

DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY / DAVID GEFFEN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT UCLA
100 Stein Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90095-7003

April 9, 2026

Dear Committee,

It is an absolute pleasure to provide this strongest letter of support for Dr. Ken Kitayama to be selected for participation in the 2026 Heed Resident Retreat. Dr. Kitayama has excelled at the highest level in both the clinical and research settings during his time in our combined PhD-Residency EyeSTAR program and is currently a PGY4. We could not be more thrilled that he has chosen to stay for a glaucoma fellowship at the UCLA Stein Eye Institute. With his impressive and robust scholarly background, Dr. Kitayama is ideally positioned for a career in academic ophthalmology and would benefit immensely from the educational and networking opportunities at the Heed retreat. **Per our discussion with Heed Ophthalmic Foundation staff, the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology is nominating three individuals for the 2026 Heed Retreat (two current PGY3 residents and one current PGY4 resident who will be our glaucoma fellow). Our department is able to provide retreat attendance funding for two of the three individuals.**

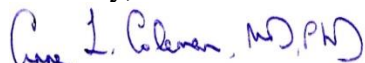
Dr. Kitayama completed his undergraduate education at Columbia University, where he performed at the highest level. He was a recipient of multiple scholarships including the Mike Jupka Jr. Memorial Scholarship Fund for four years and multiple travel grants. Dr. Kitayama received the Susan Huntington Vernon Award for his work in Latin American studies, and was also a *cum laude* graduate at Columbia. Dedicated to working with populations at need from the earliest stages of his training, Dr. Kitayama then spent two years working with AmeriCorps in East Los Angeles working in HIV prevention efforts with an underserved urban population. With his commitment to serving the underserved, Dr. Kitayama then enrolled in the highly prestigious PRIME-LA Program at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine, which provided the opportunity to complete his medical training in conjunction with a Master's degree, with a focus on leadership and advocacy throughout medical school. Dr. Kitayama thrived as a medical student at UCLA. He was again the recipient of countless scholarships for his achievements in public health and working with the community at large, including the National Medical Fellowships Primary Care Leadership Scholarship and the California Community Service Learning Program Scholarship. He received the Knights Templar Travel Grant from the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology for his outstanding research in public health. With my research lab, Dr. Kitayama independently piloted a novel method of glaucoma screening using visual field tests on iPads with the UCLA Mobile Eye Clinic (UMEC) and implemented this screening at several health fairs with UMEC. This novel study was published in the *Journal of Glaucoma* with Dr. Kitayama as first author. As a student, he already demonstrated impressive characteristics of creativity and leadership with this project with the ability work in teams and think outside the box.

Dr. Kitayama chose to continue his training at UCLA as part of the EyeSTAR program which combines PhD training with ophthalmology residency at our Institute. During his PhD, Dr. Kitayama performed innovative research investigating mediators of racial and ethnic disparities in glaucoma surgical outcomes. Dr. Kitayama forged meaningful relationships with mentors in the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and developed expertise in advanced epidemiologic methods including causal mediation analysis and social network analysis. His ability to bring these techniques into ophthalmic research has added a unique

and much-needed dimension to our traditional epidemiologic analysis techniques in ophthalmology to investigate social and environmental causes of chronic eye disease with a deeper level of rigor and understanding. These efforts have not gone un-noticed, with senior faculty colleagues from other institutions inviting Dr. Kitayama to present his work on the podium and moderate sessions on ophthalmology and public health at our national meetings despite his trainee status. Now, as a clinical ophthalmology resident, Dr. Kitayama has excelled in the clinical and surgical settings, showing that he truly has the complete package to thrive as a clinician-scientist in his academic career. Dr. Kitayama's outstanding performance in all aspects of academic ophthalmology during his time in EyeSTAR have been recognized on the university and national level with an impressive number of awards, including the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology/Research to Prevent Blindness Resident and Fellow Research Forum Award, the UCLA Stein Eye Institute Resident Research Award, the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA Excellence in Teaching with Humanism Residents and Fellows Award, and the American Public Health Association Vision Care Section Outstanding Scientific Paper Award.

In summary, **Dr. Kitayama demonstrates phenomenal abilities in research, teaching, service, and patient care, and has the complete package to thrive in a career in academic ophthalmology.** He is an exceptional candidate to participate in the Heed Resident Retreat and would benefit immensely from all the opportunities that the retreat offers. We give Dr. Kitayama our highest recommendation without reservation. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. **Dr. Kitayama is a superstar!**

Sincerely,



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