### Challenges Identified Through Backwards Design Exercises:

**#1: Reading Comprehension of Theoretical Texts**

Weekly Critical Reading Exercises To Do Before Class Discussion

**Early Critical Reading Assignments** asked students to identify key quotes and be ready to explain what they meant, synthesize main ideas, identify quotes that complicate the main idea and sections they had questions about, as well as finding key theoretical ideas represented in quotes from application articles using those theories.

**Later Critical Reading Assignments** asked students to develop their own positions on readings by identifying ideas they agreed or disagreed with, comparing potential strengths and weaknesses of different theories, and noticing how key theoretical terms were deployed in ways that multiplied or varied their meaning.

### Course Design Adaptation:

**#2: Applying Theory to a Variety of “Texts”**

Applying Theories to in-class “Case Study” Texts such as “My Country Tis of Thee,” The Reichstag Building, & Fight Club

After main theoretical concepts were mastered and students had opportunities to read and discuss articles written by other critics who were applying those theories to our shared class literary texts, we worked on in-class “case studies,” applying theories to a wider range of non-fiction, film, and cultural texts.

### Practical Implementation:

Students used their reading work in small groups to develop responses to questions inserted throughout an introductory lecture and to apply the theory to a “text” chosen for class discussion. Points were awarded for completing the exercises each week. Occasionally I would collect a round and comment on them.

### #3: Innovative Final Projects that Encourage Students to Find Value in Theory

Freedom to Apply 2 Course Theories to ANY KIND OF TEXT students wanted to work with.

As early as the middle of the semester, reading exercises asked students to begin evaluating potential texts and theories for the final project. They wrote proposals and gave in-class oral presentations of the proposals, which generated class questions and feedback. Peer-review workshops were also designed.

### The Challenge of Teaching Theory:

**Becoming Jazz Players in a World of Ideas**

Kelly Sultzbach, English

### A Few Final Project Paper Titles

- Size Matters and Soccer Doesn’t: An American Masculinity
- A New Historicist & Marxist Critique of Cultural Oppression and Discrimination in the Harry Potter Novels
- The Difference in Hip-Hop: Kanye West’s Yeezus
- Domestic-ish Beliefs on Diversity Deconstructed
- A Marxist & Post-Structuralist Reading of Empire in the Melian Dialogue (431-404 BC)
- Power Control and Gender Equality in 50 Shades of Grey
- Devils in the Wilderness: The Character of Wilderness in American Horror Fiction