

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

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*Jeeho Ahn*

*Applying for Ph.D. in Robotics*

During my school years, I moved from country to country, and have been fortunate in life to have traveled around the world twice. While my life has not been a static or sedentary one, my answer to the question about my life's calling has never changed: to be a robotics engineer who saves lives. I was just 12 years old when I built my first robot. I won a series of robotics competitions with a line tracer I made, but it was not the awards that drove me; rather, it was the future I envisioned to make the world a better place with robots. For this reason, I was immensely shocked when I heard that DARPA had failed to deploy any of its robots in relief efforts in the wake of the nuclear explosion in Fukushima, Japan, in 2011. Participating in the DARPA Robotics Challenge (DRC) Finals 2015, the competition inspired by the tragedy, I realized that to bring about the change I wanted to see in the world, intelligence in robots would have to grow exponentially, something which would only be achieved through academic studies.

At the end of my undergraduate program, I was offered to join a DRC contestant team as an intern. Although I had to postpone my graduation, I could not turn down the opportunity. At the competition, I witnessed robots from teams affiliated with renowned names, MIT, CMU, and even NASA, failing to complete the most basic tasks. To understand what was under the hood, I visited the booths of other groups to have discussions, and I concluded that what needed to be improved were not technical skills but mathematics and theories that could bridge the gap. Ultimately, it led me to pursue my goal in academia.

My multicultural experience will prove I fit the best in the perspective of divergence at the University of Michigan. I failed to justify the "study-first-think-later" approach in Korean education, and I convinced my parents to send me to schools in a different country. I started going to a school in Ireland, but it meant I had to be on the other side of the earth without my family living with me at age 14, with no internet at home. The challenge was an excellent chance to learn to view everything from a different perspective in Irish society, which also helped me adjust to the American school composed of a fairly diverse student body.

Pursuing a Ph.D. is not a decision to be taken lightly but is a decision to which I am firmly committed. I have no doubt about my preparedness for the program, and this is easily recognizable by my experience as a published researcher. Not only do I have multiple publications for a prestigious conference, but I also have hands-on experience on the ground. In sum, I believe my experience, background, commitment, and dedication, as outlined in this statement, make me an ideal candidate for the doctoral program in Robotics at the University of Michigan.