

MARIA C. OLIVARES, PHD



DESIGN STRATEGIST | EXPERIENCE RESEARCHER
FACILITATOR | VISUAL SENSEMAKER

Helping people navigate complexity, build shared understanding, and transform ambiguity into action.

Boston, MA — Relocating to Los Angeles / Santa Monica

CONTACT

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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

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

MIT Sloan Executive Education
Communicating Data Through
Storytelling
2022

FACILITATION & COLLABORATIVE INNOVATION

- Workshop Design & Facilitation
- Stakeholder Alignment
- Cross-Functional Leadership
- Organizational Learning
- Change Enablement
- Participatory Design

RESEARCH, STRATEGY & SENSEMAKING

- Experience Research

SUMMARY

PhD-trained experience researcher, designer, and facilitator with 10+ years helping organizations navigate complexity, align diverse stakeholders, and transform ambiguity into action. Expertise spans human-centered change, participatory research, workshop facilitation, visual sensemaking, organizational learning, and collaborative innovation. Designs environments where people externalize thinking, build shared understanding, and turn ideas into action.

SELECTED IMPACT

- Facilitated collaboration across researchers, educators, designers, community partners, and institutional leaders to align stakeholders around shared goals and strategic initiatives.
- Designed visual frameworks and collaborative systems that transformed complexity into actionable insight and collective action.
- Created Theory & Concept Visualizations (TCVs), an original multimodal sensemaking methodology that enabled students to weave together theory, lived experience, visual media, and reflection into evolving knowledge systems.
- Led the design and implementation of programs, workflows, and organizational initiatives that translated ideas into sustained practice.
- Secured and stewarded \$4.7M+ in externally funded initiatives by translating vision into compelling strategies, partnerships, and implementation plans.

WORK EXPERIENCE

(2021 — Present)

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

- Lead design strategy across research, learning, media, and innovation initiatives, translating complex organizational goals into actionable frameworks, programs, and collaborative processes.
- Design and facilitate workshops, strategy sessions, and participatory design experiences that help diverse stakeholders build shared understanding, align around priorities, and move ideas into action.
- Architect systems, tools, and workflows that support cross-functional collaboration, organizational learning, and collective problem-solving.
- Co-designed Educational Design for Transformative Social Futures, an interdisciplinary undergraduate pathway that integrates systems thinking, collaborative design, field-based inquiry, and real-world problem-solving to prepare students to address complex social challenges.
- Designed the Earl Center's digital presence, creating scalable structures that help stakeholders navigate complexity and engage with ideas effectively.
- Developed Miro-based Theory & Concept Visualizations (TCVs), an original multimodal sensemaking methodology that enabled students to weave together theory, lived experience, visual media, and reflection into evolving knowledge systems.

(2019 — Present)

- Ethnographic Research
- Qualitative Synthesis
- Systems Thinking
- Journey Mapping
- Visual Sensemaking

COLLABORATION & INNOVATION PLATFORMS

- Miro
- Mural
- Framer
- Notion
- Google Workspace
- Microsoft 365

DESIGN & COMMUNICATION

- Information Design
- Strategic Storytelling
- Visual Framework Development
- Adobe Illustrator
- Adobe InDesign
- Adobe Photoshop

LANGUAGES

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

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

- Lead qualitative and participatory research initiatives with youth, educators, community organizations, and institutional partners, transforming complex findings into actionable insights and strategic recommendations.
- Facilitate collaboration across researchers, schools, and community stakeholders, creating alignment around shared goals, design opportunities, and pathways for implementation.
- Develop visual frameworks, knowledge artifacts, and sensemaking tools that help teams surface patterns, connect perspectives, and make informed decisions.
- Mentor emerging researchers and designers in qualitative inquiry, visual communication, collaborative research methods, and stakeholder-centered design practices.

(2017 — 2019)

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

- Led design-based research focused on computational learning, STEM equity, and collaborative inquiry, translating findings into practical tools, frameworks, and professional learning experiences.
- Designed and facilitated workshops that helped educators, researchers, and community partners explore new approaches to learning, participation, and innovation
- Synthesized research findings into accessible resources, visual frameworks, and implementation strategies that supported adoption and long-term impact.

SELECTED INNOVATION & SENSEMAKING PROJECTS

- **Theory and Concept Visualization:** Created an original visual sensemaking methodology that enables students to externalize thinking, surface relationships, and build shared understanding through evolving collaborative knowledge systems.
- **Design Companion Playbook:** Designed a reflective learning and collaboration system that helped participants capture insights, connect experiences across contexts, and translate observations into collective action.