

How to be funny: Comedic storytelling class has multiple benefits

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Claremont McKenna College student Bertha Tobas shares her story at The Motley Coffeehouse in April as part of the Claremont Colleges Comedic Storytelling course. Image/courtesy of Jonathan Aragon

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Professor Jonathan Aragon's Claremont Colleges [Comedic Storytelling](#) course aims to impart a critical comedic principle: how to tell a funny story.

Aragon began hosting the free and open to the public course Tuesday at 130 E. Seventh St., Claremont. The class, which is offered through [The Hive](#), a Claremont Colleges hub that hosts courses not typically offered through regular curriculum, will continue over three consecutive Tuesdays. More info is at <https://profaragon.com/events/>, search "Claremont Colleges Comedic Storytelling."

The course is facilitated by [Aragon](#), Professor of Transdisciplinary Studies at CGU [Shamini Dias](#), and actor [Bryan Truong](#), from last semester's course. Students will workshop a story ahead of an October 24 showcase at The Motley Coffeehouse on the Scripps College campus. "I encourage them to have that sense of bravery and step into that because vulnerability, it's usually the last thing we want to give, but it's the first thing other people want in us," Aragon said. "And through the vulnerability, that's where the connections happen with the audience, because the audience can identify with the human experience in that way."

The course is meant to promote social emotional learning and empowerment, "So you can take a negative and present it in a comedic way," Aragon said. "You turn it into a positive. "It's also an opportunity to sort of reflect and explore your own past or something you're vulnerable about. And then by sharing it openly with others using humor, it re-frames that experience in your mind."

Students will also learn how to craft a story that captures an audience's attention and taps their emotions. With over a decade in the entertainment industry as a comic and academic experience with CGU, Aragon is hoping to share what he knows about blending comedy with education for amateurs. "If you tell a true personal story, you can never bomb. Even if the jokes don't land, people are still going to be super engaged in the story that you're telling," he said. "You have to understand others just as much as you understand yourself. And then you have to know how to read a room too. It's not just how you understand the story or what's funny to you, but how do you explain it in a way that others cannot only understand it, but relate to it. "You don't just pick a joke to tell because it's funny. You pick a joke that's going to help other people too. Right now, I don't really critique what they choose to say because I want them to have that freedom, but I do teach them something that is going to be some kind of message at the end that's going to help other people."

Aragon is hoping the idea will get some legs. "There's nothing like this in colleges right now," he said. "We have theater in the colleges, we have maybe speech, public speaking classes. When you do comedy, when you

do storytelling instead of comedy and you're only saying things that are true, you are putting yourself out there. It's great for comedy, but it's also great if you got to do a research talk. Human beings connect to storytelling. "Doing community storytelling is not watching television, it's all about the magic of the moment."

For more information, visit colleges.claremont.edu/thehive or <https://profaragon.com/events/>.