

Assoc Prof Milagros Rivera

Communications and New Media Programme



Assoc Prof Rivera is able to challenge students to think critically and “think academically” about objects and activities which are part of their everyday lives in order to place them within a broader intellectual framework and discourse. Her instruction techniques, choice of materials, and selection of assessment tasks work together to transform students from users of technology into students of communications able to examine and analyze it from many different perspectives. Her objective is to produce articulate, confident, and knowledgeable students with critical thinking skills who will be able to apply their knowledge from the classroom in order to address key developments in

media and communications.

Assoc Prof Rivera places a high priority on providing a nurturing environment for students within her modules, no matter what the class size. This is the case beginning with her 1000-level exposure module and extending through modules at other levels as well, and it is centred around a maximum amount of personal interaction with the students, as well as structured interactive and communicative exercises which help them to find their footing in an unfamiliar subject and begin to engage with it at a conceptual level. While making the classroom a comfortable place, at the same time she insists that students must be prepared to go beyond their “comfort zone” in order to challenge assumptions and common practices and look critically at the issues confronting a technology-savvy society in the twenty-first century.

Assoc Prof Rivera places great emphasis on techniques like presentations and IVLE Forum postings which encourage a maximum degree of participation on the students’ part. The use of the Forum is particularly effective; given that the topics being studied are issues which relate to students’ daily lives and on which they will certainly have ready opinions.

That her enthusiasm for her field is not only effectively communicated to the students but infects them from the start is made abundantly clear from their feedback. She is constantly encouraging self-reflection and questioning of their assumptions about the world of information around them and helping them to engage with this world at a more conceptual, analytical, and theoretical level.

As mentioned above Assoc Prof Rivera has made significant contributions to the CNM curriculum, first as a lecturer and then as Head of Programme. Over the past three years CNM has created more than twenty new modules, some of them taught by Assoc Prof Rivera herself and others by her colleagues under her supervision and guidance. Her upper-level modules have emphasized policymaking and legal aspects of information and communications technology. These topics challenge students not only to examine these issues in an academic framework and to consider the implications of rules and policies for society as a whole, but also to look at such ethical issues on a personal basis.

Assoc Prof Rivera places great emphasis on the value of project work by students working as individuals or in groups. Particularly valuable is her involvement with internships (including Lucasfilm, Singapore Airlines, and Sun Microsystems) and other student activities outside the campus (notably projects to help government agencies and non-profit organizations such as Health Promotion Board and NUS Centre for the Arts). She has also supervised a number of graduate and Honours students and has guided several of the latter in getting their research published in professional journals (*Media Asia*, *Asian Journal of Communication*). In addition, she provides a tremendous amount of practical advice to students preparing to look for jobs, giving direct hands-on guidance for preparing CVs, handling interviews, etc.

Assoc Prof Rivera has taught at all levels from 1000- through 5000- and has developed several of these modules herself. Her effectiveness in the exposure module is particularly noteworthy as such modules are notoriously difficult because of their size (up to 450 students), the lack of academic experience of the students, and the challenge of introducing the key points of an entire field in a single semester. Her use of tasks such as “reaction papers” and “buzz moments” during the lecture sessions helps to engage the students and to demonstrate to them how communications can be studied as a subject, which is the most fundamental objective of a 1000-level module.

Assoc Prof Rivera uses a wide variety of materials for her various modules. The readings represent a balance between theoretical/conceptual approaches to provide a broader framework for the topics, very practical documents on the “nuts and bolts” of IT, and discussions of the social and cultural issues involved. Students are exposed to cutting-edge scholarly literature and receive a firm grounding in the latest developments in the subjects they are studying. The module on *Cybercrime and Society* (NM3201) is an excellent example of this, as the readings cover a comprehensive spectrum of subjects, and many of them are virtually “hot off the press” analyses of ongoing issues, such as electronic theft and cyberstalking. This allows students to directly and thoughtfully engage with topical and even controversial matters to which they have already been exposed online or through the media.

Assoc Prof Rivera’s assessment tasks emphasize interaction among students and engagement by students with the material they are studying. This includes reaction papers and brief presentations which ensure that students are keeping up with the pace of the module and absorbing the material as it is presented rather than trying to learn everything at the end of the semester. Some projects involve “fieldwork” whereby students are sent to public places to interview people of various ages in order to understand the “digital divide”, thus emphasizing the direct social relevance of the topics they are studying in the module. Others are more research-oriented but very much focused on practical issues in the field. Exams are geared to the level of the module, ranging from challenging multiple choice and short answer questions in the introductory module to broad and practical essay questions at the upper levels.