

Evidence of teaching effectiveness

Student evaluations

Undergraduate students at Rice University evaluate their instructors based on aspects such as preparation and classroom organization. The evaluation scale ranges from 1 to 5, where lower values indicate higher evaluations: 1 indicates “Outstanding,” 2 “Good,” 3 “Average,” 4 “Fair,” and 5 “Poor.” I compare student evaluations of my Latin American Politics class to the Rice mean in Table 1. I find that, with the exception of “responsiveness” and “independence,” students evaluated me with the highest possible grade in all categories. In all cases, my evaluations were above the average evaluation of Rice instructors.

Table 1: Instructor evaluation from students

| | Class mean | Rice mean |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Organization | 1 | 1.53 |
| Presentation | 1 | 1.66 |
| Responsiveness | 1.1 | 1.53 |
| Atmosphere | 1 | 1.5 |
| Independence | 1.1 | 1.56 |
| Stimulation | 1 | 1.59 |
| Knowledge | 1 | 1.52 |
| Effectiveness | 1 | 1.6 |
| Responsibility | 1 | 1.4 |

Below, I include comments submitted by students from my time as an instructor of record, a TA, and a graduate consultant at the CAPC, where I have had over 100 consultations with Rice students. Reviews underscore how I managed to achieve critical engagement from students and to create a safe forum for ideas where students felt comfortable. Students felt encouraged to take autonomy over their own ideas and learning, found the activities engaging, and appreciated the clarity, organization and structure of the class:

Table 2: Selection of teaching evaluations from students

| Instructor | Teaching assistant | CAPC consultant |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I really enjoyed your style of teaching. Your slides were very organized and easy to access. I really like the PollEvs and the Kahoots as they help me stay engaged. Overall, I just want to say thank you for a great semester, I learned a lot and am glad I took this course!” • “I would say this class was very well designed, engaging, and fun. The fact that this was your first semester teaching makes it all the more impressive. I had a great experience!” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Gustavo was great!!! He was a lot of help during the lab sessions and his conduct made it obvious that he didn’t want us to just get a 10/10 on the lab assignments and leave, but instead to actually understand why we’re coding things in specific ways and be able to replicate it later. Amazing TA, great vibes, very enjoyable experience, and I walked out liking R a lot more than I did before his class.” • “Gustavo was beyond fantastic! he was helpful, kind, patient, understanding and went way out of his way to help me succeed. It would be a disservice to his hard work and guidance for me to say anything that isn’t a glowing compliment” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Very attentive, helped me walked through structure while helping me work independently.” • “Friendly and well-organized session. I feel like we discussed a lot and I appreciated the chance to get real-time feedback on writing I produced during the session. Clearly not their first rodeo!” |

Faculty evaluations

It was a pleasure to sit in on Gustavo’s Latin American Politics course today. This is the first time Gustavo has taught his own course, and he did a great job with this class. The topic of the class was electoral systems in Latin America. Attendance was excellent (all 13/13 students were in class), and students were interested and engaged. The class was predominantly lecture, but Gustavo worked in a number of fun and compelling interactive activities. Gustavo’s presentation of the topic was clear, informative, effective, and appropriately aimed for a 300-level course. Overall, his teaching was excellent.

Gustavo started class by using discussion questions posed by the students. Students got engaged right from the start and stayed engaged throughout the class. He then presented a summary of what they learned the previous week to situate the topic of the day. Gustavo seamlessly moved between lecture and interaction with the students. He would present a topic and then ask the students to respond to questions or engage in discussion related to the topic. For example, he introduced electoral formulas, showed students how they vary across Latin American countries, and then engaged the students in a voting exercise using polleverywhere.com. They got to see up close how their votes translated into an election winner. Gustavo then overviewed the political consequences of different electoral systems—majoritarian and proportional. In another example, he asked students whether they thought democracy should listen more to the majority of citizens or as many voices as possible. Students responded via polleverywhere.com, and interestingly, 77% of the class thought democracy should listen to as many voices as possible, whereas only 23% thought democracy should listen to a majority. Somewhat surprising for students in the U.S., which is a clear majoritarian system! Gustavo used this question to help motivate discussion on the pros and cons of different electoral systems. I also really appreciated the analogy of votes as currency to discussion how the Hare quota formula translates votes into seats. A very well done class.

The syllabus for the course is thorough, clear, and sets appropriate expectations for the students. Gustavo articulates

the course learning goals and describes how students will meet them. Requirements include two exams, three country reports, and participation. All are well-weighted for the final grade. Gustavo holds two hours of office hours each week to assist students as needed. The amount of reading is at an appropriate level, and the readings draw on scholarly literature at an undergraduate level.

In sum, I thoroughly enjoyed Gustavo's class. He is an excellent teacher and has a bright future in the classroom.

Leslie Schwindt-Bayer, Edwards Professor of Political Science at Rice University

Student confidence

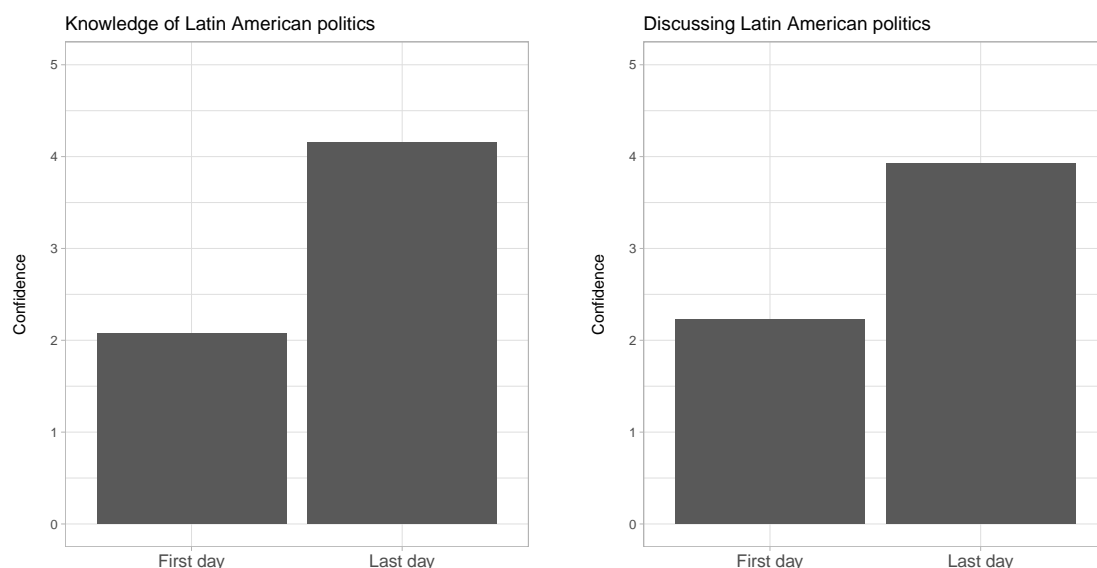
I believe that keeping track of student progress and their perceptions of that progress is invaluable for two reasons. First, doing so provides another way to evaluate teaching effectiveness and can help inform the design of future iterations of the class. Second, focusing on confidence can provide insight into the extent to which students feel comfortable discussing class content outside the classroom.

To keep track of student progress, I conducted two surveys in my Latin American Politics class, on the first and last day of class. Surveys asked students to rate their level of confidence (1 being "not confident at all" and 5 being "very confident") when talking about Latin American Politics:

- How confident are you in your knowledge about Latin American politics?
- How confident are you in your ability to discuss recent political events in Latin America?

Below, I compare the average response for each question in the first and last day of classes. Figure 1 shows that, overall, students felt considerably more confident in their knowledge and their ability to discuss Latin American politics by the end of the semester. The average confidence that students felt about their knowledge and discussing Latin American politics practically doubled.

Figure 1: Student confidence at the start and end of the semester



Note: Average reported confidence in a 5 point scale (1 being "not confident at all" and 5 being "very confident"). The standard deviation for the last day was 0.68 for knowledge and 0.64 for discussing Latin American politics.