

Editor's Note

In her essay “Not a One-Man Show—But Definitely One of a Kind,” Jaclyn Goldsmith profiles a familiar smiling face around Cal Poly’s campus, improvisational comedy group Smile and Nod’s Jose Molina. How does the writer establish the tone of the essay? For instance, is the title interesting? Informative? How does Goldsmith’s approach to the introduction compare with other profile introductions in *Fresh Voices*? For instance, she writes, “Silence. On center stage some twenty people configured in a circle, stationed high above the audience. Then—clap, clap, clap. . . .” How does the remainder of the introduction continue to establish tone and serve the rest of the profile?

Notice how Goldsmith uses images to convey a sense of Molina’s exuberant personality. Are the images effective in terms of content and placement? Does the organization drive the essay’s focus forward? How else could it be described: perhaps fluid, choppy, improvisational? What devices enhance coherence and unity, and where could you apply them to this piece? Just as with a skit, this essay clearly signals a beginning and ending. What do you make of its bookended structure?

Not a One-Man Show—But Definitely One of a Kind

Jaclyn Goldsmith

Silence. On center stage, some twenty people configured a circle, stationed high above the audience. Then—clap, clap, clap, he slowly began: clap, clap, clap, accelerating speed—then he yelled: “Do you feel that spirit?” and all responded: “Aw ya!” Again, he yelled: “Do you feel that spirit?” All responded: “Aw ya!” Jumping, bumping, shouting—it’s the chant before every practice and every performance—and it belongs to the cast members of Smile and Nod. The voice that started this pump-up scene was that of Jose Molina, a fourth year student at Cal Poly. As the spotlight focused on him, the voices of the crowd dwindled—it was show time.

Molina is a business and marketing major, contrary to the typical theater major of most Smile and Nod cast members. Hollywood, California is his hometown. He is the first of his family to attend college. It was difficult for Molina to describe improv comedy to his Spanish-speaking parents. He showed them a present-day improv comedy television show called *Who’s Line is it Anyway*, which expressed exactly what he did. Improvisation is the act of creating spoken words extemporaneously without previous planning or preparation. “My parents are crazy,” Molina admitted, “They always taught me to keep it real.” He stressed how his parents say anything they want to say and don’t feel shame when they joke around with him.

Lee Barats, the manager of Smile and Nod, is also a senior at Cal Poly. Barats met Molina through his good friend from home who was also Molina's roommate freshman year. After Barats made it on Smile and Nod, he encouraged Molina many times throughout his first two years of college to try out. Barats knew that Molina's clever humor and wild personality would positively contribute to the cast. Molina had no idea what Smile and Nod was about, and was reluctant to commit to it. He continued to reject the endless offers by Barats. During his junior year, Molina ran into Barats at a local bar. He finally gave in, and soon enough he was performing on stage, thankful to have found a great passion for improv comedy. Molina is unique for his strong charisma, his self-confidence, and his lack of fear in life.

During the interview, Molina described himself as being energetic, to say the least. We laughed together when he made funny comments in between interview questions. He stated that he always has energy to give away—"Sick, I get to scream now!" Molina expressed. Molina dressed like a typical college male. His dark jeans, white t-shirt, and black zip-up jacket showed his simplistic style. His casual persona compliments his comical, worry-free lifestyle: "I am never serious." He rarely feels like he's not himself. With brown eyes, brown hair, and brown skin, he's just a whole lot of brown, but one would never find him boring.

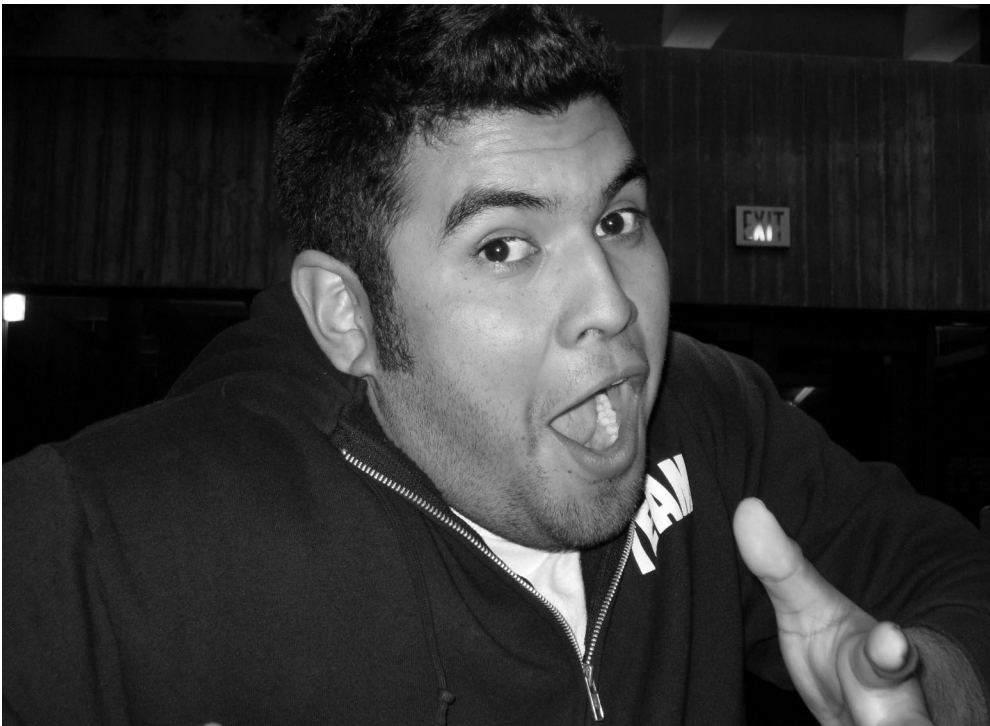


FIGURE 1 Jose Molina is a unique cast member of the Cal Poly improv comedy group, Smile and Nod.

While public speaking is the number one fear of most people, Molina isn't part of that statistic. When we were talking he constantly shifted in his chair, not because he was nervous but because he couldn't sit still. Molina has this interesting quality about himself—he doesn't get embarrassed in public. "I don't really know what embarrassment feels like, to tell you the truth. I wish I felt nervous sometimes," Molina commented. He is most comfortable when the spotlight is on him. His fearlessness is astounding. Molina isn't fazed by the everyday fears that many college students possess, such as wanting to create an attractive, intelligent image to gain acceptance. He has the confidence to be himself.

Stand out—oh no, not Molina. While he does stand out as an individual, he stated that it's not important to him: "I don't want to stand out. I don't want it to be 'that one guy was funny,' I want it to be all [of] Smile and Nod [was funny]." One of his main goals of being on a team is his strong desire for everyone to do equally as well. As early as middle school, Molina found inspiration from comedian Adam Sandler. Molina noted that the cast members of *Smile and Nod* look after each other like Adam Sandler looks after his co-workers. Sometimes he finds it difficult to get the experienced performers to trust the new cast members to excel. Molina stresses the idea of just letting things flow: "Whatever I'm feeling at the time [is what] I say. You either have it or you don't, you can't try too hard." During a show, Molina doesn't think about what he's going to say next; he says the first thing that comes to mind.



FIGURE 2 Jose Molina's comical character gets the crowd laughing every show.

The fact that he performs voluntarily is something Molina finds satisfying. “We don’t get paid, but we all share the common joy of putting smiles on peoples’ faces, and that’s what makes us a family. There’s never a dull moment; there’s always something crazy going on,” Molina emphasized. He grows and improves off of others as they grow and improve off of him. Something I found intriguing was his comment about being a Big Bro, similar to the way a fraternity member obtains this identity. Molina commented how he is a Big Bro to a freshman, male cast member who joined the cast this year. He looks out for his “new-bee” cast member and gives him tips on his performances. The cast of Smile and Nod has a great social support system.

Improv comedy is an art unlike any other: “It’s a series of games that we play completely relying on quick wit,” Molina explained. His favorite game to perform is called “Pan Left, Pan Right.” I really enjoyed watching this game. It was absolutely hilarious. It was set up with three cast members on stage, positioned in the shape of a triangle. The host asked the audience for a setting and the audience chose a laundry mat. When the host said pan left or pan right, the cast members rotated and two of them started improvising the scene in a laundry mat. The third cast member was at the back of the stage, waiting to jump into the scene and play along. Molina feels a sense of accomplishment when a game goes well: “A good run is better than sex,” Molina admitted.

Molina expresses so much excitement towards improvisation. His energy, passion, determination, and fearlessness set him apart from his cast members. These qualities compliment his strong stage presence and ability to capture a crowd. He’s not a one-man show, but he’s definitely one of a kind.

Silence. In rows of chairs the audience yearned for the show to begin. The spotlight covered the cast members on stage. As I looked around the room, every person in the audience was wide-eyed and anxiously waiting. He performs for the audience to bring them joy: “I want them to forget everything, I just want [it to be] them and us, just listening to our stories for an hour and a half; sit there for an hour and a half and forget about college worries,” Molina illustrated. Minutes into the show he had everyone laughing just as he’d hoped for; and when it was over, we exited with smiles on our faces—mission accomplished.

Jaclyn Goldsmith is a nutrition major at Cal Poly.