

## Teaching Statement

### SERGIO M. CABRALES

Teaching at a university is a powerful form of solidarity and social change. It represents a meaningful way to bring about change, with the potential for transformation over the medium and long term. When I teach a class, especially in sociology, it's not just an academic task—it's a demonstration of my commitment to a social process that helps shape competent and compassionate professionals who can make a real impact on the world. I've seen evidence of this transformation in the ten courses **I've taught in Spanish and English, reaching over six hundred undergraduate students** in the United States, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

I design my courses to enhance professionalization skills, allowing students to connect to a particular topic and make creative and critical comparisons with external cases, personal anecdotes, and current events. Two recent examples show how I implement this teaching style. In a Political Sociology class, after presenting the current state of the discussion on the Rational Choice Perspective and the sociological use of this framework, I prepared an analysis of cases of natural disasters in the United States and Latin America. Students discussed in groups, with actual examples, how individual decisions, agencies, and rationales shaped the outcome of those disasters. In subsequent evaluations, students shared with me how much they enjoyed the activity as it allowed them to read about the theory and apply it.

Similarly, in Classic Sociological Theory class, I prepared a didactic laboratory that allowed us to use the resources from our library to observe the contemporary uses of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber's theory in a range of diverse topics, such as sports, religion, gender, organizations, and industries, among others. The students selected, read, and presented recent papers, thus observing the sociological canon's validity and criticism. The students developed skills by appropriating and applying this significant body of theory.

I ensure that my classes are designed to immerse students in a reflective, assessed, and participatory process and develop their competencies through learning activities. For example, I often allocate time for students to write continuously for a minute about the topics discussed in the lecture up to that point. This technique helps students digest dense content, encourages participation, prompts more frequent questions from students, and makes note-taking easier.

I regularly conduct evaluations regardless of the group size to monitor reading rates, class participation, attendance, and overall learning progress. I require students to take a stance rather than summarize content for assignments like essays, quizzes, and presentations. This type of evaluation encourages students to provide insightful criticisms that wouldn't be possible in a simple Q&A format. As a result, students engage in ongoing academic discussions in the sociological field, contributing valuable insights, often from personal or interdisciplinary perspectives.

In my role, I prioritize ensuring that students comprehend the high professional and academic standards required in today's world. I emphasize the importance of quality in

coursework and believe that students can meet these standards to transform our societies. For instance, during my research methodology class in Nicaragua, I encouraged students to adopt ambitious techniques and maintain rigor and discipline in their work despite the challenging political environment. Similarly, in Guatemala, I urged students to strive for ambitious social transformation within the university, even amidst a politically volatile and corrupt context.

I also contribute to the training of compassionate professionals. In my classes, I present examples with accurate data, names, and faces, which both humanize and personalize the theories and problems we study for students. Through this personalizing approach, my students understand that they should not contemplate society as passive observers but must work to connect to and influence society actively. In one class, I discussed types of political regimes and brought up examples from around the world of growing authoritarianism in contrast to democratic or hybrid contexts. The cases, multimedia, testimonies, and first-hand newspaper articles reminded students that we talked about actual humans living under these regimes. In the essays the students produced due to that session, I observed heightened global sensitivity and deep recognition of the severe political problems affecting millions of lives.

In my classes, I encourage students to share their perspectives and personal anecdotes about our study topics. I always urge them to question the realities they might otherwise accept. In dialogue with the other disciplines they study, I present sociology and research as powerful tools in this work.

These teaching approaches, most of them a result of my experience with Jesuit Education in Central America, aim to mold students into competent and compassionate professionals who can significantly impact the world. This way of teaching represents a true calling for me, and I will always fervently follow it.