

NO MORE WINNING: STEPHEN COLBERT ON LOVE, SERVICE, AND IMPROV

<https://mbird.com/theology/no-more-winning-colbert-on-love-service-and-improv/>

THE REAL STEPHEN COLBERT - Comedy Central star goes beyond truthiness about his Northwestern days and why he gave up drama for improv.

<https://www.northwestern.edu/magazine/winter2010/feature/the-real-stephen-colbert.html>

David Schwimmer Reconnects With His College Improv Buddy Stephen Colbert

<https://youtu.be/5hw87VYAKwU?si=GIhF2NCI-NSf3B-d>

Stephen Colbert's college classmates reflect on political comedy career after 'Late Show' cancellation

<https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/08/05/top-stories/stephen-colberts-college-classmates-reflect-on-political-comedy-career-after-late-show-cancellation/>

Stephen Colbert's college graduation day was awkward. Namely because he didn't graduate.

[https://youtu.be/c-ZPvcrXqQc?si=dBEZYrncDb\\_NlbfX](https://youtu.be/c-ZPvcrXqQc?si=dBEZYrncDb_NlbfX)

NU Rules Late-Night - Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers and Robin Thede have changed the late-night landscape.

<https://magazine.northwestern.edu/features/nu-rules-late-night-tv>

NU: Cradle of Comedians

<https://magazine.northwestern.edu/features/nu-rules-late-night-tv>

## [night-tv/nu-cradle-of-comedians](#)

.....In 1992, Johnny Carson's final "Tonight Show" episode attracted an estimated 50 million viewers — a number no one has since replicated live. However, audiences no longer have to tune in to late-night programs before they fall asleep. Comedians can now reach a broader audience when clips from their shows get posted online, said Michael Schneider (Medill '95), executive editor of TV at Variety.

"There's no limit to how many people can tune in, and that's why Colbert, Seth Meyers (Communication '96), Kimmel, Fallon — they all still have a tremendous impact on popular culture and on the dialogue, and that's why they're still so hated by the politicians who they're skewering," Schneider said.

The Federal Communications Commission approved the Paramount-Skydance merger on July 24, just weeks after the former company's settlement and Colbert's cancellation.

Schneider, Friedman and Colbert's NU peers all said the "Late Show" host can carve out new opportunities after leaving CBS. However, Schneider said the Trump administration has displayed a willingness to "weaponize" the FCC and other federal agencies against select comedians and journalists.

.....<https://dailynorthwestern.com/tag/michael-schneider/>

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Stephen Colbert was part of an improv group called the "No Fun Mud Piranhas" with actor David Schwimmer while they were both theater students at Northwestern University in the 1980s. The group frequently performed "the Harold," a classic long-form improv game, at Chicago's ImprovOlympic.

Details about Colbert's improv background:

The "No Fun Mud Piranhas" was an improv group that Stephen Colbert and David Schwimmer were part of during their time as theater students at Northwestern University in the mid-1980s. The group frequently performed at Chicago's ImprovOlympic and included fellow members such as Alan Goldwasser.

History of the group

- Formation: The Piranhas formed out of the competitive atmosphere of the Northwestern improv scene in the mid-1980s. An audition for the campus group Mee-Ow in 1984, which Colbert and fellow student Chris Pfaff didn't make, spurred the formation of alternative troupes.

- The name: The group's unusual name has a similarly unusual origin story. A former colleague recalled that a graphic nightmare, recounted by the son of a Northwestern library employee, was the inspiration. The dream involved mean piranhas that hated laughter trapped in a mud puddle..

- Colbert and his colleagues found the imagery hilarious and adopted the name.

- Notable performances and members:
  - Performing at ImprovOlympic: The group performed weekly at Chicago's ImprovOlympic, where they specialized in "the Harold," a complex long-form improv structure.
  - On-screen appearance: In 1985, - the No Fun Mud Piranhas were featured on The Friday Club, a public access cable show in Evanston, Illinois. In a 15-minute segment, a 21-year-old Colbert plays an ice sculptor.
  - • David Schwimmer: Actor David Schwimmer, also a theater student at Northwestern, was a prominent member of the group. In an interview with Colbert on The Late Show, Schwimmer revealed that he was so impressed by Colbert's fast-paced improv skills that it drove him toward a career in acting instead.
  - Legacy
    - While the group had a limited run, it was an important training ground for its members. The No Fun Mud Piranhas are also a recurring fixture in Northwestern's improv community. The group has disappeared and reappeared on campus over the years, serving as an outlet for students who don't make it into the more exclusive improv troupes.
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- Embracing failure: A key lesson Colbert took from improv was the need to penetrate through the fear of

failing in front of an audience.

- "No winning" rule: One of the most important lessons for Colbert was that in improv, "you cannot win". Instead, the goal is to serve your fellow performers. He has since applied this philosophy to life.

- Ensemble support: According to a former colleague, Colbert was an "ensemble player" who genuinely supported his fellow actors. He was also known for his quick wit and encyclopedic recall, which aided his improvisational skills.

- Post-college improv: After graduating from Northwestern in 1986, Colbert moved to Chicago to continue his improv career before joining The Second City.

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- Commencement speech: In a 2011 commencement address at Northwestern, Colbert spoke at length about how the lessons of improv shaped his life and career, including the importance of loving and serving others.