

March 4, 2025

Dear Selection Committee for the College of Creative Arts and Media Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award:

I am writing in support of Kendyl Bostic's research project, "Engaging Preschool Children in Art Museums through Interactive Programming." I have been working with Kendyl since the fall of 2023 to develop her research questions, guide her as she engages with theoretical literature, and provide the necessary institutional support for her to collect the data for this MA thesis project.

Prior to 2024 the Art Museum of WVU offered no dedicated programming for preschool audiences. Since this was the specific demographic that interested Kendyl, she had two options: review preschool programs at other institutions from afar, relying on secondhand accounts and already-published literature, or create a program here in Morgantown that would allow her first-hand access to the research population. She chose the second option, which was considerably more difficult and complex. It also meant that, as her faculty mentor, I had to commit the space, time, and staff to run a program for her to observe. Given the strength of her work with me, I chose to make this commitment to her and her research project. She and I submitted an IRB protocol, which was approved in spring 2024 [IRB protocol number: [2401906313](#)], allowing us to recruit participants to a custom-built preschool program held at the Art Museum of WVU on Sunday mornings in September 2024. I served as the primary museum educator for the program, leading the preschoolers through each of the four strategies Kendyl identified. This was for two reasons. First, I had more experience with each strategy than any of the museum's student workers who help to support our education programs. I wanted to be sure that the strategies were implemented appropriately, to give Kendyl the richest data possible. Second, it allowed Kendyl to solely focus on data collection (notetaking, recording, photographing) without being distracted by the young participants' needs. To bolster this support, I also arranged for two student workers to serve as paid assistants, who helped with behavior management, physical needs (bathrooms, tissues, shoe-tying, etc.), and distribution of materials.

While I provided the labor and the space for the program to happen, I cannot emphasize enough Kendyl's ownership of this project. She recruited participants, wrote the lesson-plans for each session, and ensured that all aspects of the program and museum were organized to minimize intervening variables which might negatively impact the data collection process.

Since the conclusion of the program, Kendyl has been processing data to draw conclusions for her thesis project. I have mentored her in qualitative research strategies, particularly related to data-coding. She has amassed significant evidence through rigorous transcription and classification processes to support her emerging conclusions. It has been a pleasure to see the effort she put into mounting a fully realized museum program as a test case come to fruition in the form of meaningful findings about the efficacy of various museum education strategies with young audiences.

Kendyl's project is unique insofar as it is an example of both high-caliber qualitative research as well as of educational program-planning and implementation. Her efforts not only serve her own scholarly goals but also support the Art Museum of WVU's land-grant mission by providing free educational programming to the young people of West Virginia – setting a precedent for further analogous programs. For these reasons I highly recommend Kendyl for the 2025 mentored research award.

Sincerely,



Heather M. Harris, PhD (she/her)

Curator of Education, Art Museum of West Virginia University
Service Assistant Professor, Art History and Museum Professions