

**ETHICS & AESTHETICS OF STAND-UP COMEDY CONFERENCE
BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY, APRIL 5-8, 2017**

APA Small Project Grant
Conference Report

Conference Chair: Sheila Lintott, Bucknell University

Conference Committee: Steven Gimbel, Gettysburg University; Diane Jakacki, Bucknell University; Jason Leddington, Bucknell University; Kathryn Maguet, Bucknell University; Aaron Meskin, University of Leeds; Meenakshi Ponnuswami, Bucknell University; Alex Skitolsky, Goddard College; Nikki Young, Bucknell University.

Administrative Support: Jane Baker, Bucknell University; Martha Shaunessy, Bucknell University;

Summary: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Stand-Up Comedy Conference at Bucknell University, Lewisburg PA, (April 5-8, 2017) featured academics, comedians, journalists, and comedy writers in discussion of the theory and practice of the art of stand-up comedy. Total conference attendance was over 125 and the conference was truly interdisciplinary and international. In addition to philosophy, academic disciplines represented include American studies, Africana studies, anthropology, art history, communication studies, comparative humanities, classics, dance, English, film studies, geography, interdisciplinary arts, media studies, performance research, neuroscience, political science, religious studies, sociology, Spanish, theatre, women's & gender studies, and writing & rhetoric. Conference participants hailed from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, Netherlands, Turkey, UK, and more than 20 U.S. states. The conference included five comedy workshops, four keynote talks, four invited talks, 12 sessions with three papers and three commentators each, and a comedian panel discussion with eight comedians. In addition, entertainment included a local stand-up showcase, performances and Q&A with Hari Kondabolu and opening act Camille Harris, a performance by members of the Frog Night Comedy Show, and a performance by Paula Poundstone. A highlight of the conference was a very successful open mic where conference participants put theory to practice.

Submissions & Review Process: 63 proposals were submitted of which 22.5 (36%) were authored by women and 40.5 (64%) by men (1 was co-authored by 2 men; 1 was co-authored by a man and a woman). 36 (57%) of the 63 submitted proposals were accepted. Of the 36 proposals accepted, 15.5 (43%) were by women; 20.5 (57%) by men. Of the 22.5 submissions by women, (15.5) 69% (15.5) were accepted; of the 40.5 submissions by men, 51% (20.5) were accepted.

Each member of the conference committee reviewed, on average, 17 anonymized proposals. Each anonymized proposal was reviewed by two reviewers and the conference chair. The conference chair ensured each proposal was fully anonymized before they were sent to reviewers and reviewed all submissions. The deadline for submissions was initially December 20, 2016, ultimately extended to January 3, 2017. The review process began during the first week of January 2017. Decisions were communicated to those who submitted during the first week of February 2017. As commitments to participate were received, commentators were recruited.

Demographics of Invited Program Members: We invited 4 keynote speakers: 1 female, 3 male; 4 non-Hispanic White; 3 from US; 1 UK; 3 academics (1 of whom is also a comedian); 1 journalist/comedy critic. Academic disciplines represented by keynote speakers were philosophy with a specialization in philosophy of art (1); philosophy & women's and gender studies (1); and comedy studies (1); one speaker was not an academic and was a journalist/comedy critic.

The 6 invited speakers were: 2 female; 4 male; 1 Latinx/Hispanic/Spanish Origin, 1 African American/Black, 4 non-Hispanic White; 6 from US; all 3 of the academics were in philosophy with specialization in philosophy of art, 3 were non-academic authors/comedy writers. One invited speaker, a Latinx woman, withdrew 10 days prior to the conference due to family illness. And one of the invited talks was given by two non-Hispanic White males.

Invited workshop leaders were: 1 female; 3 male; all non-Hispanic White; 2 from US, 1 UK, 1 Australia; 2 stand-up comedians; all were comedy performers; and all were academics, representing philosophy, theatre and dance, and comedy studies, and interdisciplinary arts.

Demographics of Conference: Our best approximation based on self-identification on registration materials (which included optional open-ended questions asking for: gender, race, ethnicity, nationality) suggest the conference was approximately 52% male; 48% female; 79% non-Hispanic White; 13% African American/White; 2% Latinx/Hispanic/Spanish Origin; 5% Asian/Pacific Islander; 1% 2+ Races.

In planning the program, a conscious decision was made not to isolate papers addressing race, ethnicity, and/or gender on specialized panels. In other words, there were no sessions devoted specifically to race or gender. As a result of this and of a concerted effort to recruit chairs and commentators who, in addition to bringing relevant experience and expertise, would add to the diversity of the conference, only 1 of the concurrent sessions lacked racial/ethnic diversity (was all non-Hispanic White) and only 1 lacked racial/ethnic diversity and gender diversity (was all male and all non-Hispanic White). All other panels were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and gender.

19 graduate students were on the program as workshop leaders (3), presenters (12), and commentators (4); 7

undergraduate students were on the program as presenters (3), commentators (3), and chair (1), and more were audience members.

Session Attendance. On average, keynote lunches had audiences of 75, invited talks of 40, and concurrent panels and workshops of 20.

Advertising: The conference was advertised broadly on Facebook, Facebook Ads, Twitter, word of mouth, listservs, direct outreach, and event sites such as HeyEvent and EventBrite.

Finances: The American Philosophical Association awarded the conference \$5,000 in a small project grant. Due this generous funding from the APA, we were able to waive the conference fee for all students and underemployed participants and to provide travel grants up to \$500 for the 21 students and underemployed participants who applied for this funding. We awarded a total of \$8,500 in such funding, \$5,000 of which was from the APA.

Future Plans: Building on the excitement for the topic that the conference made obvious and the networking and connections it made possible, we are proposing a special issue on stand-up comedy to the *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*. If successful, selected conference papers and papers solicited via a Call for Papers, the special issue will be 78.1, the February 2020 issue. In addition, a special issue of *The Israeli Journal for Humor Research* on stand-up comedy will be guest edited by one of the conference participants, Steve Gimbel, and will include a selection of conference papers.

In addition, although the conference is unlikely to be organized to occur again at Bucknell University, the chair and committee members have encouraged participants to consider organizing future conferences on the theme of stand-up comedy at their home institutions. A few have expressed interest along with hesitation in doing so. We'll see.

Summary of Quantitative Feedback (Qualitative Feedback Available on Request): All registered participants were sent a survey several times. We received 34 responses.

1. Why did you attend this conference? (Check all that apply.)
90.9% content; 54.5% networking; 57.6% speakers; 57.6% events/entertainment; was invited 3 %; 3% commenting; 3% presenting; 3% first conference in a new field; 3%personal learning and exposure.
2. Did the conference deliver what you hoped it would?
93.1% yes; 6.1% somewhat; 0% no
2. Please evaluate the overall CONTENT of the conference.
90.9% excellent; good 6.1%;0% fair; 0% poor; 3% N/A
3. Please evaluate the KEYNOTE TALKS you attended.
73.5% excellent; 20.6% good; 0% fair; 0% poor; % N/A
4. Please evaluate the INVITED TALKS you attended.
64.5% excellent; 25.8% good; 0% fair; 0% good; 9.7% n/a.
5. Please evaluate the CONCURRENT SESSIONS you attended.
52.9% excellent; 38.2% good; fair 2.9%; 0% poor; 5.9% n/a.
6. Please evaluate the SCHEDULE of the conference.
69.7% excellent; 24.2% good; 6.1% fair; 0% poor; 0% n/a.
7. Please evaluate the NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES at the conference.
71.9% excellent; 15.6% good; 6.3% fair; 0% poor; 6.3% n/a.
9. Please evaluate the ACCESSIBILITY of the conference.
52.9% excellent; 29.4% good; 5.9% fair; 0% poor; 11.8% n/a.
10. Please evaluate the INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY of the conference.
82.4% excellent; 5.9% good; 11.8% fair; 0% poor; 0% n/a.
11. Please evaluate the INTERDISCIPLINARITY of the conference.
63.6% excellent; 30.3% good; 6.1% fair; 0% poor; 0% n/a.
12. Please evaluate the EVENING EVENTS/ENTERTAINMENT at the conference.
81.8% excellent; 9.1% good; 0% fair; 0% poor; 9.1% n/a.
13. Please evaluate the overall quality of the conference SUPPORT STAFF.
100% excellent

Represented Professions and Academic Disciplines

Some individuals represent nonacademic and academic professions and/or more than one academic discipline.

All Conference Participants (Inclusive of Audience and Participants on the Program)

Non-Academic Professions

	28%
Comedian	14%
Author	4%
Teacher	1%
Student Life Professional	1%
Journalist	1%
Lawyer	1%
Other non-academic	10%

Academic Disciplines

	76%		
Philosophy	34%	Philosophy of Art	10%
American Studies	3%		
Anthropology	1%		
Art History	2%		
Chemical Engineering	1%		
Classics	1%		
Comedy Studies	3%		
Communication Arts	7%		
Economics	1%		
Education	1%		
English	7%		
Film Studies	2%		
Geography	2%		
Interdisciplinary Arts	1%		
Neuroscience	1%		
Political Science	2%		
Psychology	2%		
Public Health	1%		
Religious Studies	2%		
Sociology	2%		
Theatre/Dance	3%		
Women's & Gender Studies	56%		

In closing, on behalf of the conference committee and all participants who attended and benefitted from this conference, I would like to express our gratitude for the support, assistance, and generosity of the American Philosophical Association, all of which helped make the Ethics and Aesthetics of Stand-Up Comedy Conference a reality.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Lintott