Teaching Statement
Dr. Amanda Cote

As an instructor, I have two main goals for any given course—to develop critical analytic skills among my students and to encourage them to apply these to their daily lives. Specifically, I challenge them to question cultural power structures and inequalities, particularly those sustained through media texts and industries, in carefully researched, well-supported ways. To achieve these goals, I focus on presenting material in multiple ways and incorporating active learning assignments. Simultaneously, I work to develop a safe space for challenging the status quo through careful contextualization of discussions and strategies like small-group work.

Due to my research focus on video games, it comes as no surprise that the format of learning in games originally inspired the concept/application framework I use in teaching. No one enters a game already knowing everything they can accomplish. Rather, players are introduced to their abilities through short demonstrations, then through a situation in which they apply that material. For instance, in the popular *Assassin's Creed* series, the character first learns how to run, then how to "free-run", which allows them to climb buildings parkour-style. Next, they learn methods for descending, and so on. After a tutorial in each new ability, the player immediately encounters a challenge in which they need to apply it. These move the player from simply knowing something to being able use it well and to connect it with previously learned capabilities.

I emulate this form of learning through my organization of class time into the aforementioned concept/application framework. First, I never assume students' knowledge, recognizing that even if they have background on a topic, clarification and connections between ideas will help deepen their understanding. Therefore, the beginning of class serves as time to introduce new material, link it to previously covered topics, and answer questions. For instance, in large lectures, I begin with a review slide that summarizes the main points of the previous class. I ask my students to define or explain these concepts, and check if there are any lingering questions before connecting in the new material. After introducing the body of the lecture, I again ask for a summary. Students grasp concepts more effectively when they have a chance to rephrase the main points of lecture in their own words, and this also indicates to me where further explanation is needed.

Once I have introduced concepts and students begin to understand them, the challenge is developing ideas into real critical analytic skills. Just as video games teach a new concept and then provide a circumstance in which it needs to be used, I follow the introduction of new material with applied practice, in both lecture and discussion section settings. For this purpose, I generally turn to short media examples that are relevant to students' daily lives, such as popular TV shows, Internet memes, or film trailers. My past teaching experience and student evaluations clearly demonstrate that media clips keep students excited and engaged while also indicating how their academic work has real-life applications. Active learning aids in retention as well, with students remembering far more of the material they discuss or teach to another person than that they just read or hear. Therefore, activities like think-pair-share, peer evaluations, minute papers, or case studies form an important part of my curriculum.

To teach semiotics and critical analysis, for example, I have employed a think-pair-share activity where the class watched two versions of the Florida Georgia Line music video "Cruise". When I first introduced this activity, this song was number one on the Billboard charts and had both a country version and a remix version featuring rapper Nelly. Students individually listed the elements of the videos that stood out to them while watching, then with a partner started to form these into thematic differences between the two texts. Finally, the class collectively drew on these themes to develop research questions regarding race and gender portrayals in country vs. rap music videos and what this might say about power structures in music's various genres. Because the media example was relevant to their lives, students could connect the process of analysis to their day-to-day experiences. The step-by-step nature of the activity also meant that they had a strong grasp on the how to

conduct analysis. Subsequently, they were able to bring other media examples that displayed inequality to class, assess how that inequality was portrayed, and analyze how it was sustained.

In addition to aiding in student engagement, I have also found that short, active assignments like think-pair-share and minute papers allow me to assess student learning. For instance, minute papers ask students to write a response to a question or media clip individually, with only a short time given to do so. These brief paragraphs demonstrate how well students are developing the ability to apply ideas off the top of their heads and are an easy means for providing them with feedback. In my smaller seminar on media and masculinities, for example, I have collected minute papers asking students to explain what characteristics they associate with hegemonic masculinity, as well as complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities. This allowed me to check that they understood the concepts clearly before they had to use them in larger assignments. It also gave students a concrete contribution to their participation grade, which they often view as a subjective, rather than objective, assessment. Using different active learning strategies from week to week sets up the possibility for occasional submissions that help me as an instructor evaluate how my students are learning and help my students clearly see where they can improve and where they are succeeding.

This is particularly significant given that both my teaching and my research touch on topics that undergraduate students in particular are often nervous to discuss, like sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Encouraging students to analyze and critique structural inequalities in meaningful ways can be a challenge. To minimize this problem, I often contextualize discussion by explaining that recognizing a stereotype or negative representation doesn't mean you agree with it; it just means you know it exists. I then provide a few examples of well-known stereotypes and draw students into a discussion of where these come from and how they are sustained. This shows them that we can discuss things we don't agree with and allows them to speak up without fearing that they will be seen as discriminatory. I also treat critical analysis as a matter-of-fact element of class and inform students that I expect them to question things they generally take for granted. When a student later makes a statement that rests on social constructions, asking the rest of the class whether they agree and why leads them to interrogate the idea. Putting the question to the broader class takes pressure off the student who first proposed the idea, ensuring that they do not feel picked on or attacked, but also helps students realize that they need to question cultural beliefs. Finally, I have found that redirecting an uncomfortable discussion back to examples from my research or from mass media more generally can help defuse tensions by focusing the dialogue on concrete examples rather than individual relationships or disagreements between students. This builds a more critical and less emotional conversation.

Small group activities also help make class inclusive and encourage more critical discussions. First, they get everyone involved, with students hearing and responding to each other's ideas. Peers become trusted resources, rather than just desk mates. This helps students feel safe sharing with each other, and, from my perspective, also eases the difficulty of teaching a large class where it is impossible to meet individually with everyone. Second, group activities ease the burden of talking in class by providing practice time. Even shy students or those who need time to think through what they want to say are better able to contribute following partner or small group work. This makes the classroom an open forum in which to share ideas and critique social constructs.

Through the clear introduction and connection of concepts, the application of material to real-world scenarios, and the careful management of the classroom environment to ensure a safe space for challenging tough ideas, my teaching works to help students develop critical skills and recognize how they relate to the real world. Now, when I find myself and my students in deep discussions around race, gender, sexuality, and other large topics, the conversations serve as productive steps towards understanding and resisting inequality, rather than struggles to get them to speak. Furthermore, they are better able to put their ideas into both verbal and written form, providing strong arguments with detailed support, due to their practice in applied critique.