



SELF PROGRAM

2026/2027

Comparative Legal Traditions

Dr Andrew BALDWIN

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Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours

Hours taught per week: 5 hours

Teaching period: Fall Semester 2026

Course description

This course offers an understanding of the distinctions between the three most influential legal traditions in the modern world: common law, civil law, and Islamic law. Students will learn about the theoretical bases of these traditions, as well as the way in which each tradition has evolved and been adapted over time. Topics covered include the nature of legal sources themselves, the approach of each tradition to key legal subjects, and the kinds of judicial structure and method to be found in each. There will also be a brief introduction to some minority legal traditions and examples, as well as to the interaction between legal tradition and international law.

Course outline

Class 1 Issues in comparative law

Class 2 Introduction to common law

Class 3 Introduction to civil law

Class 4 Introduction to Islamic law

Class 5 How legal traditions affect personal rights

Class 6 Contract law in the different legal traditions

Class 7 How criminal cases look in each legal tradition

Class 8 Outlier and hybrid legal traditions

Class 9 Legal traditions and international law

Prerequisites

No previous training in law is required and students of all subject backgrounds are very welcome; but naturally participants must be prepared to absorb and deal with detailed legal concepts. While the course will be of some use to any students who go on to practise law or business in an international sphere, it will also be relevant for anyone with an interest in the origins and evolution of modern states, in the underlying philosophy behind legal systems, and in the impact of state structures on human rights.

Course objectives

This course aims at providing students with the following:

- Awareness of the historical origins of the principal legal traditions in the modern world, and of the diversity within those traditions
- Knowledge of the key distinctions in theory, structure and process between these families of legal systems
- Appreciation of ongoing issues across the world's legal traditions, such as the protection of the individual and the impact of international law

Assessment

30% – mid-term in-class test of knowledge comprehension

70% – final in-class (i.e. class 10) extended written examination

Please note that the marks obtained for each element in the assessment are definitive. Save in exceptional medical circumstances, there will be no retakes or supplementary tests.

Attendance

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise, no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography

H.P. Glenn, *Legal Traditions of the World: Sustainable Diversity in Law* (4th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

H. Kötz & K. Zweigert (tr. T. Weir), *An Introduction to Comparative Law* (3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Further reading relating to each of the weekly themes will be provided via the Moodle platform as the course progresses.