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The Behrend Beacon

Virginia college students treated to standup Q&A with Jon Stewart

by Mike Holtzclaw
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There are Q&A sessions, and then there's what Jon Stewart gave at William and Mary Hall recently.

Stewart — star of Comedy Central's Emmy-winning "The Daily Show," host of the past two Grammy Award shows, and a member of William and Mary's graduating class of 1984 — re-

and answered, so technically it was a Q&A. But in style and content, much to the delight of the crowd, it was an uproarious display of improvisational standup comedy — with the occasional life lesson tossed in for good measure.

"Whatever you do," he said in response to a question about preparing for a career, "don't add to the suckiness that's out there. There's a lot of mediocrity. Don't add to it."

When he played soccer at William and Mary, and when he coached the Gloucester (Va.) High School boys soccer team to the first victory in the program's history, he was still going by his real name, Jonathan Stewart Liebowitz. But in

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-Jon Stewart

turned to the campus for homecoming weekend and did a free question-and-answer session for about 4,000 students who crowded into the auditorium.

Questions, submitted by students and read by members of the University Centers Activities Board, were asked

his homecoming appearance, there was no mistaking the edgy, topical and frequently profane wit that has made Stewart a star.

Stewart, 40, explained that while making the drive from New York along Interstate 95, he celebrated the arrest of the sniper suspects by "stopping for gas every five minutes and dancing at the pump." Asked about the moving speech he gave on the first "Daily Show" telecast after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, he replied, "The funny thing is, I wrote that speech in July and told myself, 'Boy, I hope I never have to use this.'"

Stewart mocked banal questions such as the most important thing he learned in college — "What adult proctor selected these questions?" — but went to town on the hipper submissions. One student said he once had someone tell him he looked like Jon Stewart, and wondered why that person laughed while making the comparison. Stewart replied that television is "a great equalizer," and suggested that if you put a grapefruit on TV, some people would find themselves sexually attracted to citrus fruit.

"So the reason that person was laughing," Stewart said, "is because of the sad juxtaposition of how your life would be if you were on TV. If you look like me and you're on TV, there are people who find you interesting. You look like me and you're not on TV, you're alone."

Melissa Anderson would disagree. She and her friends, fellow sophomores Kristen McAlister and Rachel Miller, came to the event with handmade signs proclaiming Stewart "W&M's dreamiest alum." Stewart's answers did nothing to change their opinion, even as he reminded his audience that he graduated college the same year that some of them were born.

"He was great," Anderson said. "When you hear that it's a Q&A session, you don't know if he's going to be serious or funny, or if it's going to be exciting or boring. But this was fantastic."

Aware of the strong social and political themes of the comedy in "The Daily Show," one student asked what Stewart considered to be "the most pertinent issue facing our country today." Stewart demurred, but then observed that the biggest political divide is not between Republicans and Democrats, not between liberals and conservatives.

"Really," he said, "it's between reasonable people and extremist knuckleheads on both sides. The left, through the ACLU, has largely paralyzed the legal system, and the right, through big business, has largely paralyzed the wealth. But there will come a time when the disaffected middle will take control, and that will be you guys."

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