

April 26th, 2026

Re: Emily Sun, Candidate for Heed Residency Retreat

Dear Heed Retreat Selection Committee:

It is my pleasure to nominate Emily Sun for the Heed Foundation Resident Retreat. Emily is an **all-star** in our residency and represents the **prototype clinician educator leader for our field**. She is a thoughtful, driven, and highly capable resident who has already begun to distinguish herself as a future leader in academic ophthalmology. She combines **academic productivity, emotional intelligence, and a sincere desire to improve the systems around her** — exactly the type of resident who should be supported early in her trajectory.

Emily's path has been defined by excellence and purpose. She graduated **summa cum laude from Duke University**, where she was also recognized repeatedly on the Dean's List with Distinction, and then went on to **Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, where she was elected to the Gold Humanism Honor Society**. These honors reflect what we have seen from her at Columbia: she is **smart, mature, conscientious, and deeply committed to doing things the right way**.

Academically, Emily has already built an impressive and unusually coherent portfolio. Her work spans cornea, disparities research, and medical education, with peer-reviewed publications and national presentations in each of these areas. She has published on gender and underrepresented-in-medicine status in research productivity among ophthalmology residency applicants, the fate of research articles reported by residency applicants, giant cell arteritis presentation across patient populations, and ophthalmic manifestations of Down syndrome. She also has several current cornea-focused projects, including work on intracameral antibiotic use, ocular surface inflammation, corneal transplantation outcomes in older patients, and endothelial keratoplasty postoperative management. On top of her scholarly work, she has also found time to read and study, earning the **Harkness Award this year for highest OKAP score from the residency cohort**.

What stands out most about Emily is not simply that she gets things done — it is that her work has a clear point of view. She is interested in how ophthalmology trains people, how academic careers develop, how inequities emerge, and how systems can be improved for patients and trainees. She has presented at AUPO, Women in Ophthalmology, the Eye Bank Association of America, NANOS, and the World Cornea Congress, among others. She has also already begun participating nationally through Women in Ophthalmology's Academic Research Network, Speaker Training Task Force, and Social Media/Outreach Committee, while locally serving as a Resident Mentor for Diversity at Columbia and as a member of the New York Eye-Bank Leadership Council.

Within our residency, **Emily is a natural and tireless leader**, and she has brought the same thoughtfulness and initiative. She has contributed to efforts to strengthen intern education, formalize aspects of the wet lab curriculum, create resources for junior residents, and improve the training environment. She has also **greatly contributed to residency culture**, singing in our a cappella group, the Harkness Tonometers, and writing lyrics for our graduation musical videos. This is exactly the kind of work that does not always receive immediate external recognition, but it is the work that makes a residency program better. Emily sees gaps, thinks carefully about solutions, and then follows through. She will most likely become **Chief Resident** in her class.

Clinically, Emily is excellent. She is composed, mature, kind, and dependable. She brings a calm thoughtfulness to patient care and a high level of professionalism to every interaction. She is the type of resident who earns trust because she is prepared, self-aware, and focused on the patient in front of her. She is the kind of doctor that I would send all of my family members to.

Emily also has a rare level of insight into what a career in academic ophthalmology can be. In her personal statement, she describes how her early experiences at AUPO shaped her view of academic ophthalmology as not only the advancement of scientific knowledge, but also the improvement of the systems that support learners and patients. She has articulated a clear long-term goal of becoming an academic cornea specialist and clinician-educator, with the aspiration to contribute through curriculum development, mentorship, research, and national leadership.

In summary, Emily is an **exceptional resident with the intellect, work ethic, compassion, and vision to become a leader in academic ophthalmology.** She says she wants to become a **future Residency Program Director**, and the program that she eventually leads will greatly benefit from her leadership. Hopefully it's ours! She has already shown the ability to contribute meaningfully to scholarship, education, mentorship, and systems improvement. She is exactly the type of candidate who will both benefit from and contribute meaningfully to the Heed Resident Retreat. We give her our strongest recommendation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me (RWSC) at 617-519-0597 or rc2631@cumc.columbia.edu with any questions or concerns. Emily has waived her right to see this letter. Please note that if both of our residents are accepted for the retreat, our department will support the second resident.

Sincerely,



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