

Samantha McDonald, PhD

User Experience (UX), Design, Research

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I have seven years of research answering challenging questions across government, industry, and nonprofit spaces. I thrive on multi-disciplinary teams with cross-functional partners to deploy exceptional user experiences + impact.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Qualitative UX Researcher - Monetization Team

META PLATFORMS INC., Menlo Park, California, USA

September 2021 - February 2023

- Researched and developed statistical measurement tools for the 10 million active advertisers on the platform, ranging from small enterprises (e.g., bakeries, hair salons) to large corporations (e.g., Nike).
- Supported cross-functional teams of software engineers, designers, product managers, and data scientists to collaboratively produce exceptional user experiences and steer product direction and performance.
- Conducted 3-4 research dynamic projects per quarter, interviewing 100+ businesses worldwide. Focused on issues such as statistical literacy, information accessibility, and product actionability.

Impact:

- Identified actionable insights to repair recall issues that boosted adoption of one product by 16%.
- Directed a multi-team literature review of internal research projects to improve access to historical research.
- Introduced a new rapid prototyping feedback method to accelerate user feedback for designers.
- Proposed projects that led half of team investments in two quarters.
- Onboarded and mentored two UX researchers; managed the tasks of one consulting UXR.

Deliberative Democracy + Technology Research Consultant

POPVOX FOUNDATION, Redwood City, California, USA

January 2021 - August 2021

- Developed one of the first asynchronous online forums between Members of the United States Congress and their constituents, applying frameworks of deliberative democracy to improve connection and dialogue.
- Contacted over 150,000 constituents and managed recruitment of 300 individuals.
- Designed all aspects of experiment including survey questions, forum design, and analysis methodology - balancing academic rigor and practical relevance.
- Conducted heuristic evaluations of LegiDash software to enhance overall platform usability.
- Managed relationships with external stakeholders and funders, including the Congressional Management Foundation, The Democracy Fund, and The Dirksen Congressional Research Center.

Independent Congressional Researcher + Consultant

CONGRESSIONAL MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION, Washington D.C., USA

May 2017 - June 2018

- Conducted 2 years of ethnographic research of Congressional staff and constituent correspondence.
- Interviewed 40+ staff and visited 100+ congressional offices in the House of Representatives.
- Mapped the landscape of congressional communication tools using qualitative coding and discourse analysis.
- Analyzed constituent satisfaction survey data for four Member offices partnering with CMF for feedback.
- Attended hearings and seminars to assess the evolving congressional technology landscape.
- Published academic articles and public media on technology's impact on democracy.

Lecturer, ICS3, Internet Technologies and Their Social Impact

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE, California, USA

Spring 2020 Semester, Fall 2020 Semester

- Taught two semesters of a 150-student course on internet technologies and their societal impact
- Covered topics such as infrastructure, labor, politics, games, and the history of the internet.
- Developed all lecture materials and managed two graduate teaching assistants per semester.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

CASA ORANGE COUNTY, California

2017-2025

- Watch over and advocate for two 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.
- Dedicated 600+ hours advocating and mentoring with foster children ages 12-19.
- Completed over 100 hours of training on childhood trauma and foster care law.

California Tidelands and Maritime Advocate

NEWPORT BEACH HARBOR, California

2023-2025

- Sailed over 5,000 nautical miles of the Pacific Ocean between California, Mexico, and the South Pacific, showcasing high resiliency, patience, and maritime skill.
- Spent over 300 hours in 2 years advocating to City Council, Harbor Commission, California Coastal Commission, and California State Land Commission to protect equitable public access to state tidelands.
- Spoke on behalf of a coalition of thousands of sailors and liveaboards to protect maritime culture and legalized affordable housing for mariners in California.

Human Factors Engineering Internship, Asymmetric Operations Unit

JOHNS HOPKINS APPLIED PHYSICS LABORATORY, Laurel, Maryland, USA

May 2015 - August 2015

- Supported an IARPA project designing educational games to reduce cognitive biases in intelligence analysis.
- Designed and administered participant surveys, analyzing game-based learning effectiveness.
- Supervised playtesting sessions with cognitive bias mitigation experts.

SKILLS + CERTIFICATIONS

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

Platforms | Figma | Qualtrics | Mural | Canva | WordPress | Miro | Dovetail

Code | JavaScript | C++ | HTML+CSS | R | SQL

Certifications | Introduction to Web Accessibility - W3Cx • WAI0.1x

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Informatics

University of California, Irvine, Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences

August 2016 - April 2021

**For full academic accomplishments and publications, please see my CV at <https://www.samiam.info/>*

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