

# Drama therapy at K-State uses creativity to solve people's problems

By Tori Wieggers Nov 14, 2018



Sally Bailey, a professor in theatre, director of graduate studies in theatre, and director of the drama therapy program helps students practice improv skits in her Monday afternoon class. Professor Bailey has taught numerous courses at K-State including, principles of drama therapy, drama therapy with special populations, creative dramatics, workshop in playwriting, creative arts therapies, and drama therapy practicum. (Brooke Barrett | Collegian Media Group)

Kansas State University is the only public university in the United States that teaches drama therapy. The program in drama therapy is a concentration offered with the M.A. in theatre. Accredited private schools are located in New York, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco and in Canada.

"Drama therapy is using creativity to solve people's problems," said Sally Bailey, professor of music, theatre, and dance and director of the drama therapy program.

"We've had people come from all over the world," said Bailey. "We have a student from Ghana. One from Korea, Japan, South Africa and Nigeria to study drama therapy and take it back to their countries."

These programs make it easier for students to become registered drama therapists. However, while K-State is the only public university program for drama therapy, it's not accredited. The North American Drama Therapy Association is the professional organization for drama therapists. The association decides whether a program is accredited or not.

"When the accreditation happens, and I'm sure it's going to happen this spring, we will have master's in drama therapy. The program itself will be recognized by the organization," said Emily Trube, graduate student in theatre.

"With the accreditation, enrollment will increase a lot," said Trube. "Right now we have about five students per cohort. There's about ten students total in the entire program. I think that will double with the accreditation."

Drama therapy has a long history at K-State — it was brought to K-State through a man named Norman Fedder, a playwright and drama therapy professor. When he retired, he let Sally Bailey know that he wanted her to apply for his job.

"I think it's important to create drama therapists," Bailey said. "There are only four other schools in the United States that have drama therapy programs. I knew that having the fifth school to keep it alive is very important."

"People in psychology or social work take my classes and think 'Wow, I can use these skills in what I'm going to do,'" Bailey said.

In total, thirty-nine students have graduated from the program to become registered drama therapists. They're now located all over the world.

"One's in Holland, several are in Japan, one is in Korea, one student became a U.S. citizen and is teaching in Seattle at a university," Bailey said.

Students have been able to get jobs before they graduate or very soon after they graduate. "The world has social skills problems and emotional control problems," Bailey said. "Drama therapy can teach that."

Ashley Barrow, graduate student in theater, heard the term drama therapy for the first time in 2007. "Drama therapy isn't just for actors," Barrow said. "It can be, but it's so much more. For me personally, the community aspect is the most important thing. Theatre includes all of the different creative arts and puts emphasis on community."

Trube said she was invited to engage in a therapeutic session in Chicago. "The patients were cool with me doing activities with them," Trube said. "I'm looking around and realizing there was something happening that was significant and healing. They were laughing, they were engaged with each

other, they were using their imaginations, they were confident. All these things that are huge components of recovery from anything were happening during theatre games.

"I said, 'What is this?'" Trube said. "The therapist said, 'I don't know. But it has to be something!' I Googled it and it came up drama therapy. I saw all these places pop up where you can study them. I saw all the private schools and thought, 'There's no way I can afford this,' and then I saw Kansas.

The research is validating the field that we know has been working," Trube said. "We're starting to see some case studies and other studies that show us why it works."

"A lot of people who work with drama therapists are stigmatized," Bailey said. "People with disabilities, prisoners, people with mental illnesses. Society stigmatizes them. You can't look at them as another label. You have to look at them as another human being who is here to learn something."