

## **Making mental calculations**

*Christina "V" Villarreal leverages the guiding questions in her syllabus as a tool for prioritizing class time and making real-time adjustments*

### **Featured faculty: Christina Villarreal**

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*Class:* T004: Ethnic Studies and Education (Fall 2016), 23 graduate students

CHRISTINA VILLARREAL, LECTURER: I always talk about the work of teachers is we are making a thousand mental calculations at any given moment. During class time, when I find that discussions are going on longer than I anticipated, and I'm trying to, in the moment, negotiate and prioritize -- what I'm doing in those moments, I'm thinking, I'm listening to them and really trying to, to note and to capture what is, what is at the heart, what is the common thread across the different comments, questions, reflections that are being shared. And oftentimes what I will do in those moments is literally flip through my notes and my PowerPoint slides and make some decisions. I will do things like place stars next to -- OK, I know I want to get to this idea. Do I need the slide, or can I find a way to insert it into this discussion? Maybe we won't get to this entire section; these 12 slides might be cut. I oftentimes also return to my syllabus and look at the middle column on my syllabus. I pose key questions that I want them to keep in mind, so I use those as as an initial frame -- that's kind of my go-to.

*[Classroom footage]*

VILLARREAL: There's often, oftentimes classes where I won't get to half of my PowerPoint slides that I created based on the key questions, and ideas, and concepts that I wanted to get to. And I go in always having those prepared but knowing that there's always the possibility that given how they read, that how they engaged with the literature and what they may be seeing in their lives that week -- that will, that takes priority, because the classes are really about them and their learning experiences.

MK KIRIGIN, HGSE STUDENT: She might have a very ambitious set of goals planned for the class based on what different activities we're going to do. But if we start talking about something in the reading, or something that happened in our school that week, or a personal experience that we had outside of class or something, and we're talking with each other, and people have different comments, and we want to go deeper, she will allow us to do that. She won't force us to stop just because we have a different activity to move on to that she had planned out. That doesn't happen in a lot of my other classes. Often we have to follow the professor's goals for the day and it makes us have very choppy discussions.

JUSTIN HAUVER, HGSE STUDENT: I think oftentimes our discussions gave space to thoughts and ideas and emotions that are often either implicitly or explicitly excluded from other kinds of discussion. And so I think opening that space, and maybe letting it go for longer than other courses might allow, in that way became a healing space for many people, because then their ideas, and thoughts, and emotions were validated and incorporated into this institution.