

Owen Schaffer, PhD

Candidate for UI/UX Director

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SUMMARY

UI/UX leader with over 18 years in UX and player experience research across industry and academia. Games user research experience at Ubisoft and a PhD focused on digital game enjoyment, followed by seven years as a professor mentoring a research group that builds custom games for player experience research. Built and validated two psychometric instruments measuring about 40 distinct sources of digital game enjoyment. Experienced across the full range of qualitative and quantitative UX research methods. Runs a research practice end to end, including mentoring and guiding students through game design and development.

CORE QUALIFICATIONS

- Over 18 years in UX and player experience research across industry and academia, prepared to set UI/UX vision and lead a UX practice that creates a feedback loop to continuously improve the player experience
- Runs a research practice end to end: mentoring and guiding 25+ independent-study students over seven years to build games and conduct player experience research
- Breaks down ambiguous UX problems into testable hypotheses and measurable goals, backed by research isolating specific UI/UX and game design variables against player experience outcomes
- Builds alignment among people with competing priorities toward a shared plan: chaired a departmental curriculum committee and built game programming and game design programs from scratch
- Fluent in UX research methods: card sorting, psychometric instrument development and validation, factor analysis, usability testing, heuristic evaluation, and qualitative interviewing
- HFI Certified Usability Analyst (CUA) and Certified User Experience Analyst (CXA)

EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor of Computer Science — Elmhurst University, Elmhurst, IL

Aug 2023 – Present

- Mentored a research group of independent-study students building custom Unity games for player experience research
- Built game development and HCI curriculum from the ground up: designed and launched a 4-course Game Programming concentration and a Human-Computer Interaction course covering UX process, prototyping, and evaluation methods
- Mentored 15+ undergraduate independent-study projects; multiple students co-authored peer-reviewed publications and presented at academic conferences
- Averaged 4.68/5.0 for contribution to course success and 4.73/5.0 for enthusiasm across teaching evaluations

Assistant Professor — Bradley University, Peoria, IL

Aug 2019 – Aug 2023

- Chaired the CSIS Department Curriculum Committee (2021–2023)
- Mentored 4 graduate research assistants on research projects, and supervised 10 undergraduate independent studies
- Proposed and developed two courses for the Computer Game Technology concentration

Lead Usability Analyst — Human Factors International, Fairfield, IA & Shanghai, China

Feb 2012 – Jul 2016

- Designed and taught advanced UX training courses on design for persuasion, emotion, and trust to practicing UX professionals
- Led international user research studies across the US, UK, India, Mexico, Spain, and South Africa for financial and telecom clients
- Mentored junior usability specialists on research methodology and study design

Playtest Project Manager — Ubisoft Entertainment, Montreal, QC

Sep 2011 – Feb 2012

- Designed and ran 5 games usability studies across 3 AAA titles: Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist, Ghost Recon: Future Soldier, and WATCH_DOGS (single-player and multiplayer modes)
- Managed a team of 4 trained observers for playtest data gathering and analysis
- Produced usability and player experience reports combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, and followed up on issues found in the playtests by working with the development team

User Researcher — Kaiser Permanente Internet Services Group, Pasadena, CA

Mar 2011 – Aug 2011

- Ran regular usability testing sessions for the redesign of KP.org, Kaiser Permanente's website
- Performed heuristic evaluations that reduced a key task flow from 27 to 7 steps

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS & RESEARCH

- Author or co-author of 18 publications on player experience and game enjoyment, including 15 peer-reviewed papers, 2 book chapters, and an industry whitepaper for Human Factors International, presented at CHI, HCI International, and AMCIS. Selected examples:
 - "Development and Preliminary Validation of the Enjoyment Questionnaire and the Sources of Enjoyment Questionnaire" (CHI 2022), psychometric instruments measuring about 40 distinct sources of digital game enjoyment
 - "Guidance is Good: Controlled Experiment Shows the Impact of Navigational Guidance on Digital Game Enjoyment and Flow" (HCI International 2022)
- Ran controlled experiments isolating the impact of specific interface and feedback design choices, including progress feedback, navigational guidance, and narrative framing, on player engagement and flow

EDUCATION

PhD, Computer and Information Sciences — DePaul University, Chicago, IL (2019)

Dissertation: A Desire Fulfillment Theory of Digital Game Enjoyment

MA, Positive Organizational Psychology / Evaluation — Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA (2010)

Research adviser: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, founder of positive psychology and author of Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

BA, Psychology and Japanese — Hampshire College, Amherst, MA (2008)

CERTIFICATIONS

- HFI Certified Usability Analyst (CUA), License 2007-198
- HFI Certified User Experience Analyst (CXA), License 2014-047
- Trained in HFI's Persuasion, Emotion, and Trust (PET) interview technique, for identifying user drives, blocks, feelings, and beliefs to inform emotional design