

# Outstanding Graduate explores AI's role in collaborative decision-making around sustainability

By Jasmine Cataño Mata, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Sola Kim's north star that guided her studies at Arizona State University was the work of Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics.

Kim knew that she wanted to build upon Ostrom's legacy that fundamentally challenged the belief that humans would always overexploit and destroy natural resources over time. Inspired by this idea, Kim sought out to work alongside scholars at ASU who are continuing Ostrom's legacy.

"Her work shifted my entire understanding of human behavior, and I knew I wanted to build on her legacy. It gave me the foundation for everything I've done since, including my research on how AI systems can either support or undermine collective decision-making in sustainability," explained Kim.

Honored as the Outstanding Graduate for the [Rob Walton College of Global Futures](#), Kim will be graduating this spring with a [PhD in sustainability](#) from the [School of Sustainability](#).

Kim has been consistently highlighted for her unique interdisciplinary research between artificial intelligence systems and sustainability research that had not yet existed in the School of Sustainability. With no clear blueprint or established network, Kim sought out opportunities and connections to create her own area of research within the constantly evolving knowledge of AI.

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**Sola Kim**

2026 outstanding graduate, Rob Walton College of Global Futures

In addition, Kim worked to find her way at ASU as a first-generation student and an international student from South Korea researching in a second language. Her dedication and perseverance through this work was supported by ASU's commitment to inclusion and success for students.

"ASU showed me that inclusivity isn't just about policy; it's about creating an environment where students from all backgrounds can actually see themselves succeeding," Kim said.

Kim also credits her supervisory committee co-chairs [Marty Anderies](#) and [Marco Janssen](#) for supporting her growth and success while researching at ASU.

"They showed me what it looks like to be a modest, sincere scholar in a field that often rewards self-promotion," Kim said. "They didn't just teach me how to do research; they taught me what kind of scholar I want to be."

Looking toward a bright future, Kim will be continuing her work at Argonne National Laboratory DuPage County, Illinois, where she will be developing an artificial intelligence system for sustainable nuclear waste management. Her goal is to ensure that AI tools are being built and used responsibly in collective decision-making.

Continue reading to learn more about Kim's experience at ASU and her innovative research in AI and sustainability decision-making.

**Question: Why did you choose ASU?**

**Answer:** I came to ASU specifically to study Elinor Ostrom's legacy with professors in the School of Sustainability, especially Professor Marty Anderies and Professor Marco Janssen. I had admired their work from afar before I ever applied, and the opportunity to learn from scholars who were actively extending Ostrom's research on collective action and the commons was something I couldn't find elsewhere. Beyond that, the College of Global Futures was one of the few programs in the country that genuinely supported interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. I wanted to combine AI and sustainability, and most institutions would have told me to pick one. ASU gave me the space to pursue both, and the faculty gave me the trust to build something new. That combination of intellectual heritage and openness to new directions is what made my decision clear.

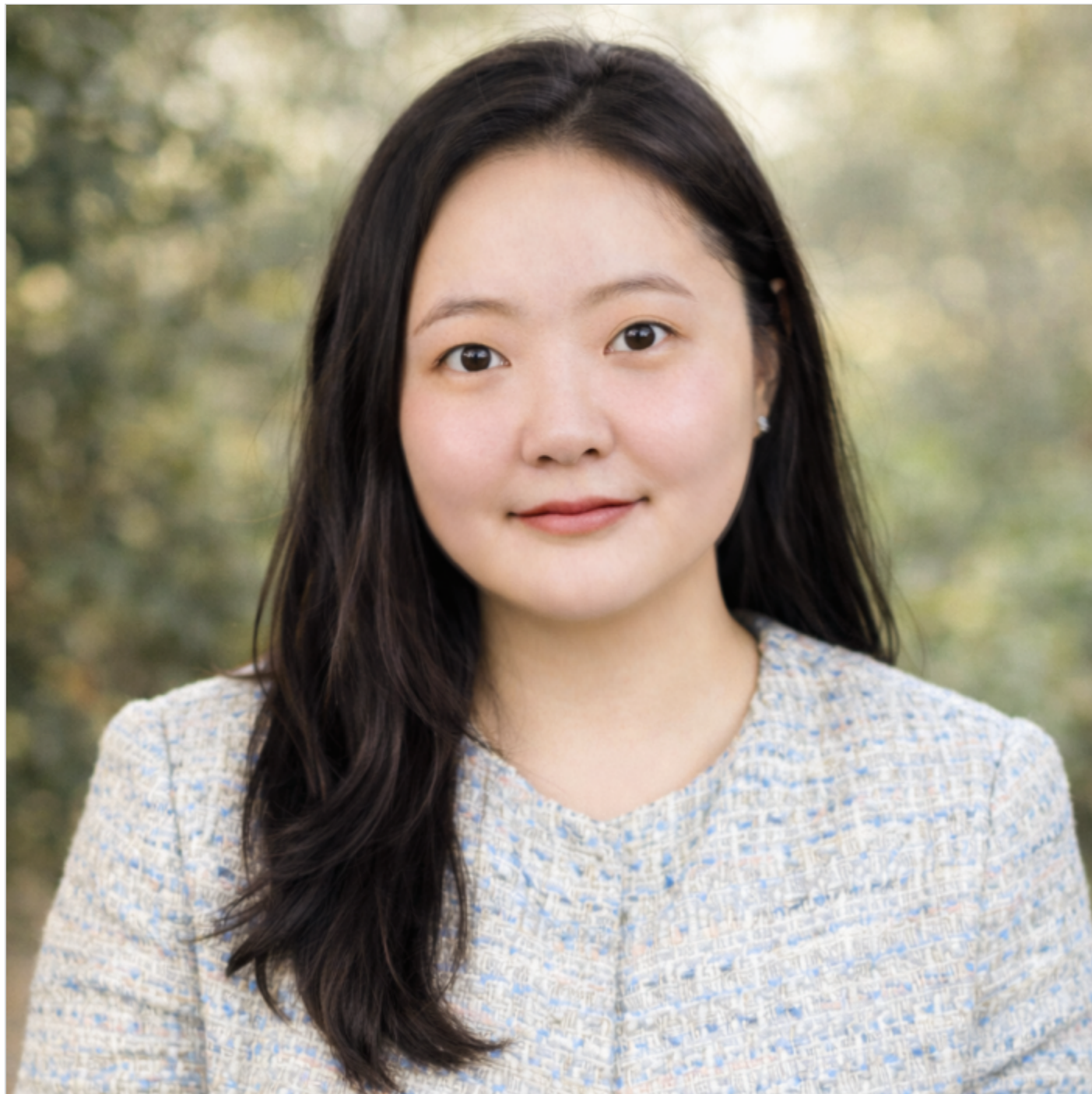
**Q: What impact do you want to have through sustainability, and how are you working toward that?**

**A:** I want to ensure that AI tools used in sustainability decisions represent everyone fairly, not just the communities with the most visibility or political power. My research has shown that AI systems currently used by federal agencies to process public climate opinions systematically misrepresent what certain communities actually believe, especially across racial and gender lines. That kind of invisible distortion can quietly shape policy in ways that harm the people who are already most vulnerable to climate change. I am working toward a future where these systems are rigorously audited for bias, transparent in how they process public input, and equitable in whose voices they amplify. This isn't just a technical problem; it's a democratic one. If AI is going to mediate between the public and policymakers, we have a responsibility to make sure it does so fairly.

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**Text image(s)**



Sola Kim. Courtesy photo