What is comedy? Seriously. Is it more than laughter and humor? How is comedy related to other artistic genres, and how is it expressed in different languages, literatures, and art forms? Is comedy specific to culture, or are some forms of comedy universal? How does comedy undermine or reinforce our attitudes towards race, gender, religion, class and ethnicity? Does what makes us laugh reveal our deep social norms and taboos? What can biology and the social sciences tell us about what laughter means? Philosophers and literary theorists have argued that comedy is a structure of feeling built on biological patterns and the seasonal promise of new life. Can these theories help us to explore a phenomenon we think we know so well?

"Comedy, Seriously," the Annual Humanities Theme for 2012-13, is a year-long, campus-wide initiative designed to foster interdisciplinary discussion and collaboration. Through course work, performances, lectures, film series, exhibits and collegial conversation, Colby faculty, staff and students celebrate the richness of the comic tradition and the vibrant place of comedy in our contemporary world.

Annual Humanities Themes »

PAST EVENTS

Monday Lecture Series: Comedy Across Cultures
Monday, September 10 - Monday, December 17, 7 p.m.
Lovell 100

Lecture: Comio Folktales about Clever Women and Magic Rings
Wednesday, September 12, 7 p.m.
Olin Auditorium

Visiting Writers Series: Cartoonist and Essayist Tim Kreider
Tuesday, September 18, 7 p.m.
Robinson Room, Miller Library

Film: My Fuehrer
Wednesday, September 19, 7 p.m.
Lovell 400

Film: Men
Thursday, October 4, 7 p.m.
Lovell 400

Visiting Writers Series: Poet Tony Hoagland on "Poem as Flea Market, Poem as Oil Well; Poem as Capitalism, Poem as Communitas"
Monday, October 8, 5 p.m.
Robinson Room, Miller Library

Poetry Reading: Tony Hoagland
Tuesday, October 9, 7 p.m.
Robinson Room, Miller Library

political Cartoonist Matt Wuerker
Wednesday, October 10, 7 p.m.
Lamont 122

Cartooning Workshop with Matt Wuerker
Wednesday, October 10, 3:30 p.m.
Comedian Bob Marley
Saturday, October 13, 7 p.m.
Watertown Opera House

Political Satire Film Competition Screening
Sunday, October 28, 7 p.m.
Givon Auditorium

Schlack and Sympathy: Jewish Humor from the Bible to the Present
Tuesday, October 30, 7 p.m.
Lovejoy 450

Baratunde Thurston: Comedian, Author, Satirist
Thursday, November 1, 7 p.m.
Page Commons

Film: Latest from the DaDaR
Tuesday, November 6, 7 p.m.
Robinson Room, Miller Library

Theater Production: Aristophanes' Lysistrata
Thursday, November 8 - Saturday, November 10, 7:30 p.m.
Strider Theater

Comedian Erin Jackson
Thursday, February 21
7BA

Lecture: Humor, Norms, and Solidarity: Taking a Joke and Taking it Too Far
Thursday, February 28, 4 p.m.
Lovejoy 213
Comedy in the News

Below are links to stories about comedy in the news compiled by Christina Garbarino, member of our Humanities Division Student Advisory Board and Assistant to the library’s Special Collections. If you have a story you'd like to contribute, please forward it to cgarbarin@colby.edu

How do The Onion writers choose their headlines? A This American Life podcast detailing the harsh editorial process:
This American Life

Former SNL star Senator Al Franken's balancing act - using humor in the political world:
Politico

The challenges political writers face in satirizing Mitt Romney:
The Daily Beast

Ted is the only Comedy film in the past couple years that has been truly funny. Why is there a lack in humor in American films?:
The Daily Beast

Why are openly gay males underrepresented in stand-up comedy?:
New York Times

Comedians Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele discuss finding humor in race. A Talk of the Nation podcast:
NPR

Popular female characters in comedy, such as in Bridesmaids and 30 Rock, tend to be flawed. Feminists are complaining. Why flaws are good comic material:
 Slate

Emmy nominations show us that it was a good year for women in comedy. How women on TV have found more ways to be funny:
Slate

Stand-up comic Maria Bamford suffered a nervous breakdown onstage in 2008. Recently, she participated in Arts in Mind, a series of conversations about the arts and mental health. An interview with Maria about comedy and mental illness:
Slate

North Carolinians are well established in today's comedy. Why they offer a unique perspective:
Slate

Stand-up comedian Mitch Hedberg died in 2005. He left behind 30 notebooks that he had used to record his thoughts. A video on his writing process:
Splitlader

Robert Lynch is a PhD student in anthropology at Rutgers University and an aspiring stand-up comedian. He's trying to figure out what we laugh at and why:
NPR
WGN Radio

What do Louis C.K.'s stand-up comedy and Jazz Improvisation have in common? A music lover wants to know:
The New Yorker

Rob Delaney, stand-up comedian and "twitter comedy star," on comedy, twitter, and the presidential race:
Hollywood Reporter

What is it like to try to write jokes for a comedian? Dick Cavett considers:
New York Times

Is it appropriate to laugh at horrific events? If so, when? Two comedians came under fire for joking about the mass shooting in Colorado:
New York Times
The Huffington Post

How have Jewish comedians changed the face of humor? What characterizes a "Jewish joke"?
NPR

Can humor translate between cultures? South African comedian Trevor Noah on making South African jokes funny for American audiences:
NPR

Baratunde Thurston on how comedy is a great way to mess with people’s heads:
NPR
Comic Colby

Blogs

Colby Creative Projects: Comedy Across Culture

View creative projects posted by students in the fall, 2012 mini-course RU197—"Comedy Across Cultures"! This can be any manner of project that demonstrates engagement with course ideas or materials: a monologue, spoken word or stand-up comedy routine; something in the visual arts; a short play, a poem, or a song; a mime or a dance. Enjoy!

View blog

Student Profiles

Mike Langley ’13, editor of Colby's satirical publication The Libel and member of the Humanities Student Advisory Board, has collected the following profiles of fellow Colby students who take comedy seriously in different ways around campus.

Dan Covert ’13

My name is Dan Covert and I'm a senior Math and Physics double major and hail from the bustling metropolis of Dover New Hampshire. At Colby I keep myself busy with the Colby Volunteer Center where I'm the associate director, Colby freestyle ski team where I am the president, whatever that means, and the radio WMHB where my friend Luke and I do a weekly show called justacouplekmuckleheads.

Read more...

Tom Letourneau ’13

My name is Tom Letourneau, and I am a senior from Dayton, Maine. I am an English and WGSS double major, and a Russian minor. In addition being on the cross country, indoor, and outdoor track teams, I am co-president of The Bridge, Colby's LGBTQ organization. Not only do I like to talk loudly about my personal life in public spaces, but I also like to tell others what to do.

Read more...