

## **English department launches podcast**

Kathleen Quinlan

The Mercer English Department has launched a new literature-based podcast called "Willingham Live!"

A bi-weekly podcast, "Willingham Live!" will feature both Mercer students and professors discussing short texts. The podcast is currently recorded in Andrew Silver's third-floor office in Willingham with the guests sitting around a table and speaking into microphones for roughly 40 minutes.

Silver decided to create the podcast because of long drives he occasionally has to take and uses podcasts to pass the time. Roundtable discussions were the best because it entertained Silver and allowed him to feel involved with the drama of the discussion.

After Silver suggested the podcast, the English Department helped with the creative ideas and development. Mary Raschko thought of the podcast's title, "Willingham Live!" and Jonathan Glance composed the introduction music. Silver said that it has been a collective faculty endeavor.

In addition to its student audience, Silver thought the podcast should be produced for the alumni.

"It's a podcast that the English Department began as a way of reaching out to our alums. They often write back to us and say, 'You know we miss being in your classes because it was fun; we felt intellectually alive and we had a community,'" said Silver.

The faculty wanted to remain in touch with their former students as well, and this podcast will allow the alumni back into a discussion with Mercer.

Silver also believes that Mercer students need to be showcased to a wider audience. The podcast was created "in part to telegraph to more people the quality of Mercer students and just how good they are, just how articulate and wise they are," said Silver. "The students have just been remarkable. They always upstage the professors in these podcasts."

Selected texts will not be longer pieces. The texts will be short so that it can be read on air so that the audience can feel connected to the text without having read it. If a longer text is chosen, it would be one that is familiar to almost any listener, such as "Hamlet" because it is a work that does not need an introduction. The podcast is supposed to be fun and a distraction, so Silver does not want listeners to feel as if they have been assigned homework.

Professors outside the English Department will also be featured on the podcast so that there will be an interdisciplinary approach to different works.

The professors who are featured on the podcast will pick the text (usually a poem) within their area of expertise. The first podcast featured "Dream of the Rood," one of the first Anglo-Saxon poems. Raschko was the expert scholar on this piece and she chose a couple of students who were interested in medieval literature to appear on the podcast.

Silver hopes that professors will suggest different texts and students so that the podcast does not have recurring students and that faculty will filter in and out.

"The other thing that I realized in doing this, if people listen to it, it creates an intellectual community for our current students. I kind of like that idea-- that we privilege conversation, that we privilege inquiry and discussion and debate. I like the idea this holds up the process we have in the classroom as something worthy of a wider audience," said Silver.

Silver wants to find a way to feature retired professors on the show. Also, when poets come to campus, Silver would like to interview the poet as well as showcasing faculty members who have recently published books. The podcast's format can vary while remaining an intellectual discussion.

"I think all of us in the college want to find ways of telling the world about what we do, both inside majors and in the college of liberal arts and at Mercer University in general. I hope that somebody will find talk about literature interesting enough to plug into," said Silver.

Silver encourages anyone who is interested in helping to produce the show to contact him. Senior Nick Tomko is the podcast's director and manages the sound levels during recording sessions.

Silver also wants people to suggest poems and appear on the podcast to discuss them. "If you have ideas, it doesn't matter what department you're in. We can have a podcast and a conversation on just about anything. I think this is really promoting the humanities at Mercer—the English department in particular but humanities in general. If people have ideas or particularly if they want to help, let us know."

Glance will post the podcasts on the English Department's website, but it will also be available on iTunes under "Willingham Live!"