

# Excellence in Teaching

## David Ensminger English



Know a faculty member who regularly plays pool with students? Who organizes film nights for students? Who plays drums in a band and has an album coming out in France? David Ensminger, a faculty member in English (and drummer with the Texas Biscuit Bombs) does all of these things and more. David brings a fresh enthusiasm to Western Oregon University and new ideas for teaching and connecting with students to promote student success.

David began teaching at WOU in fall 2005. Prior to coming here he taught for 7 years at Houston Community College. David lives in Monmouth and is enjoying the change from a 4.2 million urban population to a rural university campus. He teaches courses in composition and literature (including poetry and drama). David enjoys the campus community at Western and observes, "There are many exceptionally talented people on campus. I didn't expect to meet so many folks who share my interests." David's interests are broad and include music (particularly punk rock), art and creative writing.

Connecting with students and helping students discover in themselves the will to succeed are David's passions. His teaching style is dynamic. He offers students multiple ways to enter into and think about literature and writing. David explains that he tries to bridge and connect several ideas in his teaching. He has high expectations of his students, and expects them to demonstrate academic vigor, but he also wants to be understanding and accessible to students. He seeks to empower students by helping them gain an understanding of what it means to be a good student.

How does pool fit in to this picture? The Community College in Houston discovered that faculty interaction with students increased retention. "When students know you're interested in them and that you really care, that makes a big impact," explains David. One way



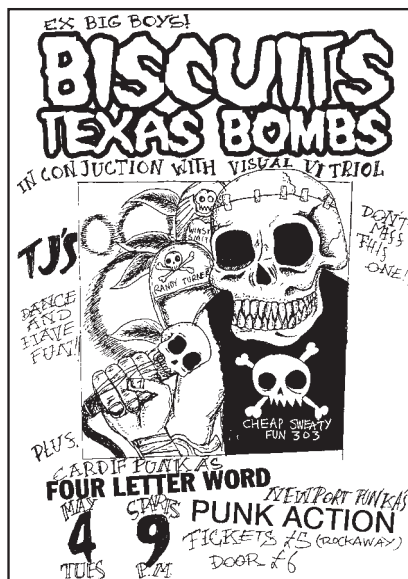
### Teaching Philosophy

David believes that students learn best from each other. His weekly film nights are open to students in all the classes he teaches. What David finds exciting is that the composition students teach the drama students and the drama students teach the poetry students and so on. The films allow students to discuss broad questions central to the humanities, such as the nature of theme, the role of symbols and the significance of dialogue. The evenings allow students to mentor one another, and this innovative learning opportunity shifts responsibility from the teacher to students. As David explains, "This is another way to offer students opportunities for increasing their own success. Students are able to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge by talking with other. They have the chance to take the lead, and to take charge of their own education."

David is working with faculty across campus developing a display for the Gallery in Hamersly Library on Beatnik Literature. The display will go up next year. David has met with faculty all over campus, including music, humanities and in the American Sign Language program, to discuss shared interests. You can be sure this show will simulate discussion with his students as well.

### What his colleagues say:

David is an enthusiastic gifted teacher, able to grab and hold students' attention, weaving together current events, literary and sociological theory, and literary texts in a fascinating, challenging, and yet accessible way. Dr. Kit Andrews, English.



Texas Biscuit Bombs concert poster

David has made himself accessible to students during winter quarter is through a weekly game of pool. (David even owns his own pool cue.) Come spring David plans to schedule weekly baseball games with students. These friendly and informal gatherings foster community.

David also explores creative ways of teaching and reaching students. One innovation he has implemented at Western is a weekly Tuesday film night, for example. The films give students an opportunity to discuss and explore themes and vocabulary used in class (and to earn some extra credit). Students select the films, creating a positive synergy in which student and faculty learn from each other. David says, "I learn from the students and they share their culture with me. It's a win/win for both of us."



### Backwash in the wine glass, Samuel Beam needs to cut Calexico's reins.

Iron and Wine has teamed horses with Calexico again for a seven song LP--In the Reins. Dare we say sophomore or even junior slump? Iron and Wine's debut effort, The Creek Drank the Cradle, was a shining, screen-door-view of southern scenery, including its distinct people, and was written like hymnal. Beam's latest effort is a photo album containing poorly developed pictures, no captions and simply leaves us asking, so what?

A healthy portion of abstract lyrics can make for a great record, but the amount of foggy song writing that In the Reins has will make a listener choke. The seven song cocktail is not mixed very well, pooling together the worst of Beam's writing and the clanging instrumentation of Calexico. What's missing from In the Reins is the grit that his previous work provided: those stark details, the blood and the dust if you will. Beam needs to loosen the driving reins and run back to what is best at--writing down home lyrics about the strange and the shortcomings of the South. Furthermore, he needs to forget about using any kind of electrical instrument other than a slide guitar. Musical experimentation is a phase that many artists face, but at some point returning to a diet of bread and butter is something that Beam should consider. Iron and Wine really only gives us one thing to cheer about, and that is in his last song on the LP, "Dead Man's Will" where he sings, Now that I come to fall, please say it's not too late that I am dead and gone. At least he ended on a strong note, but if he keeps acting like this it will be too late and he will be dead and gone.

—Lance G. Deal

David is proud of the work his students have done. Above is former student Lance Deal's review in *Left of the Dial*...([www.leftofthedialmag.com](http://www.leftofthedialmag.com))

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