Sepehr Vaez Afshar

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Authorized to work in the U.S., no sponsorship required

Summary

- Researcher, producer, and prototyper of interactive experiences across games, XR, and museums, focused on accessibility.
- Mixed-methods UX research and playtesting, from IRB-approved studies with wheelchair users to large-scale datasets.
- Nine years across university research, funded production teams, and two startups; clear communicator to teams and sponsors.

Education

Ph.D., Informatics (Data Analytics & Information Visualization), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign — Expected May 2028
M.Sc., Architecture (Historic Preservation), Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, with Honors — 2024
M.Sc., Landscape Architecture, Istanbul Technical University, Türkiye, with Honors — 2022

Experience

Research Assistant, VRchaeology — Fall 2026–Present
Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL
- Lead IRB-approved accessibility playtests with wheelchair users (14 to date): surveys, interviews, observation, and video.
- Designed and built the gamified platform for GSD 282 (quests, points, semester map); co-creating the course for Spring 2027.

Doctoral Researcher, Games, XR & Museums — 2024–Present
School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL
- Built and validated a hand-coded dataset of XR adoption in 161 U.S. museums; now scaling the coding protocol to about 1,100.
- Developed Bitong WebAR, a no-install AR pipeline letting small museums publish 3D artifacts via QR code (Spurlock Museum pilot).
- Mined Steam reviews of 1,371 historical and educational games to model what drives player experience; in submission.

Associate Producer & XR Lead — Aug 2024–Aug 2026
Game Studies & Design stu/dio, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL
- Coordinated programmers, designers, and artists on three externally funded projects (NSF-funded VRchaeology, VR Rocketry, Mo Sho), owning scope, timelines, sponsor communication, and QA.
- Led UX evaluation and playtesting for VRchaeology on Meta Quest 3, turning player feedback into prioritized design changes.

Teaching & Research Assistant — 2022–2026
University of Illinois, Urbana, IL and Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
- Supported four graduate courses (game development, architecture, community design) and three faculty research projects.
- Built a web-based gamified AR experience for FabriCity XR, exhibited at the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Research & Development Intern — Summer 2023
JHP Architecture/Urban Design, Dallas, TX
- Built a proof of concept moving client projects from ARCHICAD to Twinmotion and Unreal Engine.

Co-Founder & CTO, OyuNest | **Co-Founder & R&D Lead, ARTechi** — 2017–2022
İTÜ ARI Teknokent, Istanbul, Türkiye and Urmia Science & Technology Park, Iran
- Led product development for a TÜBİTAK-funded game design platform ($25K grant; methodology patented in South Korea).

Leadership & Service

- **Founder & Council Lead,** IMMERSE Graduate Student Council, University of Illinois (2026–Present)
- **Panelist,** game production and communities of practice, MDEV game developer conference (2025, 2026)
- **Student Member,** ADA Coordinator Student Advisory Committee; **Inaugural Fellow,** Ethos of Care, Spurlock Museum (2026–2027)
- **Web Master,** NCPE (2024–Present); **Workshops Coordinator,** DigitalFUTURES (2023–Present)
- **Reviewer,** ACM CHI 2027; **Program Committee,** GALA 2026

Selected Recognition

- 3 journal articles, 1 book chapter (Routledge), 12 conference papers, 16 peer-reviewed presentations, and 9 invited lectures
- Herbert G. Schaefer Scholarship ($10K, 2026); APT (3 years) and NCPE (4 years) Student Scholar Awards; Ivan Petrovic Prize, eCAADe 2021; Phi Kappa Phi

Skills

Research & Evaluation: Mixed methods, UX evaluation, playtesting, accessibility testing, surveys and interviews, qualitative coding, Python, QGIS
Technical: Unity, Unreal Engine, Meta Quest, WebAR, Three.js/WebGL, HTML/CSS/JS, photogrammetry, Jira, AI-assisted development
Languages: English (professional), Persian and Azerbaijani (native), Turkish (advanced) **Design:** Photoshop, InDesign