

ABSURDLY FUNNY: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF HUMOR IN STAND-UP
COMEDY

by

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by

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Artist's Statement:

As a finance major, pursuing a Signature Honors Project centered around stand-up comedy might seem unexpected. And it is. For me, humor has always been a natural way to process life, connect with others, and explore ideas. This project was my opportunity to take comedy seriously, treating it as both an art form and a tool for cultural reflection. I have always gravitated towards absurd, surreal humor—the kind that makes people laugh not because it is relatable, but because it is so far removed from everyday logic. Through this performance, I combined a mix of normal, observational humor with odd, surreal statements to see how an audience would react. That is what comedy is!

My goal was not only to entertain, but also to test how people respond to surreal or disjointed comedy, which often flies under the radar in mainstream stand-up. Comedy does not just make us laugh—it can challenge expectations, expose cultural habits, and invite empathy. My performance leaned into those possibilities while still staying true to my own comedic voice: one that embraces the weird and illogical.

Background and Context

I started doing stand-up comedy in the Spring of 2023 when I took the first-of-its-kind honors seminar, *How to Invite Laughter and Applause: The Rhetorical and Psychological Techniques Employed by Stand-Up Comedians*. This course taught me the techniques that professional speakers use to invite laughter and applause and then apply those techniques to my own public speaking. There truly is a science to stand-up comedy and it was in that class where I learned it; what makes a joke work and why.

In the course, I had to write 1,000 words and perform (in the classroom) every week. This was challenging but it sharpened my writing and public speaking skills. An interesting, and crazy, thing to note is that in the 2nd week of the course my instructor, Dr. Eric Shouse, had every student perform in front of an audience. It was a pretest of sorts to see where the students were and to know, at the end, how much we improved. Safe to say, every student improved. It was the most fun class I have ever taken.

When deciding what to do for my SHP, I knew I did not want to do research. I thought back on my time taking the honors seminar and decided to pursue the creative endeavor route. I reached out to Dr. Shouse, proposed my project, and the ball started rolling. The “curriculum” for my independent study course consisted of writing 1,000 words, writing 10-25 one-liners, and performing at Pitt Street Brewery’s open mic every week. This was to sharpen my skills and prepare myself for what would be the culmination of my project: my own comedy special.

My comedy special was held on April 18th, 2025 in room 1220 of the Jenkins Fine Arts Center. To advertise, I put up posters around campus and was quite vocal about the show on social media. At least 70 people were in the audience, and I was fortunate to receive much laughter and applause. Dr. Shouse, also a comedian, opened up the show for me and I followed after. I was expecting my routine to be around 15 minutes, but I surprised myself with 20 minutes.

I believe I am the first person in history to perform a comedy special as a Signature Honors Project. It was a great and enriching journey. I am thankful for Dr. Shouse and all the advice and help he has given me. I hope I have paved the way for maybe another student or two to pursue something a little different for their SHP.