

Library Wayfinding and Signage Recommendations

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Overview

The library, in addition to being one of the largest buildings on campus, is uniquely confusing in its layout due to its construction history. Built in two parts, the three public stairwells and two elevators do not connect to all the floors because the floors do not vertically align or span the two sections of the building. This leads to considerable confusion when navigating the building, especially when patrons must also use unfamiliar systems (e.g. Library of Congress call numbers and Cutter Numbers) to provide direction.

Additionally, the building has also undergone several renovations, either in sections or across the entire building. These changes have brought improvements to spaces but also inconsistencies in sign design and placement.

Lastly, as a building with many uses, library employees frequently post informational, instructional, or regulatory signs. These signs, while less permanent, set the tone for library users as a written extension of our services and instruction.

To address these issues the library created a task force, comprised of members from three departments. Following a brief literature review, we scanned the building to review current sign issues and examples and surveyed both patrons and library employees. The patron survey focused on wayfinding specifically. The following report is a summary of our findings and recommendations.

Key Survey Findings

Across the three “ease of use” questions, patrons were nearly evenly split in finding it easy (very easy, easy, somewhat easy) or difficult (very difficult, difficult, somewhat difficult) to find collections, services and offices and spaces. When asked where they got lost, the top three areas were bookshelves (25%), the stairs (23.9%) and hallways (21.6%). An additional 12.5% reported getting lost in the building’s elevators.

Surveyed library employees were split regarding the amount and placement of signage in the building. However, employees agreed more in regards to accuracy and design. Positively, most responded that signs are “mostly accurate.” Unfortunately, most reported that they were inconsistently designed.

Directional

Directional signs help patrons navigate the space. They point to rooms, spaces, collections, offices, stairs and elevators.

Stairs

With almost a quarter of our surveyed users getting lost in the stairs, this indicates that our patrons need more directional help when they are using stairwells in the building. Currently, there is no signage in the stairwells indicating the floor number or providing any information about the services or collections on that floor. We recommend using adhesive/vinyl lettering on walls in stairwells to create signage that conveys what floor you are on and the services available on that floor. Any references to Level 3 should also make clear that this is the Main Level.



Elevators

The library's elevators can confuse patrons. To some extent, this is due to the building's layout. Since floors do not vertically align between "new" and "old" sections of the building, the elevators on either side of the building go to different floors. This layout creates confusion when navigating elevators, but improved signage could mitigate some of this. In the elevator on the "old" side of the building, the original buttons for the floors are mislabeled, and makeshift stickers and paper signs are used to indicate the correct floor numbers. We recommend replacing the elevator buttons with buttons that are correctly numbered, a potentially simple fix that could go a long way to reduce confusion. There is also currently an abundance of signs around the library's elevators, and too many signs can create more confusion than they resolve. See "Removal" for recommendations about removing superfluous signs around the building.

Open Spaces

As the third floor is the main floor of the building, and where many patrons enter from the quad, it is important to have immediately accessible and clear navigational tools visible from the doorway. We recommend a stand-alone directory sign, placed in a central location of the 3rd floor lobby. To address

changing library spaces the directory must have slots or spaces for printed labels, maps or information.

In addition to hallways, stairs and elevators, patrons must make navigational decisions in more open spaces as well, such as the 3rd/main floor and 1A/1B. While good design practice dictates sign placement in more traditional spaces with only a few directions a patron can go, open, visually and navigationally complex spaces will require further experimentation. See "Service Points, Departments, Named Rooms and directional signs in open spaces" for more.

Identification

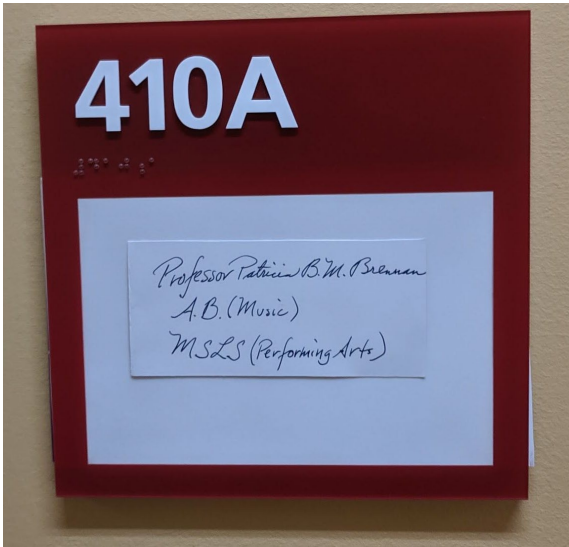
These signs label and describe desks, offices, rooms, collections, tools, spaces, etc. to be both visible from other areas in the building and clarify that you have found what you are looking for.

Shelves/Collection

Bookshelves were the most commonly cited place where surveyed patrons had been lost in the library. Shelves are currently affixed with signs that indicate the LC classification numbers shelved in that range. Although LC classification numbers are essential to locate books on the shelves, they are not necessarily meaningful or sensible to patrons. We recommend using signs at the ends of some shelf ranges that briefly describe subjects. The American Library Association offers an inexpensive option for creating these signs: <https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/library-congress-class-signs> and <https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/find-it-lc-poster>. We recommend exploring further options for call number labeling after the collection is shifted to follow LC call number order throughout the building.

Employee Offices

Library employees specifically requested improved office signs. In addition to requesting unified design and placement for functionality, having easily updated slots for the occupants' names was seen as helpful in humanizing staff for patrons and a practical way to address office moves.



We recommend that the library use the office and room signs currently used in new construction on campus, such as Library Level 1, Craig Lee and Gaige. These signs clearly identify the room, are ADA compliant with Braille, and have space to update the room occupant or use.

Service Points, Departments, Named Rooms and directional signs in open spaces

To explore better signage options for these needs the committee plans on: reviewing signs at other libraries, digital mock-ups for placement and size, and potentially using temporary signage to prototype options with patrons.

Instructional, Informational & Regulatory

These signs may be less permanent and created by library employees. They include things like: instructions (printing, photocopying, adding funds to a student ID), behavior guidelines (cell phone use, silent study floors, policies), and notices of events or issues in the library (work being done, computers needing repair).

Currently the library has many temporary, or semi-temporary instructional, informational and regulatory signs. Among library employees 64.7% believed there were too many of this type of sign and 82.4% believed they are inconsistently designed.

Removal



For a new coherent library sign design to fully work old signs, of all types, must be removed, both where new signs will be placed and in areas that will not have new signs. "No signage whatsoever is better than bad signage" (White, 2010). Throughout the survey employees noted that the paper signs also frequently look dated, worn, scribbled on or taken down.

Some areas have multiple paper signs, clearly trying to address an issue, but leading to a cluttered space and information overload.



Additionally the library has several hanging signs. These signs are frequently blocked by columns and above patrons' eye-level.

We recommend removing the hanging signs and reducing the number of instructional, informational and regulatory signs. The remaining instructional signs should be large, have short and simple text, and be posted at the point of need. Regulatory signs, if required, should be posted where the behavior needs to be addressed - for example signs about leaving items unattended are not responding to the issue when posted on shelving, but is more targeted when posted near seating and tables.

Additionally, we recommend that periodic checks of temporary signs to ensure only relevant signs are up in the building. When signs stay up for too long, they become part of the environment. With only the needed signs up, the remaining will be more noticeable to patrons.



Printable Templates

To make it easy for temporary signage to be consistent, we recommend maintaining and laminating a collection of frequently used temporary signs, such as notifications for events in the library, and saving digital templates for unexpected temporary sign needs that all library staff members can access. See an example at the end of this report.

Additional Considerations

For greater accessibility, regularly used instructional, informational and regulatory signs should be saved digitally in a space all library employees, including students, can easily send to patrons who use screen readers for text.

While not directly related to signage, a visually impaired patron also noted that the areas of the library with limited light, such as some of the shelving on the second floor, and stairwells, are not safe for patrons with limited visibility. While understandably more environmentally friendly, these should be set back to fully lit to be functional for all patrons.

Literature

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