I am dedicated to building transparent and inclusive spaces in academia, especially supporting first-generation, career-changing, and underrepresented students who often face systemic barriers. My commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is shaped by my own journey as a non-traditional academic from rural Korea, pursuing AI research without a computer science background. This experience has made me keenly aware of the unique challenges faced by students from non-traditional and marginalized backgrounds. By demystifying the *'hidden curriculum'* – the unspoken norms and expectations of academic culture – I strive to bridge knowledge gaps and foster an environment where all students can thrive.

Having entered AI as a self-taught learner without formal training in computer science, I intimately understand the obstacles posed by a lack of access to foundational knowledge and academic networks. Raised in a rural area of South Korea where STEM fields were unfamiliar to my family, my undergraduate education did not include computer science. After two years of military service (Korean Augmentation to the US Army), I began to learn programming and AI entirely from scratch, relying on online resources. Initially, I lacked even basic technical skills, such as using Linux, which made the learning process particularly challenging. My initial round of PhD applications resulted in rejections from every CS program I applied to, likely due to a lack of prior research experience. These setbacks underscored the importance of academic practices like internships, independent projects, and mentoring – elements of the hidden curriculum that often remain inaccessible to many students. Ensuring transparency and equitable access to this hidden curriculum has since become central to my approach to mentorship. When new students join our lab every year, I actively support new members in my lab by providing individualized onboarding sessions, where I share technical resources, guidance based on my early-year challenges, and information about potential collaborators, internships, and job opportunities. I have also responded to over ten prospective students seeking advice on PhD applications, offering feedback on their materials, introducing research opportunities (e.g., pre-doctoral programs), and meeting them at conferences.

Working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds – including Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Canada, Iran, Australia, Japan, Switzerland, and Bulgaria – has shaped my approach to fostering inclusion. As a recent green card holder (as of October 2024), I understand the challenges faced by international students, including navigating visa uncertainties, managing cultural transitions, and communicating in a non-native language. When new international students join our lab, I share my experiences navigating challenges as an international student, along with campus resources that I found helpful, such as the UNC Writing Center for improving English communication. Additionally, I provide insights into my green card application process and recommend law firms, helping them realize that applying for a green card may be possible much earlier than they might expect.

My research also reflects my commitment to addressing biases and fostering inclusivity in AI. In an ICCV 2023 paper (DALL-Eval), I conducted pioneering research evaluating social biases, such as gender and skin tone representation, in modern text-to-image generation models. This work was adapted into red-teaming of DALL-E 2 preview, highlighting biases in earlier versions of DALL-E 2 and aiding OpenAI in their efforts to mitigate these biases. In an interdisciplinary study co-authored with social scientist Dr. Heesoo Jang, which received the top paper award at the 2024 International Communication Association (ICA) conference, we analyzed how large language models (LLMs) report and address biases and harms in their technical reports.

Lastly, I strongly advocate for mental health awareness, support, and resources across academic and community settings. During my PhD program, I experienced the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the trauma of active shooter incidents on the UNC campus. Additionally, my military service provided me with a firsthand understanding of the mental health challenges faced by veterans transitioning to civilian and academic life. I promote mental health awareness to all students in our lab by connecting them with counseling resources.

Through mentorship, research, and advocacy, I am dedicated to creating an academic environment that prioritizes equity, supports diverse voices, and empowers all students to succeed.