Summer Fellowship in Library User Experience

Revised 1/22/2026 (Final version)

Description

The Summer Fellowship in Library User Experience is an 8-week, paid opportunity for a student enrolled in University of Michigan's School of Information to perform user research related to a real-world problem facing one of U-M Library's systems, such as Library Search, Digital Collections, Finding Aids, Research Guides, and the Library website. Mentors from the UX + Design team in Library IT and other library experts will provide guidance and context during this deep exploration.

Through this opportunity, the recipient will gain experience designing and running a user research project centered on library systems, as well as in working closely with experienced library teams.

Example Projects

The project will be aligned with the recipient's areas of interest. Possible projects include, but are not limited to, the following:

Digital Repositories

- Usability-test the user interfaces for Deep Blue Data or Deep Blue Documents, each based on customized open-source platforms and supporting detailed workflows for the deposit of works to enable stable access over time.

Digital and Special Collections

- Perform usability research on making requests for archival materials to be viewed in a reading room. (Vendor-hosted Aeon system)
- In progress Winter 2026! ~~Using research and best practices, develop either a research guide or an onscreen onboarding tutorial or first-time user experience (FTUE) for searching Finding Aids, which has been a tricky concept for new users, and other digital collections content.~~

- In progress FALL 2025/Winter 2026! ~~Explore and test "crosswalks" to enable EAD elements used in finding aids (or metadata from digital collections) to be compatible with the MARC data elements used in library catalog records.~~
- Completed Summer 2025! ~~Perform research and propose interface solutions related to the display of sensitive content in Digital Collections, including prefacing with historical context and implementing screen shielding.~~

Library Search

- Explore the needs Library Search's users, particularly undergraduates, have for "primary source" material. Explore the kinds of resources available across Library Search's 5 search areas to identify definitions of items that could be part of a future "primary source" search function.
- Explore user needs to support enhanced access to materials through Library Search, such as connecting to Interlibrary Loan, highlighting new materials, viewing recommended databases by academic discipline, or browsing materials more effectively.
- Explore the way users understand the current "Get This" functionality in the library's catalog and how the various delivery options align with user understanding and need.
- Completed SUMMER 2024! ~~Propose a redesign of the Library Search "Everything" view to better support new or inexperienced users.~~
- Completed SUMMER/FALL 2024! ~~Analyze Library Catalog search queries (as a first step toward smart searches tailored to users' goals).~~

Library Website

- Explore how users find information about people (library staff) on the library website — including how they move (or not) between site search in the header, the staff directory, find a specialist, division and department pages, and staff profiles — and identify potential areas for improvement to help folks find and connect with experts who can support them.
- In progress SUMMER 2026! ~~Investigate how well users can navigate the library website to explore our spaces and support their own wayfinding. This may touch on the presentation of what libraries and other destinations are in each building, as well as floor plans. (Note, a project to redesign our presentation of study spaces was completed in summer 2025.)~~

Research Guides (Springshare LibGuides)

- Perform usability and/or accessibility research on Research Guides, including analysis of navigation and common guide formats and content structures.

Other Library Websites or Tools

- Perform usability and/or accessibility research on the Library Account site.

Other Possible Areas of Focus

- Propose data-centered projects related to U-M Library, including web analytics
- Propose projects related to AI tool use in library research

Expectations

The recipient will work 28 hours per week during standard business hours (8AM-5PM) for the 8 weeks of the fellowship, including weekly check-ins with mentors and research-related appointments and working sessions. Working remotely or hybrid/remote is possible, depending on the nature of the project selected.

At the conclusion of the fellowship, the recipient will present research findings and recommendations, as well as share a brief narrative reflecting on their own learning experience to be shared with our generous anonymous donor.

Fellowship Details

- **Pay rate:** $22/hour
- **Duration and hours:** 28 hours/week for 8 weeks (up 224 total hours) Negotiable start date
- **Location:** Ann Arbor Campus, with hybrid or remote work possible
- **Supervisor:** Robyn Ness, Senior User Experience Strategist, Design and Discovery Department, Library IT, University of Michigan Library

How to Apply

Use this form to submit your resume and a statement of interest in PDF format by Friday, March 20, 2026.

Your statement of interest must include:

- Your UMSI program, student level, and graduation date/expected graduation date.
- Areas of research interest for library systems (see Example Projects above for ideas, but you can also propose your own topic) and a brief explanation of how you might approach a related project.
- (Optional, but encouraged) Previous experience with libraries or library systems (as a library patron, student at UMSI, or other).
- Contact information for three professional or academic references who can talk about your working style (to be contacted only in the final stage after we confirm your interest in accepting an offer).

We will be reviewing applications and scheduling interviews as applications are received. Following a first interview, selected finalists will have a second interview to outline their proposed project in greater detail. Selection and notification of applicants will be completed by mid-April.

Please contact Robyn Ness (rlness@umich.edu) for any questions.