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STEVEN A. BERG, PhD

UX RESEARCHER & PRODUCT DESIGNER

PhD in cognitive psychology with behavioral research since 2006, including a decade as principal investigator; now a product designer leading a design team for an AI-powered SaaS platform. Published research centers on judgment under uncertainty and word recognition, two of the mechanisms underlying onboarding, defaults, labeling, and information architecture: the parts of a complex product where comprehension is the hard problem.

EXPERIENCE

SideKix HQ, Inc.

Product Designer

April 2026–present

- Lead the design team (up to seven designers): run weekly stand-ups and design critiques, give feedback on progress, and clear blockers; represent design in executive planning and roadmap decisions, then carry guidance back to the team
- Scope design tasks, write acceptance criteria with the leadership team, and maintain the backlog in Linear and Trello, spanning user flows, information architecture, onboarding, defaults, labeling, copy, journey mapping, and design system maintenance
- Led the 0-to-1 product design for the platform; built a scalable design system spanning tokens, components, iconography, type scale, color palette, and motion
- Own design of the Entrepreneurship Development Program: 174 assessments (2,208 scored items) and 696 micro-trainings in nested 5-, 10-, and 15-minute versions; built two AI-assisted authoring tools to generate them, with every item routed through review
- Partner daily with engineering and product on design handoffs, interaction patterns, component specs, and acceptance criteria for a platform in active development
- Audited the mobile app against WCAG 2.1 AA; refined specs and remediation priorities
- Produced six promotional and explainer films for the company’s website and YouTube channel, including separate explainers for members, advisors, and partners; three are featured on the homepage and audience landing pages

Product Design Intern

March 2026–April 2026

- Presented research to executives; findings shaped the roadmap on membership pricing, learning modules, and onboarding
- Wireframed, mapped user flows, and developed components in Figma

The Pennsylvania State University

Assistant Teaching Professor & Laboratory Director

July 2017–December 2025

- Principal investigator on multiple end-to-end research streams examining how people process, interpret, and respond to information; designed and ran controlled experiments in the lab and online (Qualtrics and MTurk) with 3–5 research assistants and ~200 participants per semester
- Published peer-reviewed research on cognitive bias and decision-making with direct implications for UX design patterns
- Translated complex datasets into interaction design, information architecture, and usability decisions; presented and defended findings to high-level stakeholders
- Directed research operations for the department's participant pool: ~35 research assistants and ~500 participants per semester; as sole Sona Systems administrator, verified IRB approval for every live study and trained researchers on study setup and credit administration; developed and administered the IRB protocols, with data governance and confidentiality controls throughout
- Proposed, justified, and managed the lab's annual budget, covering research assistant wages, equipment, and supplies
- Taught, advised, and mentored ~2,500 undergraduate and graduate students
- Helped develop an interdisciplinary Behavioral Finance Certificate with business faculty (2020–2022), applying research on cognitive bias to financial decision-making

Arkansas Tech University

Assistant Professor

July 2015–May 2017

- Launched the department's Sona Systems participant pool (2016): wrote its IRB protocol, coordinated setup with Sona Systems, and served as its sole administrator; principal investigator on mixed-methods experimental studies
- Taught, advised, and mentored ~1,000 undergraduate and graduate students

Additional teaching appointments

Instructor of Record

~5,000 students across five institutions, including Penn State and Arkansas Tech

- University at Buffalo (SUNY; August 2009–July 2015; taught ~1,000 students including a 450-seat introductory lecture)
- Niagara County Community College (May 2014–June 2015)
- Daemen College (now Daemen University) (August 2010–July 2013)

EDUCATION

PhD, Cognitive Psychology · MA, Psychology · BA, Psychology

2015 · 2011 · 2006

University at Buffalo (SUNY) — graduate research in psycholinguistics, 2006–2015, training research assistants throughout; laboratory manager, 2009–2015

Dissertation topic: On word recognition and lexicalization, or how people perceive, encode, and learn new words under lexical competition from existing vocabulary (mental models, vocabulary acquisition, learnability, and onboarding)

CERTIFICATIONS

Professional Certificate, Google UX Design

2026, Google on Coursera (credential ID: MBN0NAW4TZC2)

Professional Certificate, Google AI

2026, Google on Coursera (credential ID: UDWWGN5HAT9X)

Specialization, AI-Powered Design & Creative Tools

2026, SkillsBooster Academy on Coursera (credential ID: KCIOLCUMU8AX)

CITI Program Certifications

2026, human subjects research (social and behavioral, biomedical, internet, and FDA-regulated), Good Clinical Practice (ICH E6(R3)), and Responsible Conduct of Research; valid through 2029

CORE COMPETENCIES

- *Research:* mixed-methods user research (qualitative and quantitative), user interviews, observational studies, usability testing, surveys, card sorting, A/B testing, behavioral telemetry, personas, and competitive audits
- *Design:* wireframing, prototyping, storyboarding, UI fundamentals, information architecture, navigation design, design systems, and affinity and journey mapping
- *Design leadership:* task scoping, acceptance criteria, backlog management, stand-ups and design critiques, and executive presentations
- *Web and accessibility:* WCAG 2.1 AA audits, accessibility standards, and SEO (page titles, meta descriptions, sitemaps, canonical URLs, social link previews, and indexing through Google Search Console)

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGIES

- *Design and collaboration:* Figma, Framer, Claude Design, Miro, Adobe Premiere, and Adobe Photoshop
- *Research and data:* SPSS, R, E-Prime, Qualtrics, REDCap, Sona Systems, and Amazon Mechanical Turk

- *AI and creative:* Claude, Figma Make, Google Gemini and Flow, and Adobe Firefly
- *Productivity:* Microsoft 365 (Excel, PowerPoint, SharePoint, Word), Google Workspace, Slack, Trello, Linear, and Canva

RESEARCH WITH UX IMPLICATIONS (orcid.org/0000-0003-0533-1194)

Anchoring and source credibility: An experimental test of attributed expertise

Under review at *Psychological Reports* (Berg, S. A., 2026)

- Found that source expertise moderates anchoring: the same number swayed estimates 3.6× as strongly when labeled as expert input
- Exploratory analysis found 30% of participants copied an expert-labeled value versus 7% for a novice-labeled one, with implications for prefilled defaults and pricing displays
- Implications for trust signals and AI-assisted decisions: endorsements, verified badges, and AI recommendations may raise reliance on a displayed value

Anchoring and judgment bias: Disregarding under uncertainty

Psychological Reports (Berg, S. A., & Moss, J. H., 2022) [doi.org/10.1177/00332941211016750]

- Instruction to disregard an anchor narrowed the spread between anchors but did not remove the bias
- Asymmetric correction: subjects discounted only the implausible anchor
- A caveat weakens a reference value without removing it; direct implications for price anchoring, pre-filled defaults, and form-field priming

Novel forms in the adult mental lexicon: Listening to new neighbors

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Berg, S. A., 2015) [Publication No. 3725897]

- Newly learned word forms built to compete with familiar ones (“cathedruke” against “cathedral”) produced facilitation rather than the predicted interference; they primed shared sounds before they were learned well enough to compete lexically
- Recognition was slower and less accurate for words with more similar-sounding neighbors; implications for menu labels, feature names, and onboarding terminology

SELECTED WORK

Full case studies at smudgeless.io

- SideKix Entrepreneurship Development Program (2026) — product design
- SideKix (2026) — 0-to-1 SaaS product design
- Disregard the number? Users don’t (2026) — field translation of controlled experiment
- Disregard the expert? Users don’t (2026) — companion study on source credibility
- VR for binocular dysfunction (2026) — case study and feasibility assessment
- Anchoring and judgment bias (2022) — experiment behind the Disregard series