

Daniela M. Markazi

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EDUCATION

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

Ph.D. in Informatics (Focus Area: Design, Technology, and Society)

January 2020 - August 2026

GPA 4.00/4.00

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Bachelor of Science (B.S.) and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (B.S.A.G.) in Agricultural and Biological Engineering

August 2015 - December 2019

PROFESSIONAL & RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Biological Modeling Analysis and System Simulation Laboratory

Graduate UX Researcher and Mentor

Urbana, IL / Puerto Rico

January 2020 - Present

- Led and designed foundational research with 20 teens to understand how they learn about climate change on social media, using surveys and written/visual diary studies to capture broad behavioral patterns, perceptions, and in-the-moment insights.
- Co-designed climate change social media content via design thinking workshops with 18 teens, translating participant-generated concepts into actionable design recommendations, with preliminary results published in 2 top HCI conferences.
- Partnered with a Puerto Rican community organization to identify teen technology practices via 4 focus groups with 31 teens.
- Helped to secure a \$750,000 National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant, co-developing and co-leading a Research Experiences for Undergraduates program; oversaw 11 research projects from ideation through dissemination, resulting in 2 publications, 12 presentations, 1 paper under review, and 50+ students in Illinois and Puerto Rico with research opportunities.

The Family Resiliency Center, Department of Human Development and Family Studies

Graduate Researcher and Mentor

Urbana, IL

May 2023 - August 2025

- Led participatory action research with 50+ youth, educators, and practitioners, guiding them on independent projects.
- Directed a team of 3 graduate researchers in facilitating 100+ focus groups at 4 schools, shaping project design and strategy.
- Mentored, coached, and co-led 3 youth research teams through the full research lifecycle (from question framing to insight synthesis), resulting in their selection as the only high school presenters at the UIUC Undergraduate Research Symposium.
- Designed an evidence-based framework for teaching research methods, integrating ethnography, interviews, and survey design; research findings published in the Journal of Research on Adolescence, with 2 more manuscripts under review.

Community Informatics Research Network (CIRN)

Graduate Researcher

Champaign, IL

July 2023 - October 2024

- Led the development of a global vision and mission for Community Informatics, synthesizing interdisciplinary research and community input into an inclusive, user-centered 20-year roadmap, published in The Journal of Community Informatics.
- Co-designed and co-facilitated an interactive, research-driven workshop at the 2023 CIRN Conference, engaging global researchers and practitioners in structured activities to examine community informatics across diverse community contexts.
- Co-hosted and conducted collaborative sensemaking sessions, leading sticky note-based activities to capture academic and practitioner perspectives, surface socio-technical challenges, and identify shared values across global, diverse contexts.

Coding it Forward, General Services Administration (GSA)

User Researcher Fellow

Remote / Washington, DC

June 2024 - August 2024

- Selected from an applicant pool of 4,500 with an acceptance rate of 2% as part of the Coding it Forward Fellowship, a highly competitive national program that empowers early-career technologists to explore technology careers in government.
- Led a cross-organization UX research initiative at GSA to improve how research insights are shared and reused, directly enabling more informed primary research and reducing duplicated effort across design, engineering, and product teams.
- Uncovered unmet stakeholder needs through 27 in-depth interviews, a literature review, competitive analysis, and persona development; translated findings into a scalable insights library strategy to support user-centered, data-driven decisions.
- Project selected as 1 of 12 to present at Coding it Forward Demo Day and the only Coding it Forward project invited to present at the GSA Research Guild, demonstrating organizational impact and relevance beyond the fellowship cohort.
- Awarded the 2024 Courtney Brousseau Community Builder Award (sole recipient), recognizing exceptional leadership in fostering collaboration, peer engagement, and inclusive research culture across the fellowship and agency partners.

INFEWS-ER Disaster Relief and Resilience Cohort Challenge

Graduate Student Lead, Project Manager, and Mentor

Remote / Urbana, IL

October 2020 - August 2023

- Led a global, transdisciplinary research initiative with 17 graduate researchers and a Puerto Rican NGO, aligning academic expertise with community needs to build a centralized literature and grant database to directly support funding strategies.
- Authored an empirical case study on transdisciplinary academic-NGO collaboration in Puerto Rico, examining how research, design, and technology practices can strengthen resilience; findings inform scalable models for research partnerships.

- Conducted qualitative document analysis and participant observation across a multi-institution NSF project, synthesizing insights into eight core themes (e.g., collaboration, participation outcomes, technology setup) that demonstrate how transdisciplinary research methods can increase NGO capacity and real-world impact in food, energy, and water systems.
- Mentored a team of 14 graduate students to develop and prototype a virtual resource hub to support graduate transdisciplinary research and education, utilizing Figma, design thinking, need-finding interviews, A/B testing, and a literature review.

John Deere

Software / Robotics Engineer

Champaign, IL

January 2018 - April 2023

- Developed a user-friendly tire monitoring UI for an autonomous tractor using Visual Studio Code, C, and the Gen 4 John Deere platform, improving usability and system efficiency through customer insights, UI/UX collaboration, and field testing.
- Engineered software for the Raspberry Pi, enabling five senior design teams at UIUC to control John Deere autonomous lawnmowers and improve operational efficiency; presented the solution to C-Suite executives, leading to global adoption.
- Created and trained neural network models to assess and classify grass health, supporting autonomous mowing; integrated model outputs into robotic workflows, bridging ML insights with UX considerations for autonomous system feedback.

Social Computing Systems Laboratory

Graduate UX Researcher

Champaign, IL

January 2020 - October 2021

- Led 2 qualitative UX research studies on user perceptions of AI, conducting 15 in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to understand how people used AI during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they think about trust and privacy in high-stakes, AI-powered and voice-enabled systems; delivered research-backed design recommendations for building trustworthy AI.
- Directed and oversaw a two-phase research initiative for PocketBot, a chatbot for long-distance couples, employing iterative design and conducting interviews and performed pilot studies with 11 participants and evaluated the chatbot design with 18 participants in a week-long field trial followed by exit interviews; results published and presented at a top HCI conference.

Bhalerao Laboratory

Undergraduate UX Researcher

Urbana, IL

May 2017 - May 2018

- Designed and developed the UI for a swine fertility probe mobile app for the Department of Animal Sciences at UIUC.
- Conducted contextual observations and need-finding interviews with target users to understand constraints and task flows; synthesized feedback into iterative design changes, refining the interface to better align with real-world use and user needs.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

UIUC Alliance for Research Enterprise Excellence in STEM (AREES)

Professional Socialization Working Group Co-Lead and Program Coordinator

Champaign, IL

June 2022 - Present

- Facilitated the inaugural Student Summer Research Experience, mentoring 16 underrepresented students across 6 universities, and collaborating with professors and academic research advisors to support participant progress and goals.
- Designed and led a two-day research workshop for 28 underrepresented students, guiding attendees through best practices.

UIUC Puerto Rico Disaster Relief Program

Graduate Student Lead, Head of Engagement, and Mentor

Urbana, IL / Puerto Rico

January 2018 - Present

- Develops different projects to assist Puerto Rican communities and global stakeholders, leading and mentoring 52 undergraduate students in human-centered design, UX, engineering, computing, and data science research projects.
- Designed, developed, and instructed a course (creating all materials) on Community-based Design and Management for Disaster Resilience based on design justice principles, engaging with community partners in Puerto Rico and beyond.

National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT)

Chair of the Central Illinois Chapter of NCWIT Aspirations, Campus Ambassador, Mentor

Urbana, IL

September 2015 - Present

- Organizes the NCWIT Aspirations in Computing Ceremony and delivers STEM outreach presentations at elementary, middle, and high schools, reaching 300+ students nationwide annually and inspiring interest in UX and STEM pathways.
- Increased participation in the Central Illinois Chapter by 50%; recognized with the 2024 NCWIT Impact Award.

SKILLS

Research: Human-centered design, mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative analysis, usability testing, interview design, contextual observation, ethnography, survey design, focus groups, design accessibility, prototyping, storytelling, persona development

Tools & Programming: Figma, Dovetail, Qualtrics, Miro, Airtable, Excel, Jira, Notion, Trello, Canva, Python, R, SQL, Swift, C

Management: Agile development, stakeholder engagement, cross-functional team management, project management, prioritization

HONORS AND AWARDS

NCWIT Impact Award (2024); Coding it Forward Courtney Brousseau Community Builder Award (2024, Sole Winner); UIUC Graduate Student Leadership Award (2023, Sole PhD Winner); UIUC President's Research in Diversity Award (2023); New Face of Tech Scholarship (2023); ACM Computing Fellowship (2021 - 2025, 1 of 11 in the World); Generation Google Scholarship (2021)