Minglai Yang

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Education

University of Arizona **Tucson**
B.S. in Computer Science *2023–Present*
- GPA: *4.0 / 4.0*
- Expected Graduation: December 2025 (on track to complete B.S. in 2.5 years)
- Relevant coursework available here.

Experience

Tsinghua University **Beijing, China**
Visiting Researcher *Upcoming*
- Research in faithful reasoning.

The University of Arizona, CLU-LAB **Tucson, AZ**
Undergraduate Research Assistant *Oct 2024 – Present*
- Advisor: Dr. Liangming Pan and Dr. Mihai Surdeanu
- Leading Research Project on analyzing large language models' reasoning (Preprint - First Author).
- Collaborating with Thang Duong and Dr. Chicheng Zhang on improving RL efficiency with LLM-guided warm starts (Preprint).
- Conducting research with Razvan Dumitru and Dr. Vikas Yadav on speculative decoding strategies for large language models (Preprint).

The University of Arizona, ML4AI-LAB and IVI-LAB **Tucson, AZ**
Undergraduate Research Assistant *Oct 2023 – Present*
- Advisor: Dr. Kobus Barnard and Dr. Adarsh Pyarelal
- Developing dynamic Bayesian networks and Theory of Mind models within the ToMCAT project to improve AI modeling of human coordination.
- Working on a probabilistic model to distinguish genuine interpersonal coordination from spurious synchrony.

The University of Arizona, HDC-LAB **Tucson, AZ**
Undergraduate Research Assistant *Jan 2024 – May 2024*
- Advisor: Dr. Reyan Ahmed and Dr. Stephen Kobourov
- Conducting deep learning research on graph drawing through controlled experiments, with a focus on evaluating and interpreting the behavior of Graph Neural Networks.

Coretechs **Kensington, MD**
Machine Learning Engineer Intern (Full Time) *May 2024 – Aug 2024*
- Built GPT-powered bots for Slack using retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), and integrated Slack-based live chat into the official website using JavaScript—resulting in a 57% increase in active users.
- Orchestrate end-to-end website development, including design, deployment, and management on AWS with Nginx, Docker, and services like EC2, RDS, and S3. Simulated 500+ concurrent users with Selenium to rigorously stress test the web application's performance.
- Best Intern Award

Preprints

1. *How Is LLM Reasoning Distracted by Irrelevant Context? An Analysis Using a Controlled Benchmark*
   Minglai Yang, Ethan Huang, Liang Zhang, Mihai Surdeanu, William Wang, Liangming Pan
   arXiv preprint, 2025 [preprint] [code] [slides]
2. *Improving the Data-efficiency of Reinforcement Learning by Warm-starting with LLM*
   Thang Duong, **Minglai Yang**, Chicheng Zhang
   arXiv preprint, 2025 [preprint] [code]
3. *CopySpec: Accelerating LLMs with Speculative Copy-and-Paste Without Compromising Quality*
   Razvan Dumitru, **Minglai Yang**, Vikas Yadav, Mihai Surdeanu
   arXiv preprint, 2025 [preprint] [code]

Honors and Awards

2025: **Galileo Circle Scholar**, College of Science, *University of Arizona*

2023–2025: **Academic Highest Distinction (Dean's List) (6 times)**, *University of Arizona*

2023–2025: **Global Wildcat Scholarship**, *University of Arizona*

2021: **Shanghai Science and Technology Award**, Third Prize, *Shanghai Municipal Government*

2020: **Shanghai Youth Science and Technology Innovation Competition**, Third Prize, *Shanghai Nanyang Model High School*

2018: **China National Youth Arts Competition**, First Prize (Group), *Shanghai Nanyang Model High School*

Leadership and Extracurricular Activities

AI Club at University of Arizona **Tucson, AZ**
President *Aug 2024 – Present*

- Organized workshops on AI agents and LLM applications, including a Hack Arizona event with 100+ participants.
- Led weekly lectures and invited speaker sessions to foster AI learning across disciplines.
- Organized a reading group that mentors students interested in AI research.
- Raised over $12,000 in sponsorships to support club activities and student research projects.

Teaching

Fall 2024 – Spring 2025: Instructor, Math for AI Workshop Series, AI Club, University of Arizona

Spring 2025: TA, CSC-144: Discrete Mathematics, Computer Science, University of Arizona