



March 23, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

I write this recommendation on behalf of Dr. Desiree (Desi) Cameron in support of her work as an instructor, arts education scholar, professional development facilitator, and arts administrator.

As the Director of the UCLA Visual and Performing Arts Education (VAPAE) Program in the School of the Arts and Architecture, I oversee the design and implementation of arts education courses, special arts projects, community arts programs, and public events that highlight the importance of the arts and arts education in the lives of children and families, local schools, and society. As VAPAE's Director, and a lecturer in the Program, I feel confident to speak on behalf of our faculty's commitment to arts education as an issue of educational equity and social justice, and their deep engagement with research-based practices in the field of arts education and community engagement.

Our VAPAE faculty support and guide undergraduate students in their goals of becoming qualified teaching artists, arts administrators, socially engaged artists, and/or arts advocates. Gifted instructors like Desi are crucial to helping make these goals possible.

I have observed Desi excel in numerous settings and know her to be a skillful and dedicated educator, caring mentor, and expert facilitator. Desi's expertise in arts integration, classroom management, curriculum design and instruction, and her substantial experience as a teacher and administrator in a variety of school and university settings has made her uniquely qualified to work with UCLA students arts education students.

Recognizing her range of skills and caring nature, I first invited Desi into VAPAE in the Fall 2019 to facilitate a day-long teacher professional development workshop with our arts education students. Desi's sessions were well designed, comprehensive, and pragmatic, informed by relevant research and theory, and full of practical advice for students, most of whom were just beginning their careers as teaching artists.

Soon after, VAPAE engaged Desi to design and teach an undergraduate course called Social Emotional Learning in the Arts (SEL). In this class, Desi helped students understand how the arts classroom can be a safe and welcoming environment for all children but especially those deemed high-risk and vulnerable. Under Desi's expert guidance, VAPAE students found themselves healing through the arts at the same time identifying ways to utilize similar strategies in their own arts lessons and arts classrooms.

A second version of this class was implemented in Fall 2020, with an emphasis on SEL during the time of Covid, an extraordinarily challenging time for educators everywhere. Desi's compassionate guidance

allowed students to design and manage their own self-care practices, at the same time implementing effective SEL strategies in their lessons and their teaching assignments. An emphasis was placed on designing arts lessons that could be taught synchronously and asynchronously, in-person and virtually.

Most recently, Desi has successfully led a cohort of UCLA VAPAE students through the rigorous Arts Education Teaching Sequence (AETS), a 3-quarter sequence that takes students from theory to practice, via experiential teaching assignment in local arts classrooms. In the AETS, Desi led students from a variety of backgrounds to understand the field of arts education and imagine themselves as arts educators. She conscientiously guided her students to design and implement original art lessons in a variety of settings, including numerous K through 12 classrooms and local community arts organizations.

Desi was devoted to her students and their learning, adaptive to their needs and well-being. Accomplishing all of this during the time of Covid has required an instructor with a great capacity for flexibility, creativity, and patience. Desi has been all of this for her students. In my classroom observations, it has been clear Desi was making a positive impact on her students and, in return, her students were incredibly grateful to her.

Desi has regularly received glowing evaluations from her students. Among these testimonies include one VAPAE student that described how Desi, “has a wealth of information and real life experience incorporating social-emotional learning in the classroom. She provided opportunities for students to grow their skill set, reflection, discussion and always modeled the strategies discussed in class.”

Another student shared: “I personally felt very supported in every class, and even outside the classroom when I reached out for help. Desi answered every question and made each concept easy to grasp and understand. She created such a fun and welcoming environment in the classroom which allowed all of the students to grow a closer bond and become their own small community.” Yet another student described Desi as, “a master at turning complex ideas and topics into digestible ideas that students are able to grasp. At the same time, she cultivates a classroom environment that is welcoming and comfortable.”

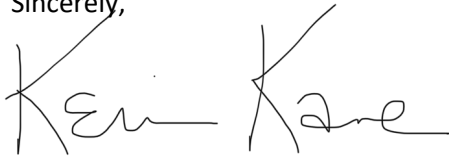
These are but a few of the glowing reviews Desi has received from VAPAE students these past two years. It is clear that Desi has been responsive and supportive of all her VAPAE students.

Finally, but crucially, Desi led VAPAE’s most recent staff retreat, which functioned as the first step of a three-year, mandatory institutional review process. Desi’s skillful facilitation helped the VAPAE staff (including myself) reflect on the VAPAE mission, evaluate and, in some cases, redefine job descriptions, and more clearly articulate our personal and professional goals. This process helped the team refine our core values, articulate a new vision statement, and develop a practical 3, 5, and 7-year plan. The final self-review was met with glowing reviews from both internal and external reviewers- due in great part to a process that began with Desi’s excellent facilitation.

As a colleague, I recognize a kindred spirit in Desi, someone who understands the powerful possibilities of the arts to change individuals and communities; someone who views arts education to be not just a privilege but a right and therefore an issue of social justice; and someone that utilizes her impressive set of skills, knowledge, and instincts as a professor and facilitator to work tirelessly with students from a wide range of academic, artistic, and personal backgrounds.

On a personal level, it is a pleasure to work with as smart, caring and committed a colleague as Desi. I believe she will make a positive impression on any committee, department, or organization she joins. I highly recommend Desi as an arts educator, facilitator, curriculum designer, and teaching coach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Kane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "K" at the beginning and a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Kevin M. Kane, MFA, Ph.D.  
Director, VAPAE Program