

HECTOR CHAIDEZ RUACHO, LCSW

Teaching Statement

My approach to teaching is grounded in the belief that social work education should equip students not only with knowledge and skills but also with the critical awareness necessary to engage ethically and effectively with diverse communities. As a bilingual clinician, researcher, and social work educator, my teaching is shaped by experiences working with immigrant families, conducting community-engaged research, and providing clinical services. These experiences have taught me that meaningful learning occurs when students are invited to question assumptions, engage with perspectives different from their own, and connect classroom knowledge to the complexities of social work practice. I therefore center my teaching on three interconnected principles: critical reflection, active engagement, and the integration of research, theory, and practice.

Social work students must learn to move between conceptual knowledge and real-world application. In my classroom, I facilitate this process through interactive discussions, small-group activities, case examples, and applied exercises that ask students to consider how systems, policies, culture, and historical contexts shape individual and community experiences. Rather than treating these activities as opportunities to identify a single “correct” response, I ask students to explain their reasoning, consider alternative perspectives, and reflect on the assumptions informing their decisions. I look for evidence of learning in students’ ability to move beyond describing a concept toward applying it, questioning it, and articulating its implications for social work practice.

My experiences as a Co-Teacher and Teaching Assistant at the University of Texas at Austin have been particularly important in developing this approach. I have supported undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral instruction in Foundations of Social Justice, Dynamics of Organizations and Communities, Social Work Research Methods, Qualitative Research Methods, and Spanish for Social Workers. I have also delivered four guest lectures in social work and psychology courses, providing additional opportunities to translate my clinical and research expertise into accessible learning experiences for students across disciplines. Beyond the classroom, I have delivered 14 oral and 6 poster presentations, both professional and scholarly, to academic, clinical, and community audiences, including an international presentation at the Latino Social Workers Organization (LSWO) Symposium in Oaxaca, Mexico. These experiences have strengthened my ability to communicate complex ideas to audiences with different levels of familiarity and expertise, a skill that directly informs my teaching.

Across my teaching experiences, I have learned that students engage most deeply with course material when they have opportunities to actively use it. In Spanish for Social Workers, for example, I have supported activities requiring students to practice communicating social work concepts in Spanish and apply their developing language skills to realistic professional situations. These exercises move students beyond literal translation by asking them to consider how language, culture, and professional communication influence assessment, engagement, and relationships with clients. Discussion and reflection following these activities allow students to identify areas of growth and consider what culturally and linguistically responsive practice requires of social workers.

My teaching in Dynamics of Organizations and Communities has similarly reinforced the value of experiential learning. In one class session, I used a community-engaged project from my own research to walk students through the process of identifying a community need and translating assessment into intervention and evaluation. The project became a basis for discussing whose needs are prioritized, how interventions respond to multiple stakeholders, and how social workers determine whether an intervention is responsive to community priorities. One student reflected that seeing the process applied to a real-world project “further solidified the concepts in practical, real-world experiences,” particularly by demonstrating how engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation can be applied across different needs and communities. This feedback affirmed that students often develop a deeper understanding of abstract concepts when they can examine how those concepts shape actual decisions in research and practice.

My clinical and research experiences provide another bridge between classroom learning and social work practice. My work with Spanish-speaking immigrant families at the Yale Child Study Center and my research

examining mental health inequities among Hispanic/Latino populations have shown me how language access, discrimination, immigration-related stressors, and the availability of culturally responsive services can shape behavioral health outcomes. I draw on these experiences through de-identified cases and examples that ask students to examine how individual experiences are embedded within organizational and structural contexts. I also bring my scholarship into research methods instruction to make the research process more tangible. For example, after presenting how an interview guide from one of my projects developed into data collection, analysis, and a publishable study, students described the example as helpful for understanding how the stages of qualitative research connect. In this way, I use my research not simply to present findings, but to make visible the decisions, uncertainties, and iterative processes involved in producing knowledge.

Critical reflection is central to both my instruction and my assessment of student learning. I encourage students to ask not only “What should I do?” but also “Why am I making this decision?” “Whose perspective am I prioritizing?” “What assumptions am I bringing to this situation?” and “What evidence supports my approach?” Interactive activities provide opportunities to practice this process collaboratively, while written assignments and individualized feedback allow students to develop their reasoning more intentionally. I view feedback as an extension of instruction rather than simply a mechanism for assigning a grade. Students have described my feedback as “constructive and positive” and as helping them recognize areas for improvement and ideas they could expand upon. Another student noted that classroom discussions “raised questions or points I did not think of and furthered my learning.” Such feedback helps me evaluate whether my teaching strategies are encouraging the reflection and intellectual curiosity I want students to develop.

My approach to mentorship extends my teaching beyond the classroom and into the professional development of emerging social workers and scholars. At the Yale Child Study Center, I have mentored post-MSW social work fellows as they develop their clinical and professional identities, navigate career decisions, and consider opportunities for advanced training. I approach these relationships by helping trainees identify their strengths and long-term goals, providing individualized feedback, and making the often-unspoken processes of academic and professional advancement more transparent. For example, I mentored a post-MSW fellow throughout the PhD application process, helping identify programs aligned with their interests, strengthen application materials, and prepare for the transition from clinical practice to doctoral training. Their successful admission to doctoral programs reinforced for me how individualized mentorship can help trainees translate their interests and experiences into concrete pathways for continued professional and scholarly development.

My teaching interests include social work practice, mental health, diversity and social justice, qualitative and mixed-methods research, community and organizational practice, and policy. I would be particularly excited to contribute to courses such as Spanish for Social Workers, Community and Organizational Practice, and Social Justice, where such courses or related curricular opportunities are available, while remaining eager to teach across the curriculum in areas that align with departmental needs. My scholarship on Hispanic/Latino mental health, immigrant families, and the behavioral health workforce provides opportunities to engage students with questions of mental health equity, culturally responsive practice, and community-engaged research. I am especially interested in helping students see research and practice as mutually informative: practice can generate important research questions, while rigorous, community-responsive research can improve services, organizations, and systems.

Ultimately, I view effective social work education as a process of helping students learn how to think critically about complex problems rather than simply teaching them what to think. My teaching experiences have shown me the value of creating opportunities for students to practice, discuss, question, receive feedback, and reflect. They have also taught me to evaluate my own teaching through student feedback and adapt my instruction accordingly. By connecting theoretical knowledge with applied learning and encouraging students to examine the cultural and structural contexts surrounding social work practice, my goal is to prepare thoughtful, culturally responsive practitioners and scholars who can use evidence, reflection, and collaboration to address complex social problems and advance a more equitable social service system.