

## UMBC UGC New Course Request: GWST 344: Trans/national Femininities

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### COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	GWST 344
Formal Title	Trans/national Femininities
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Transnational Femininities
Recommended Course Preparation	GWST 100 or GWST 210
Prerequisite <b>NOTE:</b> Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	
# of Credits Must adhere to the <a href="#">UMBC Credit Hour Policy</a>	3
Repeatable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Max. Total Credits	<small>This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.</small>
Grading Method(s)	X Reg (A-F) Audit Pass-Fail

### PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

This course studies femininity in a trans/national context. "Trans" suggests that we will discuss femininity as something performed by and written on many kinds of bodies, not only those assigned female at birth. "Transnational" denotes that we will situate femininity in the US, across multiple nations, and within a broad socio-cultural framework. We will discuss how class, bodily comportment, sexuality, nation, ability, and religion affect feminine performance and feminine/feminist/queer politics.

### RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

a) This course fills an important gap in the Gender and Women's Studies and Critical Sexuality Studies curricula by focusing specifically on socio-cultural forms of femininity as situated in multiple nations and written on many kinds of bodies. Using an intersectional feminist/queer studies approach, it will discuss a wide variety of affects and politics that shape the performance, recognition, and representation of femininities. It does not duplicate courses offered in other programs or departments.

b) This course is likely to be taught annually.

c) The course fits into the GWST curriculum by adding a course on transnational gender issues to the offering for the GWST major, minor and the Critical Sexuality Studies minor. It complements the existing course focused on modern masculinities. Majors and minors who take this course will earn credit toward filling the requirements on "Representations as/in Culture" and "Range of Experience." This course will be submitted to be considered for the fulfillment of the GEP Arts and Humanities and Culture requirements.

d) The course will serve students seeking upper division electives in the GWST major, minor, and CSST programs. It will also attract students seeking courses in this subject area and will be of particular interest to students in Global Studies, as well as students who wish to fulfill their GEP Arts and Humanities and Culture requirements.

e) The course will be offered at the 300 level because it presumes that students will have experience reading and analyzing academic texts and articles. The course requires regular writing assignments that build to a final project, which are appropriate for the 300 level. It falls in line with our department's other 300-level courses that focus on subfields in the discipline; students should have completed introductory and intermediate work in arts, humanities, or social sciences, as well as in GWST specifically.

f) Students should consider taking GWST 100 or GWST 210 in preparation for this course in order to familiarize themselves with key concepts and arguments in Gender and Women's Studies, Critical Sexuality Studies.

g) The course will follow the regular grading method.

h) This course is not repeatable for credit.

**ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory):**

**GWST 344**  
**Tu/Th 1:00-2:15pm**  
**Course Location: 110 Sondheim**

**Mejdulene Shomali**  
**[mshomali@umbc.edu](mailto:mshomali@umbc.edu)**  
**Office: 411 FAB**

**Trans/National Femininities**

**Course Description**

This course studies femininity in a trans/national context. Here, trans suggests that we will not be looking at femininity as necessarily or inherently attached to bodies assigned female at birth. Instead, we will think about femininity as a gender category that is performed by and written on many kinds of bodies. The term "transnational" in the course title suggests that we will attempt to talk about femininity not only in the context of the US and the "western" world but across different nations and within a broader socio-cultural framework. We will consider a broad range of disciplinary accounts of femininity in the US and beyond. We will also discuss how class, bodily comportment, ability, and religion affect feminine performance and feminine/feminist/queer politics.

In this course, we will destabilize femininity instead of assuming it is stable; we will deconstruct its formation alongside masculinity and androgyny. Additionally, we will attempt to think of femininity outside the binary gender paradigm. We will look at the ways femininity can be a normative gender performance and the ways femininity can also be subversive. We will examine the ways femininity is ever evolving and shifting in response to oppressive paradigms. We will attend to how non-normative femininities are performed by intersectional subjects; we will look for political paradigms that do not perpetuate misogyny and trans misogyny and do not dismiss or eclipse femininity within their movements.

**Learning Objectives**

- Examine femininity from multiple angles in order to determine what it is, how it works, and what it can do.
- Identify and define key concepts in the study of femininity in a trans/national frame. Some key words include: femininity, gender, socialization, embodiment, sexuality,

normativity, sexism, misogyny, transgender, trans misogyny, transnationalism, colonialism, nationalism, racism, homophobia, heterosexism, intersectionality, queer, and feminism.

- Introduce several scholarly approaches to studying femininity.
  - Develop facility with the concepts and approached through reading and writing assignments, presentations, and other exercises.
  - Use the concepts and theoretical approaches to creatively contribute to a broadly imagined study of femininity.

### **Primary Course Texts**

- Our readings are available as PDFs on Blackboard, under Course Documents. Please print readings and bring them to class. Readings listed in the schedule should be read and responded to by the date on which they are listed.

### **Assignments**

#### **Participation**

**5%**

It's hard to have a meaningful discussion when only one person is talking. If you're shy, please try to contribute at least weekly. If you're prone to talking a lot, please try to give space for others to speak. Our conversation rules and guidelines will be developed in conjunction with one another on the second day of class, based on your emails to me. Our guidelines will help us have challenging but safe conversations discussing some controversial and sometimes intimate, painful topics.

Participation also relies on being prepared. If it becomes apparent that students are not reading or doing the small exercises that are designed to make class time productive, I will begin deducting points from participation. Showing up is not participating; it's just showing up. Please take care to be present and listen actively. Don't have side conversations. Don't be disruptive. Don't be late or leave early. Don't fall asleep. Each one of these actions is noticeable, disrespectful, and a cause for point deductions in the participation category.

#### **Discussion Posts**

**25%**

At least an hour before class (that is, due at noon), you should go to the Blackboard/Discussion Board/Forum for that day, and write a one-two paragraph response to that day's reading(s). I will review these before class and use your comments and questions as the starting point for our discussions.

*Your response should demonstrate that you have done the reading. It should:*

1. Make some statements. For example, "this author argues X" or "this article attempts to say Y." Statements like "this is hard" do not count. You do not need to know for sure. You can say, "I think X is happening here." You can also talk about your response to what has been said.
2. Ask an open-ended question. For example, "what is the value of idea X for thinking about idea Y?" Closed questions, or questions to which there is a set correct answer do not count (e.g. Who is the author?) Incredulous, cruel, or otherwise absurd questions also do not count (e.g. Is this argument a joke?).

So, a response might go like this: The author talked about concept X and said ABC things. This made me think of my experience of Y, and led me to ask: Z?

It will be possible and likely that someone else will post the thing you want to say. In that case, you can EITHER respond to their question with a statement (still doing pt. 1) and ask a follow up question (still doing pt. 2) OR say what you want to say how you need to say it, and ask what you need to ask how you need to ask it (still doing both parts).

Please make a good faith effort to not simply rehash your classmate's work and present it as your own. A discussion is easier and more interesting than a bunch of people saying the same thing. Good faith is also the grading rubric. You receive full credit for completing these entries in full and on time (5 points). You receive 50% credit for doing them in part (2.5 points). You receive zero credit for not doing them at all or doing them in bad faith (0 points).

You do not need to do this on the day our first and third responses are due. You do not need to do this on the day you lead class discussion or the day you chose to turn in your second response. You do not need to do this for student presentation weeks. You can drop your lowest score/skip one. In other words, you are accountable for 20 posts. Your email to me at the start of class counts and your visit to my office regarding your final project each count as one of your discussion posts.

### **Formal Response Papers (3)**

**30%**

Each response paper is valued at 10% of your grade. Response papers should be between 750- and 1250 words and can be based off your discussion posts (but should *not* copy and paste their exact language). *These are due printed and in class on their due date.* A grading rubric for this assignment is available on our blackboard site. Prompts for the responses are below.

In your responses, you should not repeat learned content but try to analyze and synthesize what you've learned. If those words concern or scare you, a simple way to go about it is to think about relationships: what is the relationship between different concepts we are learning? What is the relationship to a concept you've learned about (say femininity), to something you already know (math, science, art, family)? What is the relationship of the concept to you—how does it affect you? You can use this space to work out an idea you have or a question you want to answer.

*You must make reference to and “engage” with at least one article from the unit in your response.* Engage means: agree/disagree with the author and say why; use the author's idea as a springboard to your own; explain the article's relevance or irrelevance to the topic; use the ideas the author presents to think about something the author didn't present. You can also attempt to relate the reading to other readings and/or things you would like to bring in from the outside world (clips, songs, blogs, news items, etc).

#### *Response One:*

Reflect on the first unit of class. How do you define femininity? What troubles you about femininity? What is interesting to you about it? What questions do you have moving forward in the course? What do you want to figure out? For this response, you should incorporate something from beyond the class materials, perhaps something relevant to your interests or your major and respond to how it frames, produces, or represents femininity. What does it say, how does it say it? Due Thurs 2/11.

#### *Response Two:*

Select one of the themes in the last unit of class (Girls and Girlhood; Beauties and Bodies; Fashion and Adornment) and write a response to that topic. What is the relationship of femininity to that topic? How does the topic change what you think or how you think about femininity? Please be specific in this response. For example, do not talk about “adornment” in every way possible, but hone in on a certain kind, say tattooing. You can also explore one of the ideas in a way we didn't get to in class. So, if you are interested in girlhood but we didn't talk about

femininity in the middle school classroom, tell me what you think and why you think it. This response paper has staggered due dates that correspond to the end of each topic discussion. Due 3/29, 4/7, and 4/21 respectively.

*Response Three:*

Reflect on the class and topic. What did you learn? How has your thinking changed? What were the best parts and worst parts (not like: what did you hate; but rather: what challenged you and what was hard and uncomfortable and forced you out of your comfort zone)? What made the most and least sense to you? What will you take away with you from this class? What will you leave behind? I would also encourage you to consider these questions: How is it different to talk about “femininity” vs. “women”? What can we learn from talking about femininity that we cannot learn from talking about women, masculinity, non-binary gender, etc? Due 5/10.

**Team Teach/Class Discussion**

**20%**

In teams of two-three, you will lead one class session. This will involve first, giving a summary of that day’s readings and second, leading a discussion on those readings, using your questions and any other questions that come up on the discussion board. Your team should create a handout to distribute at the start of class with the following information included:

1. A paragraph summary of the main argument(s).
2. A short outline of the argument’s structure (key points, key terms, supporting evidence, examples, etc).
3. Your questions regarding the article(s)/topic.

You can and should come and talk to me about your teaching day. The articles you will be presenting can be difficult; at the same time, the best way to learn things is teach them to someone else. I’ll help you, and you will go on to help your classmates. You should *most definitely* vet your handout with me at least 24 hours before the start of your teaching day. You need to email it to me no later than noon on the day of your presentation, so I can print copies for everyone. I realize this assignment sounds scary. It’s a little scary, but by this point in the term, we will have been meeting for at least three weeks. No one is going to point and laugh. If something goes wrong, I am there to back you up. We are all going to work with one another to make the best experience possible. A grading rubric for this assignment is available on our blackboard site.

**Final Project/Final Presentation**

**20%**

What: For the final project, you will produce original work that explores, in depth, 2-4 of the major themes from the first and third units of class, drawing on the analytic tools we developed in the second unit. Topically, you may build on any of your discussion posts or response papers. You should not repeat the content, but use it as a jumping point for this project.

How: The format of this project is open to your interpretation. Play to your strengths: are you a researcher and writer? Write a traditional research paper that relates to your field (let’s say education)—what can you tell us about femininity is received in the classroom, by students and by teachers? Are you an artist? Create a series of pieces that explore aspects of femininity. Are you an activist? Maybe you’ll design an awareness campaign on campus or create a teaching module for a movement in which you already participate. It’s really up to you. Just seriously consider: What do I want to say? What is the best way to say it? Is an academic research paper the best way to convey what you have learned or what you imagine? Would your knowledge be better expressed in a zine, a website, a visual arts project, video, a podcast? The answer to this question could be no, a traditional “paper” is where it’s at, but that’s a decision that you must make and reason for yourself. Along those lines, you will submit an essay explaining your format choices and outlining which concepts you used and how. Think of this as an artist’s statement, or, if you do a research paper, your methodology section.

When: You will come to my office to propose a project sometime on or around 4/12, approximately one week before your final project is due. Your final project is due on the final exam date of this course (or before, if you're into it). Your presentation will take place in the last two weeks of class. This means your presentation may occur before you are finished with your project. I am hoping scaffolding this will give you the incentive you need to work on your project in small chunks over the last few weeks rather than entirely the night before it's due.

More information, including the breakdown of the components of this project and its grading process will be made available on Blackboard later in the term.

## **Course Policies and Resources**

### **Attendance**

I will not formally take attendance. However, I will notice when you are present and when you are not, especially given the small class size. Since participation constitutes 5% of your grade, and it's impossible to participate when you are not present, it is in your best interest to show up. Note: Missing five or more classes will likely result in failure of the course, regardless of work completed. Please contact me in case of extended illness, emergencies, and religious holidays (these are reasonable absences). It is your responsibility to catch up on work missed during an absence. If a religious holiday conflicts with a class or meeting date, we will make alternative arrangements, and in accordance with university policy, it will not affect your grade. Failing to do the work required of that day in a timely manner given your religious observances or other obligations, however, will.

### **Technologies**

Cell phones should be off and out of sight during class. If you have an extenuating circumstance regarding phone usage, you may speak with me ahead of time. Laptops/tablets are not appropriate during most class activities, especially discussion and peer workshops. I do expect all reading and writing to be brought to class in hard copy. However, you may choose to bring a computer for taking notes or if you use a screen device for accessibility purposes. Be warned that if you are off-task on your computer or cell phone, even for a moment, I will mark down your participation grade. In most circumstances, you are better off not bringing a computer to class, unless you actually use it for class. Computer/phone misuse will count against you in my participation and thus will directly affect your letter grade in the course.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is when you knowingly (or unknowingly) submit someone else's ideas or words as your own. It is also submitting work completed for one class to another, without permission of both instructors. If you commit an act of academic dishonesty in this course by either plagiarizing someone's work or allowing your own work to be misused by another, you will fail the assignment and possibly the entire course. For further clarification of the University policies regarding academic integrity and plagiarism, please refer to the following website:

[http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad\\_ed/honesty/](http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/honesty/)

### **Late Assignments**

*Late assignments are not accepted.* Discussion posts should be made by no later than noon on their due date. Late posts will not count. Response essays are due at the start of class. If you are

unreasonably late to class, your paper will not be accepted. I will consider giving an extension if you contact me at least 24 hours before the due date. The final project is due on the exam date

and time for this course (Tues May 17, 1pm). It must be submitted to my office, 411 FA. There are no extensions for the final project.

### **Grade Change**

If you feel I have incorrectly graded your work, please wait 48 hours before contacting me about it. Then, send me an email detailing your exact complaint, showing where on the rubric you were allegedly misjudged, and why you feel your grade should change. I will consider it, but be forewarned: I rarely change grades unless there's a mathematical error. However, I am always happy to discuss comments on papers and strategies for improvement.

### **Flexibility**

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus (including readings, assignments, and policies) to better suit class needs.

### **Additional Resources**

*Me:* I hold office hours on T/Th, before class, from 12:00 - 1:00pm. My office is in 411 Fine Arts, in the Gender and Women's Studies block. If these times don't work for you, please email me and we can find another time. My email is [mshomali@umbc.edu](mailto:mshomali@umbc.edu); I generally respond to email within 48 hours, barring the weekend. If I haven't responded to you, there is a good chance the question you asked has already been addressed in the syllabus. If that's not the case, I will get back to you in a reasonable time frame. Speaking of reasonable time frames, do try to contact me in advance if you can't complete an assignment or if something is going amuck in your world. It's easier for me to accommodate you with advance notice—and I really do want to help you succeed. But if you contact me two hours before an assignment is due, and there is nothing to explain this panic aside from your own procrastination, there is little I can do.

*Student Support Services, Disability Services:* I hope to support the full participation of all students in the learning process of this class. I have incorporated a variety of instruction techniques and evaluation methods in the course process. In spite of these efforts, situations may occur in which the learning style of individual students is not met by the instructional climate. In such a situation, I expect that students who require specific or additional support will inform me of their needs within two weeks of the start of the course so accommodations can be made. I'm happy to work with SSS to make your success in the course accessible and achievable.

<http://sss.umbc.edu/>

*The Writing Center:* can help you with assignments in any course! Even this one!

<http://lrc.umbc.edu/tutoring/writing-center/>

*Counseling Services:* life can be really hard. <http://counseling.umbc.edu/>

### **Schedule**

Thurs 1/28 Introduction to Class

Assignment: email me. Your email will concern the following:

1. Introduce yourself (who are you, why are you here, whatever works for you). Please also designate your pronouns and tell me how you like to be addressed. I go by Dr. Mej or Mej or, if you feel really formal, Dr. Shomali. My pronouns are she/her/hers.
2. Read the syllabus. Ask at least one specific question about something on the syllabus (whether it's something that needs clarification, something you want to know more about, etc).



3. Propose at least one guideline for our classroom environment.
4. Send this to me by 11am before our next class (Tues 2/2). This counts as your first discussion post.

*Don't forget!* You should also make a discussion post(s) on Tuesday's reading selection by noon on Tuesday. Since we had a snow day, this post is going to double count. You should either a) make two posts, both original; b) make one post: one original, one response; c) make one post that has twice the content.

### **Unit One: Our Key Terms**

The first three weeks of class are designed to get us all speaking the same language. We will read about what femininity is and how femininity is troubled. We will look at different kinds of femininity and think about how femininity is defined differently in different contexts. We will try to be specific about specific things while at the same time trying to get some broad ideas about how femininity works, what it does, and what it can do. We might also ask (advanced level questions we cannot necessarily answer right now): How is it different to talk about "femininity" vs. "women"? What can we learn from talking about femininity that we cannot learn from talking about women, masculinity, non-binary gender, etc?

Tues 2/2 Schippers "Recovering the Feminine Other." (17)  
Martin "Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." (19)

**Thurs 2/4** Hill Collins "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images." (12) Skeggs "The Toilet Paper." (12)  
Vidal-Ortiz "The Figure of the Transwoman of Color Through the Lens of 'Doing Gender.'" (5)

Tues 2/9 Scott "Almost Passing..." (20)  
Mingus "[Moving Toward the Ugly](#)" (8; about 3900 words)

Thurs 2/11 Bring in the item/article/object/idea to which you responded in your essay.  
**Response One Due**

### **Unit Two: Academic Debates and Theoretical Frames**

This unit places femininity in several different scholarly conversations. We are reading these pieces to understand, like above, what femininity is *and* to see models of how to analyze femininity. So, here, we are always doing at least two things: trying to understand a concept *and* learning ways to study and talk about the concept. At the same time, we are *also* thinking about how we might intervene in this conversation? What has been said? Who got it wrong, right? What needs to be said? Sometimes this unit will feel hard because we are trying to understand how these fields and scholars talk about femininity rather than what we did above, where our goal was to grasp mainstream ideas about femininity, or how femininity appears in the world. Obviously, these are related, so it's OK if you feel like things are slippery. Ultimately, this unit should give us a set of tools and approaches to our major topic.

#### *Feminist, Queer, and Trans Studies*

Tues 2/16 Maltry & Tucker "Female Fem(me)ininitities." (13) Rose and Camilleri excerpts from *Brazen Femme* Gomez "Femme Butch Feminist (12)

Thurs 2/18 No Class. Live your life!

Tues 2/23 Serano Excerpts from *Excluded* and *Whipping Girl*



Rhyne “Racializing White Drag.” (13)

*Trans/National*

Thurs 2/25 Freeman “Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine?” (26) Ameeriar “Pedagogies of Affect.” (18)

Tues 3/1 Guzmán and Valdivia “Brain, Brow, and Booty” (15) Gopinath “Queering Bollywood.” (13)

Thurs 3/3 Balogun “Cultural and Cosmopolitan” (24) Ochoa Excerpts from *Queen for a Day*

*American Ethnic Studies*

Tues 3/8 Naber “Arab American Femininities.” (22)  
Pyke and Johnson “Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities” (19)

Thurs 3/10 Reid-Brinkley “The *Essence* of Res(ex)pectability.” (24) Helgren “Native American and White Camp Fire Girls.” (23)

Tues 3/15 NO CLASS

Thurs 3/17 SPRING BREAK

**Unit Three: Focused Femininity: Some Sites of Interest**

I personally consider this the “fun” unit. We’ve done a lot of heavy lifting already—figuring out key concepts and outlining major debates. We’ve basically mapped a broad field called “femininity studies” and we have some ways to approach analyzing femininity. Now we can look more specifically at topics within the field, or moments within femininity that carry a lot of weight in our imagination of what femininity is and how it works.

*Girls and Girlhood*

Tues 3/22 Hladki “Disability and Girlhood.” (17)  
Ervelles and Mutua “Rewriting Cartographies of Girlhood.” (16)

Thurs 3/24 Azzaarito “Future Girls, Transcendent Femininities and New Pedagogies.” (13) Read “Britney, Beyoncé, and Me.” (13)

Tues 3/29 Walkerdine “Playing the Game.” (18) Cullen “Are Teenage Girls Funny?” (16)  
**Response Two Due; Girls and Girlhood**

*Beauties and Bodies*

Thurs 3/31 Bartky “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.” (14) Fisanick “Fatness (In)Visible.” (3)

Tues 4/5 Moreno Figueroa “Displaced Looks” (14) Aizura “Where Health and Beauty Meet” (11)

Thurs 4/7 Lamb and Plocha “Pride and Sexiness.” (15) Whitney “Some Assembly Required.” (17)

## **Response Two Due; Beauties and Bodies**

Tues 4/12 No Class; Individual office visits re: final projects.

### *Fashion and Adornment*

Thurs 4/14 Zakaria "[Clothes and Daggers](#)" (approx. 8/3800 words)  
Reddy Excerpts from *Fashioning Diaspora*

Tues 4/19 Pham "The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terrorism (24)

Thurs 4/21 Black and Sharma "Men are Real, Women are 'Made Up.'" (13) Toerien and Wilkinson  
"Gender and Body Hair." (10)

### **Response Two Due; Fashion and Adornment**

Tues 4/26 Work Day; No in-class Meeting

Thurs 4/28 Student Presentations

Tues 5/3 Student Presentations

Thurs 5/5 Student Presentations

Tues 5/10 Last Day of Class

### **Response Three Due**

Tues 5/17 **Final Projects Due to 411 FAB at 1pm**