

## The Quarterly Interview: Ning Zou

Harvard Graduate School of Education

-Edited Transcript-

**LOEX:** *Where do you work? What is your job title and what are your main responsibilities? How long have you been in this position?*

**Zou:** I work at the Gutman Library, Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). My job title is Associate Director for Student Academic Services and Learning Design | Research Librarian.

Below are my main job responsibilities:

- Oversees Gutman Library's community, peer-to-peer learning functions: the Writing Center, the Communications Lab, and research services. These services include programming, coaching students, and partnering across related offices at HGSE.
- Leads Gutman Library's Research Services Team (RST), including managing communications internal to the team and external to it; working closely with all the Gutman research librarians to lead and collaborate on RST vision, strategic planning, budgeting, and web-based research services (including virtual reference, HOLLIS, tutorials, and management of Springshare products in conjunction with Access Services).
- Manages Gutman Library's provisions for blended learning, instructional design, and technological innovation.
- Serves as not only an active member of Gutman Library's Research Services Team but also the larger Research, Teaching, and Learning (RTL) Team; leverages critical pedagogies, the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, and the RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers to support HGSE's curricular, research, and strategic priorities.
- Facilitates collaboration with other RTL librarians within Gutman Library and across the Harvard Library.
- Serves as a member of the Gutman Library leadership team

**You have been very active in ALA's Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT), including a term as President. What do you like best about LIRT? What is your proudest accomplishment?**

I love LIRT's inclusiveness of its membership. LIRT welcomes librarians from all types of libraries who commit to library instruction. My proudest accomplishment within LIRT is to work with colleagues to boost the Roundtable's membership to the second largest within ALA Roundtables during my LIRT presidential term.

**You have a background in Learning Design. How would you describe Learning Design, and how has it been helpful in your role as a librarian (particularly when it comes to instruction)?**

Learning Design to me is the process of creating learning objects and opportunities which could be delivered a/synchronously. I'm a firm believer in University Design for Instruction (UDI) and Backward Design. When it comes to instruction, the Backward Design principles help me think like an assessor—designing the learning piece is like auditing whether I have a way to collect evidence to assess the effectiveness of the instruction. Starting from the end of outcomes enables me to include well-thought-out activities and crafted content to support learning and to monitor how learning is going throughout the process. UDI provides the framework for designing accessible and inclusive instructional materials and lessons.

I often found that learning design principles are applicable to non-learning design projects including but not limited to project management and meeting facilitation. For example, having a UDI mindset when designing a project or facilitating a meeting will foster an inclusive working and meeting environment. As a project manager, one should consider providing options of perception and expression, from forming a project team to managing and supporting the members throughout the project. More specifically, making an effort to learn about each member's skill set, their preferred meeting time of the day, desired communication method and favored way to give feedback would help engage the team and enhance performance.

**When designing an online tutorial or reviewing one that has been designed by someone else, what is the most common one or two mistakes that you see made?**

Based on my observation, I found many tutorials are lacking context and assessment activities or focus on teaching students how to use a specific library research tool. I wouldn't frame these as mistakes; instead, I would frame them as lacking a holistic approach to learning design. I would suggest learning designers enrich their design wherever applicable by 1) contextualizing the learning topics either through a simulated or real research assignment (e.g., a literature review or an annotated bibliography); 2) finding a way to add an assessment component, not user satisfaction or attitude type of assessment, but integrated exercises to reinforce learning and making learning visible ; 3) emphasizing more on research strategies and library research knowledge (e.g., types of information sources, the information cycle, etc.) that learners can transfer when using different research tools or working with various types of library materials. These recommendations would work best if the tutorial is a comprehensive information literacy piece or a course embedded

*(Interview...Continued on page 11)*

*(Interview...Continued from page 12)*

learning object. I understand there might be barriers such as librarian's capacity, project timeline, and other external factors that prevent learning designers from fully utilize learning design principles.

***Including the library at which you work, the Gutman Library, Harvard University has 28 libraries that comprise Harvard Library. How does having so many libraries impact, both positively and negatively, your work? How do you facilitate collaboration with other Harvard librarians?***

The more the merrier, as having a diverse body of libraries and personnel can only enrich my work. Harvard Library just recently revamped its governance system to provide a more structured and supportive ecosystem for colleagues to provide services across libraries and schools. In addition to serving on university-wide library committees and councils, folks can join/start discussion groups, affinity groups, etc. to engage in a wide range of collaborations. For example, last year I started a writing service affinity group to involve colleagues from the professional school libraries who have job responsibilities in working for their schools' writing and communications unit. We used Microsoft Teams to share resources. We also have routine chats to keep one other posted with our local practices and exchange our joys and woes concerning writing and communication.

***You oversee Gutman Library's community, peer-to-peer learning functions. What initiatives have you undertaken in the past few years that you are most proud of? How has this community work been impacted by the pandemic?***

I founded the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Communications Lab (CommLab). In addition to writing support, the CommLab provides expertise and space for students to hone their oral and visual communication skills through one-on-one and small group appointments as well as workshops and webinars. In the past few years, our CommLab Teaching Fellows (TFs) have worked with both master's and doctoral students and helped them with doctoral defenses, capstone presentations, elevator pitches, and even commencement speeches.

Another great initiative, I think, is to start a new tradition to create the Writing Center and CommLab annual report. The annual report articulates our mission, team background students' experience, future plans, and service statistics. It's an imperative artifact to demonstrate the value of our services to stake holders and administrators and to engage them in conversations for future advancement, funding, and support.

Honestly speaking, a big accomplishment was our ability to effectively handle the increased demand for our services when our number of appointments spiked for the academic year (AY) 2020-2021, 40% more than the previous year, 758 in total. Once our school decided to go online for AY 2020-2021 in June 2020, we started to move our in-person academic writing workshops to Canvas and developed learning modules with check-in quizzes. That way we could offer the workshops a/synchronously.

I deeply appreciate our amazing HGSE teaching fellows who work with me at the Writing Center and CommLab. They are the backbone of the services.

Ironically, the pandemic had a very positive impact on how we approach our service and program design. Before the pandemic, our signature Introduction to Academic Writing workshop series were offered only in-person. To maximize attendance, these workshops were scheduled during a few weekends in September each year. However, that timing required our TFs and the students to work during the week-end and during the peak apple picking season. Additionally, the learning materials were not readily accessible after the workshops. But once we were notified in June 2020 the school will move the entire program online in Academic Year 2020-2021, our team started to transform the in-person workshops to a comprehensive a/synchronous learning experience; when we designed the modules, we aimed to be able to use them regardless of the delivery mode. Now, the workshop modules are available for students all year long. There are also helpful writing materials for a course teaching fellow or a faculty to refer their students to. We were forced by the pandemic to move our 1:1 writing appointments online as well. As our degree programs are completely residential, before the pandemic almost all the student individual support services were delivered in-person. Today, due to the pandemic, the writing center offers only virtual appointments. We have received great feedback from the students, especially about the accessibility of the appointments.

***What do you wish that academic librarians would change about the way they think about and teach information literacy?***

This is a challenging question to answer. Without knowing the "learner" or "learning environment", it's hard to just make a general wish. I would encourage academic librarians to contextualize their information literacy instruction and integrate their instruction into the curriculum as much as they can. To accomplish that requires their library director or dean's support as they sit at the table with their school's department chairs/deans advocating and promoting the library's information literacy programs.

***What books or articles have influenced you?***

- Harvard Business Review Press. (2017). *The Harvard Business Review manager's handbook : the 17 skills leaders need to stand out*. Harvard Business Review Press.

I would recommend the above title to any managers, novice or experienced. The handbook provides easy to follow strategies to be an effective manager without being burned out.

*(Interview...Continued on page 10)*

(Mentimeter...Continued from page 6)

## Teaching with Mentimeter

Now that you know how it works, you may decide to use Mentimeter as a tool to deliver library instruction to your students or patrons. If so, here are a few ideas for how it might be used to encourage interaction and engagement:

*Icebreakers:* Consider starting your instruction session with a fun, easy-to-answer question in order to set a relaxed tone and the expectation that there will be student participation. This will also introduce them to the mechanics of responding via Menti and reduce the number of questions you need to field about how to use the tool once you get into the meat of your presentation.

*Brainstorming:* Pose a question to your students and use an “open-ended” or “word cloud” slide to collect their ideas. You could either have the submitted ideas appear immediately (allowing students to build off others’ ideas), or instead, hide the results until all submissions are complete and reveal them all at once (in order to gauge, without the influence of fellow audience members, which ideas might be the most common).

*Think-Pair-Share:* Use Mentimeter for the “share” part of this classic classroom activity. Students can discuss their thoughts in pairs or small groups, whether in the classroom or an online breakout room, and then report out to the whole class by entering their responses via an “open ended” question slide.

*Assess Knowledge:* Quiz slides can be used to develop a quick assessment that you could use at the beginning of a session to judge what students already know about your topic. Alternately, you could sprinkle quiz questions throughout your presentation to assess whether students understand a specific concept or if more discussion is needed.

*Feedback Tool:* Allow students to provide feedback on their learning experience at the end of the class. Use a “scales” or “ranking” slide type to gauge which activities students found helpful and/or which need to be improved. Or use open-ended questions to do a “one-minute paper” where students tell you the most important concept(s) they learned and what question(s) remained unanswered.

## Conclusion

Presentation software and polling applications are both commonly used by library instructors to develop and deliver engaging instructional content to students both in person and online. Typically, however, it is necessary to use at least two separate tools in order to take advantage of the strengths of each. With Mentimeter, you get the benefit of both types of tools in one, all wrapped up in an easy-to-use interface. Give it a try, and I think you’ll find that you are able to create fun, interactive, and engaging presentation materials in a snap.

(Interview...Continued from page 11)

- Norman. (1990). *The design of everyday things* (1st Doubleday/Currency ed.). Doubleday.

This was one of the textbooks I had while in library school studying human computer interaction. Norman infused humor and visualization to depict core design principles. A must read for all learning designers.

- Ritchhart, Morrison, K., & Church, M. (2011). *Making Thinking Visible : How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners* (First edition). Jossey-Bass.

As a big believer in evidence-based practice, *Making Thinking Visible* opens a new door of designing effective assessment activities and offers a plethora of ways to make thinking visible. If you’re designing an information literacy course a/synchronously, you would benefit the most from this book.