

January 24, 2017

Dear Sir or Madam,

Allow me to enthusiastically recommend Sophie Winnick as the SCSPA Journalist of the year. (And I'm holding myself to 'enthusiastically' because I worry you'll think I'm crazy if I use 'rabidly' and not read the rest of this letter—and you need to read the rest of this letter.) For four years Sophie has pushed herself by choosing to take Honors and Advanced Placement courses, from English 2 Honors to AP Human Geography to Chemistry 1 Honors. And she has made solid grades in these challenging classes while holding down a couple of jobs, volunteering her time and her talents to various organizations and causes, and helping produce Wando's multi-award winning, 400+ page yearbook, Legend.

Somehow Sophie successfully juggles school and work while never neglecting her yearbook responsibilities. First, Sophie's outgoing personality, love of education, and desire to serve are shown as she passes on her knowledge and talents to fellow students of photography. Sophie is fiercely committed to seeing her peers excel—and so she teaches! Passing on her 'eye' for the shot and mastery of the technical details of photography resulted in Wando's yearbook winning more awards for photography than any other school in the Southeast. Among these awards were three Best in Show SIPA awards for Sophie herself. And Sophie shares her talents with all. Her seats on the student boards of the SCSPA and SIPA are not honorary. She is a *working* board member. She has taught seminars at SCSPA and SIPA conferences to both students and teachers. And she is in demand because her work is *literally world-class*. Her photography and design work on the Town of Mount Pleasant Planning and Development Department 2015 Annual Report won a Hermes Creative Platinum Award. This is an international honor that also honored Fortune 500 companies such as Pepsi, Sony Pictures, Time Warner, and IBM. That's right—the creativity of a high school student from a small town on the coast of South Carolina is on the same level as that of marketing experts based in New York, Atlanta, London. But Wando's yearbook is her focus--and her responsibility. As a three-year veteran of Wando's yearbook staff, there hasn't been a day in yearbook where she wasn't a leader: sports editor as a sophomore, photo editor as a junior, and now editor in chief.

Obviously, Sophie is a well-rounded student and leader who successfully balances her educational and extracurricular activities with a wide range of interests. When she crosses the stage at graduation, she will wear academic cords around her neck and have an armful of awards. But this is not the whole picture. Sophie, more so than any other student I know, is *fiercely committed to fighting the good fight*. Whether she is writing an essay about social injustices against women in *Things Fall Apart* (and her essay was the best I read that year) or commemorating the good people who died in the shooting at Mother Emmanuel, she refuses to pass by, much less cooperate, with injustice. As adults, we often try to shelter children from anger, fear, and violence, but Sophie will have none of that. We are in desperate need of adult journalists who seek and convey the true story, the truth. At Wando, we have been lucky enough to teach and mentor and launch a young woman who can't even conceive of the alternative. In a world of 'alternative facts', Sophie faces the truth and never flinches. She is, without question, the SCSPA Journalist of the Year.

Giselle Cheeseman
English teacher, Wando High School