Midterm Review
Teaching Statement
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 push students to question cultural power structures and inequalities, particularly those sustained through media, in thoughtful, well-supported ways. To achieve these goals, I present material in multiple ways, employ active learning assignments, and balance rigor with accessibility by assessing performance throughout the term, providing room for productive failure, and building flexibility into my assignments. I also aim to make my classroom a safe space for challenging the status quo through careful contextualization of discussions, helping students build critical perspectives on their media environment.

Due to my research focus on video games, it comes as no surprise that in-game tutorials originally inspired the concept/application framework I use in teaching. In games, players are introduced to their abilities through short lessons, after which they immediately encounter a challenge in which they must employ their new skill. This structure helps the player learn the new ability and apply it in context, connecting it with previously learned capabilities. I emulate this form of learning by organizing my class time via the aforementioned concept/application framework, where students review previous material, then learn new concepts, then draw them together via a hands-on activity. For instance, my lectures begin with a series of questions generated from the previous class, which students answer collectively. (e.g. "What is the definition of hegemony?" "How does the concept of the audience commodity connect to advertising?" "Name a film that's a good example of hegemonic masculinity.") This approach helps get students into the learning mindset and addresses lingering questions, while repeated exposure to key ideas deepens both individual and class-wide understanding. Following the review, we cover new material—often via a short lecture—after which 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.

Next, we work to develop ideas into critical analytic skills. Just as video games teach a new concept and then provide an opportunity for application, I follow the introduction of new material with active practice. Active learning grounds abstract ideas in concrete examples and experience, and it also aids in retention and understanding. Therefore, activities like think-pair-share, minute papers, or case studies form an important part of my curriculum. For example, when teaching Intro to Media Studies, my students gain hands-on experience with the work of Karl Marx though a game where they exchange "capital" (paperclips) by playing one another in rounds of Rock, Paper, Scissors. The rules of the game are structured so that paperclips coalesce in the hands of a few students, illustrating Marx's contention that the structures of capitalism empower the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. Students may then agree or disagree with Marx's ideas, but they develop more nuanced arguments regarding *why* they agree or disagree, as well as a stronger ability to critique structural systems, following this game. In another instance, my Studying Games class grounded their study of representation in games by separating into groups and performing a character analysis of the best-selling games in a given year. Each group then presented their results to the class; this think-pair-share activity highlighted how video games tend to overrepresent white male characters in comparison to others. Active learning strategies keep students excited and engaged while also indicating how their classwork has real-life applications.

In addition to aiding in engagement, I use active learning assignments to evaluate student performance throughout the term and provide space for productive failure. Many of my classes

introduce students to complex theories and readings that take time to grasp. Further, University of Oregon students often balance several responsibilities, such as outside jobs, which can leave little time for processing class materials deeply. Short assignments like think-pair-share and minute papers allow me to assess student learning as it is in progress, helping to head off confusion. For instance, minute papers give students a short period of time in which to write a response to a question or media clip. These brief paragraphs demonstrate how students apply ideas off the top of their heads and are an easy means for providing them with feedback. In my media and masculinities seminar, for example, I assign students a minute paper where they quickly list media texts they associate with Connell's (2005) forms of masculinity. This allows me to check that they understand the concepts in advance of larger projects. Because I grade in-class activities based on completion, rather than correctness, these assignments also give students the freedom to be wrong without it affecting their class performance; this encourages them to take chances, engage ideas independently, and develop their own perspectives without stress.

I also balance rigor with accessibility by providing flexibility in assignments. For instance, students in my Studying Games class were able to propose any relevant project they wanted for their final assignment. Some turned in academic papers, while others created documentaries, posters, zines, or other creative projects. This let them bring their personal interests and strengths to the classroom, taking advantage of the practical media skills many gain in the SOJC. In a more extreme example, my media and masculinities class employs a "choose-your-own-adventure" format where students choose from array of assignments with varying difficulties and associated point values, selecting whichever they want to complete with the goal of earning 1000 total points. Some opt for many small assignments; others choose a few large projects. They can also adjust dynamically in response to their performance, completing extra work, revising previous submissions, or participating more in class as needed. This flexibility allows students to make mistakes and learn from them, gives them a sense of ownership over their classroom experience, and ups their engagement with and application of the ideas at hand.

Finally, a key goal of my pedagogy is building a vibrant classroom environment in which students can freely engage complicated topics. This is particularly significant given that both my teaching and my research touch on topics that students are often nervous to discuss, like sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. To minimize this problem, I often contextualize discussion by explaining that recognizing a 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, how they are sustained, and what sociocultural work they do. This models how 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 often use media clips to focus challenging discussions on concrete examples from outside the classroom. Finally, small group work can encourage more critical discussions by letting students hear and respond to each other's ideas in closer contexts. This helps students feel safe sharing with each other, can ease the burden on shy students by letting them contribute in lower-cost ways, and helps make the classroom an open forum in which to critique social constructs.

Through the clear introduction and connection of concepts, the application of material to real-world scenarios, space for productive failure and flexibility, and the careful management of the classroom environment, my teaching works to help students develop critical skills and recognize how media influences their daily lives, as well as broader social and cultural structures. In-class conversations around race, gender, sexuality, and other large topics also serve as productive steps towards understanding and resisting inequality. Finally, students 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.