Sara Weston

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DATA SCIENTIST | QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH | ADVANCED ANALYTICS & BEHAVIORAL DATA

Behavioral scientist with 14 years of experience and 50+ peer-reviewed publications, specializing in individual differences and heterogeneity analysis. I build reproducible data pipelines and modular systems that transform "messy data" into actionable insights—treating variation as signal, not noise. Award-winning instructor skilled at translating complex statistical methods into clear stakeholder narratives. I'm easier to work with than most academics: I trained 10+ grad students to challenge my thinking, I document so others can iterate without me, and I change my mind when the data says I should.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development (RAPID-EC)   04/2020 - Present
Data Scientist • Contractor   Remote

- Designed and deployed 50+ waves of nationally representative surveys tracking 3,300+ families during COVID-19, integrating behavioral and attitudinal data to uncover unmet needs; outputs used by Senate Finance Committee staff to inform Child Tax Credit expansion.
- Built automated NLP pipeline (tidytext, stm) to analyze 6,500+ open-ended responses, identifying emerging pain points in real time; findings informed survey iteration and federal policy recommendations.
- Developed predictive models identifying families at highest risk for material hardship, integrating attitudinal and behavioral data for targeted interventions.
- Created interactive R Markdown dashboards visualizing trends by demographic segments (e.g., material hardship by poverty status over time); used by policymakers and RAPID team to prioritize research questions.
- Collaborated with policymakers, non-profits, and technical teams to translate complex survey data into product-style briefs; insights reached 50,000+ households through federal support programs.

University of Oregon   01/2019 - Present
Associate Professor of Psychology & Director of Graduate Studies Eugene, OR

- Built Power BI dashboard tracking 70+ doctoral students' milestone progress; used by 30 faculty to identify at-risk students, reducing time-to-degree and informing program policy decisions.
- Led program redesign through stakeholder research: conducted interviews with faculty and students to identify pain points in a key milestone, synthesized feedback into proposals, and secured unanimous faculty vote—reducing completion time and advisor burden.
- Implemented proactive student tracking system with regular progress check-ins and newsletters, improving milestone completion rates and student satisfaction.
- Applied NLP and social network analysis to 700,000+ online community posts to map individual differences in the Type 1 diabetes community; findings informed healthcare communication strategies for patient advocacy organizations.
- Mentored 13 early-career researchers (5 graduate, 8 undergraduate) through publication and career transitions; graduates placed in data science roles, graduate programs, and industry research positions.
- Designed and delivered graduate-level statistics curriculum using open-source tools (R, jamovi); received Tykeson Teaching Award (2025) for making complex data accessible through clear storytelling.
- Managed $250K annual research budget across multiple concurrent projects; secured $1.5M+ in competitive NIH and foundation funding as PI. (

Northwestern University
Postdoctoral Fellow, Medical Social Sciences

01/2017 - 01/2019
Evanston, IL

- Coordinated analysis across 15 longitudinal datasets (49,000+ participants) to identify patterns in health behavior; led team of analysts across multiple international institutions.
- Built automated R pipelines for reproducible meta-analysis: analysts ran standardized scripts, outputs fed directly into aggregation and visualization. Increased research output 4x (from 3 coordinated analyses pre-pipeline to 12+ post-implementation).

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Personality Psychology
Washington University in St. Louis   St. Louis, MO • 05/2017

B.A. in English & Psychology
Northwestern University   Evanston, IL • 06/2012

Recipient of Undergraduate Research Award

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

Tykeson Teaching Award   05/2025
University of Oregon

Rising Star Award   06/2021
Association for Psychological Science

Rising Star Award   06/2017
Association for Research in Personality

PUBLICATIONS

Identifying the number and labels of topics in structural topic modeling analyses: A tutorial.   05/2023
Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science
Methods tutorial (cited 100+ times).

Mapping individual differences online: A case study of the Type 1 diabetes community.   10/2021
JMIR Diabetes
Large-scale social media text analysis.

Psychosocial factors associated with preventive pediatric care during the COVID-19 pandemic.   10/2021
Social Science & Medicine
ML for health behavior prediction; informed policy recommendations.

For a complete list of publications, see www.sarajweston.com.

SKILLS

Programming & Tools: brms), ggplot2, Git, Power BI, Qualtrics, R (tidyverse, SQL, stm, Tableau, tidytext

Analytics & Modeling: Bayesian inference, causal inference, Multilevel/longitudinal modeling, NLP/topic modeling, predictive modeling, psychometrics, segmentation

Research Methods: A/B testing, experimental design, interviews, scale development, Survey design, usability testing

Collboration & Communication: cross-functional alignment, Stakeholder management, translating technical findings for non-technical audiences, workshop facilitation