

Egerton delivers laughs, enlightenment

James Armstrong

Enthusiastic writers, future comedians and somber students in need of a pick-me-up now have a home to explore the world of comedy at St. Edward's University.

A new special topics class, *Humor in Creative Writing*, educates students about how to mix humor into their own work and examines comedy in newspapers, movies, television, current events and daily life.

Adjunct professor Owen Egerton heads up the course, which normally begins with an open forum where the class discusses a new writer someone has discovered or a movie that impressed them.

Students are also guided through the editing process and the ins and outs of getting their work published.

Egerton hopes to emphasize the importance of constantly revising one's work and allowing ideas to emerge before the writer even knows it.

"The class is freeing up the writing process," Egerton said. "Letting the pen move, surprising the writer, then looking back, polishing, crafting the piece—making sure you've got an eye for the craft."

Senior Andrew Rosas said the course is helpful when it comes to the sometimes dangerous task of including sarcasm in written documents, such as e-mails.

"Comedy is something that is very hard to do in writing, and people can trip themselves up," Rosas said.

Revising also gives writers a chance to examine their stories and decide if they accu-



Christina Villarreal

Owen Egerton strives to help students polish writing skills.

rately reflect their intentions or if they crossed the line between amusing and insulting.

"Are you offending for a reason or smashing windows just for the sake of smashing windows?" Egerton said. "That's something you don't

know until you write it down."

Rosas believes that comedians and audiences know the boundaries of a good laugh.

"I think you're able to tell pretty quickly who's using comedy for malicious intent and who's using it to point to

a truth that is below the surface," Rosas said. "The best tool in a comedian's belt is discernment."

A native of England, Egerton moved to Austin in 1991 and later co-founded the Alamo Drafthouse's "Sinus Show" and served as artistic director of the National Comedy Theatre of Austin. His writing credits include the novel "Marshall Hollenzer is Driving" and "How Best to Avoid Dying," a collection of short stories.

This month, Egerton was voted Best Author/Poet in the Austin Chronicle "Best of Austin 2008 Readers Poll."

Egerton singled out essayist and short-story writer George Saunders as one of his own comedic inspirations.

"He makes you laugh at the character, but not in the

schoolyard way," Egerton said. "It's laughter that encourages empathy. Humor can belittle or foster compassion."

Other influences include Woody Allen, who excels at "mixing humor and the potent question of life," as well as Monty Python, about which Egerton said, "I love the pursuit of the absurd," the comedy troupe engaged in.

Egerton, who is married to Jodi Egerton, an assistant professor of English Writing and Rhetoric at St. Edward's, has enjoyed taking a break from writing and hopes to continue teaching the course.

"It's been inspiring and a lot of fun," Egerton said. "It's also a good change to step off the laptop and talk with enthusiastic students."

jarmstr3@stedwards.edu