

West Virginia University
College of Creative Arts
1436 Evansdale Drive
Morgantown, WV 26506
615-319-0646
marygrace.johnson@mail.wvu.edu

March 6th, 2026

Dear Selection Committee for the College of Creative Arts Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award,

I am writing as the faculty mentor for Shairah Sanchez, who has submitted her performance activity for consideration for the 2025-26 College of Creative Arts Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award. Shairah is a senior violin performance major and has been my violin student for three years. Last year, Shairah applied and was selected for the prestigious opportunity to perform for the collegiate masterclass at the American String Teacher's Association National Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 20th, 2025, with Kevin Lawrence, violin professor at University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

I encouraged Shairah to submit a video audition to perform in the masterclass at the national conference in the fall of 2024, and she was selected from a national pool of applicants. After months of preparation, she traveled to Atlanta to perform the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto for the masterclass in front of an audience of college professors, music educators and students from all over the country. Despite dealing with a playing injury at the time, Shairah represented herself and WVU with a beautiful performance. Because of this national honor, Shairah was awarded the Riddle Award for outstanding rising senior last Spring upon nomination by the music faculty.

Shairah is from Martinsburg and is a product of West Virginia's public high school strings programs. She is also one of the most naturally expressive and musical violinists I have ever taught. During our time together, I have seen her blossom into a mature and confident player with many impressive performances and achievements under her belt. Even as an undergraduate, Shairah is a leader in the violin studio and the music school at large. Shairah's abilities on the violin rival that of the traditional conservatory student, and I was not surprised that she stood out on a national stage. I am excited to see her represent WVU and West Virginia as she continues in her career.

I believe that Shairah's accomplishments deserve recognition, as such a high-profile performance is an important part of building her portfolio as a performer. Please feel free to contact me at the phone number of email listed above if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,



Mary Grace Johnson
Assistant Professor of Violin