

Rubia R. Valente | TEACHING STATEMENT

My teaching philosophy is to inspire students to realize their full potential through the application of knowledge and skills. As a professor, I seek to foster students' passion for learning and discovery, and to engage them in the pursuit of reassuring 'aha' moments that follow the understanding of new concepts. My goal is to provide students with a solid foundation in social sciences, enabling them to pursue challenging projects and achieve their academic endeavors. 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 six years, I have had the opportunity to independently design and instruct seven different courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. At the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), I taught a sociology course in "Culture Regions – Brazil" (SOC 3336), an interdisciplinary course in "World Resources and Development" (ISS 3349), and a quantitative course in "Social Statistics" (EPPS 3405). At Princeton University, I taught a course on "Latinos in American Life and Culture" (LAO 200), and at Baruch College I have taught and I am currently teaching "Quantitative Methods for Policy and Practice" (PAF 3401), "Principles of Survey Research" (PAF 3405), and "Regression and Analysis II" (PAF 9172).

To facilitate students' assimilation of the taught material, I tailor each course to specific lecturing styles and classroom dynamics. For instance, I typically design non-quantitative courses (SOC 3336, ISS 3349, LAO 200) 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, allowing students to critically and neutrally assess each position on a given subject. To illustrate, ISS 3349 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?". To substantiate the discussion, I introduce students to articles with conflicting views and opinions. As an example, 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. This strategy presents students with both sides of an argument and teaches them that a holistic approach is critical to address pressing real-world problems.

Course evaluations for these courses have been extremely positive. For example, a student from SOC 3336 wrote, "*this professor presented detailed and very insightful subject material; she made it fun to learn about this fascinating culture, and her lectures often prompted dynamic and thoughtful discussions in class.*" Another student from ISS 3349 said, "*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.*" I believe that my role as an 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.

Conversely, research methods courses (PAF 3401, PAF 9172, EPPS3405) demand different dynamics, involving striking a balance between pure expository lecturing, in-class exercises, and discussion. As often as possible, I put learned concepts into context by discussing their real-life applications. The lecture portion of these classes guides students towards concepts of research methods while providing examples and comparisons of when and how these concepts can be applied. During in-class exercises, I emphasize the importance of such concepts by providing

problem sets that cover a diversity of areas, such as public affairs and public policy, sociology, economics, and political science. This illustrates to students how statistical concepts can be applied in many fields and under a variety of circumstances. I leverage technology-enhanced learning techniques by teaching students how to solve statistical problems using tools such as STATA, SPSS, and the Data Analysis Package in Excel. Research methods can be intimidating for non-sciences majors. To reduce students' anxiety, I engage with them during in-class exercises. For example, I invite students to assist me in solving exercises while guiding them through every step of the problem. When appropriate, I divide them into small groups, which allows me to engage with students more closely. It is immensely rewarding to help students overcome the fear of taking a research methods class and instill in them appreciation for the subject. For example, a student in PAF 9172 said, "*I was very worried about taking this course, but the instructor did a fantastic job at making the material accessible and easier to understand, with many examples and in-class exercises to help improve knowledge of the topics. I would highly recommend her to other students taking PAF 9172.*"

I strive to make students feel welcome and at ease in my classroom. I have had 408 students so far, and every semester I have made sure that I know each one of their names by the end of the first week of class. 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, students often mention how this made an important difference in the learning process.

Teaching is immensely rewarding to me. I cherish the wealth of knowledge, and revel in the sparkle of comprehension in a student's eye. 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 me, as a professor, there is not a more satisfying reward than being recognized by my students. I was honored to be nominated and win the *Outstanding Teaching Comet Award* at the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences at UTD for three consecutive years (2014–2016). This award is based on students' nominations of the faculty in each of the school's degree areas.¹

Teaching Interests. I am prepared to teach undergraduate and graduate methods courses in Research and Analysis (PAF 9170, PAF 9172), Principles of Survey Research (PAF 3405), Quantitative Methods for Policy and Practice (PAF 3401), and Data Management and Analysis. I am also prepared to teach courses in Public Policy, Public and International Affairs, Sociology, Political Economy, Political Science, and Latin American Studies, with a particular focus on World Resources and Development, Social Problems, Race and Ethnicity, and Gender Issues.

Community Outreach. I have been significantly involved in outreach activities. At UTD I was 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 empower their communities, with a focus on helping minority women. In collaboration with three student organizations at UTD, I organized two university-wide events open to the community to discuss the horrific ongoing global phenomena of human trafficking. 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 at Baruch.

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>.