WST 338 [H,D] [HUM] Women and Popular Culture

Fall 2015
Dr. Gordillo
Class: Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:15 MMC 219
Office Hours: T – TH 11:00 – 12:00 MMC 202 U
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Course Description and Goals
Cultural production in societies has been a point of contention and challenge for many scholars. How do we represent ourselves through various mediums of dissemination? What are the things about our cultural practices that we market and enhance popularly? What are the things that we don’t “talk” about in popular TV series, films, and literary work? The purpose of this course is twofold: First we will look at how we construct different “texts” to disseminate social meanings and messages; visually, literary, and through sound. Secondly, we will critically analyze who are the main contributors of these images/messages and how these are disseminated.

Women and popular culture have had a historical symbiotic relationship whereby women have played different roles in the dissemination and creation of societal constructs about gender. In this course we will carefully deconstruct how we create social “texts” in the form of popular culture. Cultural critic Cynthia Orozco, “U.S. mainstream popular culture should be exposed for what it is – an ambassador of modern day imperialism.” What are the implications of this statement? Do we replicate social norms that are normalized via the media and accept them without challenge? Do we knowingly contribute to the many recycled stereotypes that we see on TV and in film about Euroamerican women and women of color? How do we construct and perform gender in popular culture?

The course will approach the study of women in popular culture through lectures, films, music, and discussion of secondary and primary source readings. It is critical to read with care each assignment (refer regularly to syllabus schedule) and come to class prepared to contribute your thoughts, questions, insights, and evaluations. The success of the class depends on the full participation of all members. We will strive to create an atmosphere of cooperation, respect, openness, and good humor.

I strongly encourage the continuation of our discussions outside of the classroom via email, Blackboard, or in my office. Priority goals for the course include improving your reading comprehension, historical analysis, critical thinking, writing, and oral communication skills, as well as to expand your knowledge of the study of representations of women in popular media.
Required Readings:
1. Strinati, Domini, An Introduction to Theories on Popular Culture
2. Andi Zeisler, Feminism and Pop Culture
3. Joanna Russ, To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction
Extra readings will be available through blackboard.

Course Requirements
All the assignments are due by the date marked on the syllabus. No late assignments will be accepted (refer to the extra credit at the end of this syllabus).

1) First assignment: A 2-3 page essay. Pick a Sci Fi film (has to be approved by instructor first) and provide a critical analysis on the representation of women of color and women in general. Identify tropes that define femininity and masculinity and illustrate how gendered constructions of futuristic worlds are socially organized. This essay must focus on intersections of class, gender, race, and sexuality. 150 points
Things to consider when working on your essay:

1. Have a title that’s interesting and somewhat points to your main argument.
   a. Summarize the plot of the film and the novel.
   b. Offer your overall impression of the film and mention the title, author, and key actors/protagonists.
   c. Were any particular film techniques used in key scenes? How did the film techniques enhance the plot (camera angles, soundtrack, etc)?
   d. Address how the film represents notions of femininity and masculinity. Offer evidence for your opinion. Remember to mention the use of symbols and literary devices.
   e. Ending paragraph--your last opportunity to guide the reader. Offer a clincher that tells the reader how the film represented women of color and women in general. Reiterate your main argument before you close the last paragraph.
   f. You must edit and revise your work before you turn it in.
2. Grammar:
   a. Did you follow all Writing Rules? Are citations complete?
   b. Is there a clear thesis and are there strong paragraphs (with topic sentences)?
   c. Strength of argument: Does the paper argue the thesis throughout? Does the paper offer strong evidence for all arguments? Did you use all required sources to support carefully crafted arguments?
   d. Analysis: Are you able to apply concepts from course readings to your research? Did you demonstrate an ability to use course readings for your theoretical analysis?

1b) The second assignment begins today: Start an informal journal at the beginning of class on any Sci Fi TV shows that have strong women with powers and who have authority (must be approved by instructor and no vampires or zombies please). Outline the representations of women’s roles, attitudes, race, class, nationality, and sexualities. How are women treated in the episode (all women not just the main characters)? What is their relationship to science? You
must have at least 10 entries by the end of the course. Some shows to consider: *The Dome; Person of Interest; Humans; 12 Monkeys; Orphan Black*. Your entries should be kept at one or two paragraph’s length. Include the following information: In one or two lines describe very briefly the episode (include the name and date); in a paragraph or two make comments about representations of gender/race/class/sexuality/nationality. The journal should be 5-7 pages maximum. **150 points**

**Sample entry from one of your peers (different topic):**

*The Closer* is a cop television show that has a female protagonist, Brenda, as the lead detective of the ‘Major Crimes’ team. She and her immediate superior Chief Pope had a relationship in the past. She is currently in a relationship with an FBI Agent.

Season 6, Episode 2- Help Wanted (July 19, 2010): Chief Pope enlists the help of Brenda and her team (Major Crimes) to find a missing nanny in hopes that it will impress the Mayor during the election campaign. Captain Raydor, a female special police investigator, questions Brenda about her and Chief Pope’s past relationship. Brenda and her team discover two other nannies’ involvement with Brenda’s investigation. Captain Raydor reveals her true reason for questioning Brenda; she may be a candidate for the next Chief of Police. Women’s intimate spaces in this episode are violated by having Captain Raydor ask Brenda personal questions in what we find out is like a job interview.

Women of color are represented in a negative light in this episode. The prime victim is a Mexican American female, Adriana Gomez who was raped and killed because an Immigration and Customs officer could not keep her quiet by deporting her. Women of color in this episode are represented as weak, having little to no education, and they are taken advantage of while they aid wealthy families caring for their children. This emphasizes derogatory stereotypes of Latina/o immigrants and Latinos in the U.S. For example, when Brenda and Detective Gabriel question Mr. and Mrs. Disken about Adriana, Mrs. Disken speaks of her as if she isn’t appreciative of her help. For one, she doesn’t know anything about Adriana which leads me to believe Mrs. Disken didn’t try to get to know the woman who cares for her children, this is sad, considering Adriana has been with the Diskens almost 12 years. This is a clear example of white privilege and how women of color are invisible despite the fact that they spend more time with the Dikens’ children than the parents do. They see her as labor and not as a person, they dehumanize her in order to exploit her.

2) A mid-term **150 points**

3) A class group presentation (students need to discuss the topic in advance) **200 points**

4) Final Exam **250 points**

5) Class meetings will rely more heavily on discussion than lecture. Be prepared to discuss the readings for each class. Participation weighs heavily in evaluation of your performance.

**Students will turn in two short homework assignments** based on answering film critique questions. The answers must be in essay format, double-spaced, and they must include an interpretive analysis that does not merely describe the film. These answers must also include information learned from class discussions, lectures, and readings. Use the language we discuss in class, like ‘signifiers’ and ‘signified,’ from the lecture on semiology. **100 points**

**Example:** “In the film *Sleeping With the Enemy* the wedding ring, though usually a signifier of love and commitment, signifies patriarchal oppression, captivity, and abuse against women.
Furthermore, the film normalizes domestic abuse by representing male dominance in a powerful, successful, middle aged, Euroamerican, good-looking man.” You must edit and revise your work before you turn it in.

Class Attendance:
Students are required to attend class meetings. Any changes in this syllabus or in the scheduling of the exams or readings will be announced during class meetings. Students are responsible for any material missed in case of an absence.
This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. The Professor will notify students of any changes ahead of time. Regular attendance and completion of all assignments is critical for success in the course. In addition, to earn good grades in this class, you must complete all reading assignments in time for class, as indicated on syllabus; submit all writing assignments on time; work with the writing center staff to make sure that your papers have a clear thesis and organization; participate actively in class discussions, and not be absent during film showing days and final presentation days. If there are more than two absences at one time during the showing of the film, the Professor will assign the rest of the films for the course as homework.

The instructor assumes that an absence is due to an illness or family emergency, and the student is responsible for missed information and instructions. This means that if you are absent you do not e-mail your professor and say, “Dear Dr. X I was absent last week. Did I miss anything? Can you please tell me what went on in class?” This is inappropriate and unprofessional. Your best option is to ask a peer if they may inform you of what material was covered in class. Since critical announcements and instructions are usually delivered at the beginning of class, please be in the classroom on time. Also, please be courteous to fellow students and the instructor. No cell phones, arriving late or leaving early.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is the cornerstone of the university and will be strongly enforced in this course. Any student caught cheating on any assignment will be given an “F” for the assignment and will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Plagiarism is considered cheating. It is when you present someone else’s words or ideas as your own, in writing or in speaking; present ideas without citing the source; paraphrase without crediting the source; use direct quotes with no quotation marks; use direct quotes without citation of the source; submit material written by someone else as your own (this includes purchasing a paper); submit a paper or assignment for which you have received so much help that it is no longer your own work. Consult with the instructor if you do not have a clear understanding of plagiarism.

Grading Scale
1000-930: A
929-900: A-
899-870: B+
869-830: B
829-800: B-
799-770: C+
769-730: C
729-700: C-
699-670: D+
Tabulate Your Own Grade
Course Requirements (points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Short 2-page critical essay</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>Journal</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power point</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and two Short Assignments</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment #1</td>
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<td>Assignment #2</td>
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Film Analysis Questions:
1. How are women, men and people of color portrayed in the film?
2. Do the main characters develop during the course of the film? What are their traits and how are they conveyed? (You might look at speech, actions, costumes, makeup and narration.) Is behavior motivated, consistent? Are the characters “realistic” or caricatured?
3. What is represented on the film? Who represents and who is not represented?
4. What values do the characters seem to represent? What do they say about such matters as their county, authority, sexuality, and political ideology?
5. Does the film make use of symbols to convey its message? What symbols are particularly noticeable or recurring in the film? How do they affect the response of the spectator towards the film?
6. What is the function of the setting and décor (location, sets, props, costumes)? How do they contribute to the mood of the film?
7. How is the construction of National/collective and individual identities represented?
8. How do popular culture and high culture interface in this film?
9. Does the film question or reinforce the marginalization or exotization of “difference”? Who are marginalized or exotized?
10. What sexual identities are normalized and marketed as the status quo? (Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, trans-gendered, transvestite, etc.) Why?

Washington State University Learning Outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use evidence and context to increase understanding of representations of women in</th>
<th>Course topics (and dates) that address these learning outcomes are:</th>
<th>This outcome will be evaluated primarily by:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All- Especially discussions on theoretical approaches: Aug 29; Sept 10; 17; Oct 8;</td>
<td>Weekly participation/ short assignments, essay exams, and film analysis papers.</td>
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<td>pop culture. (Critical and Creative Thinking)</td>
<td>29 and Nov 5</td>
<td>Weekly analysis of primary and secondary sources, data bases, and especially the research paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locate and evaluate information from multiple sources. (Information Literacy)</td>
<td>All but more specifically Nov. 7 Visit from Karen Diller Associate Library Director</td>
<td>Weekly analysis of primary and secondary sources, data bases, and especially the research paper.</td>
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<td>Integrate different approaches to and sources about cultural theory. (Depth, Breadth, and Integration of Learning)</td>
<td>All; especially Oct 1-3-15, Nov 5-14</td>
<td>Analysis and discussion of required readings and incorporation into exam essays.</td>
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<td>Identify and explain key events, people, and movements in cultural production (Communication)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Weekly discussions and Angel postings, and essay exams.</td>
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<td>Understand how events and actions of the past shaped inequalities in U.S. popular culture. (Diversity)</td>
<td>All; especially feminism and popular culture; women’s roles in U.S. media; Marxism and media</td>
<td>Discussions of pertinent readings and essay exams. But more specifically discussions on Marxism, Feminism, and the Frankfurt School.</td>
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**Communications**

**Additional WSUV Policies**

**Students with Disabilities:** Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Access Center at 360-546-9238 or [van.access.center@wsu.edu](mailto:van.access.center@wsu.edu) (link sends e-mail). Accommodations may take some time to implement so it is critical that you contact the Access Center as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through the Access Center, located in the Classroom Building, Room 160, at 360-546-9238 or [van.access.center@wsu.edu](mailto:van.access.center@wsu.edu) (link sends e-mail).

Emergency Notification System: The WSU Vancouver Campus Safety Plan, which can be found at [http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/safety-plan](http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/safety-plan), contains a comprehensive listing of university policies, procedures, statistics, and information relating to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community. Everyone should also become familiar with the WSU Vancouver ALERTS web site ([http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/alerts/](http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/alerts/)) where information about emergencies and other issues affecting WSU Vancouver will be found and should go to the ZZUSIS portal at [http://zzusis.wsu.edu](http://zzusis.wsu.edu) and register/update their emergency contact information for the Crisis Communication System (CCS).
Important Dates and Deadlines: Students are encouraged to refer to the academic calendar often to be aware of critical deadlines throughout the semester. Questions regarding the academic calendar can be directed to the Office of Student Affairs in VSS.

**Important Dates and Deadlines:** [www.registrar.wsu.edu/Registrar/Apps/AcadCal.ASPX](http://www.registrar.wsu.edu/Registrar/Apps/AcadCal.ASPX)

I reserve the right to make adjustments to this syllabus including changes in the films listed below. Students are responsible to make note of any changes to this syllabus. The readings in parenthesis will posted on Angel by the Professor ahead of time.

This syllabus tells you the dates by which you need to have the material read. Some films will not be seen in their entirety due to time restrictions. The students are responsible for completing the films at home. All films are available in the library.

**Week 1**
August 25  Introduction to the class; Definitions; Film: Little Angry Asian Girl
Review your syllabus and mark important due dates.
27  Introduction to Theories on Popular Culture
Strinati, xiii-21 (xi-19); Zeisler 18-19 Answer the question and be ready to discuss it in class.

**Week 2**
Sept  1  Americanization and Mass Culture
Strinati, 21–50 (19-43)
Sept  3  The Frankfurt School
Strinati, 51-85 (45-76)

**Week 3**
Sept  8  Gender Representations in Film
Zeisler 1-21; Russ 3-14
10  (hooks, 1-20)
**TV Episode: Firefly with Zoe Washburne (Gina Torres)**

**Week 4**
Sept  15  Roland Barthes and Semiology
Strinati, 87-128 (77-114)); Russ 15-25
17  Race and Ethnicity
Zeisler 23-39; Russ 26-40
**TV Episode: Battlestar Galactica with Kara “Starbuck” and Anastasia Dualla**

**Week 5**
Sept  22  Marxism and Popular Culture
Strinati, 130–155 (115-137); Zeisler 39-55
24  Russ 79-93; **Assignment #1 Due.**
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>TV Episode: <em>Torchwood</em> with Gwen Cooper</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 29</td>
<td>Action Women</td>
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<td>Zeisler 57-75; Russ 65-78 Russ 41-64</td>
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<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Zeisler 75-87; <strong>Re-writes Due</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Film: The Hunger Games</strong></td>
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<th>Week 7</th>
<th><strong>Feminist Utopias</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>Russ 121-148;</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><strong>MIDTERM EXAM</strong></td>
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<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Marxism and Popular Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td>Strinati, 155-176 (137-158); Zeisler 89-105</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Zeisler 105-119</td>
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<td><strong>TV Episode: The Charmed Ones</strong></td>
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<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Border Culture and Myth or Stereotype?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 20</td>
<td>(Edén E Torres, pp129-144)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Zeisler 121-132</td>
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<td><strong>Film: Sleep Dealer</strong> (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Criminalization and the Sexualizing of Women’s work</th>
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<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>Russ 149-158</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>(hooks, 115-131); Zeisler 132-148</td>
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<td><strong>Scene from the film: The Fantastic Four with Jessica Alba</strong></td>
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<th>Week 11</th>
<th>(Post)Feminism and Popular Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 3</td>
<td>Strinati, 177-219 (159-201); Russ 159-166</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The Femme Fatale</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Russ 94-119; Show video 3</td>
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<td><strong>Film: TBA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Rethinking Feminism and Film Violence</th>
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<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>(Tasker and Negra, 153-175); <strong>Assignment #2 Due: Journal on TV’s popular shows</strong> (this assignment started from the beginning of the course so you should have at least 10 entries with their respective commentaries). Make sure that you revise and edit your essay.</td>
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<td>Female Friendships and/or Lesbians?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strinati, 235-261 (216-238)</td>
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Week 13
Nov 17 Comedy and Representations of Women
Russ 167-176
19 TV Episode: *Firefly* with Morena Baccarin
Outline for your research paper and final presentation due.

Week 14 Thanksgiving Break November 23-27

Week 15
Dec 1 Is “Smashing” Erotic?
Russ 167-175; Watch Film *Anaconda*
3 Be prepared to discuss Scenes from film: *Anaconda* with Jennifer Lopez

Week 16
Dec 8 Presentations
10 Presentations

Final Examination Week December 14-18

**Final Power Point Presentation**
Find a particular subject that has attracted your interest from the class material and develop a 5 to 8-minute power point presentation. Timing is of the essence since you will be given a 3 and 1-minute warnings to end on time. Students in the past have been stopped at the 8-minute mark not being able to make their final remarks that usually contain the conclusion of the research. These groups lost points that could have been avoided had they timed their presentations. Please be careful that this does not happen to you.

Avoid “talkie” slides, which are slides with a lot of writing on them (do not have a presenter read literally from the slide during the presentation). Power points are tools to help you emphasize your arguments not make the arguments for you. I want to see more images than writing on the presentation slides. Make sure that you cite all your sources. You may choose to do this either at the bottom of each slide (write the web page where the image came from or any other source where you got it from). Remember that images work like texts and you must provide the sources where they came from. You may also have all your sources bibliography-style at the end of the presentation.

These presentations need to be professionally done and delivered. I will be taking attendance during the days of the presentations and will mark down those students who are absent during presentation days (these dates are marked on your syllabus). You need to be respectful of your classmates’ time and commitment to this project by being present whether you are presenting or not. If you have further questions contact Dr. Gordillo at gordillo@vancouver.wsu.edu

The day of your presentation you need to turn in: 1) a CD with a copy of your power point. Make sure that you write your groups’ names and the title of the presentation on the CD. 2) Your final research paper 3) a folder with all of the materials you used for the research paper and the power point presentation (these can be notes on paper bags or magazine clips, or copies ant titles of articles used and highlighted, anything related to your presentation should be included in the folder).

**Make sure that all the materials have your group’s names and titles.**
Extra Credit: If you missed assignment #1 then attach the assignment plus the extra credit assignment for a total of 8%.
If you feel that you need extra credit then you may turn in an essay worth 8% (only one extra credit per student).

X-TRA Write a 2-3-page essay reviewing a short sci fi novel and/or a current sci fi film, providing a critical analysis on how race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender and how these are “performed” in the “text.” Only one extra credit is allowed per student. This extra credit will give you extra points equal in value to 8%.