

Samantha McDonald, PhD

User Experience (UX) Research

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Informatics

University of California, Irvine, Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences
August 2016 - April 2021

M.S. Informatics

University of California, Irvine, Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences
August 2016 - May 2019
Courses in political science, sociology, anthropology, statistics, computer science, and business.

B.S. Information Systems

University of Maryland, Baltimore County, College of Engineering and Information Technology
August 2012 - May 2016

WORK EXPERIENCE

META PLATFORMS INC., Menlo Park, California, USA

UX Researcher - Monetization Team
September 2021 - February 2023

RESEARCH

- Supported the monetization teams to develop statistical tools (e.g., A/B testing) for advertisers. Collaborated closely with a cross-functional team to research and inform platform development.
- Investigated research topics of statistical literacy, information accessibility, information recall, user trust, user retention, and product actionability.
- Conduct three to four research projects per quarter, interviewing over a hundred small and large businesses internationally. Used research insights to create new designs for products.
- Utilized methodologies such as unmoderated and moderated user testing, in-product surveys, rapid prototyping, SQL queries of user behavior, and usability evaluations. This research was conducted using tools like Figma, Qualtrics, Mural, and Canva.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Identified information recall issues in product flow and worked with my team to prioritize changes that improved performance and grew product adoption by 16%.
- Directed a multi-team literature review to improve access to historical research that is still used to this day.
- Established a usability baseline for the flow of user's personalization of ad experiences to benchmark.
- Introduced a new rapid prototyping feedback method to accelerate user feedback cycles.
- Onboarded and mentored two UX researchers; managed the tasks of one consulting UXR.

POPVOX FOUNDATION, Redwood City, California, USA

Research Consultant
January 2021 - August 2021

RESEARCH

- Deployed an asynchronous online town hall experiment in the U.S. Congress based on academic frameworks of deliberative democracy and democratic representation.
- Conducted user testing and new designs for POPVOX Inc.'s new constituent correspondence and media software, LegiDash, a free platform to help congressional staff organize communication within a user-friendly dashboard.
- Collaborated with stakeholding organizations including the Congressional Management Foundation, The Democracy Fund, UCI Center for Congressional Research, and The Dirksen Congressional Research Center.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Pioneered the first asynchronous, single-topic, online town hall for Members of Congress using POPVOX's constituent correspondence software, LegiDash.
- Designed every aspect of the experiment including recruitment, surveys, and deliberation methods - ensuring the experiment maintained academic rigor and practical relevance.
- Evaluated the platform for basic UX heuristics and collaborated with the software engineer to enhance platform performance.
- Developed my dissertation and a civic metrics toolkit for participatory governance.

CONGRESSIONAL MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION, Washington D.C., USA

Independent Researcher + Consultant

May 2017 - June 2018

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Conduct ethnographic fieldwork to study the U.S. Congress' legislative correspondence process.
- Map the congressional communication landscape, assessing the technologies used by congressional offices to manage, track, and leverage constituent communication.
- Conduct data analysis for constituent satisfaction surveys deployed by four Members.
- Attend congressional hearings, seminars, and lectures in Washington, D.C. to gain insights into the congressional technology landscape.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Visited over 100 offices of Members of Congress and interviewed over 40 staff to understand the legislative correspondence experience.
- Used qualitative coding and discourse analysis to unpack underlying themes in constituent communication. Codes were used to develop academic theories of congressional communication and participatory democracy online.
- Published both academic papers and multiple public articles to showcase the effects of technology design on the democratic process.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE, California, USA

Lecturer, ICS3, Internet Technologies and Their Social Impact

Spring 2020 Semester, Fall 2020 Semester

- Instructed undergraduate class that examined current Internet technologies and their social implications at the individual, group and societal levels. This included topics like technology infrastructure, labor, politics, environment, play, and the history of the internet.
- Developed all lecture materials and the syllabus for the course, and managed two graduate-level teaching assistants each semester.
- Each seminar held 130-150 students.

JOHNS HOPKINS APPLIED PHYSICS LABORATORY, Laurel, Maryland, USA

Research Internship, Asymmetric Operations Unit

May 2015 - August 2015

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Supported an Intelligence Advanced Research Project Activity (IARPA) initiative to design and deploy educational video games to mitigate cognitive biases in government intelligence.
- Designed in-person surveys with participants and recorded participant game activities.
- Supervised the testing of video games with subject matter experts in cognitive bias mitigation.

SKILLS

User Research + Design Interviews | Rapid Prototyping | Requirements Analysis | Task Design + Redesign | Ethnography | Journey Maps | Focus Groups | Experimentation | Survey Design + Deployment | Statistical Analysis | AI Tools for Research | Accessibility Design | Heuristic Analysis | Agile Methods | Figma | Qualtrics |

Mural | Canva | WordPress | Miro | Dovetail
Code JavaScript | C++ | HTML+CSS | R | SQL

VOLUNTEER

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (CASA), Orange County, California 2017-2025

- CASA volunteers watch over and advocate for foster care children to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal system or languish in an inappropriate group or foster home.
- Volunteered over 600 hours in 7 years to advocate for two foster care children in court.
- Attend weekly outings with foster children to establish friendship and mentorship.
- Attend over 60 hours of training on topics of childhood trauma, foster care court procedures, and methods of legal and non-legal advocacy for foster children.

HIGHLIGHTED PUBLICATIONS*

The CivX Metrics Toolkit. Samantha McDonald. POPVOX Foundation. 2021.

Configurations of Digital Participatory Budgeting. Victoria Palacin, Samantha McDonald, Pablo Aragón, and Matti Nelimarkka. 2024. ACM Trans. Comput.-Hum. Interact. 31, 2, Article 28.

Communications Technology as Symbols of Institutional Legitimacy in the U.S.Congress. Samantha McDonald, Fan Yin & Melissa Mazmanian. (2020) Journal of Information Technology & Politics (JITP).

How Congress turns citizens' voices into data points. Samantha McDonald (2019) The Conversation. 16, Sep. 2019.

**For full publication list, please see my CV at <https://www.samiam.info/>*

HIGHLIGHTED APPEARANCES

Guest Lectures

Provided students with an overview of my research and the role technology plays in democracy. Encourage students to use their technical expertise to improve the lives of others through the design of civic technology.

- University of California Irvine, CS3 - Internet Technologies and Their Social Impact
Professor Daniel Gardner, 2019.
- University of Southern California, CSCI 499 - Computing For Social Good
Professor Barath Raghavan, 2019.
- University of Helsinki, COS-D421 - The Political in Human-Computer Interaction, University of Helsinki,
Professor Matti Nelimarkka, 2019.

Podcast Guest:

Invited as a speaker on 'Personal Finance For PhDs by Dr. Emily Roberts'. Discussed the role of funding and financial support for graduate students. Podcast episode was titled "Knowing Your Worth in an Environment that Devalues Your Work." January 2021.

NOTE ON CAREER GAP

From February 2022 to September 2024, I embarked on a sabbatical, living aboard a 37-foot off-grid sailboat with my partner. We sailed over 8,000 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean, visiting regions of the Western U.S., Mexico, and French Polynesia. This experience greatly expanded my exposure to diverse cultures and deepened my understanding of global societal challenges. I consider this experience to be my 'second' PhD in life and a valuable asset in both a personal and professional context.