

# *The Learning Community International*



Graduation

Class of 2025

Saturday  
June 7, 2025



# The Learning Community International



## Our Mission

*Empowering individuals to reach their highest potential through a customized and collaborative process of reflection, self-evaluation and self-correction to achieve their educational goals.*



## Administration



**Nancy De Luca Stempel**  
**Executive Director**



**Manfred Smith**  
**Principal Director**



**Romana Hughes**  
**Director Academic Affairs**



**John Ghim**  
**Associate Director,  
East Asia**



**Jeanne Smith**  
**Associate Director**

TLCI is an accredited private school offering an educational alternative since 1984  
Columbia, MD 21045  
[www.tlcischool.org](http://www.tlcischool.org)

# Graduation Celebration

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

**Manfred Smith**  
**Principal Director**

**Romana Hughes**  
**Director Academic Affairs**

**John Ghim**  
**Assoc. Director, East Asia**

## Graduate Reflections

**Joyce Dahyun Ghim**  
**Jason Christopher Hale**  
**Woobin Jo**  
**Hyunjin Lee**  
**Jaeyoung Lee**  
**Nakyung Lee**  
**Raquel Maria McDowell Link**  
**Michael Wijaja**  
**Heejin Won**

## Closing

**Nancy De Luca Stempel**  
**Executive Director**

# Opening Remarks



**Manfred Smith**  
**Principal Director**

Congratulations graduates from Indonesia, South Korea, and the United States. I'm Manfred Smith, principal director of the Learning Community International.

Unlike the millions of high school seniors who have graduated from high school since our founding in 1984, you have made the choice to be a learner at the most unique school in the world: TLCI, the school for one: YOU.

A school for one where you can choose a truly individualized educational program that is aligned with your interests and goals. A school for one that can be customized to ensure that you can study the most diverse array of topics imaginable to achieve your short and long-term goals.

A school for one where none of our 1350 graduates have followed an identical educational program. Where no two graduates have an identical transcript. A school for one where no two graduates have the same background, the same interests, or the same goals.

Besides providing you with a most unique opportunity to shape your program and follow your passion, all of us at TLCI are also focused on your success long after you have graduated. Every graduate since 1984 has confronted challenges in college, career, and life. And that has not changed.

Today, Artificial Intelligence is one of many challenges that you will confront. You have heard that AI will replace hundreds of thousand, millions of jobs currently employed by humans... or not. There is great debate about the threat of AI and how to prepare for its use throughout business and government.

Like the challenges faced by graduates decades ago, TLCI's unique individualized program provides you with the tools to negotiate a host of challenges ranging from an economic slowdown to an AI apocalypse.

IBM has recently replaced hundreds of jobs with AI. Jobs that AI could handle more efficiently. But that is only part of the story. According to Arvind Krishna, IBM's CEO, the company has hired more workers than were eliminated by AI.

These new jobs require "critical thinking...as opposed to rote work." Jobs where workers need to deal directly with other humans to arrive at solutions and successful outcomes.

The jobs of this AI future align perfectly with TLCI's approach to learning. Critical life skills such as self-reflection, self-evaluation, and self-correction. Proven strategies for success in life such as accepting personal responsibility for your choices and actions, self-motivation, and adopting lifelong learning.

You will face many new and old challenges as you move forward in your life. Employing the success strategies that you have learned as part of your unique TLCI experience will allow you to succeed in any endeavor you choose.

***Congratulations graduates of 2025! Make yours a life worth living.***



**Romana Hughes**  
**Director Academic Affairs**

Families, friends, TLCI staff, and most importantly, our graduating seniors — welcome. I am Romana Hughes, most of you know me as Romy. I am the Director of Academic Affairs and an Advisor for TLCI.

Today is a celebration not just of completed coursework or finished projects, but of something much deeper: the journey each of you has taken to become a thoughtful, engaged learner and a confident architect of your future.

At The Learning Community International, learning is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Each of you is living proof of that belief. You have built your education with your own hands—through your passions, interests, talents, and yes, sometimes through your struggles, too. You didn't just check off boxes to meet requirements; you cultivated a learning experience that was uniquely yours.

One of my greatest joys at TLCI is working with families to design Individual Learning Plans and customized courses that honor who you are. To me, education is not about simply preparing for tests or assignments — it's about building a lifelong love of learning and providing you with the tools to shape your future. It's about active learning, where you didn't just sit back and absorb — you questioned, created, and explored.

Today, we honor not just what you know but also how you have learned: with curiosity, persistence, creativity, and heart.

Throughout your time at TLCI, you met challenges with resilience. You worked through scaffolding activities that built your skills step-by-step, and you rose to meet signature assessments that measured not just knowledge but also your ability to think critically, collaborate meaningfully, and express yourself authentically.

Most of all, you stayed true to the spirit of TLCI — making learning personal, purposeful, and powerful.

Remember that your learning journey never ends as you move forward—whether into college, careers, travel, or new adventures. It just grows. Carry with you the tools, confidence, and joy you discovered here. Trust your ability to adapt, persevere, and keep your love of learning alive, no matter your path.

Graduates, we are so proud of you. You have made your education your own; now, you will make your future your own.

Congratulations, TLCI Class of 2025!

Thank you.



**John Ghim**  
**Associate Director,**  
**East Asia**

Congratulations to the class of 2025. You are closing the last page of a certain chapter in your history. Now, TLCI School is a record which cannot be erased from your history.

Year 2025 is a very memorable for all of us. I'm so proud of you and your great accomplishments. Our graduates were admitted to top tier schools such as SVA, Parsons, Pepperdine University, Case Western Reserve University, etc.

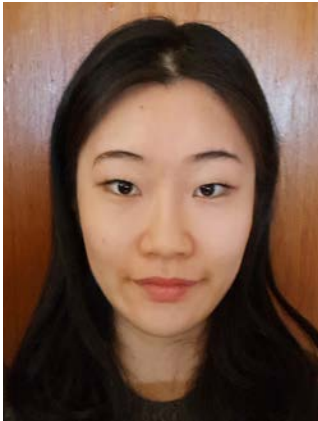
A number of graduates received scholarships and grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$300,000 for 4 years. | really appreciate all your hard work and the support given by your parents to yourselves and to TLCI.

I also want to thank the faculty and staff of TLCI and our educational providers for their hard work and support to all our students.

Congratulations on your graduation. God Bless you.



# Congratulations, Class of 2025!



**Joyce Dahyun Ghim**



**Jason Christopher Hale**



**Woobin Jo**



**Hyunjin Lee**



**Jaeyoung Lee**



**Nakyoung Lee**



**Raquel Maria McDowell Link**



**Michael Wijaja**

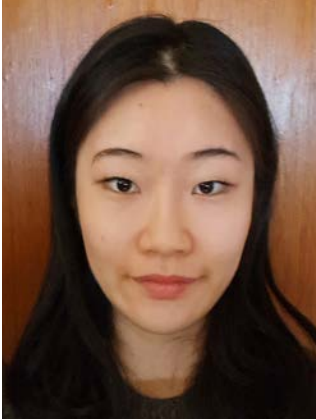


**Heejin Won**

# Graduate

## Memory Pages

---



**Joyce Dahyun Ghim**

Hi everyone, my name is Joyce, and I have been a TLCI student since 9th grade.

Reflecting on the past few years, one of my significant challenges has been writing. I graduated from a Korean middle school, so I had few chances to express my thoughts with written words. In 9th grade, when I first faced writing assignments, I panicked.

I still must spend much more effort and time writing essays than English-speaking writers. However, after four years of practice, I now take joy and fulfillment in writing.

Writing taught me how to deal with uncertainty. In the early stages, I feel stuck and wonder when I'll ever get this thing done. Like many others, brainstorming always holds me back whenever I am writing.

However, I always know that if I overcome that first phase, I can finish the work at the right time, as usual. Writing taught me to handle the chaos and see significant patterns in what felt random. The words wouldn't come some days, and I'd feel stuck. But over time, with effort and a little luck, the theme always came up in my head.

This experience has shown me that life isn't about figuring everything out. It's about moving forward, trusting that the pieces will fall into place.

As I prepare for college in the US, I have options to review and choices to make. I can take my time to make the best choices for me at this point in my life.

Looking back on the past, I've seen how challenges I once worried about eventually worked out. I have faith in myself and know that the right choices will be there when I need to make those decisions.

I will close by thanking everyone who has supported me.







**Jason Christopher Hale**

Hello, parents, students, advisors, and the TLCI community,  
My name is Jace Hale, and I'm honored to stand here today as a graduating senior. My journey to this moment has been unique, and I'd like to share a bit of it with you.

I joined The Learning Community International School (TLCI) in my junior year after facing some challenges in public school. Everything changed when I enrolled in TLCI. Here, I found a system that values flexibility, individuality, and passion for learning.

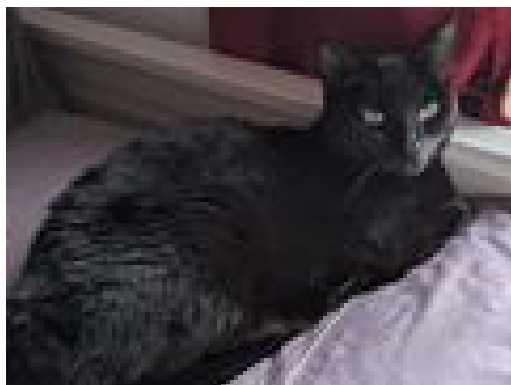
One of the things I've appreciated most about TLCI is the ability to learn at my own pace and explore topics that genuinely interest me. For example, I dove deep into the history of weapons, beginning with the Industrial Revolution and following their evolution through World War II. This wasn't just a surface-level study; I conducted a compare-and-contrast research project connecting historical weapons with those featured in Star Wars. I also focused on life skills—learning about finances and daily responsibilities essential for living independently. These lessons have given me a solid foundation for navigating the real world.

The one-on-one work sessions with my advisor have been a game-changer throughout this journey. Unlike the crowded classrooms of public schools, these sessions allowed me to ask questions, get personalized feedback, and truly understand the material.

Looking ahead, I'm excited to start college in the fall of 2025. While I don't have my path completely figured out yet, I'm eager to explore a variety of subjects to discover where my passions and talents align.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible support system around me. First, I want to thank my parents for always sitting down with me to help with my work and encouraging me when things got tough. To my grandparents—thank you for taking the time to visit museums with me, enriching my learning experience in ways that textbooks never could. To my siblings, thank you for being there for me and always finding ways to make me smile. And finally, to Romana Hughes, my advisor—your guidance, patience, and unwavering support have been invaluable. You've helped me navigate challenges and discover my potential.

I am grateful, optimistic, and proud to graduate from TLCI. It has been not only a place of learning for me but also a community of encouragement and growth. Thank you all for being a part of my journey.





**Woobin Jo**

My name is Woobin Jo, and today, standing at the finish line of high school, I can't help but reflect on the journey that brought me here.

High school wasn't just about academics or deadlines but about the moments in between. The late-night study sessions where exhaustion turned into laughter. The group projects that tested my patience but strengthened my friendships, and the unexpected detours that led to my most significant learning experiences.

If I had to describe these years in one word, it would be growth. Growth in knowledge, resilience, and understanding who I am. There were challenges—moments when I doubted myself when the pressure felt overwhelming—but those were also the moments that shaped me. I learned that failure isn't the opposite of success; it's part of it.

One of my most significant takeaways from TLCI is the power of community. No matter how tough things got, I was surrounded by people who believed in me—my family, friends, and teachers. To them, I owe a heartfelt thank you.

As I step into the next chapter, whether it be college, new experiences, or challenges I have yet to discover, I carry the lessons, the memories, and the confidence that I can face whatever comes next.





**Hyunjin Lee**

Hello, TLCI High School graduates, family, friends, and teachers!

My Name is Hyunjin Lee. It is a great honor to stand here today. I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on the past few years and share what I have learned and my plans for my future.

TLCI was not simply a place where I learned academically. I experienced different challenges, which allowed me to grow, and I built valuable relationships with many people, including classmates.

After returning to Korea from the Philippines' CIS due to COVID-19, I attended Dalton and KIS before transferring to TLCI. When I first arrived, I feared the new environment and challenges, but that fear transformed into excitement and confidence.

One of my most memorable moments was last year's graduation trip to Japan with my friends and teachers. This trip allowed me to strengthen my friendships, and it also became a valuable experience before I moved to Japan for university. The trip enhanced my eagerness to go to university in Japan.

Additionally, while completing the assignments given by my teachers throughout my time at school, I faced many difficulties. But I was able to grow through these challenges. I also experienced failures, such as turning in my work late. I learned to manage my time to finish and hand it in on time.

As I conclude my high school journey, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, who have always supported me; to my teachers, who have guided me; and to my friends, with whom I have grown together. Without you all, I would not be who I am today. Now, we are each stepping onto our new paths.

After graduation, I plan to continue my studies at a university in Japan, and I hope to keep learning and growing. Especially in economics or psychology, I would like to enhance my skills in both areas and determine what would suit my future career best. I encourage you to pursue your goals fearlessly and work towards making your dreams come true.

Lastly, graduation is not the end but a new beginning. I hope we will walk the unique and special paths we choose to succeed in life. Congratulations to the Class of 2025 on your graduation! Thank you.







**Jaeyoung Lee**

Good morning to our respected Principal, dedicated faculty, loving families, friends, and, most importantly, my fellow graduates. Today is a day of celebration, reflection, and gratitude. As I stand here, I feel an overwhelming mix of emotions—pride for what we’ve achieved, nostalgia for the journey we’ve shared, and excitement for the future that awaits us.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my father. As a college professor, he was not only a pillar of strength in my life, but also a role model of dedication and hard work. Throughout my academic journey, he did everything he could to ensure that I had every opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed. Without his sacrifice and unwavering support, I would not be standing here today. Thank you, my father, my guide, and all my TLCI teachers and TLCI School Staff for being my biggest supporters.

Reflecting on my time at this school, I am reminded of how much we’ve grown—not just academically, but as individuals. I walked into this school as a young, uncertain teenager, full of dreams but also doubts. Today, I leave as a confident, empowered young adult, ready to take on the world.

Our school has been more than just a place of learning. It has been a second home where I’ve experienced kindness, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. The dedicated teachers here have inspired us to think critically, push boundaries, and approach the world with an open mind. They taught us that education goes far beyond textbooks—it’s about understanding, empathy, and the courage to ask questions.

One of the most memorable aspects of our school is the diversity of character and thought. Here, I have had the privilege of meeting classmates with different characters and backgrounds, each with their own unique story and perspective.

Through these connections, I have learned the importance of mutual respect, tolerance, and teamwork, which I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

As we prepare to step into the next chapter of our lives, I know that challenges await us. Whether it’s addressing global issues like climate change or navigating the complexities of a fast-evolving world, the future demands resilience, creativity, and compassion. I am confident that the education, values, and experiences we’ve gained here will guide us as we face these challenges head-on.

To my fellow graduates: As we close this chapter and embark on new adventures, let us remember the friendships we’ve built, the lessons we’ve learned, and the memories we’ve created. Let us step into the world with courage, hope, and the determination to make a difference.

Finally, to our parents, teachers, and mentors: Thank you for believing in us and for shaping us into the individuals we are today. Your support has been our foundation, and your wisdom will continue to guide us as we move forward.

Congratulations, Class of 2025! The future is ours to shape. Let’s go out there and make it extraordinary. Thank you.





**Nakyoung Lee**

My name is Nakyoung Lee, and I'm a student who has always loved art. My dream is to become an interior designer in the future. Growing up, my father, an architect, inspired me. Watching him work, I naturally developed an interest in interior design.

I've always been emotional, and small things can hurt my feelings. However, when I do art, I feel like all my worries disappear, and I can focus on creating. Moreover, I struggled with subjects like Biology and History in school, but whenever I felt stressed, I would go to my art academy to relax.

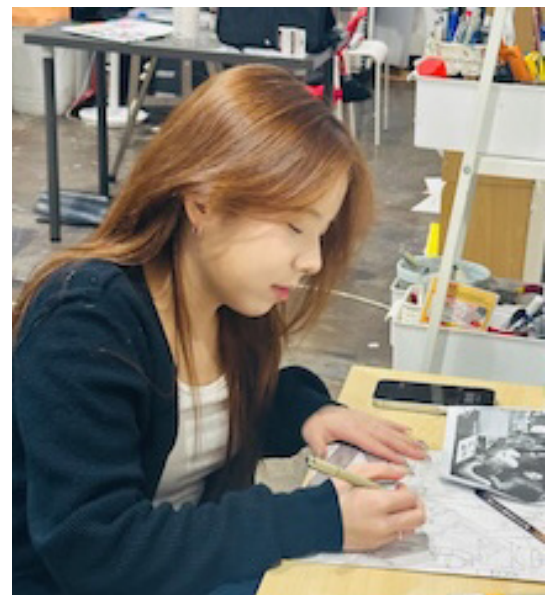
I shared many hours with my teachers and friends each week at the art academy. Whenever I had a problem, my art teachers and friends would always offer passionate advice and were always there to listen and encourage me. This support gave me the strength to keep going.

I also have a hobby of playing the marimba, a percussion instrument. Its beautiful sound is something I can't put into words. Whenever I felt stressed, I played the marimba, which helped me stay calm and even kept my grades up.

Another unforgettable experience was when I went on a school trip to Osaka. I made unforgettable memories with my friends, bringing us closer together and making school life more meaningful.

I aim to attend university, build strong connections, and succeed in my career choice. After that, I want to gain experience in the interior design field, and someday, just like my parents, I hope to start my own business and achieve something great.

Once I've reached my goals, I want to travel and live a happy, fulfilling life. Thank you.







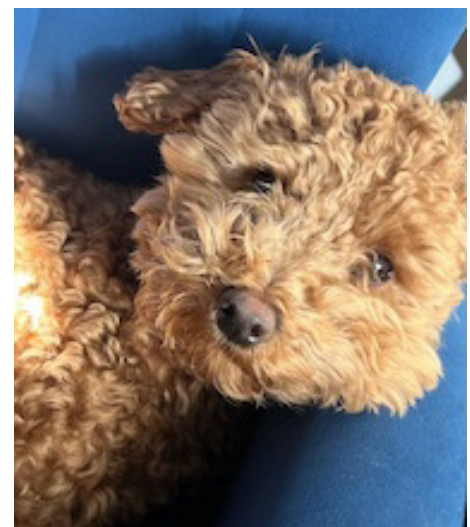
**Raquel Maria McDowell Link**

Hello, fellow TLCI students, staff, and the community. My name is Raquel. I joined TLCI in my senior year because public school wasn't working out due to my inability to keep up with the heavy workload, I was given to complete in all my classes in a short period of time. TLCI has helped me tremendously in bringing up both my grades and GPI. They've worked to help accommodate my needs to successfully ensure that I complete my work and don't feel too overwhelmed.

My educational journey was both important and impactful because I wasn't given workloads and was instead allowed to work

at a pace that was manageable and not draining, which immensely improved my educational success. During my time in the TLCI program, I've enjoyed studying criminal justice because I want to become a crime scene investigator. I've also enjoyed learning life skills because they will help me become independent in the future.

After graduating, I plan to go to Montgomery County Community College before going to a four-year college and getting my bachelor's degree in the field of criminal justice field. My experience overall in the TLCI program has been beneficial and incredible. Lastly, I would like to thank my mom, who has given me this wonderful opportunity and has supported me all throughout the way. And finally, I would like to thank Romy, who has helped keep me on track with my work by discussing the work I've completed that week, what work needs to be completed and giving me reminders on due dates during our meetings we have every week. She has also been super understanding when I've either had technical problems or wasn't feeling well. She has given me extended time, which has helped me not feel stressed and allows me to catch up on other assignments.





**Michael Wijaya**

My name is Michael Wijaya. I am from Jakarta, Indonesia. I go to school in Bina Abyakta. I am joining TLCI from grade 6. I am so happy because I finally graduated from High School this year.

I am happy and enjoy going to school every day because I can meet my friends and study together with them. At school, I learned language, math, science, social studies, P.E., art, music, and IT.

My favorite subject is IT. In IT class, I design artwork. First, I sketch pictures in my sketchbook and then trace and colour them using Adobe Illustrator. I design many things for tumblers, mugs, t-shirts, bags, and many more.

I am so proud because one of my paintings became part of a campaign with a local clothing brand called TRISET.

I loved visiting museums, zoos, and aquariums for field trips. I went to Bandung for sleepovers, too, with friends and teachers. I went there by train. It was fun.

I am looking forward to the Show and Tell session with Ms. Nancy because I can present my project to her. I was so happy and proud when Ms. Nancy enjoyed our presentation.

Thank you to Mommy, Papi, and Cici Echa for always supporting and loving me. Thank you to all the teachers for guiding me through this journey. Thank you to all my friends for always being kind to me. Lastly, thank you to Ms. Nancy and Mr. Manfred for the chance to be a TLCI student.

Thank you, everyone!







**Heejin Won**

Hello, my name is Regina Won, I transferred to this school in 11th grade. I've had so many great experiences here, learned a lot, and made memories I'll never forget. As I look toward the future, I'm excited to pursue a career in Graphic Design. It's something I've always been passionate about, and I'm eager to continue developing my skills and creativity in this field.

Over the past one year, I've learned so much, not only from textbooks but also from the people around me. From my teachers who guided me, to my classmates who became my friends, every experience helped me grow in ways I never imagined. I remember long nights of studying together with friends, sharing not just knowledge but also laughter, and even stress. Those moments of collaboration made every challenge feel a bit lighter and the successes even sweeter.

One of the most unforgettable experiences of my high school years was the school trip to Osaka, Japan. It was my first time traveling abroad, and I was amazed by the culture, the food, and the beautiful sights. The trip was not just about sightseeing, but it gave me a chance to bond with my friends in a way that went beyond the classroom. It was one of the most fun and memorable experiences I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

I'm really grateful to all the teachers who supported me and helped me grow, and to my parents for always being there. To my friends, thank you for making these years unforgettable. The memories we've created together will stay with me forever, and I'm so happy we got to share this journey. I'm excited for what comes next, but I'll always carry these moments with me.



# Closing Remarks



Nancy De Luca Stempel  
Executive Director

Caerostris darwini – The Darwin’s Bark Spider  
Discovered in 2009, Darwin’s bark spider is an orb-weaver and known for producing some of the largest and strongest webs in the world. Its webs span an incredible 140 to 4,340 square inches, with bridge lines stretching up to 82 feet across rivers. Most remarkably, its silk is the strongest natural substance known to science, 25 times stronger than steel.

That is unique—in the truest sense of the word: the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.

Founded in 1984, The Learning Community International is built on a similar principle of uniqueness. TLCI’s specialty is customized learning plans while using the whole world as the classroom. The plan is based on each learner’s inherent gifts, talents, needs, and interests, as well as their personal and academic goals.

Through a distinctive admissions process involving assessments and collaborative meetings, our learners and advisors craft each a personalized learning plan.. Every plan is truly unique because every learner is unique.

TLCI: Uniquely a Private School for One.

Today, I proudly congratulate the unique and inspiring graduates of TLCI’s Class of 2025. These students have not only achieved their academic goals—they’ve been active architects of those goals, designing personalized four-year high school plans that reflect their dreams, strengths, and ambitions.

For some, the journey began with uncertainty. But with the unwavering support of their families and the expert guidance of their advisors—grounded in Dr. Skip Downing’s On Course principles of Success—they grew into confident, self-directed learners. By embracing personal responsibility, engaging in meaningful self-reflection, and ultimately learning to believe in themselves, they’ve laid the foundation for a life of purpose and possibility.

It is my great pleasure to wish each of you continued success as you move forward. You are now equipped with the tools to intentionally create a life that matters—to you. Believe in yourself, and continue this empowered journey of lifelong learning, whether in college, in your career, or wherever life takes you next.

***Congratulations, Class of 2025. Your future is yours to shape.***

## Acknowledgements

*Video Production*  
**Alejandro Falcone**

*Editor*  
**Manfred W. Smith**

## TLCI Board of Advisors

**Skip Downing, PhD:** *Faculty Development*

**Hercules Pinkney, PhD:** *Resource Development*

**Eric Reid, CEO:** *School Improvement*

**Brooke Walker, M.Ed:** *International Enrollment*

