# Maral Akbarianvaryan

Design Researcher | Communication, Care & Well-Being

Wayne State University | Detroit, Michigan
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## Education

**Wayne State University** **2024–present**
Master of Fine Arts in Industrial Design (in progress) Detroit, Michigan
GPA: 3.93/4
**Funding:** Awarded three years of full funding for the MFA program.

**Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch** **2017–2022**
Bachelor of Industrial Design (completed) Tehran, Iran
GPA: 3.62/4

## Certifications & Training

**CITI Program Training** **2025**

**Build Wireframes and Low-Fidelity Prototypes** **2026**
Google

**Foundations of User Experience (UX) Design** **2024**
Google

**Project Management Training** **2023**
College of Engineering, University of Tehran

## Research Interests

- Interpersonal communication and social support
- Care, responsiveness, and close relationships
- Health communication and well-being
- Digital mental health and personal informatics
- Human–computer interaction
- Trauma-informed and inclusive design

## Research & Analytical Skills

**Qualitative analysis:** Thematic and qualitative content analysis; synthesis of semi-structured user and expert interviews; app-store review analysis; identification of user needs and behavioral patterns.

**Quantitative and evaluative methods:** Surveys, quantitative analysis, A/B testing, moderated and unmoderated usability testing, card sorting, heuristic evaluation, benchmarking, and comparative interface analysis.

**Evidence to design:** Research synthesis, insight communication, persona and journey development, interaction design, and low- to high-fidelity prototyping.

## Research Experience

**MFA Thesis — Care and Support in Close Relationships** **In progress**
- Investigates differences between how care is expressed and experienced among partners and friends, focusing on how people communicate needs, interpret intentions, and navigate mismatched support.
- Connects questions about communication and human behavior with design opportunities that reflect people's individual needs and experiences.

**Trace — Mental Health Reflection** **2025**
- Conducted user and expert interviews within an IRB-approved qualitative study to explore how people capture meaningful everyday experiences and prepare for therapy or support conversations.
- Synthesized interview insights and literature into a trauma-informed digital prototype linking events, actions, and outcomes for contextual reflection and pattern exploration.
- Evaluation is ongoing; usability and benefits for reflection remain to be established.

**Uber Safety — Ride-Hailing Safety Concept** **2026**
- Used semi-structured interviews with riders and drivers, card sorting, thematic analysis, and journey mapping to examine safety needs across a trip.
- Translated findings into an interactive concept with adaptive support, trip sharing, reporting, and emergency actions. Usability validation is planned.

**Opal — Flexible Focus Management Concept** **2026**
- Analyzed 100+ app-store reviews using qualitative content analysis and comparative interface analysis to identify needs around focus, autonomy, and changing motivation.
- Developed a high-fidelity prototype with flexible session controls, task planning, peer accountability, and exit-reason prompts.

**Hide and Seek | 2025**
Furniture exploration of how body position and spatial interaction allow people to move between privacy and social connection.

**Rocking Chair** **2025**
Seating exploration connecting childhood play and memory with adult movement, stability, and comfort.

## Teaching Experience

**Instructor, Design Process | Wayne State University** **Aug. 2024–present**
- Support 80+ students in user research, ideation, prototyping, and critique; help them translate user needs into coherent design decisions.
- Adapt explanations and feedback to different skill levels and cultural perspectives, helping students develop their own approaches.

**Graduate Teaching Assistant, Woodshop | Wayne State University** **Aug. 2024–present**

## Professional Design Experience

**Visual Brand Lead | Zarafe, Tehran, Iran** **Dec. 2023–Jun. 2024**
Led visual direction for a notebook product line; collaborated on branding and visual assets, communicated with artists, and coordinated artwork permissions.

**Packaging Designer | Freelance** **2023**
Translated brand identity into structural and visual packaging concepts, connecting material choices, usability, product experience, and production needs.

**Product Designer | Namad** **Apr.–Nov. 2019**
Used user research, competitive analysis, and iterative prototyping to develop modular felt products. Contributed to products that sold more than 7,000 units.

**Interior Designer | Idero** **Jun. 2018–Jan. 2019**
Translated client needs into spatial layouts and material choices with attention to comfort, usability, accessibility, and spatial flow.

## Writing & Academic Service

**Manuscript in preparation**
Beyond Mood Tracking: Designing Trace for Trauma-Informed Reflection and Pattern Exploration.

**Writer | Designooor Lighting Media**
Translate lighting-focused architectural, urban, and product design ideas into clear, accessible stories.

**Peer Reviewer | JMIR Publications**

## Awards & Scholarship Support

**D'Light Lighting Design Award** **2026**
Silver Award, Art and Installation Light category, for Arch of Shiraz.

**Scholarship support | WSU College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts** **Dec. 2025**
Awarded $3,000 in scholarship support.

## Tools & Technical Skills

**Research and collaboration:** Figma, Miro; Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign.
**Prototyping and making:** SolidWorks, Fusion 360, Shapr3D, AutoCAD, KeyShot; 3D modeling, 3D printing, and laser cutting.
**Additional tools:** Procreate, 3ds Max, Blender, Vizcom, and AI-assisted design tools.