



INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN  
EN ESTUDIOS NORTEAMERICANOS  
“BENJAMIN FRANKLIN”

<b>Course</b>	Comparative Justice Systems
<b>Program, semester, year</b>	International Studies Program, Spring 2027
<b>Credits ECTS</b>	3 USA
<b>Instructor's full name and email</b>	Ziwei Qi z_qi5@fhsu.edu
<b>Block dates (days and time)</b>	Monday-Thursday, 9 am-12 pm
<b>Classroom</b>	TBA
<b>Class hours</b>	45
<b>Office Hours</b>	By appointment
<b>Requirements</b>	Students should complete assigned readings before class and be prepared to engage in discussion, case analysis, and comparative reflection. Prior coursework in criminal justice is helpful but not required unless specified by the program.
<b>Language of instruction</b>	English
<b>Type of teaching</b>	In person

## INTRODUCTION

This course examines contemporary criminal justice systems across different legal traditions and cultural contexts. Using the North American justice system (United States and Canada) as an anchor point, students compare how nations organize policing, courts, corrections, punishment, and justice reform. Particular attention is given to the social, political, economic, and ideological forces that shape justice institutions, as well as the possibilities and limits of cross-national comparison.

The course is designed to help students think critically about how law and legal culture interact, how justice is practiced in different countries, and how comparative analysis can deepen understanding of both global systems and North American criminal justice debates. Topics include legal traditions, criminal procedure, human rights, comparative policing, courts, prison models, juvenile justice, wrongful convictions, and contemporary reform trends.

## COMPETENCES

### **General Competences (GC):**

GC1: Develop critical comparative thinking about law, crime, and justice across different national and cultural contexts.

GC2: Strengthen analytical and communication skills through class discussion, written work, and evidence-based comparison.

GC3: Build intercultural understanding by examining how history, politics, and social values shape criminal justice institutions.

### **Specific Competences (CE):**

SC1: Identify key legal traditions and explain how they influence policing, courts, and corrections in selected countries.

SC2: Analyze similarities and differences between the North American systems and other justice systems using comparative criminal justice frameworks.

SC3: Evaluate justice policies, procedures, and reforms in relation to human rights, fairness, effectiveness, and accountability.

## METHODOLOGY

The course combines lecture, guided discussion, short comparative case studies, student-led analysis, and applied activities. Students will engage with theoretical material on legal traditions and comparative methodology while also applying those ideas to real-world justice systems, policy problems, and reform debates. Class sessions will include close reading of assigned texts, instructor presentation, small-group discussion, country-based comparison, and occasional media or documentary analysis.

## PREPARATION FOR CLASS

- Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before class and come prepared to discuss major concepts, cases, and comparative themes.
- Students should connect readings to prior coursework, current events, travel experiences, and broader questions about justice, rights, and governance.
- Students should take notes during lectures and discussions, contribute thoughtful questions, and engage respectfully in comparative debate.

## EVALUATION

Evaluation is based on students' ability to understand, compare, and critically discuss criminal justice systems across national contexts. Assessment emphasizes preparation, engagement, written analysis, and the ability to apply comparative frameworks to legal and policy questions.

- **Activities outside of the classroom. (20%)**

Field-based or co-curricular activities may include site visits, guest lectures, cultural excursions, or justice-related observations connected to the course themes. These experiences are designed to help you connect course concepts to real world settings and deepen your comparative understanding. You may be asked to reflect on what you observed, how the experience connects to course themes, what similarities or differences you noticed compared to the United States or Canada, and what broader questions the experience raises about justice, law, and society.

- **Country-Based Guided Discussions. (30 %)**

You will complete **three short country-based** critical discussions throughout the course. These assignments are designed to help you build comparative thinking, strengthen your class engagement, and deepen your understanding of key concepts, legal traditions, comparative frameworks, and major themes in comparative justice systems.

**Purpose**

The purpose of these discussions is to help you examine how justice systems operate in different countries and think critically about how law, politics, culture, history, and social conditions shape justice practices and outcomes. These discussions are also intended to help you connect country-specific examples to broader course themes.

**Format**

You will complete three short country-based guided discussions during the course. Each discussion will focus on one major part of the justice system: **policing, courts, and corrections**. For each discussion, you will prepare to engage with an assigned

or selected country and respond to questions that help you analyze how that country's justice system works in context and how it compares with the United States or Canada.

### **Discussion 1: Policing**

In this discussion, you will examine the role, structure, and practices of policing in your selected country.

Guiding questions:

1. How is policing organized in this country? Is it centralized, decentralized, national, local, or some combination?
2. What are the main responsibilities of the police in this country?
3. What legal powers do police have, and how do those powers compare with policing in the United States and/or Canada?
4. How are police officers trained, selected, and monitored?
5. What systems of police accountability exist in this country?
6. How does the public view the police? Is there a high or low level of trust?
7. What major policing challenges, controversies, or reforms are currently shaping policing in this country?
8. How do history, politics, culture, or social inequality influence policing practices?
9. In what ways is policing in this country similar to or different from policing in the United States and/or Canada?
10. What does this country's approach to policing suggest about its broader view of justice, order, and public safety?

### **Discussion 2: Courts**

In this discussion, you will examine how the court system operates and how justice is formally administered in your selected country.

Guiding questions:

1. What legal tradition shapes this country's justice system, such as common law, civil law, religious law, or mixed law?
2. How is the court system structured? What are the major levels or types of courts?
3. What rights do individuals have when accused of a crime?
4. How does due process work in this country?
5. What is the role of judges, lawyers, and prosecutors in the justice process?
6. Are jury trials used? If not, what is used instead?
7. How do trial procedures in this country compare with those in the United States and/or Canada?
8. Is plea bargaining used, and if so, how important is it in resolving cases?
9. How is the court system accessible to ordinary people, especially marginalized or disadvantaged groups?
10. What do this country's court procedures and legal traditions reveal about its broader values regarding justice, fairness, and legal authority?

### **Discussion 3: Corrections**

In this discussion, you will examine punishment, incarceration, rehabilitation, and reentry in your selected country.

Guiding questions:

1. What are the main goals of the correctional system in this country? Are they focused more on punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, restoration, or social control?
2. What types of correctional sanctions are commonly used, such as prison, probation, parole, fines, community service, or alternatives to incarceration?
3. What are prison conditions like in this country?
4. How does this country approach rehabilitation and reintegration?
5. What kinds of support or barriers exist for people returning to the community after incarceration?
6. How does this country address youth offenders, women, or other specific populations in corrections?
7. Are there major criticisms, challenges, or reform efforts related to corrections in this country?
8. How do incarceration rates or sentencing practices compare with those in the United States and/or Canada?
9. How do culture, politics, economics, or social inequality shape correctional policies and outcomes?
10. What does this country's correctional system suggest about how it understands crime, punishment, and second chances?

### **Expectations**

These discussions should go beyond basic summary or description. You are expected to come prepared, engage course materials, and contribute thoughtful observations, questions, and analysis during class. Strong contributions will demonstrate familiarity with the selected country, clear engagement with readings and lectures, and the ability to connect the discussion to broader comparative justice themes.

### **Evaluation**

You will be evaluated based on preparation, quality of analysis, engagement with course concepts, and meaningful participation in class discussion. The goal is not simply to recall information, but to demonstrate critical thinking, comparative insight, and active involvement in the learning process.

- **Written work (30 %)**

#### **Research Paper**

Length: Minimum 5 pages, not including title page and references

You will complete a final project based on one of the two options below. In addition to submitting the written assignment, you will also present your project to the class. The presentation is a required part of the final project and should clearly explain your selected country, main topic or legal issue, key findings, and comparative insights. The goal is to help you share your research, strengthen your comparative analysis, and connect your work to broader themes in comparative justice systems.

### **Option 1: Special Issue Policy Analysis and Recommendation**

Select a critical issue in the U.S. criminal justice system, such as human trafficking, crimes against women, drug trafficking, terrorism, or mass shootings. Then choose a country to compare with the United States or Canada. In your paper, you should describe the issue in the U.S., explain how another country has addressed it, compare the legal, social, or policy responses, and evaluate whether that approach could work in the U.S. and why. Your paper should go beyond description and show a clear comparative analysis.

You may work with classmates to share resources and ideas, but each student must submit an individual paper.

### **Option 2: Travel Legal Consultation for Jane Doe**

Jane Doe, a 20-year-old U.S. college student, is planning to travel to the country you selected and is asking for legal guidance. Your task is to prepare a step by step consultation plan for Jane by responding to the following kinds of questions: whether legal help is available in a language she understands, what the legal drinking and driving age is, what laws or customs she should know, what rights she would have if she encounters legal trouble, what the arrest and pretrial process looks like, whether bail is available, whether jury trials or plea bargaining exist, and whether she can appeal if convicted.

For this option, you may use a question-and-answer format. Each answer should be fully developed and at least 300 words long. Brief or surface-level answers will not be enough. I expect clear, accurate, and detailed explanations that demonstrate your understanding of the country's legal system and how it compares to the United States or Canada.

### **Presentation Requirement (10%)**

As part of the final research paper project, you will give a brief class presentation on your project. The presentation should summarize the selected country, the issue or legal topic examined, the main findings from the research, and the most important

comparative takeaways. You should be prepared to explain how the selected country's justice system differs from the U.S. system and why those differences matter.

**Additional Notes**

***We will use one class session to workshop final paper ideas and proposals.***

***Please use a consistent citation style and submit your final project by the deadline listed in the syllabus.***

- **Participation (10%).**

A student's participation grade will reflect overall performance across these categories throughout the course rather than any one single class meeting.

<b>Participation Level</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>Strong</b>	Regular attendance, clear preparation, thoughtful discussion, active listening, respectful engagement, and consistent contribution to class activities.
<b>Moderate</b>	Generally attends and participates, with some evidence of preparation and engagement, but not consistently.
<b>Limited</b>	Inconsistent attendance or preparation, minimal engagement, inattentiveness, or limited contribution to class discussion and activities.

**EVALUATION**

PARTICIPATION	10%
ACTIVITIES AND FIELD TRIPS	20%
COUNTRY BASED GUIDED DISCUSSIONS	30 %
RESEARCH PAPER	30%

ORAL PRESENTATION

10%

Your final grade is based on active engagement, comparative discussion, research, and presentation.

- **Participation (10%)** reflects attendance, preparation, and contribution to class.
- **Activities and Field Trips (20%)** assess involvement in course-related experiences and applied learning.
- **Country-Based Guided Discussions (30%)** focus on critical discussion of assigned or selected countries and their justice systems in relation to course themes.
- **The Research Paper (30%)** allows you to examine a comparative justice issue in greater depth through research and analysis.
- **The Oral Presentation (10%)** allows you to share your project and key comparative insights with the class.

### Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a violation of academic norms and, as such, can result in a failing grade. In extreme cases, it can include expulsion from the program. In order to avoid this, it is recommended to remind students of how to cite and rephrase the works of authors when writing papers.

### ATTENDANCE (Instituto Franklin-UAH Policy)

Attendance is mandatory. Students are not permitted to miss any classes of the program without proper justification (i.e., emergencies, health problems); in this case, students have to show a medical note. The following types of excuses are not justified: family visits, illnesses without a medical note, personal trips, etc. Each unjustified absence will result in a grade deduction of 10 points in the final grade of the class (example: from A to B). Students will not be allowed, in the classroom or on fieldtrips, to arrive 10 minutes late or more. If a student has continual delays, he/she will be penalized with an absence, and the instructor may not allow them into class or the visit.

### STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (Instituto Franklin-UAH Policy)

Students with special needs should contact Antonio Fernández: [antonio.fernandezm@uah.es](mailto:antonio.fernandezm@uah.es).

The Instituto Franklin-UAH can accommodate these students who show, through a medical note or a note from their academic advisor, that they require help in order to fulfill the program.

### USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CLASS

The use of technology is essential today in education, but if it is used inappropriately, it can be harmful for students. Students must ask for permission from the teacher in order to use any technological devices. Faculty should make clear to students in what instances technology can be used.

## USE OF BLACKBOARD

All courses offered by Instituto Franklin-UAH can be taught through the Blackboard virtual classroom. Also, teachers can have materials, forums, etc., in the virtual classroom even if they don't teach the class virtually. For more information about using it, contact Antonio Fernández: [antonio.fernandezm@uah.es](mailto:antonio.fernandezm@uah.es)

## CLASS SCHEDULE

DAYS	CLASS SCHEDULE	ASSIGNMENTS
MONTHS: JAN TO FEB, 2027		
BLOCK 1		
January 18-21	Comparative policing models and state authority in different national contexts	Discussion 1
January 25-28	Courts, judicial cultures, and criminal procedure across systems	Country comparison activity Discussion 2
Feb 1-4	Corrections, punishment, prison models, and human rights	Discussion 3
February 8-11	Global justice reform trends; course synthesis; student reflections	Final paper and presentation

### Note:

Any site visits, guest lectures, or field-based activities listed in the schedule are subject to change depending on program logistics and community partner availability.

## BIBLIOGRAHY

- Dammer, H. R., & Albanese, J. S. (2014). *Comparative criminal justice systems* (5th ed.). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Selected articles, media, and supplementary readings on legal traditions, policing, courts, corrections, human rights, and justice reform will also be assigned throughout the course.

## INSTRUCTOR

Ziwei Qi, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Fort Hays State University. Her teaching and research focus on comparative justice systems, gender and crime, social justice, trauma-informed practices, and community-engaged scholarship.

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