1. **What do you hope to get out of participating in the CICS Early Research Scholars Program?**

When I hear about groundbreaking innovations, like Elon Musk’s Neuralink—which pushes the boundaries of technology to improve lives and enables individuals with paralysis to control computers with their thoughts, I’m inspired to dream big and explore what’s possible.

Pursuing such ambitious goals requires hands-on experience and a deep understanding of the research process, and I believe ERSP provides a platform to develop the necessary research skills. I find the prospect of working under the guidance of an expert faculty advisor, towards their projects very exciting. Such a learn-as-you-go atmosphere would be an incredible opportunity for me to be trained in conducting computer science research. Additionally, I can build familiarity with data collection tools and develop the ability for data analysis as I learn to collect data and use various software libraries (Pandas, NumPy, etc.) on the job. These would serve me very well in the future, considering my pursuit of a career in data science.

Furthermore, the opportunity to work in teams with other equally passionate students makes this program more appealing. Such a collaborative atmosphere would only lend itself to the free flow of ideas. So, I can hear out my teammates’ ideas and their unique approaches to addressing research problems, fostering an environment where we can learn from each other and improvise. Plus, by working in teams, I envision myself learning to divide and conquer a large research task by effectively splitting them among my team members, while learning to set and meet deadlines.

So, ability to work collaboratively in teams? Check. Ability to manage time effectively by balancing coursework and research responsibilities? Check. Ability to stick to schedules and prepare ahead? Check. ERSP would be an incredible opportunity to showcase and strengthen these soft skills while growing as a computer scientist.

These transferable skills will help me excel in this program and serve me well in any future role I pursue. Therefore, research experience in ERSP would undoubtedly be a high-value addition to my resume.

1. One goal of this program is to broaden access to university research to students who have faced barriers – financial commitments, lack of role models/community/knowledge of graduate study, first-generation, etc. **Please describe how your participation in this program would be helpful to you or to those with such life experiences.**

Growing up in a small hometown with limited opportunities, I have faced unique challenges that make the CICS Early Research Scholars Program (ERSP) a crucial stepping stone for me. My parents’ financial situation poses the most significant challenge. They are self-employed in the increasingly competitive dental industry back home. Their dental practice has had to withstand fierce competition, and their income has suffered from bouts of instability. When coupled with my country’s sky-high tax rates, it becomes very evident how it is a struggle for my parents to support my education in the U.S. – where tuition costs are high and financial aid options for international students are limited. These circumstances compel me to make the most of every opportunity.

Adding to these financial challenges is the fact that my hometown lacks resources for aspiring computer scientists like myself. My high school placed little emphasis on extracurriculars and research, leaving me with minimal exposure to research and a limited understanding of what research actually entails. Furthermore, I lacked role models in computer science that shared my circumstances and experiences, making it difficult to envision a path forward.

As an international, adjusting to the new culture here in the States has brought its own challenges – particularly when it comes to approaching professors for research-related guidance, which can be intimidating. The F-1 visa restrictions that prevent me from pursuing off-campus research roles only add to the list of constraints, narrowing my opportunities for research experience to on-campus avenues.

The CICS Early Research Scholars Program, to me, presents a rare opportunity to address these gaps. Its collaborative and guided environment would provide the support I need to overcome these barriers. My participation in this program would help me gain hands-on research experience under the mentorship of a faculty expert – something that would otherwise be inaccessible to me. Additionally, by participating in this program, I develop my ability to communicate and collaborate effectively in a research setting, while learning to use essential software on the job. These skills would prepare me for success in research environments and, importantly, grow my confidence to take on more advanced challenges later in my career.

Equally important is the kind of example I would be setting for students from underrepresented backgrounds. By contributing to something meaningful and potentially making a difference in the real world via ERSP, I can show them that it is possible to thrive despite a lack of role models. Therefore, participation in this program represents an opportunity not only to overcome my own struggles but also to inspire others to chase their goals and make the most with what they have, not letting their circumstances limit them.

1. Another goal of ERSP is to promote and support a diverse CICS community along many dimensions including (but not necessarily limited to) gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, ability, sexual orientation, etc. **Explain how your participation would help to build this community or how you would create a space where students from all groups feel included.**

**(2 parts of the question to address)**

As an international student from a modest socioeconomic background, I have faced several challenges – notably, that of growing up in a small hometown with limited resources and opportunities. However, it has taught me to make the most out of every opportunity and approach challenges with resilience, and I believe that is an invaluable perspective I can bring to the Early Research Scholars Program. By voicing my ideas and actively contributing to the group, I hope to encourage others from similarly modest or disadvantaged backgrounds to do the same. As the film Coach Carter aptly puts it, ‘As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.’ This sentiment reflects my belief in how inspiring it can be to embrace our unique perspectives and voice them out.

I understand that diversity is not just about representation but about fostering an inclusive space where everyone and their contributions are acknowledged and valued. I would actively strive to be a good team player, respecting people’s identities and fostering an atmosphere where ideas can flow freely. For instance, I would make it a priority to ask for and use people’s desired pronouns, ensuring that non-binary members feel validated. Such simple acts of respect can go a long way in creating a sense of belonging.

Additionally, I would work to amplify the voices of any students from historically disadvantaged communities, acknowledging their challenges and celebrating the unique perspectives they bring to the table. Even if it’s just a germ of an idea that’s not fully developed, I would encourage them to share it. There’s always a possibility that the idea holds potential, and together, we could work to improvise and refine it. Encouraging open dialogue and making everyone feel comfortable sharing their ideas would be my priority.

For those who may have experienced challenges tied to their nationality, such as coming from regions affected by conflict or instability, I would approach their experiences with empathy. Plus, I believe in positive reinforcement. So, good ideas would be appreciated, and even ideas that miss the mark would be acknowledged. The effort is what matters. The goal would be to foster a space free of judgement, where everyone feels safe and included – whether it is in group interactions or research activities.

I also understand how important it can be to address accessibility concerns for people with disabilities. I would attempt to ensure materials are usable by everyone and adjust my communication and other aspects of group interactions to accommodate their needs. Creating a collaborative environment that highlights everyone’s strengths, rather than their limitations, is an important step in building a truly inclusive community.

Ultimately, I believe that the strength of ERSP lies in the diversity of its participants. By listening to and learning from their inputs, and supporting their identities, I hope to participate in a community where everyone feels empowered to achieve and contribute. I’m committed to helping ERSP remain a space where students from all walks of life feel inspired and valued.