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Controversial Play Highlights Importance of First Amendment

Winthrop University

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Controversial Play Highlights Importance of First Amendment

Quick Facts

- The staged reading of Sarah Kane's "Phaedra's Love" is free and open to the public.
- Laura Dougherty, assistant professor of theatre, will direct the production.



Laura Dougherty

ROCK HILL, S.C. - The **First Amendment** protects freedom of speech within the arts – a point that Winthrop students and [Laura Dougherty](#), assistant professor of theatre, hope to reiterate with the March 23 staged reading of Sarah Kane's controversial play "**Phaedra's Love**."

The reading, which will be performed at 6 p.m. in [Johnson Studio Theatre](#), is based loosely on the Roman tragedy "Phaedra" but delves into more contemporary models of desire, violence and celebrity. Unlike Seneca's original play "Phaedra," where violence happens offstage, "**Phaedra's Love**" positions things previously unseen – lust, blood, rape, castration and sex – at center in a graphic move.

"**Phaedra's Love**" is a free, approved cultural event for Winthrop students and is open to the community. Following the reading will be a discussion concerning the play's themes and the importance of the First Amendment.

Dougherty, who will direct the reading, said that she welcomes this opportunity to demonstrate how "at its best, juiciest and most effective art forges new territories in our thinking."

"New territories are filled with the dangers and potential of the unknown," Dougherty noted. "For art, especially theatre, to function at its highest level, artists need the freedom to present their work, however controversial or difficult that work may be."

The goal of the reading, however, is not to shock, but to ignite conversation. According to the [John C. West Forum on Politics and Policy](#), the production will inspire discussion and analysis centered around an effort to bring greater awareness about freedom of expression and its role in fostering the arts.

For Wendy Adams, **West Forum** student assistant, the production will give students a chance to consider how the First Amendment "can impact every facet of life, especially art."

"The purpose of the **West Forum** is to get students thinking critically about politics and its role in their lives. We wanted students to really think about what the First Amendment says," Adams said.

The **West Forum**, in conjunction with the **Department of Mass Communication** and the **Department of Theatre and Dance**, is coordinating this event through a grant obtained under the national **Liberty Tree Initiative** and 1 For All campaign that educates the public about its First Amendment rights. Winthrop is one of only two universities that have been given a renewal grant to continue fostering awareness about the important role freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly and petition play in society.

"**Phaedra's Love**" contains adult content. Students are encouraged to attend this reading and voice their opinions on their First Amendment rights. For more information on "Phaedra's Love," as well as other **West Forum** and **Liberty Tree** events, visit the [West Forum website](#).

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