

# Syllabus: WMST 20095 Feminist Humor: Disarming Laughter Disruptive Discourse

**Dr. Suzanne L. Holt**

Director, Women's Studies

Kent State University

Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality

Email: slholt@kent.edu

Delivery: 100% Web-Based, Asynchronous

Dates: August 26 – December 12

## Course Information

---

### Course Description

At the heart of this course is a single word: humor. In its shadow is laughter. Together, they are the essence of a distinctly engaging power—like lightening striking, a punch landing or mopbucket of scrubwater spilt on purpose and spreading. Although other powers have garnered our greater attention, humor—and laughter—are force-and-factor familiar to women, perhaps known intimately by them in their lives. They're no strangers to feminism and feminists either. For any given woman, any given feminist, what they mean might vary—considerably. Humor and laughter are, finally, known via experience, they're known, too, by effects—on real human dynamics, relationships, understandings, purposes. Humor and laughter, honed and refined as tools, have proven themselves vital to the disempowered, providing them capacities for wiley navigations into otherwise forbidding discursive terrain.

Further, it turns out—on inspection—there's much that's funny about feminism and feminists.

Our course dares to laugh along with feminist humor, sure, but more importantly to study its import and significance, the meaning and power within its purportedly intimidating contours. It is our contention—indeed the conclusion of our considered findings—that humor and laughter are thoroughly woven into women's legacies. And they matter. Key among reasons they matter is this: the very nature of this thing we call feminism hinges on its distinct, deep archives of discourse. In that archive are messages and meanings borne on currents of humor and laughter; in it are the ways and means of marginalized and powerless people who speak their truths, convey their critiques, share camaraderie of empathy and purpose.

At the heart of this course is: woman—and women—in contexts that have, historically, impinged upon her body, person, given necessities, granted possibilities.

One might call humor, comedy and laughter the less heralded feminist thought and theory, tradition and practice. Woman—whether she's playing provocateur of laughter or laughing at unauthorized things—has long been met with strong emotion: consternation, outrage and abject repulsion. Our course begins with a curiosity: a recurring question that kickstarted long,

hot, very public debates: Are women funny? Remarkably and yet not so remarkably after all, it was a serious question given serious, painstaking deliberation.

The *feminist* in feminist humor matters. It's a descriptor than draws lines in sand, erases lines in sand. *Feminist* remains, of course, contentious: a word and idea and identity—a credo, standpoint, manner, school of thought, tradition of struggle—that we wrangle over and wrestle with and, ultimately, have wrenched it from its simple roots. A metaphor that invites us to ponder, Shall we let feminism grow wild? Shall we pot it? replant it? prune it? 😊

### **Course Times and Location**

This is a fully online, 15-week course. There will be no face-to-face meetings. All assignments have due dates; please refer to the course schedule located within the course.

### **Prerequisites**

There are no prerequisites for this course and this course does not presume you have prior knowledge of the scholarship or frameworks you'll discover in the ensuing materials/modules.

### **Course Goals**

By the end of this course, you will:

1. Fathom the contributions of humor and laughter—their generativity—to feminisms and to women's struggles.
2. Delve into concrete examples—specific cases—of feminist humor at work and at play in their particular situated moments, discursive and provocative.
3. Add to their activist repertoire of responses, the tools of feminist humor and the possibilities of laughter as key to unleashing individual and collective emotion.
4. Comprehend the power of women taking charge of “the funny”.
5. Comprehend the contribution of humor to a freedom-centered feminism.
6. Uncover and analyze patriarchal traditions of guarding and preserving *that power* for select parties serving at the pleasure of the powerful.
7. Counterbalance the maddeningly serious, more recognized versions of feminist (and women's) struggles with fresh rendering that catch the spirit and energy of joy, song, dance and levity within “peoples” subjected to oppression.
8. Reconsider stereotypes of women and feminists—such portraiture as angry, somber suffragists and railing, radical libbers, hysterical housewives, shrill and shrewish alpha-women, etc. Or might it be that womanhood has been seen as no laughing matter? Not to women at least. Nor had they better laugh at manhood. It's offensive.
9. Redefine feminism with humor—and laughter—built-in: a feminism that tips both ways towards anger and joy, sorrow and laughter, fear and relief, harsh reality and flights of fancy, dark and light. (I mean, why wouldn't it?).

### **Course Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Compose a complex definition of feminist humor as a distinct discursive tool or weapon within the many and varied discursive traditions of feminism(s).
2. Explicate the qualities within acts of feminist laughter that capture and illumine the felt results of well-placed feminist joking.
3. Explore the transformative influence of feminism on humor and laughter and vice versa.
4. Express your experience of the nexus wherein the personal and political ends, means and meanings of feminist discourse meet the gendered, racialized, sexualized ends, means and meanings of comedic performance.
5. Analyze the mythic uses of gender, sex difference and sexuality in socio-political, cultural imaginings of females as wild, dark/mysterious, humor-deficient or, if humorous, then transgressive.
6. Break down the bases of power at play in the “masterful” deployments of humor in otherwise serious feminist messaging and missions.
7. Assess the positive and negative aspects of popular and critical response to female humorists and feminists doing comedy, comedians doing feminism.
8. Schematize the channelings of fury, pain, injury and insult into the aimed speech or physical action of feminist “funny women,” humorists and comedians.
9. Analyze the spectrum of emotions within the relational dynamics between performers and audience(s).
10. Explore and appraise scholarship on feminist humor/laughter, how and why it “places” humor within bigger pictures of socio-political arrangements and dynamics.

### **Learning Materials**

The majority of the learning materials can be found within each module folder. Some course readings will be made available in PDF format within the course via Course Reserves system. These materials will not be available to you through Course Reserves after the course ends. It is recommended that you download and save these materials for future reference.

**In Module 4, you will be assigned to watch *Nanette*** – which is a Netflix special available only on Netflix. ***You will be responsible for having access to Netflix to watch this special.***

### **Technology Requirements and Skills**

---

#### **Computer Hardware and Software**

Students new to Kent State University should review Information Service’s Technology Viewbook (link available in the Preparing your computer section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder). A personal computer with consistent, reliable Internet access is required:

1. A DSL or cable connection to the Internet; dial-up is not sufficient.
2. Laptop or desktop computer with a minimum of a 2 GHz processor and 2 GB of RAM

You should have one of the following computer operating systems and additional software applications installed on your computer:

1. Windows 7 system operating software or newer for PC computers OR Mac OS X 10.6 or newer for Apple Mac computers.
2. Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) discounts available at The Microsoft Store, link available in the Preparing your computer section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder.
3. A free version of Microsoft Office is available for students. Instructions and information can be found on [support.kent.edu](http://support.kent.edu).
4. Antivirus for Windows OS, Microsoft Security Essentials OR Antivirus for Mac OS, Sophos
5. A Blackboard Learn compatible browser, such as the latest version of Mozilla Firefox. Blackboard also supports Chrome and Safari. **Internet Explorer is NOT a supported browser and should not be used.**

### Technology Skills

The following fundamental technological skills are necessary for your success in this course: navigating a computer operating system, launching and quitting applications, connecting to the Internet, using a web browser to search the World Wide Web, downloading, saving, and uploading files, and sending and replying to email. You will also need to be proficient in using MS Word and working with files in various formats.

### Blackboard (Bb) Learn

This class will use Blackboard (Bb) Learn, the official learning management system (LMS) used by Kent State University to deliver course materials to university students. ALL course materials and activities will take place in Bb Learn.

In order to login to the online Bb Learn LMS, students will need a Kent State FlashLine User Name ID and password. Students can login to Bb Learn either through a student FlashLine account or via a direct link to the login page: <https://learn.kent.edu>

For help using the Blackboard (Bb) Learn system use the “Bb Learn Tutorials for Students” link in the main navigation of your course. In general, Bb Learn works best using the latest version of most major web browsers, including Firefox, Chrome, and Safari.

### Technology Help Guidelines

- A. **30-Minute Rule:** When you encounter struggles with technology, give yourself 30 minutes to ‘figure it out.’ If you cannot, then post a message to the discussion board; your peers may have suggestions to assist you. You are also directed to contact the KSU Helpdesk 24/7. As a last resort, contact me. However, do not expect an immediate reply, and I cannot guarantee that I will be able to help with any and all technology issues.
- B. When posting or sending email requesting help with technology issues, whether to the Helpdesk or me, use the following guidelines:

1. Include a descriptive title for the subject field that includes 1) the name of course 2) the issue. Do NOT just simply type "Help" into the subject field or leave it blank.
2. List the steps or describe the circumstance that preceded the technical issue or error. Include the exact wording of the error message.
3. When possible, always include a screenshot(s) demonstrating the technical issue or error message.
4. Also include what you have already tried to do to remedy the issue (rebooting, trying a different browser, etc.).

## **Policies and Expectations**

---

### **Online Attendance Policy**

Online courses are conducted on the premise that regular attendance requires students to log into the Bb Learn learning management system (LMS). Attendance is measured both by virtual presence in the online course and student interaction with course learning materials and assignments. Students are expected to check their Kent State e-mail and to log into the system multiple times (at least every other day) during the week.

All actions by students in the Bb Learn LMS can be tracked. At any time during the course, an instructor may generate a report that indicates when and how long individual students have been logged into the LMS, or engaged with course materials or course tools.

Students who anticipate an absence from the online course due to technical or medical reasons should consult with the instructor individually. An absence due to illness or injury requires verification from a medical professional and should be presented to the instructor.

### **Communication Policy**

1. Email course questions and personal concerns, including grading questions, to me privately using your @kent.edu email. Do NOT submit posts of a personal nature to the discussion board.
2. Email will be checked at least twice per day Monday through Friday; Saturday and Sunday, email is checked once per day. During the week, I will respond to all emails within 24 hours; on weekends and holidays, allow up to 48 hours. If there are special circumstances that will delay my response, I will make an announcement to the class.
3. General Course Questions discussion boards will be checked once per day Monday through Friday; Saturday and Sunday, these discussion boards will be checked once per day.
4. For questions related to technology, please contact: 330-672-HELP for 24/7 support.

### **Online Student Conduct and (N)etiquette**

Communicating appropriately in the online classroom can be challenging. In order to minimize this challenge, it is important to remember several points of "internet etiquette" that will smooth communication for both students and instructors:

1. **Read first, Write later.** Read the ENTIRE set of posts/comments on a discussion board before posting your reply, in order to prevent repeating commentary or asking questions that have already been answered.
2. **Avoid language that may come across as strong or offensive.** Language can be easily misinterpreted in written electronic communication. Review email and discussion board posts BEFORE submitting. Humor and sarcasm may be easily misinterpreted by your reader(s). Try to be as matter-of-fact and professional as possible.
3. **Follow the language rules of the Internet.** Do not write using all capital letters, because it will appear as shouting. Also, the use of emoticons can be helpful when used to convey nonverbal feelings. ☺
4. **Consider the privacy of others.** Ask permission prior to giving out a classmate's email address or other information.
5. **Keep attachments small.** If it is necessary to send pictures, change the size to an acceptable 250kb or less (there are several programs you can use to do this such as: Photoshop, Paint, GIMP, and picesize.com).
6. **No inappropriate material.** Do not forward virus warnings, chain letters, jokes, etc. to classmates or instructors. The sharing of pornographic material is forbidden.

**NOTE:** *The instructor reserves the right to remove posts that are not collegial in nature and/or do not meet the Online Student Conduct and Etiquette guidelines listed above.*

### **University Use of Electronic Email**

A university-assigned student e-mail account is the official university means of communication with all students at Kent State University. Students are responsible for all information sent to them via their university-assigned e-mail account. If a student chooses to forward information in their university e-mail account, he or she is responsible for all information, including attachments, sent to any other e-mail account. To stay current with university information, students are expected to check their official university e-mail account and other electronic communications on a frequent and consistent basis. Recognizing that some communications may be time-critical, the university recommends that electronic communications be checked minimally twice a week.

### **Assignments and Grades**

---

A detailed breakdown of course assignments and due dates by lesson module is available as a separate .pdf document that can be accessed in Bb Learn by clicking on the **Syllabus & Course Schedule** link in the course menu. You can earn a maximum of 1250 points for completing the assignments specified below.

### **Discussion Boards**

Each of the 5 modules will contain a discussion board that will include a prompt for your consideration. That prompt is your cue and guide to compose a post that will serve as your entry into discussion with fellow classmates. Your initial post should provide an articulate and pertinent

answer to the provided topic. It should be at least two well-developed paragraphs (approximately 6-8 sentences or more per paragraph) or as otherwise indicated by that board's specific instructions. Though ideas are of primary importance, please utilize correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar in your posts. Examples, citations of personal and/or professional experience, and the inclusion of references from the readings and lectures will all enhance your initial post.

Your classmates will be doing the same. Thus, your next requirement is to read and reply to a minimum of 2 other students. In your replies, agree and disagree, compare and contrast your classmates' judgments, comment on assessments that strike you, noting how they strike you. Your replies should offer new substantiated ideas or thoughtful questions. Each reply should be at least one well-developed paragraph (approximately 4-6 sentences or more per paragraph).

A rubric for the discussion board initial post and replies has been provided in the course.

### **Notebooks**

Each of the 5 modules will contain a notebook that will include a prompt for contemplation and reflection – for your eyes only, as if in a private notebook, diary or journal. Your submission should provide an articulate and pertinent answer to the provided topic. It should be at least two well-developed paragraphs (approximately 6-8 sentences or more per paragraph) or as otherwise indicated by that notebook's specific instructions.

A rubric for the notebook submission has been provided in the course.

### **Practice Exercises**

The first two modules will contain a practice exercise. These exercises aim to attend to the other skill in conversation – listening. More detailed instructions will be provided as part of each exercise.

### **Essays**

Modules 3 – 5 contain an essay assignment (personal, case study, and critical) that aims to elicit scholarly exploration of crucial questions and inviting connections towards the discovery of unique and unobvious conclusions, as well as of highly individual processes that take students there.

More detailed instructions and a rubric will be provided as part of each assignment.

### **Assessment and Grading Feedback**

Grades and feedback on discussion posts/replies, notebook entries, and assignments will generally be available in the Grade Center within one week of their final due date (i.e. discussion grades and feedback will be available within one week of the replies deadline) unless otherwise notified.

The Critical Essay will be graded during finals week and grades posted according to the University schedule for posting final grades.

## Rubrics

All of the assignments listed above (except the Practice Exercises) have a grading rubric associated with them. A rubric is a list of specific and measurable criteria for evaluating course work. Grading rubrics should be viewed prior to beginning work on a graded discussion or assignment. You can use the rubric to help you write the best possible discussion posts. You can refer to the rubrics to help you understand your grade and any instructor feedback. PDF versions of these rubrics are attached or linked in the description of their respective assignments.

To view grading rubrics, click on the link to **My Grades** located in the main navigation sidebar in your Bb Learn course. On the My Grades page, a link to “View Rubric” appears below the score in the **Grade** column.

## Late and Make-up Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted without prior instructor approval. Circumstances that warrant consideration for late work include university recognized absences such as illness and injury, or a death in the immediate family. Any work submitted late without prior instructor consultation or which does not involve such circumstances will be assigned partial credit.

## Assignment Distribution and Grading Scale

Method of Assessment	Number of Assessments	Total Points
Discussion Board - Posts/Replies	5	500
Notebook	5	500
Practice Exercise	2	50
Personal Essay	1	60
Case Study	1	60
Critical Essay	1	80
<b>Total Possible Points</b>		<b>1250</b>

Percentage of Earned Points	Earned Points	Grade
94% - 100%	1175-1250	A
90% - less than 94%	1125-1174	A-
87% - less than 90%	1087-1124	B+
84% - less than 87%	1050-1086	B
80% - less than 84%	1000-1049	B-
77% - less than 80%	962-999	C+
74% - less than 77%	925-961	C
70% - less than 74%	875-924	C-



67% - less than 70%	837-874	D+
64% - less than 67%	800-836	D
Under 64%	799 and under	F

## University Policies

---

Students are required to be aware of and follow all general and academic policies established by Kent State University. A list of the general academic policies is listed on the Kent State University Policy Register, which can be found in the University policies section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder. Specific policies related to the successful completion of this online course can be located and reviewed in your Blackboard Learn course. University policies are located in the University policies section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder in your Blackboard Learn course.

### Students with Disabilities

University policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit [www.kent.edu/sas](http://www.kent.edu/sas) for more information on registration procedures).

The Blackboard accessibility statement can be found in the University policies section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder.

### Course Enrollment and Withdrawal

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated.

If registration errors are not corrected by this date and you continue to attend and participate in classes for which you are not officially enrolled, you are advised now that you will not receive a grade at the conclusion of the semester for any class in which you are not properly registered. Also, it is your responsibility to check the withdrawal dates for each semester.

Every class has its own schedule of deadlines and considerations. To view the add/drop schedule and other important dates for this class, go to Student > Resources > Courses and Registration in FlashLine. Choose View or Print Course Schedule and Purchase Textbooks. To see the deadlines for this course, click on the CRN. The add/drop schedule and important dates may also be found on the Drop or Add a Course link. Click on the green clock next to the course under Registration Deadlines.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

Students enrolled in the university, at all its campuses, are to perform their academic work according to standards set by faculty members, departments, schools and colleges of the university; and cheating and plagiarism constitute fraudulent misrepresentation for which no credit can be given and for which appropriate sanctions are warranted and will be applied.

For more information see the Kent State policy on plagiarism in the University policies section of the Getting Started in Your Online Course link within the Start Here folder.

**Subject to Change Statement**

---

The syllabus and course schedule may be subject to change. Changes will be communicated via email or the Blackboard Learn announcement tool. It is the responsibility of students to check email messages and course announcements to stay current in their online courses.