

# TEACHING STATEMENT

**Pablo Fernandez-Vazquez\***

I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses in comparative politics and research methods both as instructor of record at Carlos III University in Madrid and recitation leader at New York University. My experience includes teaching small seminars and larger lectures in both a private and a public university setting. In addition to comparative politics and quantitative methods, I look forward to teaching courses in European politics, game theory, and comparative political economy.

My teaching in pursues a diverse but complementary set of goals. I aim to equip students with the core skill set for the social sciences: the capacity to formulate causal explanations to normatively-relevant questions, to select the best research design to test an empirical claim, and to draw statistical inferences using statistical software of reference like R and Stata. The teaching strategies I follow stem from my classroom experience as well as my participation in the course “Preparing Future Faculty”, organized by New York University’s School of Arts and Sciences. This seminar was an opportunity to discuss best practices in course design, lecturing strategies and student-centered teaching.

In my comparative politics courses, I emphasize how political institutions are the result of strategic interactions between politicians with conflicting interests. For that purpose, I organize group activities in which students play the role of political actors. In one of these exercises, students represent the main social groups in an imaginary country, “Livonia”, which has recently democratized and needs to choose an electoral system. By observing the outcome of this bargaining process, students obtain first-hand experience on how institutions distribute political power. I also incorporate audiovisual material as a first step to tackle complex subjects. For example, in order to explain the recent Euro crisis, I show the short film “*A Very European Breakup*”, which portrays a married couple in crisis as a satirical metaphor of the conflict between debtor and creditor countries in the Eurozone.<sup>1</sup> Student performance in exams and homework assignments indicates that using audiovisual content is particularly effective at improving the performance of students with a weaker background in political science.

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\*Postdoctoral researcher, Carlos III - Juan March Institute. Email: [pablo.fernandezvz@gmail.com](mailto:pablo.fernandezvz@gmail.com). Website: [pablofernandezvazquez.com](http://pablofernandezvazquez.com)

<sup>1</sup>You can find a link to this film [here](#).

Given the technical nature of research methods classes, I rely mostly on lecturing. I complement this strategy with computer simulations, which provide intuitive understandings of abstract concepts in statistical inference, like the central limit theorem. In addition, students develop proficiency in statistical software through a hands-on approach that includes weekly assignments and practical exercises in the midterm and final exams. A common challenge in methods courses is the heterogeneity in students' previous exposure to quantitative analysis. To obtain information about their background training, I distribute a non-graded test at the beginning of the course using *Learning Catalytics*, an online teaching and assessment tool. This information helps identify students that may need additional support.

In sum, all my pedagogical strategies emphasize analytical and quantitative skills that remain with the student long after he or she leaves the classroom and that are transferable across employment settings. For further information about my teaching experience and philosophy, my website [pablofernandezvazquez.com/teaching](http://pablofernandezvazquez.com/teaching) provides a report on my student evaluations as well as course syllabi.