GWEN HEANER, PHD

Research Manager | User Experience (UX) Researcher| Data-Driven Strategy Expert | Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologist | Agile Cross-Functional Collaborator

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Seasoned research professional with 20+ years of global experience leading user-centered research, mixed-methods evaluation, and large-scale data collection across six continents. Skilled in designing and executing UX and impact studies that uncover user needs, improve product usability, increase value-for-money, and inform strategic decisions for corporations, government agencies, and non-profits. Brings deep expertise in survey methodology, innovative qualitative methods, and actionable research translation for technical and non-technical audiences. Known for leading cross-functional, multicultural teams and managing complex, multi-stakeholder projects with rigor, adaptability, and a focus on user insight, organizational change, and inclusive design.

EXPERTISE

- **Research Design, Management, and Analysis**

- **Agile ways of working**

- **User Experience; Quantitative & Quantitative Methods**

- **Cross-Functional Collaboration**

- **Strategic Data-Driven Project Design and Adaptation**

- **Data Visualization**

- **Stakeholder Engagement**

EDUCATION

- **Google UX Design**, Certificate (2025)

- **SOAS University of London**, PhD (2006 - 2011)

- **Harvard University**, Graduate Fellow (2010)

- **SOAS University of London**, MA (2004 - 2005)

- **Smith College**, BA (2000 - 2004)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Senior Research Associate and UX Researcher   **2019 – 2025**
Education Development Center

- Led experience research for a global education platform, developing user personas, journey maps, and usability tests.
- Collected feedback from over 5,000 users to identify pain points and inform iterative product improvements that boosted engagement and accessibility: increased mailing list subscribers from 3,500 to 100,000+; LinkedIn followers from zero to 7,000+; and achieved 85% user satisfaction with online tools.
- Led research and evaluation for K-12 literacy, numeracy, STEM, and adult-learner initiatives, designing mixed-methods UX research that informed program and learning product design decisions.
- Built and maintained relationships with schools, communities, and education departments, leading stakeholder recruitment and ensuring high-quality user data collection in diverse environments.
- Developed interactive PowerBI data dashboards and other data communication tools that translated complex research findings into accessible insights.
- Collaborated with cross-functional teams including designers, developers, and product managers in Agile environments to iterate on research-backed design solutions.
- Advocated for integration of inclusive design principles across all research initiatives, ensuring diverse user perspectives were represented in research and subsequent product development.

Managing Director of Research   **2012 – 2025**
GK Consulting LLC Consulting / Various Clients

- Founded and operated a successful cross-sectoral research consultancy serving 20+ international corporate and non-profit clients.

TECHNOLOGY

- **Data Visualization:** PowerBI, Tableau

- **UX Design & Research**: Figma, Adobe, Miro, UserZoom, Optimal Workshop

- **Survey Tools**: SurveyCTO, Qualitrics, KoboToolbox, Magpi, SurveyMonkey, Googleforms

- **Quantitative Data Analysis Tools**: SPSS, Excel

- **Qualitative Data Analysis Tools**: MaxQDA, NVivo, Dedoose

COMMUNICATION

- **Research Briefs and Data Visualization:** Summarizing complex findings into one to two-page highlights and recommendations for non-technical audiences.

- **Cross-Functional Team Facilitation**: Facilitating cross-functional teams toward devising research questions, identifying user pain points, devising research strategies, and using data to make decisions.

- **Technical Writing and Presenting**: Written and verbal presentation of research findings to high-level technical audiences: Author of 20+ peer-reviewed research publications and panel presenter at 15+ academic and professional conferences.

- Designed and executed complex multi-method research studies across 25+ countries, combining qualitative insights with quantitative data to provide comprehensive understanding of user needs and appropriate project and product designs.
- Transformed technical research findings into compelling narratives and actionable recommendations for diverse stakeholders, including product teams and executive leadership.
- Developed scalable research methodologies tailored to specific user contexts, balancing rigorous approaches with practical constraints.
- Led distributed research teams of up to 50 researchers, ensuring consistent quality while adapting to diverse user environments and contexts.

Research Manager   2014 – 2019
University of Massachusetts Amherst / USAID
- Led user research initiatives for the USAID Education in Crisis and Conflict Network, growing membership from zero to 3,500 official members; 20,000 subscribers through user-centered approaches.
- Directed development of multiple high-impact digital tools and research products that consistently ranked in top 10 for user engagement and highest rates of user satisfaction, demonstrating ability to translate research into valuable user resources.
- Led research team on strategy to identify user pain points, improving workflows, creating feedback loops, and iterative testing for online tools and applications for practitioners.
- Created comprehensive research toolkit incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to assess user safety and experience, now adopted as an industry standard for rigorous measurement approaches.

Social Impact Researcher   2003 – 2015
Freelance / Various Corporate, Multilateral, and Non-Profit Clients
- Provided strategic research services to diverse organizations including multinational institutions, corporations, foundations, and NGOs, to identify end-user pain points and feedback loops to improve delivery of products and services.
- Applied ethnographic and mixed-methods approaches to uncover deep user insights, translating findings into recommendations that balanced user needs with business objectives, resources available, and value-for-money.
- Clients include The World Bank, Coca Cola Foundation, Arcelor Mittal, Pew Forum, Cadmus Group, SOAS Enterprise.