Arts & Humanities

16 ‘Outstanding’ Emmy Winners with Columbia Connections

Looking for a series to stream? These acclaimed TV shows with alumni and University ties have won Primetime Emmy awards for outstanding drama, comedy, limited, variety, or talk series.

By
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|
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"The Late Christopher Bean," an adaptation of a play by Sidney Howard, premiered in 1950. (ABC / IMDb)

Pulitzer Prize Playhouse

Introduced in 1950 at the dawn of the television age, *Pulitzer Prize Playhouse* was the first series to win the Emmy for best drama, in 1951. The ABC series, which adapted Pulitzer Prize-winning plays and books like *You Can't Take It with You* and *The Jungle* for the screen, was developed in partnership with Columbia's Pulitzer School of Journalism. The school even received a portion of the sponsorship revenue. "Television profits from the sale of this program will be used for the development of the Graduate School of Journalism and the continued support of the Pulitzer Prizes in journalism, letters, music and art," wrote then-dean Carl W. Ackerman in a telegram to the winners of the 1950 Pulitzer Prizes.



Rdikeman / Wikipedia

Seinfeld

Although the show isn't formally connected to the University, *Seinfeld* — the NBC sitcom set largely on the Upper West Side — holds a special place in the hearts of

many Columbians. The famous exterior shot of the fictional “Monk’s Café,” seen in nearly every episode, is actually of Tom’s Diner, a Columbia favorite since the 1940s. Still going strong on the corner of Broadway and 112th St., just a few blocks from the Morningside Heights campus, Tom’s now attracts plenty of television fans alongside faculty and student regulars. *Seinfeld* won the 1993 Emmy for outstanding comedy series for its fourth season, which features iconic episodes like “The Bubble Boy” and “The Contest.”



Jon Stewart hosts *The Daily Show*. (Comedy Central / IMDb)

The Daily Show

Originally premiering in 1996 with Craig Kilborn as its host*, The Daily Show* soared to critical acclaim after comedian Jon Stewart took over in 1999. The Comedy Central satirical talk show went on to win eleven Emmys for outstanding variety series (or variety talk series, as the category was later renamed) under Stewart between 2003 and 2015. *The Daily Show* received the 2023 award under host Trevor Noah, and again in 2024 for the current iteration, which features a rotating roster of hosts.

Columbia film alumna Kahane Cooperman ’91SOA served on the show’s producing team from 1996–2013, and Tim Carvell ’95CC was a writer and head writer from 2004–2014. Co-executive producer Ramin Hedayati ’02CC joined in 2013 and continues to work on the series.



Al Pacino as Roy Cohn in *Angels in America*. (2003 HBO / IMDb)

Angels in America

Adapted from the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tony Kushner ’78CC, ’10HON, *Angels in America* premiered as a six-part series on HBO in 2003. The show, set during the AIDS epidemic and starring Al Pacino as real-life attorney Roy Cohn ’46CC, ’47LAW, received the 2004 Emmy for outstanding miniseries (a category later changed to outstanding limited series) as well as a screenwriting win for Kushner and awards for directing, art direction, acting, casting, sound, and makeup.



Matthew Fox and Evangeline Lilly in *Lost*. (ABC / IMDb)

Lost

The inaugural season of *Lost*, the ABC sci-fi drama about a group of plane-crash survivors on a remote Pacific island, won the 2005 Emmy for outstanding drama series, as well as outstanding directing for the pilot episode. Columbia graduate Matthew Fox ’89CC starred as Jack Shephard, a doctor who steps into the role of the islanders’ unofficial leader.



Morgan Saylor in *Homeland*. (Photo by Kent Smith, © Copyright Showtime 2012 / IMDb)

Homeland

Homeland, the Showtime spy thriller based on the Israeli series *Prisoners of War*, won the 2012 Emmy for outstanding drama series and features the work of three Columbia grads in supporting roles. Morgan Saylor ’24GS plays Dana Brody, the daughter of US Marine Nicholas Brody, across three seasons. Amir Arison ’00CC plays fictional Saudi prince Farid Bin Abbud in the first season, and longtime character actor James Rebhorn ’72SOA has a recurring role as Frank Mathison, the father of CIA agent protagonist Carrie Mathison.



Frances McDormand and Richard Jenkins in *Olive Kitteridge*. (HBO / IMDb)

Olive Kitteridge

Lisa Cholodenko ’97SOA directed *Olive Kitteridge*, an HBO limited series based on the 2008 novel of the same name by Elizabeth Strout. The four-part show, about the personal travails of a cantankerous retired Maine teacher, won six Primetime Emmys in 2015, including outstanding limited series, outstanding direction for Cholodenko, and outstanding lead actress for Frances McDormand.



HBO / IMDb

Last Week Tonight with John Oliver

When comedian John Oliver left *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* to start his own talk show for HBO in 2014, he brought along writer Tim Carvell ’95CC, who had worked on Stewart’s series for ten years. Carvell became an executive producer of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, which won seven consecutive Emmys for outstanding variety talk series from 2016–2022, among other awards. Fellow Columbia grad Joanna Rothkopf ’14JRN has been a member of the show’s writing team since 2019.



FX / Hulu / IMDb

The Handmaid's Tale

As an executive producer of Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the dystopian feminist drama based on the 1985 novel by Margaret Atwood, Columbia film alumnus Eric Tuchman '87SOA shared a 2017 Emmy for outstanding drama series with his co-producers.



Kate McKinnon as Kellyanne Conway on *Saturday Night Live* in 2016. (Rosalind O'Connor / NBC / IMDb)

Saturday Night Live

Comedian Kate McKinnon ’06CC was a main-cast member on NBC’s *Saturday Night Live* when the sketch-comedy show won a string of consecutive Emmys for outstanding variety sketch series between 2017 and 2022.



Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook, and Kieran Culkin in *Succession*. (HBO / IMDb)

Succession

Inspired by the real-life succession dramas of the Murdochs — owners of the News Corp media empire — *Succession* follows the members of the fictional Roy family as they scheme and compete for the top spot at Waystar Royco, a news and entertainment corporation led by an aging mogul. Scott Ferguson ’90SOA joined the HBO show’s executing-producing team for the second through fourth seasons, winning Emmys for outstanding drama series in 2020, 2022, and 2023. Actor and Columbia College alum Asher Grodman ’10CC appeared in an episode of the second season as Sam, a political operative.



HBO / IMDb

Watchmen

As one of the executive producers of *Watchmen*, an HBO superhero drama that integrates the story of the 1921 Tulsa race massacre into the original DC Comics narrative, Nicole Kassell ’94CC received a 2020 Emmy for outstanding limited series. Kassell also directed three of the show’s nine episodes, including the pilot, “It’s Summer and We’re Running Out of Ice,” which earned a nomination for outstanding directing.



Hannah Einbinder and Jean Smart in *Hacks*. (2025 HBO / IMDb)

Hacks

Hacks, the HBO series about an unlikely creative partnership between a sixty-something comedian and twenty-something writer, won the 2024 Emmy for outstanding comedy series for the show’s third season — an award shared by co-showrunner Lucia Aniello ’04CC and the other executive producers. Aniello has also scored two Emmy wins for outstanding writing for the series, and one for outstanding directing.



Hiroyuki Sanada in *Shōgun*. (2024 / FX / All Rights Reserved / IMDb)

Shōgun

Justin Marks ’02CC is the co-creator and executive producer of *Shōgun*, a historical period drama set in Japan around the turn of the seventeenth century. Based on the 1975 historical-fiction novel of the same name by James Clavell, the TV adaptation for FX and Hulu swept four 2024 Primetime Emmys, including the prestigious award for best drama series. Jonathan Van Tulleken ’10SOA directed the first two episodes.



Owen Cooper in *Adolescence*. (Netflix / 2024 / IMDb)

Adolescence

Adolescence, a Netflix crime thriller about a thirteen-year-old English boy who is accused of murdering his female classmate after becoming immersed in “manosphere” content online, won the 2025 Emmy for outstanding limited series — an award shared by Plan B Entertainment co-president Dede Gardner ’90CC and the other executive producers.



Supriya Ganesh (center) in *The Pitt*. (Warrick Page / HBO / IMDb)

The Pitt

In *The Pitt*, the HBO medical drama set in a busy Pittsburgh emergency room, Supriya Ganesh ’19CC plays Dr. Samira Mohan, a resident whose slow and empathetic approach to treatment sometimes causes tension with her colleagues. Before pursuing acting full-time, Ganesh, who has a degree in neuroscience from Columbia, planned to become a doctor herself and even worked as an MCAT tutor. *The Pitt* won the 2025 Emmy for outstanding drama series for its first season.

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