

# K-STATE

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research



government



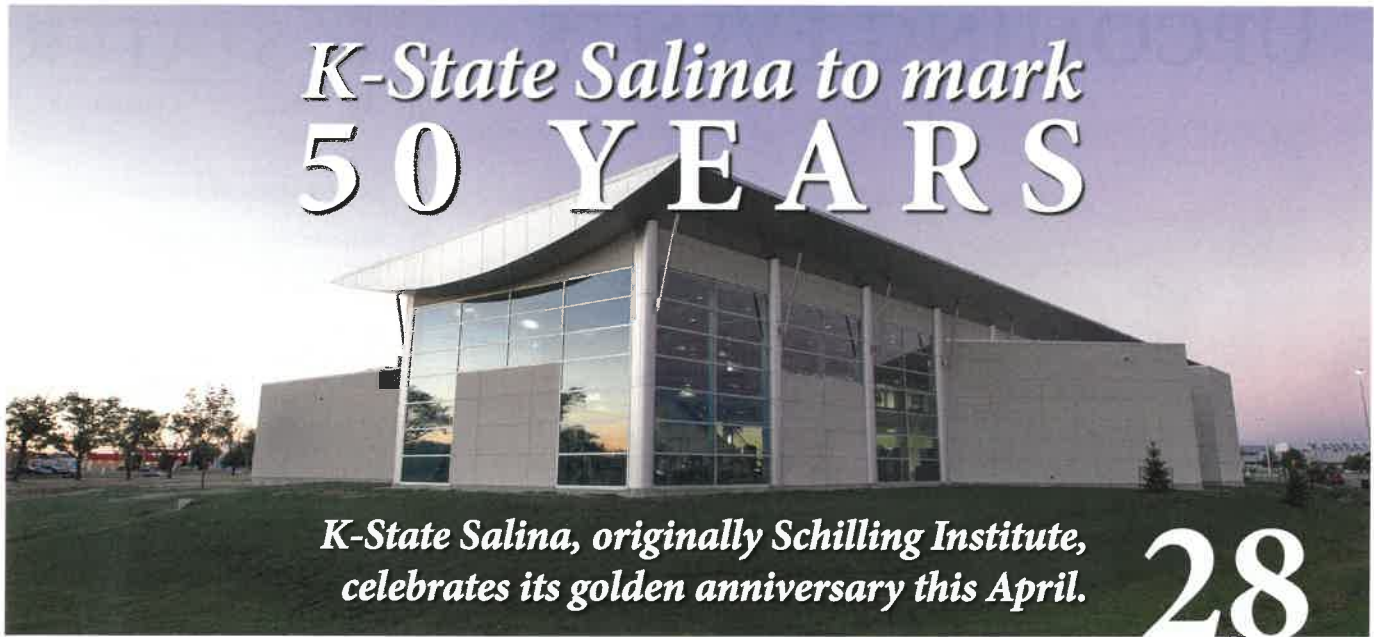
industry



academics

## THE NEXT BIG THING

*K-State's Global Food Systems initiative will involve multiple sectors and aims to take the university to the next level.*



K-State Communications and Marketing

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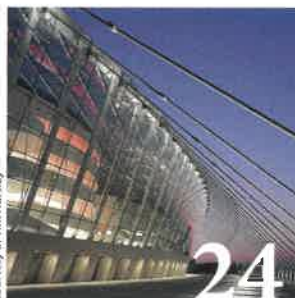
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David Mayes '96, K-State Alumni Association



Courtesy of Tim Hursley



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**On the cover:** K-State's Global Food Systems initiative will involve sectors such as research, government, industry and academics. (Photos by K-State Communications and Marketing, Kansas Historical Society and Thinkstockphotos.com)

# Drama THERAPY

K-State program looks to  
inner healing through theater.

BY BETHANEY WALLACE '10  
PHOTOS BY DAVID MAYES '96

Self-expression is one of the most important aspects of the human form. It helps us communicate, helps us better understand ourselves, helps us teach. But when channeled into a form of creative drama, it can do one better. It can heal.

And in the world of drama therapy, a program of study at Kansas State University, there's no better outcome. One of only five drama therapy programs in the country, K-State's program is led by Sally Bailey, professor and director of graduate studies in theater and director of drama therapy.

Bailey, who has been director of K-State's program since 1999, said drama therapy is perfect "because it's all about emotions and a way to practice things you need to do in life and figure out how to do it best."

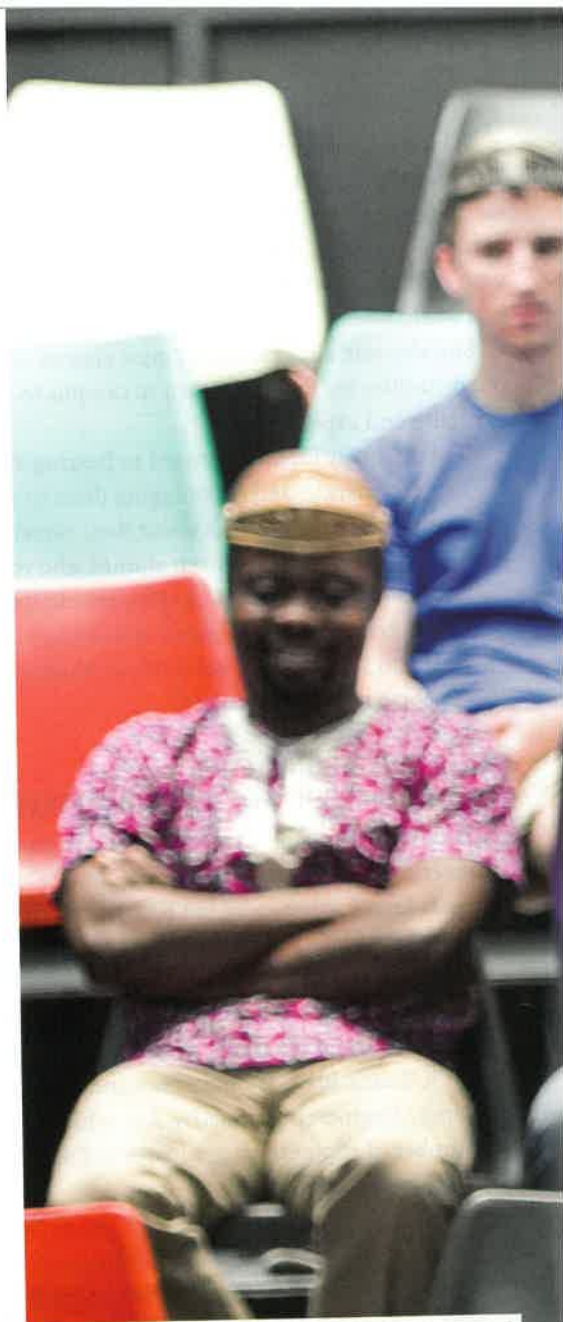
She added, "It's very much a 'we're present and we're moving and we're focusing on the positive.' It's my belief that creativity and play allow pain and trauma to be naturally healed."

One of her biggest ventures is Barrier-Free Theatre, a local program that invites approximately 25 developmentally disabled adults to star in a customized play. Since 1997, they've performed to sold-out crowds at the Manhattan Arts Center.

Practices take place once a week and start in September with rules and warm-up exercises. Participants even learn to improvise, should something not go as planned.

But perhaps their favorite part, Bailey said, is getting to create the terms of the play. Bailey takes everyone's ideas into account — they must agree — then writes a custom story based on abilities.

"People with developmental disabilities are generally not given a lot of choice," Bailey said. "In this particular



Above: Participants in Barrier-Free Theatre have some fun during rehearsal. The program, a venture of K-State drama therapy professor Sally Bailey, invites developmentally disabled adults to star in an original play.



Cheyenne Becker, senior in kinesiology, Pratt, Kansas, performs a skit in the drama therapy with special populations course. Students re-enacted scenes from a story after hearing professor Sally Bailey share the story once.



Students in the creative drama course improvise a scene out of a “group statue” exercise. From left are Meghan Misenhelter, master’s student in drama therapy, Lawrence, Kansas; Jennifer Foster, junior in biology, Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Callie Farrell, senior in dietetics, Atchison, Kansas.

“It’s my belief that creativity and play allow pain and trauma to be naturally healed.”

— Sally Bailey, professor and director of graduate studies in theater and director of drama therapy

group they can choose whatever they want — it can be outlandish, it can be outrageous.”

In years past, plays have featured Greek heroes traveling through time, mad scientists and zombies.

“We saved Manhattan from the zombie apocalypse last spring,” Bailey said. “It was very exciting.”

But that touches only the surface of drama therapy’s reach. Bailey has graduates all across the country working with children, trauma victims, addiction centers, prisons and more.

This summer, magician Kevin Spencer put on *Hocus Focus Magic* at Northview Elementary School in the Manhattan-Ogden School District, a program where special education students from the Flint Hills Summer Fun Camp learned sequencing, problem solving and communication skills by performing magic tricks.

Spencer is working with K-State to research a program for children that combines multiple creative art therapies: art, music, dance, drama and magic. Together with various K-State

programs, they’re researching, for the first time, how these therapies help children on the autism spectrum. It then will be used to create a national program on how these combined therapies can help with behavioral and social skills.

At K-State, drama therapy also has been involved in “de-roling,” a concept where actors separate themselves from their former character.

Dajah Porchia, sophomore in theater, Kansas City, Missouri, became interested in studying the method after the death of actor Heath Ledger, who played the Joker in the movie *The Dark Knight*, which was released in 2008. Working with Bailey and Jennifer Vellenga, assistant professor of theater, Porchia researched the effects of de-roling on K-State students after their fall 2013 performance of *Columbinus*, a play depicting alienation that led to the Columbine school shootings in 1999.

Actors went through a “car wash,” where they “scrubbed” bad vibes from one another, handed in character belongings and hugged — “not

because the show was over, but hugging one another as a person,” Porchia said.

“Every member of the cast said it was just a weight lifted off their shoulders,” Porchia said. “Doing a show like that can be a heavy load, but they were able to separate themselves.”

One of Bailey’s students, Soji Cole, hails from Nigeria on a Fulbright Scholarship. Cole applied to the program specifically to explore drama therapy, which he hopes to one day incorporate into his teaching at the University of Ibadan. A year away from his doctorate in theater arts, Cole said he thought drama therapy would be a great way to connect with others.

“It’s like I have been learning theater for the past 15 years but didn’t really get the type of fulfillment I wanted,” he said. “I wanted something that was really interpersonal.”

Having acted since childhood, Cole went on to college, focusing his doctoral studies on trauma in African dramas and films. Drama therapy, he said, will offer a physical way to help others, not just provide entertainment.

Of the Nigerian students who were awarded Fulbright scholarships, Cole said, he is the only humanities-based recipient.

“I’m doing something that is entirely new to them,” he said. “Something that connects with social sciences,



Soji Cole (far right), Fulbright scholar and doctorate student in theater arts, says he hopes to one day incorporate drama therapy into his teaching at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria.

arts, and combines them into a single, positive outcome.”

In fact, when he returns to Nigeria, he’ll be the country’s first drama therapy scholar.

Having visited multiple countries and continents, and taught and worked alongside many educators along the way, Cole said Bailey stands out among them all.

“She’s simply not in the realm of human beings,” Cole said. “She is an amazing woman — an angel.”



Students participate in warm-up exercises to prepare for scenes. From left are Jordan Parker, senior in biology, Topeka, Kansas; Christopher Khan, senior in communications sciences and disorders, Leawood, Kansas; and Meghan Misenhelter, master’s student in drama therapy, Lawrence, Kansas.

Magician to perform with local students at McCain

Magician Kevin Spencer will perform at McCain Auditorium in April with a few of the students from the Flint Hills Summer Fun Camp, where Spencer taught magic tricks this summer.

“We hope to have a handful of kids up on stage so Kevin

Spencer can promote awareness that these types of creative arts therapies can benefit kids on the autism spectrum,” said Todd Holmberg, executive director of McCain. “Kansas State University is behind the first research project of this kind in the world. We hope to use this research project as a

model that we can take to other communities all over the world.”

Spencers Theatre of Illusion — a family-friendly show — will take place at 4 p.m. April 19 as part of the McCain Performance Series. Spencer’s research can be followed at [HocusFocusEducation.com](http://HocusFocusEducation.com).