

2024 Jae-won Lee Distinguished Service Award

Note from the Chair of the Service Award Committee

Dr. Taehyun Kim (California State University, Northridge)

Dear KACA,

As the Chair of the Jae-won Lee Distinguished Service Award Committee, I would like to congratulate Dr. Jinae Kang at East Carolina University on receiving this honor.

I agree with the reviewers who spoke highly of your servant-leadership approach, recognizing your authentic kindness, genuine humility, and long lasting commitment to the Korean American Communication Association (KACA). In smaller organizations like ours, where resources and manpower are often limited, leadership qualities like these can be challenging to sustain and are often underappreciated.

Dr. Kang's commitment to KACA truly reflects Dr. Jae-won Lee's dedication for KACA, and this award is a well-deserved recognition of your invaluable contributions and leadership. Congratulations again!

Jae Won Lee Distinguished Service Award Acceptance Remark



Dr. Jin-Ae Kang (East Carolina University)

Thank you. I must say I am truly honored to be the recipient of the Jae Won Lee Distinguished Service Award this year. When **Dr. Taehyun Kim (California State U – Northridge)**, the award committee chair called to tell me that I had been nominated, I was taken aback – there was a moment of silence followed by my awkward laughter. He might have been a bit embarrassed, but the truth is, it was too good to believe, and I was not sure I deserved it. Nevertheless, an inner voice said, ‘Jin-Ae, someone nominated you because they saw your heart. Don’t be shy. Be brave – accept this honor and live your life as a leader worthy of it.’

That was one of the yeses that I said to the KACA. Indeed, many wonderful things have happened when I said “yes” to the invitation to serve.

In August 2018, I sat in the back of the ballroom at the opening session of KACA's 40th anniversary conference in Washington DC. In the session, all the KACA's leaders sat in one place. I felt both intimidated and excited, marveled that KACA had reached this milestone. I thought about the leaders who had founded and sustained this association for four decades. I silently prayed, "I want to be a part of this great community. What should I do? I would love to serve like these leaders – but maybe ten years later when I turn 50, since I don't feel ready now." Though that prayer was only a few seconds long, I never forgot it. Opportunities to serve arose sooner than I expected even if I didn't feel ready.

Since then, I have said "yes" to opportunities to serve KACA. Looking back, I am grateful to so many fellow KACA leaders and members. For example, **Dr. Chang Wan Woo (James Madison U)** invited me to his KACA-ICA committee; that was my first "yes" to KACA. Working together at the 2018 ICA conference in Prague was an absolute joy. I discovered a knack for collecting membership dues, haha! **Dr. Seungahn Nah (U of Florida)** later invited me to be nominated for the KACA-ICA VP in 2019, and **Dr. Eyun-Jung Ki (U of Alabama)** and **Dr. Moon J. Lee (Syracuse U)** encouraged me to run for president in 2021. Without their invitation and encouragement, I would not have moved forward.

Years of my service in KACA, though, have been marked by perseverance. I needed unwavering optimism and hope – values handed down by past leaders and strengthened by the officers I have worked with. I needed those who would say "yes" to serve.

With that being said, I am grateful to those who accepted my invitation to serve. **Dr. David Do Kyun Kim (University of Louisiana- Lafayette)** took on the role of inaugural editor-in-chief of the *Korean Journal of Communication*, even without a publisher contract in place, bringing an optimism that lifted us all. **Dr. Yeonsoo Kim (University of Texas – Austin)** played a pivotal role in connecting KACA with the University of Texas Press, stepping up and taking an action at just the right time. **Dr. YoungJu Shin (George Washington University)** has supported me since we first connected through KACA's global outreach committee in 2018, even arranging the conference venue for KACA on her campus in Washington DC these days.

I deeply appreciate my past officers and current KACA conference planning committee members. Their expertise, passion, encouragement, and friendship have made me feel wiser and more confident than I ever could have been alone. This has never been a solo effort; we've achieved everything as a team, and I feel incredibly lucky to work alongside such talented and resourceful people.

Sometimes, unexpected "yesses" have come to KACA without even asking. **Dr. David Jeong (Santa Clara University)** reached out to establish a scholarship for KACA student members – and now we have David Tae Yong Cho Memorial Scholarship. **Dr. Nojin Kwak (SUNY-Buffalo)** consistently supported us with conference reception sponsorships. A year ago, he and **Dr. Dal Yong Jin (Simon Fraser University)** shared the vision for KACA's annual

conferences and secured funding for our future. How could I turn it down when their vision aligned so perfectly with our next steps? I can only say thank you to every one of you.

Above all, I am thankful to KACA's founding father, **Dr. Jae Won Lee, and his family** for their dedication to KACA. I sometimes try to imagine the courage it must have taken for him to establish this association nearly 50 years ago when there were only a handful of Korean scholars in the US. His service extended beyond the Korean scholarly community, leaving a legacy that stands as a true example of leadership for Korean communication scholars and beyond.

I am also grateful to my director at ECU's School of Communication, **Dr. Laura Prividera** for supporting my KACA-related travels and reducing some of my internal service responsibilities so I could focus on KACA. I can't exclude **Dr. Linda Kean**, Dean of ECU's College of Fine Arts and Communication. My college and school sponsored KACA's reception at the 2022 ICA annual conference. I couldn't have come this far without this support.

To my family, thank you. Esther was seven and Joshua was five when I began to serve KACA. Sometimes they got tired of waiting for me and popped up at the end of the Zoom meetings, waving hello to everyone. Now, Esther is a highschool freshman and Joshua is already a 7th grader. Though they haven't always enjoyed having a busy mom, they sometimes called me "Madam President" for fun. I also want to thank my husband, Joseph, who has made everything possible for me. Whenever I had evening meetings, he took care of the kids and meals, and when we went to conferences together, he took the children on excursions so I could focus on my responsibilities. Sometimes, they had so much fun without me. Their adventures even made me a bit jealous at times.

In closing, KACA has truly been a home away from home. I once thought I was serving this community, but I now realize how deeply I've been blessed by it. This community reminds me of who I am and where my academic life is rooted. The mentors and friends I've found in KACA constantly inspire me to be a better scholar, a stronger leader, and a better human. Thank you, KACA members. I promise to live as a leader worthy of this honorable award. Now I invite each of you to serve KACA and beyond – will you join us?