

FROM THE DESK OF

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**KARIN MCKEMEY**

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Leslie Dennis  
SCSPA/SIPA  
School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
800 Sumter St  
Columbia SC 29208

Dear Leslie;

This recommendation for Zoe Cruz as South Carolina student journalist of the year is going to be extremely hard for me because I don't know if I can adequately describe how outstanding this young woman is. Trying to find the right words to reflect her character, tenacity, leadership and passion is a struggle because I know you are going to get dozens of applications - all will be outstanding in their respective programs; all will be exceptional students and leaders and I'm so afraid my humble words won't do her justice.

Zoe is so much more than a standout Journalism student. Sure- she is an excellent writer, videographer, interviewer and editor. She has a passion for information and sharing that information with others but she also has a very special talent. She is one of the most gifted students I've ever had in any of my classes at Fort Mill High School. She has deftness, an intuition, a singular sense of production values when it comes to putting together a television news story. She marries words and pictures like few others. What she does is so professional, it would stand out in any network news broadcast, and we are just a High School TV news program.

Now I say "just" a High School news program but to stand out in a mediocre broadcast is not extremely difficult. To stand out in a nationally ranked, highly regarded broadcast news program changes the game entirely. And it is because of Zoe, that we have received so many accolades over the past two years. Her presence, confidence and natural ability is something I rarely see in a high school student.

Currently, Zoe is an anchor and reporter for our weekly broadcast - "The Buzz TV". The competition to be part of the TV staff is extremely stiff and the students take their jobs very seriously, however Zoe is one of those exceptional students who comes in early and stays late because if she is anchoring the show - she wants it to be perfect. There have been nights when even the Janitorial staff is ready for her to leave!

Her dedication to not just the show, but the field of Broadcast Journalism, is unmatched. She doesn't just want to tell stories, she wants to tell them with integrity and believes wholeheartedly in the power of this medium to change lives. And it's not just Zoe being a star - she is one of those kids that just brings up everyone around her.

Her genuine likability makes other students push to work with her and her just plain niceness allows even the most insecure student to feel so comfortable. She loves the news, she loves journalism, and her enthusiasm and passion makes others want to participate.

Zoe's talent has not just been evident to me - over the last three years I have had the pleasure of teaching her in my broadcast journalism classes, she has gone on to win South Carolina Student Press Association 2016 "Best Reporter" as a junior, Southeastern Interscholastic Press Association "Best News Story", Student Television Network 2nd Place "Best Anchor" at the 2016 national convention and nominated for several NATAS Student Emmy Awards. Recently, The Buzz TV was honored by STN as the best student weekly broadcast in the Southeast- the show submitted had Zoe as the anchor- and we haven't even begun to start submitting pieces she has written and produced during her senior year!

I would love to say that it all comes easy to her, that Zoe has lead a charmed and privileged life where she can totally focus on her passions and dreams- but that is what makes this kid extra special. She has had to overcome quite a few personal struggles and hardships outside of school. I've seen kids completely fall apart after experiencing far less but her tenacity; her ability to pick herself up and keep going is what sets her apart. Please know, I never take recommendations lightly- I always try to speak to each prospective students' individuality and potential greatness- however nothing I say here will do justice to the student, and more importantly the person that Zoe is. She really is one of those "once in a lifetime" students that makes me love what I do every day and I truly hope you will consider her as a top candidate for the South Carolina Journalist of the Year.

Thank you so much for your time and your consideration. I look forward to watching Zoe's passion for Journalism continue to grow at the next level!

Karin McKemey  
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