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## **2018 Research Week Proposal**

**Title** – A Phenomenology of the Current State of Drama Therapy

**Program of Study** – Psychology & Theatre Arts

**Presentation Type** – Oral

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**Category** - Applied

### Abstract

A phenomenological study, focused on the fields of applied theatre and drama therapy, was investigated by a team of undergraduate and faculty researchers in the Psychology and Theatre Arts departments. The history and various forms of drama therapy were studied to learn how professionals in the field understand and apply the use of drama as a therapeutic tool. The researchers examined how drama therapy/applied theatre are utilized for various target populations, including those with mental health issues. Examples of these issues include Autism Spectrum Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Schizophrenia. Applied theatre and drama therapy were also studied in relation to various age groups and marginalized groups such as victims of abuse, refugees, prisoners, and those with disabilities. Research questions explored how drama therapy and applied theatre are understood and applied by professionals in the field, benefits and drawbacks of their use, the potential that they hold in the future, and ethical considerations for their use. The team conducted semi-structured interviews in person and via video conferencing with experts in the field including a registered drama therapist, applied theater instructors, and an applied theater actor. Interviews were transcribed and coded.

The researchers analyzed qualitative themes to note current trends in the field and future needs. In addition to interviews, the research team traveled to South Carolina to observe firsthand examples of applied theatre and drama therapy in action, as led by a Registered Drama Therapist. By gaining a more in-depth understanding of the fields, the team hopes to make an informed decision regarding the careers that are available in the field, and to explore the possibility of implementing a drama therapy program at Liberty University in the future. The research team hopes that the study will raise awareness of applied theatre and drama therapy as useful tools in theatre and psychological settings.