When I took a ride on a Tesla automobile for the first time, I was surprised that the vehicle could depict streets and surroundings in detail on the screen, just like humans perceive the world. This experience triggered my passion for self-driving vehicles and propels me to step into the field of Artificial Intelligence, especially regarding Computer Vision (CV) and Natural Language Processing (NLP). I am applying to the M.S. in Computer Science at the University of Maryland (UMD) because it provides me with an environment to develop real-world applications and solve social issues with a group of outstanding members.

During my undergraduate studies, I turned my expectations into action by participating in diverse courses. For instance, the Transfer Learning assignment in the Machine Learning course impressed me since it changed streetscapes into different styles and strengthened the ability of autonomous vehicles to move in a variety of environments. Hence, I combined semi-supervised learning to improve the performance and utilized PCA visualization to observe the latent space. My work earned recognition when it was selected as exemplary. Additionally, I implemented “Land and Road Detection” in the final project of the Robot Vision course. The experience cultivated my ability to utilize traditional CV to build a practical application, reinforcing my competence in the self-driving car industry. To hone my ability to work independently and collaboratively, I joined several research projects in my senior year.

To begin with, I took part in the Vision and Learning Lab led by Prof. Yu-Chiang Wang to develop neural networks related to CV. After winning 1st Place in the Deep Learning for Computer Vision Final Project, I became determined to focus on Face Anti-Spoofing (FAS) as my research topic. To address the image domain shift problems in FAS, I designed a disentanglement representation framework that disentangled facial liveness features and liveness-irrelevant features. The work was awarded 2nd Place in the Bachelor Thesis Award and submitted to AAAI for publication after further refinement. Reviewing the latest papers about FAS and transforming knowledge into a successful framework cultivated my ability to analyze technology trends and propose novel ideas to solve problems.

To understand more about public needs, I gained industry experience by participating in the industry-academia cooperation project on Fisheye Face Recognition, which was supervised by Prof. Homer H. Chen. Aside from working with the team to develop the Smart Face Recognition Access Control, I also improved the recognition rate from 98% to 100% successfully by developing a continuous image mechanism. To overcome the barriers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we also researched Masked Face Recognition and effectively achieved state-of-the-art performance, which research outcome was accepted by ICCE. The lessons I learned from the project were not only professional knowledge but also positive attitudes to face stress and frustration.

At first, my unfamiliarity with identifying and resolving the core problems has often resulted in harsh criticism from my supervisor. I was overwhelmed by stress and was afraid to take part in meetings. However, I soon realized that dodging problems would put me several steps behind my goals; therefore, I actively consulted the experience of senior peers and solicited guidance from the supervisor to address the issues that I encountered. Gradually, I turned the challenge into an opportunity for self-learning and advancement. Since then, I have pinpointed potential problems accurately and leveraged systematic and efficient approaches to tackling them. I was even recommended by my supervisor to deliver a speech about my research experience to undergraduates. This experience has fostered my forward-looking mindset and armed me with the ability to turn stumbling stones into building blocks whenever I came across obstacles.

In addition to CV, it was smart conversational robot systems that made me realize the importance of NLP in the automobile industry. Therefore, I actively participated in the research of Question Answering, under the guidance of Prof. Hung-Yi Lee, to lay my foundation in the field. My efforts paid off when I led my team to reproduce a state-of-the-art model in the ShARC dataset. In the next stage, I plan to research multi-user reading comprehension machines and obtain deeper knowledge about Speech Processing from online courses, both of which are promising techniques in intelligent vehicles. The research outcome and future plans show my sufficient background knowledge in AI industries and strong executive ability.

I pay close attention to social issues and strive to stay on top of global development. Hence, I hope to pursue a field that enables me to address the most urgent needs of our society. According to my observation, the "road rage" phenomenon is prevalent in many countries, including Taiwan. Often, drivers refuse to give in to each other and resort to irrational quarrels since they treat each other as objects instead of subjects. I believe that more connections can be established between the drivers and the automobiles to create a friendlier and safer road environment. By integrating the existing self-driving system and AI-backed voice-activated robot technology, I seek to make driving more humanized to alleviate the problem of road rage.

In this regard, UMD’s M.S.-CS program offers essential training with distinguished faculty for students to become experts in AI. For example, Prof. John Aloimonos’s research on integrating CV, NLP, and Robotics to advance collaborative robots strongly appeals to me. In particular, the “Forecasting Action through Contact Representations from First Person Video” project focuses on human action prediction and anticipation, which could be further applied to self-driving systems since automobiles need to have a deeper understanding of human behaviors. The research topic is in line with my aspiration to create automobile applications with AI techniques and my unique experience in several CV and NLP projects. Also, I am interested in Prof. Abhinav Shrivastava’s research on developing machines with visual perception abilities. I look forward to involving in the "Pursuit of Knowledge: Discovering and Localizing Novel Categories using Dual Memory” project, which makes self-driving vehicles smarter to perceive various objects on the road. Attending your program would prepare me for assuming positions in the Research and Development department in a related industry after graduation, such as Argo AI, Waymo, Tesla, etc.

UMD's diversified courses and solid training will give me an in-depth understanding of Artificial Intelligence, cultivating my competitive edge when entering the workforce. I am confident that my persevering and creative personality will allow me to contribute to the diversity of UMD and begin a successful career in my field of interest.