

MARIA C. OLIVARES, PHD



EXPERIENCE DESIGN LEADER | DESIGN RESEARCHER | UX RESEARCHER |
LEARNING EXPERIENCE STRATEGIST

Boston, MA — Relocating to Los Angeles / Santa Monica

CONTACT

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🌐 mcoarts.studio

EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles
PhD, Social Sciences & Comparative
Education
2011 - 2017

University of California, Los Angeles
MA, Social Sciences & Comparative
Education
2010 - 2011

University of California, Los Angeles
BA, Chicana/o Studies & History
2004 - 2009

SKILLS

Experience & Design

- Service Design
- Systems Thinking
- Journey Mapping
- Equity-Centered Design

Research & Insights

- Ethnography
- UX Research
- Participatory Inquiry
- Qualitative Synthesis
- Stakeholder Facilitation

Technical & Making

- Adobe Illustrator / InDesign / Photoshop
- Physical Prototyping
- Laser Cutting
- Web Architecture
- Miro / Mural / Framer

SUMMARY

PhD-trained design research and experience strategy leader with 10+ years translating complex human, cultural, institutional, and learning systems into actionable experience frameworks, programs, research insights, and design principles. I bring rare depth across qualitative research, participatory design, visual sensemaking, learning experience design, stakeholder facilitation, and equity-centered innovation.

STRATEGIC IMPACT SNAPSHOT

- **Human Insights & Narrative Strategy:** Translated complex cultural systems into high-impact design principles and strategic storytelling to align stakeholders and drive innovation.
- **Revenue & Budget Leadership:** Spearheaded the strategy and acquisition of \$4.7M+ in NSF and Spencer-funded initiatives, demonstrating a proven ability to pitch vision and secure investment.
- **Visual Synthesis & Sensemaking:** Created proprietary visual methods, including 'Theory and Concept Visualization', to transform dense qualitative data into dynamic, scannable maps.
- **Inclusive Design Leadership:** Established equity-centered and participatory frameworks ensuring diverse voices are co-creators in the design process.
- **Cross-Functional Orchestration:** Expert at facilitating alignment across multidisciplinary teams (engineers, researchers, community partners) to convert ambiguity into shared product roadmaps.

WORK EXPERIENCE

(2021 — Present)

Assistant Director of Design and Strategy | Earl Center for Learning & Innovation, Boston University

- Lead design strategy across research, learning experience design, media, and innovation; translating institutional goals into coherent programs, tools, and implementation approaches.
- Co-designed 'Educational Design for Transformative Social Futures', a multi-semester undergraduate pathway structured around inquiry, field-based collaboration, and studio critique.
- Designed and architected the web presence for the Earl Center; developed scalable frameworks that help partners move from observation to collective design.

(2019 — Present)

Research Assistant Professor | BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

LANGUAGES

English - fluent, speaking & writing
Spanish - fluent, speaking & writing

REFERENCES

Upon request

- Conduct qualitative and participatory research with youth and community partners, synthesizing data into actionable insights and design recommendations.
- Facilitate alignment across faculty and public schools, converting ambiguity into shared experience maps and design principles.
- Mentor students in design research, visual communication, and portfolio-ready documentation of outcomes.

(2017 — 2019)

Research Scientist / Post-Doctoral Fellow | TERC, Cheche Konnen Center

- Led design-based research on computational play and STEM equity; translated findings into professional learning experiences and practical design tools.
- Designed and facilitated workshops and collaborative inquiry sessions across STEM and making contexts.

FEATURED DESIGN & MAKER PROJECTS

- **Design Companion Playbook:** Designed and manually fabricated (physical prototyping/laser-cutting) an insight capture system for undergraduate specialists to bridge classroom theory and practicum.
- **Theory and Concept Visualization:** A proprietary visual sensemaking method turning complex research into dynamic collaborative knowledge systems.
- **SIDE-EYE / Critical Media Literacy:** Developed media-rich learning experiences and design provocations exploring platform algorithms and infrastructure.