Ashley Wardle has asked me to write a letter of recommendation in support of

her application to the New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Ph.D. program in American Studies; I am happy to do so. I have known Ashley since she entered our graduate program two years ago. In her first semester she was a student of mine in a seminar that I co-taught, Globalization and Ethics. The next semester she was my graduate assistant. And throughout her time in the program, I have been her mentor and am the faculty member most familiar with her body of work. Furthermore, Ashley and I worked together with other faculty and students organizing resistance to the austerity measures instituted by the California State University Board of Trustees and the San Diego State Administration.

I have been teaching at San Diego State for twenty years and I teach lower division general education courses, upper division courses, and graduate seminars. I also have been on the thesis committees and comprehensive exam committees of more than thirty students, five of whom are currently fully funded in Ph.D. programs at elite universities. I mention this primarily as way of indicating the groups with which I will be comparing Ashley.

For the purposes of a letter of recommendation, I evaluate students four ways that I think will be helpful in making a decision about the applicant. They are general intelligence which includes ranking within cohort, knowledge base, critical thinking skills and research skills.

First, Ashley is the best student in her cohort by far and I would rank her in the top five per cent intellectually of students that I have taught at San Diego State. This latter group includes not just graduate students but undergraduate students and would be over five thousand students. She has a good general knowledge base that has become broader in the last two semesters as she has developed a focus for her research. And she has a sharp mind which makes her able to digest ideas quickly and critically. Her paper in the globalization seminar was the best in the class and reflected very positively on her

critical thinking skills. The paper was an overview of different types of resistance throughout the world to neoliberal policies. I think this paper planted a seed which developed later into her central research focus, student resistance to neoliberalism and student unionism.

Her real strength though is research where she has done superior work. As part of the Field Practicum, she did a qualitative study of welfare workers and the impact on their jobs and their clients as the result of a type of Fordism being imposed on the work process. The results of the study were published as a report by the Center for Policy Initiatives and received widespread attention. She did an equally impressive and very interesting quantitative study which identified some of the factors determining the decisions by members of various groups not to protest even when they were sympathetic to the goals of the protest and the protestors.

Ashley has other strengths which are not evident using these criteria. The first strength is her ability to persevere in the face of adversity. She has worked full-time as a server throughout the program, and simultaneously she worked a second job, either as a graduate assistant or as a teaching assistant with multiple breakout sections. She also went through a divorce during her first year in the program and while any divorce is difficult, a divorce when one is young, working two jobs and going to school is especially difficult. Her second strength is her passion for social justice and she is a committed advocate in the fight for social justice. She was the lead student organizer at San Diego State challenging, as I mentioned above, the austerity measures being imposed throughout the system of higher education in California. She was asked to and spoke at the California State legislature’s hearings on the budget crisis in California and its effects on higher education.

Another area that I can comment on is Ashley’s performance as my graduate assistant. I believe her work as my assistant reflects well on both her maturity and her commitment to teaching. She was the best graduate assistant that I have had. She was self-motivated, dependable, and pro-active. She was on time, always knew what she had to do, and did not have to be given directions. And she did much more than was required

by the job description. She held office hours, review sessions, and tutored students.

I highly recommend Ashley for the program without qualification and believe that she will be successful in the program, complete the program, and be an outstanding representative of the program. If I can be of any further assistance, I can be reached at [psemm@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:psemm@mail.sdsu.edu) or 619-594-5906.

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