

Rubia R. Valente | TEACHING STATEMENT

My teaching philosophy is to inspire students to achieve great accomplishments through the application of knowledge and skills. As a professor, I aim to foster students' passion for learning and discovery, to inspire them to seek reassuring 'aha' moments that follow the understanding of new concepts. My goal is to provide students with a solid foundation in social sciences, to pursue challenging projects and endeavor towards their full potential. As an educator, my utmost responsibility is to disseminate knowledge and inspire students to become responsible, well-rounded individuals. My teaching philosophy is based on three guiding principles:

- (1) *employ a hands-on approach*: to motivate the learning process, I encourage my students to reflect upon learned concepts and their practical applications by proposing exercises that involve solution to real-world problems.
- (2) *encourage active participation*: to foster participation, I make lectures interactive by asking students dimensional questions that result in a constructive dialogue about the topic being discussed. When involved in class discussions, students develop independent thinking skills and become active participants in the learning process.
- (3) *reach all students*: to make the material accessible to all students, I adapt my teaching methods to my audience, and deliver the material clearly and intuitively; I build on related concepts, introduce a wide variety of examples, and show how different application domains can fit into the broader context of the class discussion.

Teaching Experience. In the past four years, I have had the opportunity to independently design and instruct three different courses at the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences (EPPS) at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD): a sociology course in "Culture Regions – Brazil" (SOC3336), an interdisciplinary course in "World Resources and Development" (ISS3349), and a quantitative course in "Social Statistics" (EPPS3405). Since Fall 2012, I have been teaching ISS3349 every fall, and EPPS3405 every spring. Given the contrasting differences between these subjects, I tailored each course to specific lecturing styles and classroom dynamics to facilitate students' assimilation to the taught material. From these experiences, I learned that it is extremely effective to instill critical thinking in students, stimulating them to learn how to articulate explanations and come up with their own conclusions, as opposed to memorizing well-rehearsed facts. I also observed that engaging students in class discussions sparks their interest and improves their comprehension of the subject being taught.

The World Resources and Development (ISS3349) and the Culture Regions (SOC3336) courses were designed to be conducted in a seminar style. When teaching a seminar, I encourage students to present their perspectives on the discussed topics while guiding the discussion to include opposing arguments. This strategy allows students to critically and neutrally assess each position on a given subject. As an example, ISS3349 engages theories of development in a normative discussion through which students can relate by posing questions such as, "Does the World Bank facilitate development, or is it partly responsible for the crises that lender countries experience?", "Is micro-credit really empowering, or can it actually leave the poor poorer?" and "Does economic growth undermine human development, or is human development a barrier to economic growth?" In addition, I introduce articles with conflicting views and opinions. For instance, when discussing micro-credit, I contrast the argument by Boudreaux and Cowen (2008) that micro-loans can have a significant positive impact on the lives of the poor with the arguments of Cockburn (2006), who argues the opposite. Following this strategy, students are presented with both sides of an argument and are taught that discussion and a holistic approach are critical when solving pressing real-world problems.

Course evaluations for these courses have been extremely positive. For example, a student from SOC3336 wrote, "this professor presented detailed and very insightful subject material. She made it fun to learn about this [Brazilian] fascinating culture, and her lectures often prompted dynamic and thoughtful discussions in class." A student from ISS3349 said "the quality of the class discussion were the best aspect of this class." Another student in the same course wrote, "the format of the class was unique with lots of student interaction (...) always on topic and informative. I really enjoyed this class because of the interaction and the way that the professor conveyed the information during lectures." These comments reflect closely on the design of my seminar-style courses, i.e., there is no such thing as absolute truth when dealing with cultural, political, and social issues. My role as instructor is to offer a learning environment where students can learn to analyze conflicting arguments and formulate a workable

solution to a complex predicament. Such skills allow students to think critically in a world that is caught up with many urgent problems and discordant ideas.

Quantitative courses such as Social Statistics (EPPS3405) demand different dynamics, involving balance between pure expository lecturing and discussion. As often as possible, I put learned concepts into context by discussing their application to real life. The class time is divided into lecture and lab exercises. The lecture portion of the class guides students towards the concepts of social statistics while providing examples and comparisons of when and how these concepts can be used. In the computer lab portion, I emphasize the importance of such concepts by providing exercises that cover a diversity of areas, such as criminology, sociology, public policy, economics, and political science. This approach illustrates to students how learned statistical concepts can be applied in many fields and under a variety of circumstances. I employ technology-enhanced learning techniques by teaching them how to solve statistical problems using STATA and MS Excel's Data Analysis Package. Statistics can be intimidating for non-sciences majors. To reduce students' anxiety, I engage with them during the lab portion as much as possible. For example, I invite students to assist me in solving lab exercises while guiding them through every step of the problem.

I strive to make students feel welcome and at ease in my classroom. I have had 248 students so far, and every semester I have made sure that I know each one of their names before class starts. UTD provides a photo roster of enrolled students, which I use to memorize their names, and on the first day of class I call on each one of them. This small act makes a huge difference on the relationship that I build with the students throughout the semester—it is my way of showing students that I really care about them and their learning experience. At the same time, knowing their names facilitates class discussion and makes students feel comfortable in contributing ideas. When filling course evaluations and teaching award nominations, students often mention how this made an important difference in the learning process. My teaching philosophy goal involves inspiring students to accomplish great things through the application of their knowledge and skills. I find teaching immensely rewarding. I cherish the wealth of knowledge, and revel in the sparkle of comprehension in a student's eye. A profession in teaching would be the greatest gift I receive. I believe that as a professor my duty is to disseminate knowledge and inspire students to become responsible, well-rounded individuals. I will strive to continue achieving this goal throughout my career.

For three consecutive years, I won the "EPPS Outstanding Teaching Comet Award" (2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016). This award is based on students' nominations of EPPS faculty in each of the school's degree areas.¹ In addition, I have been invited by my department to participate in a panel to provide teaching assistants in our department with guidance and advising on teaching college classes.

Teaching Interests. I am prepared to teach undergraduate and graduate courses on Public Policy, Sociology, Political Economy, Political Science and Latin American Studies with a particular focus on issues such as Resources and Development, Social Problems, Ethics, Culture, Race and Ethnicity, and Gender Issues. I am also prepared to teach methods courses such as Research Design, Data Management and Analysis, Methods of Quantitative Analysis, Categorical and Dependent Variables, Survey Design, and Qualitative Research Methods.

Community Outreach. I have been significantly involved in outreach activities at UTD. I am the faculty advisor for UTD IGNITE, a student association that inspires and unites young women to overcome the barriers that prevent them from seeking elected office. Its members learn and practice political leadership to make change for their communities, with focus on helping minority women. I have also organized two university-wide events, open to the community, to discuss the horrific ongoing global phenomena of human trafficking in collaboration with three student organizations. I firmly believe that it is absolutely essential to reach out to students and spread the word about important social problems, such as human trafficking, not only to bring awareness, but to foster in students the desire to become agents of change in our society. I hope to continue promoting this type of educational outreach in the future, helping diverse students and student associations organize and participate in instructive panels and workshops. I have also mentored several minority undergraduate students and look forward to continue working with underrepresented student groups in my department.

¹Students' comments can be accessed here: <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/21275047/EPPSAward2014.pdf> and here under *Public Policy and Political Economy*: <http://www.utdallas.edu/epps/events/teaching-award.html>