

HELANA DARWIN, PhD

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SENIOR UX RESEARCHER

Strategic Senior UX Researcher with 8+ years of experience leading end-to-end qualitative and mixed-methods research across fintech, healthcare, media, enterprise, and consumer digital products. Partner with product managers, designers, engineers, analytics teams, and business stakeholders to uncover user needs, evaluate concepts and experiences, and translate insights into actionable recommendations that shape product strategy. Strong background in generative, foundational, and evaluative research, with particular strength in accessibility, trust and safety, onboarding, and complex digital workflows.

CORE SKILLS

Research Methods: Generative research, foundational research, exploratory research, evaluative research, qualitative interviews, usability testing, diary studies, contextual inquiry, surveys, mixed-methods research, VOC analysis, competitive analysis, accessibility research, journey mapping, persona development, synthesis

Product & Collaboration: End-to-end research, product strategy, stakeholder management, workshop facilitation, cross-functional collaboration, agile product development, user-centered design, human-centered design, research planning, discussion guides, screeners, research protocols, insight storytelling, presentations, research deliverables

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Senior UX Researcher (Contract), NYU Langone Health

April 2026 – Present

- Established a rolling UX research program to provide continuous insight on product features, enabling ongoing design iteration and more consistent user feedback loops.
- Led iterative research for an internal scheduling platform used by medical practitioners across multiple locations, identifying user needs, usability issues, and workflow pain points to inform product decisions.
- Partnered with product management and cross-functional stakeholders to increase UX research maturity through education, advocacy, and integration of user insights into product development.
- Developed recruitment strategies to support ongoing access to relevant participant groups and sustain research across multiple feature areas.
- Modernized the public-facing website through foundational research on users' expectations of, and reactions to, the introduction of an AI feature.
- Removed product development roadblocks by leveraging AI to conduct meta-analyses of archived interview transcripts, thereby gleaning answers to pressing questions

UX Research Consultant, Broadridge Financial Services

Jan 2026 – Feb 2026

- Facilitated cross-functional workshops with product, design, and business stakeholders to align on research priorities, build buy-in, and strengthen research practices in a B2B2C environment.
- Developed a 0-to-1 research strategy informed by stakeholder interviews, competitive analysis, journey mapping, and customer archetypes, creating a foundation for future product and design decisions.

- Helped define a user-centered approach to research planning in support of broader organizational product maturity.

UX Research Lead, Money Management (Contract), Cash App

Aug 2025 – Jan 2026

- Led mixed-methods research across money management experiences, using surveys, in-depth interviews, diary studies, and usability testing to inform product development.
- Informed development of an alternative credit scoring concept by synthesizing survey and interview insights across iterative rounds of research.
- Conducted foundational diary studies to better understand teen financial needs and parent expectations, identifying opportunities for more age-appropriate and trusted financial product experiences.
- Led iterative usability testing on customer onboarding flows, surfacing friction points and informing design improvements.

Senior Mixed Methods User Researcher (Contract), Peacock, NBC

Aug 2024 – Feb 2025

- Led mixed-methods research on user expectations for personalization and AI-driven experiences, uncovering mental models, jobs to be done, accessibility needs, and opportunities for future-state product improvements.
- Conducted in-depth interviews to evaluate user interest in and expectations for an expanded News experience.
- Identified accessibility barriers in the content streaming journey through contextual inquiry with low-vision users and users who rely on screen readers, informing more inclusive product design.
- Researched unmet needs among teen users in multi-profile households, revealing limitations in the current kid/adult profile model and identifying opportunities for more nuanced experience design.

Senior User Researcher, JP Morgan Chase

Dec 2022 – July 2024

- Led research that strengthened the safety and usability of the Zelle experience, contributing to a 50% reduction in fraud claims and a 23% increase in transactions.
- Informed the development of the first user blocking feature on Zelle, establishing a model later adopted by other banks in the Early Warning Services network.
- Partnered with product, design, and analytics stakeholders to identify actionable solutions for fraud risks affecting elderly and youth populations, drawing on VOC data, user metrics, and iterative research.
- Conducted rapid iterative testing on educational interstitials and onboarding carousels to improve clarity, reduce confusion, and support safer user behavior.
- Led accessibility-focused research across desktop and mobile banking experiences, including generative interviews with blind and low-vision users, to identify pain points and improve inclusive design.
- Addressed WCAG-related issues in the bill pay flow through rapid evaluative research and close collaboration with design and product teams.
- Developed internal educational resources and best practices for inclusive design research, helping scale accessibility awareness across the organization.
- Supported modernization of the desktop banking UI by identifying user behavior patterns through analytics and iterative research, enabling product improvements that increased active payment usage and multi-product adoption.

User Researcher, AnswerLab

Dec 2021 – Nov 2022

- Led qualitative UX research for B2B and B2C clients across education technology, shopping, social media, and enterprise platforms, including Amazon, Meta, and LinkedIn.
- Designed and executed studies across a range of scopes, timelines, and methodologies to help clients understand user, customer, and employee experiences.
- Synthesized findings into journey maps, personas, storyboards, reports, and stakeholder presentations that informed product and experience decisions.
- Coordinated with research vendors to support international studies in participants' native languages, expanding the reach and relevance of insights across global audiences.

Qualitative User Researcher, HealthCourse, Inc

June 2021 – Nov 2021

- Produced mixed-methods research reports demonstrating educational impact for stakeholders by synthesizing qualitative and quantitative feedback from course discussions, discussion boards, and evaluation metrics.
- Identified key learner needs and experience themes among medical professional audiences to inform course and program improvements.

Research Scientist, Stony Brook University

Aug 2014 – Aug 2020

- Managed four teams of junior researchers responsible for coding qualitative interview and survey data, ensuring rigor and consistency across research projects and publications.
- Developed coding frameworks, mentored junior researchers, and contributed to mixed-methods studies focused on digital behavior, consumer response, and social attitudes.
- Conducted applied research using surveys, A/B testing, sentiment analysis, and digital ethnographic methods to identify patterns in audience perception and behavior.
- Developed best practices for digital research using online communities, blogs, comments, and forum data as qualitative inputs.

Social Media Director, Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities

Sept 2018 – May 2020

- Managed the Center's digital presence across web and social platforms, improving clarity of information and audience engagement.
- Streamlined website information architecture to improve usability and content discoverability.

Course Instructor, Stony Brook University

June 2017 – Jan 2019

- Designed and taught four undergraduate Sociology courses, translating complex topics into clear, structured learning experiences.
- Mentored students in qualitative analysis and critical thinking, helping them develop foundational research skills.

EDUCATION

PhD, Sociology— Stony Brook University

BA, Psychology — Stony Brook University

TOOLS

Dovetail, UserTesting, Qualtrics, Figma, Miro, Lookback, Maze, Jira, Confluence, Excel, Tableau, Google Analytics