners will submit a Research Proposal and the Background Research Paper.

The Research Proposal (500-750 words) will identify the selected polity, present basic information about the polity, and feature a bibliography of potential sources. Preliminary information on the policy should briefly overview the history of the parliamentary system (i.e., when and how it was adopted), and the polity's electoral system and major political parties.

The Background Research Paper (3,000-4000 words) should follow the format for the country chapters in the Strøm et al anthology. The structure should provide for an introduction, a brief historical overview of the parliamentary system in the selected polity and sections on each of the three links in the chain of democratic delegation and accountability. A section on external constraints can be included but is of less importance than explaining how delegation and accountability works and its impacts on the parliamentary system. Finally, the paper should feature a thesis or overall argument on how the chain of delegation and accountability shapes parliamentary democracy in the selected polity.

Submissions will be graded use of course content, inquiry and analysis skills, structure, writing style and grammar. As part of the evidence component of inquiry and analysis skills, it is important

to properly cite all sources employed in a submission. The professor prefers single-spaced documents in Times New Roman, 12 point font.

Thought Experiment Discussion Post – 2.5% of Final Grade – December 1, 2025 (Week 13)

The Thought Experiment post explores the hypothetical rules agreed to for our fictional polity during the November 11th counterfactual thought experiment class. The discussion post is a first crack for learners to explore how the rules might work in practice and the consequences for the parliamentary system in the fictional polity. It serves as preparation for our final class discussion.

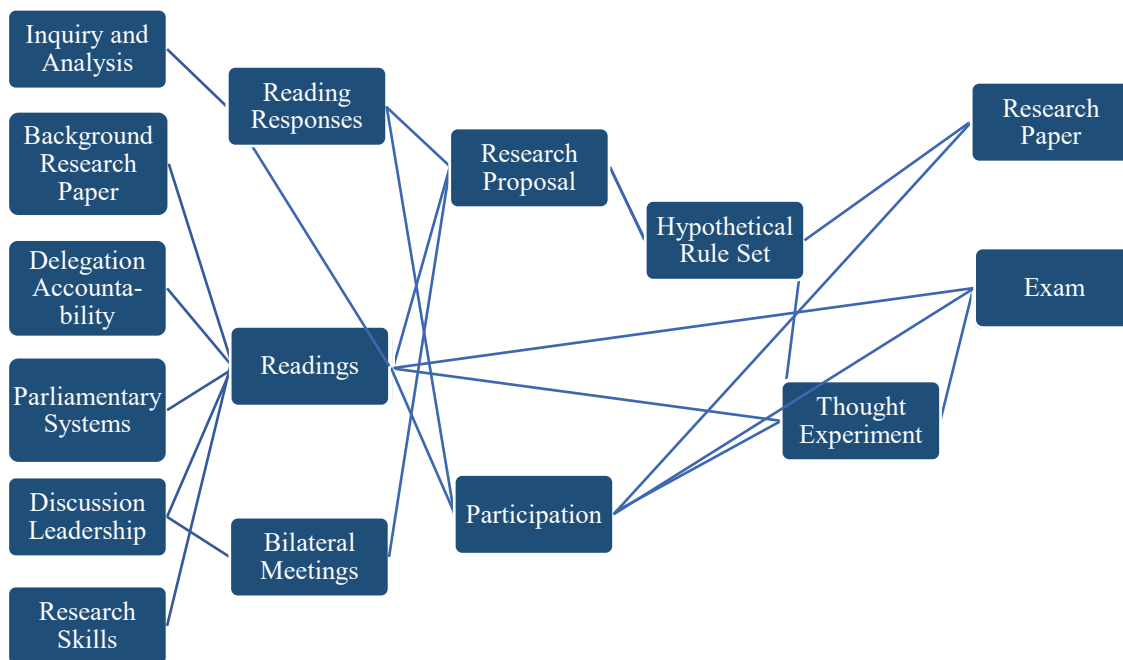
Take Home Exam –15% of Final Grade – Formal Exam Period (December 2025)

The Take Home Exam is an expansion of the Thought Experiment post and the December 2 class discussion. The exam essay should discuss how delegation and accountability works in the fictional polity, the rationale behind the rules, and whether the rules deliver on said rationale. If there are potential issues, what reforms would you make to the hypothetical rules? The essay should link the hypothetical analysis to real-world examples and evidence from the course material and readings.

The essay will be graded on use of course content and linking material/weeks, writing style and spelling and grammar. Everything should be tied together by a unifying thesis.

VIII Learning Outcomes and Concept Assessments Map

This concept map lists the 6 course-level learning outcomes 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.



IX Course Topics and Readings

Week 1 – September 2, 2025 – Course Overview

This week introduces the course, syllabus, and the inquiry and analysis skills rubric. Learners should review the course syllabus and the inquiry and analysis skills rubric, which is foundational for assignment grading rubrics.

PART I: Parliamentary Systems and Parliamentary Democracy

Week 2 – September 9, 2025 – Parliamentary Systems and Parliamentary Democracy

Our questions for the week are: What is a parliamentary system? What is a parliamentary democracy? What other theories of democracy are there? We will also discuss how to read academic articles effectively.

- Textbook, Chapter 1 (Müller et al.)
- Massicotte, Louis and F. Leslie Seidle. 1999. "Introduction." In *Taking Stock of 150 Years of Responsible Government in Canada*. Eds. F. Leslie Seidle and Louis Massicotte. Ottawa: Canadian Study of Parliament Group. 7-13.
- Optional: Davidsson, Simon. 2025. "How Parliamentarism Developed in Western Europe." *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (e53): 1-23.

Week 3 - September 16, 2025 – Delegation and Accountability

This week dives more specifically into delegation and accountability. How does delegation and accountability work in parliamentary systems? What are the relevant institutions and who are the relevant actors? How does structure vs. agency impact delegation and accountability? Why is delegation and accountability important for parliamentary systems? This week also serves as the preparation for Part II of the class examining each link in the chain of delegation and accountability (questions below).

- Textbook, Chapter 3 (Strom)
- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 109-129
- Optional: Textbook, Chapter 2 (Lupia)

PART II: The Delegation and Accountability Links

The key question for each week is: Where and when can we find delegation and accountability in parliamentary systems? We can break this question down into several smaller questions:

- Who are the actors involved and what is their role?
- What institutions are involved? What is the purpose of the institution? How is it relevant to delegation and accountability?
- Where and when does delegation and accountability take place and how are the relevant actors and institutions involved?
- What different ways are there to practice delegation and accountability in parliamentary systems?

Week 4 – September 23, 2025 – Electorate to Parliament I

This week introduces the first link in the chain of delegation and accountability: from the electorate to parliament. We will focus on elections and electoral systems, election timing and cycles. Weekly case study: Ireland.

- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 130-136
- Textbook, Chapter 13 on Ireland, especially pages 418-428
- Bowler, Shaun. 2009. "Electoral Systems." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*. Ed. Sarah Binder et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 577-594.

Week 5 – September 30, 2025 – Electorate to Parliament II

Our second week on the electorate to parliament link turns to parties, party systems, and party election campaigns and coalitions. Weekly case study: Sweden.

- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 136-145
- Textbook, Chapter 20 on Sweden, especially pages 594-601
- Aldrick, John. 2009. "Political Parties In and Out of Legislatures." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*. Ed. Sarah Binder et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 555-576.

Week 6 – October 7, 2025 – Parliament to Cabinet I

This week we turn our attention to the second link from parliament to cabinet. We will examine routine accountability in parliaments and confidence tests (investiture, non-confidence, and confidence votes). The case study is Germany.

- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 146-177
- Textbook, Chapter 10 on Germany, especially pages 347-350, 354-67
- Optional: Lento, Tal and Reuven Y. Hazan. 2022. "The Vote of No Confidence: Towards a Framework for Analysis." *West European Politics* 45(3): 502-527.

Week 7 – October 21, 2025 – Parliament to Cabinet II

We continue with the second link in the chain by examining cabinet and coalition management (inter and intra party) and dissolution rules. Weekly case study: the United Kingdom.

- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 178-195
- Schleiter, Petra and Georgina Evans. 2022. "Prime Ministers, the Vote of Confidence and the Management of Coalition Terminations between Elections." *West European Politics* 45(3): 528-549.
- Textbook, Chapter 21 on the UK, especially pages 620-625, 637-638

Week 8 – October 28, 2025 – Cabinet to the Bureaucracy

Technically, there are two links to examine here, first from the prime minister to the other cabinet ministers and second from ministers to the bureaucracy. We will be blending these two links together into for the sake of simplicity.

- Textbook, Chapter 4, pages 196-207
- Sutherland, Sharon. 1991. Responsible Government and Ministerial Responsibility." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24(1): 91-120.
- Savoie, Donald. 2004. "Searching for Accountability in a Government without Boundaries." *Canadian Public Administration* 47(1): 1-26.

Week 9 – November 4, 2025 – Constitutional Design I

This is the first class for our counterfactual thought experiment. What rules for delegation and accountability would you like to see in your ideal parliamentary system? As a class, we will develop a set of constitutional and/or parliamentary rules for delegation and accountability in a fictional new country. Plus, in preparation for the second part of the thought experiment, we will outline the broader constitutional structure and political system. This could include when the country democratized, the number of major parties, whether the political culture has a preference on the possibility of coalitions, et cetera.

- Sieberer, Ulrich. 2015. “Hire or Fire? The Link between Cabinet Investiture and Removal in Parliamentary Democracies.” In *Parliaments and Government Formation: Unpacking Investiture Rules*. Eds. Bjorn Erik Rasch, Shane Martin, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. New York: Oxford University Press. 309-329.

Part III: Challenges for Delegation and Accountability

Week 10 – November 11, 2025 – External Constraints

What external constraints limit delegation and accountability? We will look specifically at the courts and international organizations and institutions. The case study is Denmark.

- Kite, Cynthia. 2011. “East-West Conflict and Europeanization.” In *The Madisonian Turn: Political Parties and Parliamentary Democracy in Nordic Europe*. Eds. Torbjorn Bergman and Kaare Strom. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 274-300.
- Smith, David. 2007. *The People’s House of Commons: Theories of Democracy in Contention*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pages 33-50. (“Constitutional Democracy”)
- Textbook, Chapter 7 on Denmark, especially pages 295-296

Week 11 – November 18, 2025 – Electoral Democracy and Populism

What are the challenges facing delegation and accountability in parliamentary systems? We will consider electoral democracy and populist pressures on parliamentary democracy.

- Smith, David. 2007. *The People’s House of Commons*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 51-71. (“Electoral Democracy”)
- Mudde, Cas and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2017. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pages 79-96.
- Young, Lisa. 1999. “Value Clash.” In *Taking Stock of 150 Years of Responsible Government in Canada*. Eds. F. Leslie Seidle and Louis Massicotte. Ottawa: Canadian Study of Parliament Group. 105-136.
- Optional: Smith, David. 2007. *The People’s House of Commons*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 19-32. (“Parliamentary Democracy”)

Week 12 – November 25, 2025 – The Chain of Democratic Delegation and Accountability

This week is all about looking at the chain as a whole.

- Bergman, Torbjorn and Kaare Strom. 2011. “The Nordics, Demanding Citizens, Complex Politics.” In *The Madisonian Turn: Political Parties and Parliamentary Democracy in Nordic Europe*. Eds. Torbjorn Bergman and Kaare Strom. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 301-326.

- Textbook, Chapter 23, pages 732-747
- Optional: Textbook, Chapter 22

Week 13 – December 2, 2025 – Constitutional Design II

We conclude the class with the second part of the thought experiment. How might our class-developed rules for delegation and accountability play out? What are the implications for or on parties, parliamentary democracy, parliament, government, and the bureaucracy?

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 exception are the discussion posts that are due by Monday at 5:00 p.m.
- 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.

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).