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GWEN HEANER, PHD

Education Research Leader | Cross-Functional Team Collaborator | Advocate for Inclusive Design | Mixed Methods Expert | Strategic Multi-Phase Program Evaluator

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Data-driven education research leader with 20+ years' experience producing and communicating accessible, actionable insights to improve learning outcomes and advance economic mobility. Expert in leading cross-functional teams, building relationships with stakeholders, managing end-to-end research projects, and translating complex findings into clear, equity-focused reports, briefs, and presentations for diverse audiences. Recognized for methodological rigor, participatory approaches, and driving equity-focused, data-informed change in K–12, post-secondary, and adult education and vocational training initiatives.

EXPERTISE

- **Large-Scale Global Education Research & Impact Evaluation**
- **Learner Assessment & Analysis**
- **Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches**
- **Inclusive & Participatory Stakeholder Engagement**
- **Research Translation and Inclusive Communication**
- **Organizational Capacity Assessment & Action Planning**

EDUCATION

- **UMass Amherst College of Education**, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow (2014 - 2019)
- **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
Education Development Center   **(2019 – 2025)**

- Led research and evaluation for K-12 education and vocational training initiatives across US Government-funded projects, designing mixed-methods research strategies that directly informed program decisions and improved learner, teacher, and education administrator outcomes.
- Developed and maintained research partnerships with schools and education departments, successfully recruiting and managing relationships with education administrators to ensure high-quality data collection and research participation.
- Co-designed and implemented learning agenda and implementation science studies on education and youth.
- Designed and managed large-scale survey research across six cohorts of youth, producing actionable recommendations that resulted in more equitable learning outcomes on math and literacy and long-term employment outcomes
- Published and disseminated research findings through detailed reports and presentations, effectively communicating results to both technical and non-technical audiences to support program improvement.
- Developed data-driven research strategies that increased engagement (growing education networks from 3,500 to 100,000+ subscribers; 0 to 7,000+ LinkedIn followers) and generated 5,000+ learning observations that directly informed course design improvements and dissemination strategies.
- Developed interactive PowerBI data dashboards that translated complex education research findings into accessible insights, enabling cross-functional teams to make data-driven decisions.
- Integrated inclusive design principles across all research initiatives.
- Grant and proposal writing for business development teams.

TECHNOLOGY

- **Quantitative Data Analysis Tools**: SPSS, Excel, R (learning)

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

- **Data Visualization:** PowerBI, Tableau

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

- **UX Design**: Figma, Adobe, Googe UX Design Certificate

COMMUNICATION

- **Technical Writing:** Authored dozens of research reports synthesizing and detailing findings for technical audiences
- **Research Briefs:** Generated hundreds of research briefs, fact sheets, policy briefs, summarizing complex findings into one to two-page highlights and recommendations for non-technical audiences
- **Cross-Functional Team Facilitation**: Expert at facilitating cross-functional teams toward devising research questions, identifying user pain points, devising research strategies, and using data to make decisions
- **Academic Writing and Presenting**: Author of 20+ peer-reviewed publications on research methodology, evaluation approaches, and evidence-based programming; presented research findings at 15+ academic and professional conferences.

Managing Director and Chief Researcher
GK Consulting LLC Research and Evaluation   (2012 – Present)
- Founded and operated a successful research consultancy serving 20+ international clients to achieve learning and project efficacy goals.
- Led all business development including grant-writing, networking, marketing, and communications.
- Designed and executed complex multi-method research studies including experimental and quasi-experimental studies across 25+ countries, combining qualitative insights with quantitative data.
- Transformed technical research findings into compelling narratives and actionable recommendations to increase project efficacy and enhance value for money for diverse stakeholders, including project teams and executive leadership
- Developed scalable research methodologies tailored to specific end-user contexts and organizational goals, 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.

Education Research Manager
University of Massachusetts College of Education / USAID   (2014 – 2019)
- Led 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.
- Led research team on strategy to identify user pain points, improving workflows, creating feedback loops, and leading iterative testing for online tools and applications for practitioners.
- Directed development of multiple high-impact digital education research tools and learning products that consistently ranked in top 10 for user engagement and highest rates of user satisfaction.
- Created comprehensive research toolkit incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to assess learner safety and experience, now adopted as an industry standard for rigorous measurement approaches.

Social Impact Researcher and Evaluator
Freelance Consultant   (2003 – 2015)
- Provided strategic research and evaluation services to diverse organizations including multinational institutions, educational institutions, corporations, foundations, small and large non-profits.
- Managed or co-led 10+ research projects in the education sector – including foundational, vocational, and social-emotional skills.
- Designed and implemented research initiatives that informed educational and social protection product and program improvements and service delivery models.
- Clients include World Bank, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Cola Cola Foundation Pew Forum, ArcelorMittal, Cadmus Group, UN.