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ARTICLES

Out with the Old, In with the New: Best Practices for Replacing Library Signage

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Signage is an essential way of communicating with users and is a vital way to alert patrons to important information, news, upcoming events, policies, and directions. Literature on library signage has emphasized the importance of consistency and clarity, to avoid clutter and contradictory messaging, and the need for buy-in from library staff, faculty and patrons. However, few scholarly studies address user preferences in signage. This article fills the void between theory and practice, and offers step-by-step details for revamping signage, specifically in an academic library. At the heart of the authors' thesis is that library signs are living documents. Libraries are always in the process of reinventing themselves, and library signage must adapt to the constant movement of a library "in motion." If properly designed and well placed, library signage should help create a meaningful experience for its patrons. This study is a follow-up to the article, "Do You See the Signs?: Evaluating Language, Branding, and Design in a Library Signage Audit," which outlined the first stage of the authors' signage redesign project. This article addresses the implementation of new signage, which includes developing best practices, a signage policy, gaining departmental buy-in, developing a signage map, and creating new signs.

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INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase DiMattia (2005), signs, like those posting the speed limit on a highway, are often considered a suggestion and not a requirement. They are sometimes so overlooked that patrons brush them aside to ask library staff a question that was address in the very sign they moved (McMorran & Reynolds, 2010). However, signage is an essential means of communicating with users, and is often a vital way to alert patrons to important information, news, upcoming events, policies, and directions. Literature on library signage has emphasized the importance of consistency and clarity in signs and to avoid clutter and contradictory or harsh messaging. Beyond these recommendations, there remains a lack of specifics about creating a comprehensive in-house signage system. The literature has also noted the need for buy-in from library staff, faculty, and patrons, but there are few scholarly studies directly related to user preferences in signage. This article will report survey data to fill the void between theory and practice, and offer step-by-step details for revamping signage, specifically in an academic library.

At the heart of the authors' thesis is that library signs are living documents. Libraries are always in the process of reinventing themselves. They cannot remain stagnant or they will lose their relevance. Libraries attempt to meet user needs by introducing new services and addressing gaps in their collections. Library signage must adapt to the constant movement and flux of a library "in motion." If properly designed and well placed, library signage should help create a meaningful experience for its patrons. Therefore, a flexible system needs to be in place that can provide uniformity, but allows for user feedback and to reflect new resources, services, and policies. Regular updates are also necessary to keep signs looking clean and fresh, thereby more noticeable and effective. This study is a follow-up to the article "Do You See the Signs? Evaluating Language, Branding, and Design in a Library Signage Audit," published in the spring 2013 issue of this journal. The article outlined the first stage of the authors' signage redesign project. The second stage of the project addressed in this article is implementation. The implementation process has included developing best practices, signage policies and a signage process map, gaining departmental buy-in, and creating new signs.

The College of Staten Island (CSI) is a four-year senior college of the City University of New York. The college confers degrees from the associate to doctoral level in liberal arts and sciences, and professional studies. In addition to housing a three-floor library, the college's 30,000 square foot building houses other academic and support offices as well as a café, all of which are located in the front portion of the facility. Once through the

lobby, patrons officially enter the library into rotunda with a dome. Circulation and reference areas, and administrative offices, comprise the rest of the first floor. The second floor includes the Library Learning Lab (the classroom for library instruction), as well as the Archives and Special Collections, individual study rooms, the K–12 Text Collection, and additional office space. Computer terminals, printers, photocopiers, scanners, and reading areas are also abundant on both floors. The third floor houses the circulating book collection, printed periodicals, as well as computers, individual study carrels, and reading alcoves.

NEW COLLEGE BRAND

At the time of the signage redesign project, CSI underwent a new branding strategy that informed the direction the authors would take. The new branding initiative, which began in summer 2012, included a change in logo, college colors, and accompanying graphics. The new brand had implications on all print and online marketing material, affecting both academic and service departments in the college. It was important for the library to adhere to the branding guidelines, which were posted on the Design Services website. The library website, signage, flyers, brochures, and all promotional material were all affected by the change in the college brand, and the initiative greatly influenced our study.

The literature on branding emphasizes that a brand represents the spirit of the organization and its visual identity (Kenneway, 2006). The library may have its own unique brand identity, but it must be related to the larger organization. A library brand represents, “all the things that come to mind, all the expectations they have when they hear the word *library*, and how you wish people to perceive your library” (Stimson, 2007, p. 694). Branding is intangible and conceptual, and not limited to logos, font colors, or images (Kenneway, 2006). Branding represents a common vision of the organization, and that may relate to language, slogans, colors, fonts, logos, signage, and website design. Hohmann (2001) also argued for consistency in language and in its visual appearance. Shaffer (2003) asserted that brands represent the total sum of images that people have in their heads about a particular company (p. 82). In order to make the library memorable, the library must develop a strong brand. Kenneway (2006), a marketing director who is not trained as a librarian, argued that libraries are suffering from outdated perceptions (p. 120) and they need to rebrand themselves. Stimson examined library branding and argued that all librarians and library staff need to have a unified vision of their organization in order to develop a consistent library brand. She wrote that a “brand checkup” should be held annually (p. 697) to ensure that the library mission is still being supported. Consistency and the idea of a regular monthly “checkup” should be applied to signage as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have denounced libraries for poor signage; criticizing their design, tone, and haphazard nature of mounting (Barclay & Scott, 2012; Serfass, 2011; White, 2010). Such signage tarnishes the look of the facility, creates ineffective messaging, and does a disservice to a great marketing opportunity. In an effort to reverse this trend, articles have provided tips for more successful signage including branding, consistent design, avoidance of clutter, and employing user-friendly language. Recent literature has echoed these themes.

The use of library signage as a marketing tool has been discussed by Versotek (2005) and Jones, McCandless, Kiblinger, Giles, and McCabe (2011), who noted how signage, among other marketing techniques, was used to promote books and lead to a dramatic increase in circulation numbers. While specific to public libraries, Campbell-Hicks (2011) stressed the need to develop a “lively, funky, and well-designed promotional program,” and went so far as to ask if librarians have “the courage to spend more on publicity and marketing even if less on resources?” (p. 16).

Library marketing also emphasizes the concept of user-experience, aimed at creating an attractive, efficient, and welcoming learning environment. Although the 2011 keynote address by Clinton Kelly of TLC’s *What Not to Wear* at the Association of College and Research Libraries conference was met with much controversy, Fawley contends that appearances do matter (2012). She wrote that academic libraries “have expected students to visit because they have to, without making an effort to make their experiences satisfying and productive,” and asked, “What message are libraries sending when signage is hard to read, looks unprofessional, or is nonexistent?” (p. 414). Although ideal, Fawley believes that it is not necessary to be a graphic designer to develop professional signage with a concise message and harmonious design appropriate for an academic setting. Like previous articles, she recommended avoiding sloppy signage and clutter, and creating a brand with a logo or tagline that reflects your library’s mission and distinguishes it from other departments and offices on and around your campus. Fawley also advocated for developing a style manual outlining font, type size, and color for all library materials.

Mueller (2012) reported the shock he and fellow architects experienced upon taking tours of a number of new public and academic libraries deemed architecturally significant. He was distressed by the plethora of unappealing, inconsistent designs taped on seemingly any surface possible. Mueller noted that while architects are responsible for designing and mounting directional signs, as well as those identifying rooms and acknowledging donors, there remains an array of signage essentially overlooked until after the facility is utilized. He suggested that during the initial design process, architects should

create templates for staff-generated signage that will complement the overall aesthetic of the building.

While most recent articles have focused on library signage pertaining to informational, promotional, or directional signage, Yelinek and Bressler (2013) addressed policy signs. They honed in on the major policy issue of library noise, which has increased as a result of technology and the digital native culture of the current student body. Digital natives are millennials born between 1980 and 1994 who are generally tech savvy, flexible, practical, self-disciplined, multitaskers, impatient, and results-oriented. They expect to enjoy food and drinks in the library, use their cell phones, and some may believe that a library filled with computers resembles a computer lab, thus noise is permitted (p. 44). The authors consulted library noise studies from over the last 20 years after designated cellphone areas and related signage proved futile. Their literature review exposed that “support of a policy doesn’t always translate into adherence to it” (p. 47). Yelinek and Bressler discussed the need for, but limitations of, student buy-in, citing the mixed results of the studies by Clement and Scott (1994) and Snowman (2004, p. 47). They also noted the surprising outcome described by Lever and Katz (2006) at Florida Atlantic University, whose library witnessed a decline in noise complaints and cell phone use in restricted areas upon removing related signage (p. 48). This may reveal the positive effect students can have on policing their peers, and it was suggested as a topic for further research. An overriding theme in the literature was the need to have a written policy in place when confronting noisy patrons, as librarians are more at ease when a clearly identifiable policy is available to justify the need for enforcement. While there is no definitive method to prevent or curb noise issues, Yelinek and Bressler (2003) concluded that developing high quality signs and receiving buy-in from patrons has generated results. However, signage is not valuable if the policies are not enforced (p. 47).

As libraries continue to adapt and struggle for relevance in the Information Age, it is not surprising that some may consider paper signs a relic of the past. Consequently, much of the current literature on library signage has focused on digital signs. Although such signs are not directly pertinent to this study, this trend should not go unnoticed, especially as most of the same issues remain regardless of the technology applied.

The latest articles on the subject illustrate that digital signs, just as paper signs, have their own set of limitations and drawbacks. The issue of strategically placing signs in heavily trafficked areas at eye level remains as relevant for digital signage as with paper. However, a complication with digital signs, whether using computer monitor or flat screen, is the need to have a central processing unit (CPU) secured in close proximity. Such technology, both hardware and special signage software, can be expensive and necessitate training. Although freely available tools such as PowerPoint can be used, if

proprietary software is purchased, signage may only be licensed for one computer (Schander, 2013).

Larson and Quam (2010) focused on informational and directional signs as an, “essential part of the interior space,” but noted that “. . . the ubiquitous sign and media saturation has challenged us to design and maintain effective signage that is conspicuous and commands a moment of attention” (p. 37). The authors offered technological advice with specifications and justifications for selection choices and noted that their initiative resulted in the implementation of a centralized university-wide digital signage system. However, the need for designated staff and a budget for such a system may not be widely useful for libraries that struggle with limited finances and personnel. The article concluded that a hybrid of signs using various methods, including dry-erase and paper signs, continue to be used to relay time-sensitive messages.

Confronting a “tyranny of signs” (p. 6) at their public library, McMorran and Reynolds (2010) stated a clear objective “to clear away the barrier of signs that stood between us and our customers without losing a notification system” (p. 6). A new circulation desk was fitted with a 52-inch plasma screen to replace the myriad of paper announcements and policies with attention-grabbing digital images. The authors soon realized that the large plasma screen was in effect an advanced digital photo frame, and such a device could be used to solve the problem of signage clutter at the reference desk. When four other service desks also requested digital frames, the authors determined that a system to unify and maintain all the signs created in various library departments was necessary. As a result, a manual for developing and transferring slides from computer to multiple frames was created and made available in shared directory.

Literature on signage outside libraries can be very helpful when determining best practices and usability, particularly with regard to policy signs. Airport directional signs have been criticized in many U.S. airports (Stoller, 2013). Stoller critiqued four airports (Columbus, Houston, Miami, and San Francisco) and noticed common signage problems such as placement, size, outdated or confusing signs, or a lack of sufficient signs. The Columbus airport signs were designed by a Dutch designer and the program was implemented in 2001. Nonetheless, after task groups conducted extensive research, testing, and feedback, it was found that people were still confused. The main thesis of this article argued that signage needs to be continually assessed and updated. Airport officials need to solicit feedback on a more regular basis and from different user groups.

Zhang et al. (2013) studied the connection between highway signage and driver distraction. Highway signage directs drivers on and off highway exits, entrances, and provide directions for gas, food, and lodging. Such signs may possess problems such as readability (too much text), and a variety of logos, which may result in cluttered, confusing signage. Their study involved

24 participants (12 female and 12 male) from 18 to 58 years, with 20/20 vision, who had driven at least five hours a week. The subjects viewed three types of highway signs: a six-panel sign (two rows by three columns), a nine-panel sign (three by three), and a 12-panel sign (four by three; p. 473). After a total of 432 observations amongst the participants, the authors analyzed how drivers' speed was affected by the different panel sign combinations (p. 477). Nine panel logo signs attracted drivers to slow down more than 6- or 12-panel combination signs (p. 477). Drivers reduced their speed and gaze upon nine panel signs, but they either ignored or only superficially glanced over 6-panel and 12-panel combination logo signs (p. 478). It may be concluded that perhaps the square-like shape or balanced design of three by three may attract drivers more than the alternative sign designs.

Rousek and Hallbeck (2011) used three questionnaires and three pictogram identification tests to study subjects' recognition of hospital signage. The authors asked 50 participants (25 male and 25 female) with excellent eyesight to look at a variety of hospital signage in the form of pictograms. After completing the three questionnaires, the subjects wore goggles to mimic five eye conditions (p. 774). They were asked to identify the pictogram and select their preferred pictogram based on color preference and contrast. These experiments illustrated that subjects preferred high contrast, easily recognizable images. In particular, subjects were inclined toward black-white contrast or a red, black, and white contrast, noting that they connected warning signs with red (pp. 772, 782). Subjects also preferred accurate depictions of human forms, as opposed to oversimplified images (i.e., clipart; p. 780). Lastly, coupling text (bolded, serif font), in conjunction with images, helped to increase subject comprehension of signs (pp. 772, 782).

Nettle, Nott, and Bateson (2012) reported how simple signage was installed for one year in three high-theft locations on the campus of Newcastle University (p. 2). The signage was simple in nature and used as a scare tactic. The sign installed was in black and white text reading, "cycle thieves, we're watching" along with an image of piercing eyes below the text. The simplicity of this sign was effective. Over the next year, the number of cycle thefts in those three locations decreased from 39 to 15. In the control locations of campus (without signs), the number of cycle thefts increased from 31 to 51 (p. 2). The authors confirmed that there was a high association between the design and overall tone of the sign and the number of cycle thefts in the last previous year. Their study infers that simplicity and visual imagery (piercing eyes) can be effective in reducing the number of bicycle thefts on a university campus. The authors acknowledge that the signs were misleading, as they warned potential thieves that they were being watched, a claim that was not in fact true. This falsehood could have had negative effects since the signs disseminated a message of distrust to its students, faculty, and staff. The tone of the signs may evoke a toxic university culture of suspicion and paranoia,

regardless of the successful decline in bicycle thefts. Further, these signs could be interpreted as unfriendly, unethical, and offensive to those on campus who engage in law-abiding activities.

Coady et al. (2013) discussed the effectiveness of the graphic warning signs posted in selected retailers in New York City (NYC). Ten tobacco retailers were randomly selected in each of the five boroughs of NYC (p. e52). For the 50 retailers, 10 existing customers were selected to complete a baseline survey and a follow-up survey. Across the two surveys, 3,200 respondents were asked to complete the study, although in the end the authors only received 1,007 surveys because 43% declined to complete it. Participants were over the age of 18, NYC residents, and were current and recent smokers (p. e52). When the respondents completed the initial and follow-up survey, the data illustrated that the graphic signs had a profound effect on them. Sixty-six percent of respondents from the follow-up survey noticed the signs. Forty-seven percent of the follow-up survey respondents thought about the health risks, 43% of those respondents thought about quitting, and 50% of those respondents reported that the signs helped them quit (p. e54). Only 8.3% of respondents from the follow-up survey noticed the signs but went back to purchase more cigarettes regardless. The data suggest that graphic warning signs relating to smoking do have an impact when posted in tobacco retailers at the point of sale. It is evident that after the follow-up survey, the respondents were more aware of the health risks of smoking, and their increased awareness helped facilitate their decision to stop smoking (p. e54).

Aucote, Miner, and Dahlhaus (2012) discussed the interpretation of warning signage in a natural setting of a beach facing a cliff. The authors conducted face-to-face interviews with 62 subjects over two timeslots. For the first timeslot, 24 subjects were recruited as “high risk beach users” and were identified as such because they frequent the “high risk” zones of the beach (p. 524). Thirty-eight subjects were recruited for the second round of interviews from both high and low risk areas of the beach (p. 525). The authors also divided the subjects into local residents and visitors. They found that local residents understood the warning signage more than visitors, perhaps because they had pre-existing knowledge of the danger of falling cliff rock (p. 528). The authors reported that the subjects knew it was a general warning sign but did not fully comprehend its severity as a directional warning sign (p. 526). Aucote et al. argued that individuals devote little cognitive resources toward interpreting signs at the beach. The sign must be clear, simple in design, and avoid any misleading content. It was determined that the warning sign did not contain enough information, as it used elementary graphics and not enough descriptive text. The authors conclude that warning signage should be instructional in addition to visual (p. 528).

Although the current literature on library signage, both in paper and digital format, is helpful to those addressing the issue in their own libraries,

a disconnect remains between what the literature reports as quality signage and what students prefer. The literature also tends to offer vague suggestions for consistency and clarity in a signage system. The study detailed in this article hopes to offer more explicit guidelines for creating in-house library signage and includes specific feedback from patrons regarding their signage preferences. The literature argues that it is important to solicit feedback from your users so that signage is fully comprehended. Focus groups and active experimentation, engagement, and discussions may be viewed as successful methods to ensure that signage is effective and user friendly. The authors also cite buy-in as an important component. If buy-in is not established, the policies on signage will be ignored.

METHODOLOGY

Stage 1: Audit, Removal, and Replacement

To assess the effectiveness of signage, the authors conducted a thorough signage audit in summer 2012 and published their results and experiences during the process (Stempler & Polger, 2013). The authors classified signs into three types (policy, informational, and directional) and three statuses (permanent, temporary in-house, and time-sensitive in-house). After the audit, they created an inventory of the types of signs, designs, and messages, and documented their location.

After consulting the literature on signage, they created two documents: best practice guidelines and a signage policy. The first document illustrated best practices in the design and placement of signage and addressed other issues such as font, language, tone, and branding. The signage policy outlined how signs would be created in the future, and specific methods to avoid. These included mounting signage with visible tape, signage placed on student work space, and the use of punitive language.

The authors created a Signage Subcommittee, which functions as a component of the library's Marketing and Outreach Committee. The Signage Subcommittee was charged with managing all in-house temporary and time-sensitive library signs. This included removing old and outdated signage; developing the design, language, and message of new signs; and mounting new or replacement signage. Under the direction of the Chief Librarian, the Signage Subcommittee was responsible for drafting the best practice document and the signage policy. The best practice document is suggestive and makes recommendations, while the signage policy is more rigid in nature. During the process that followed the audit, the authors struggled with defining the elements that constituted a "signage policy" as opposed to a "best practice." The authors engaged in several healthy debates, and for the purposes of this study (and their work culture), they distinguish

a “signage policy” from a “best practice” through a simple distinction; a signage policy is a document that contains more specific guidelines with little flexibility. The signage policy attempts to provide consistency through a common set of policies that can be applied to signage, and all promotional material. This differed from a “best practice guideline” document that is more flexible, lenient, and subject to change.

Best practice guidelines for signage included:

- Use positive, nonpunitive language, avoiding the word “no.” Some examples of the changes in messaging that contain a more user friendly tone include:
 - Replacing a sign that read, “no cellphones,” with “please use cellphones outside of the library.” The omission of “no” creates a friendlier, non-threatening environment.
 - Replacing a sign that read, “these computers are for research only,” with “please use computers for academic purposes,” is a more inclusive and broad function that goes beyond research.
 - Replacing a sign that read, “no food or drink,” to “please enjoy food and drink outside the library,” is more pleasant, less punitive, and is more positive in overall tone.
- Avoid clipart.
- Avoid all capital letters (which suggests shouting).
- Use consistent language from a controlled vocabulary list (i.e., thesaurus)
- Policy signs should be created in the portrait orientation, and informational signs should be created in the landscape orientation. The varied orientations advance the distinctive nature of the signs, and help to differentiate one kind of sign from another. Additionally, it was determined that informational signs require more text, which the portrait orientation better facilitates.

Our library’s signage policy includes:

- All signs must contain the college and library brand at the bottom center of the sign.
- All signs must be mounted on glass, placed in plastic frames, or mounted on bulletin boards.
- All signs will not be taped on walls or furniture. If tape is necessary, it must not be visible.
- All signs should be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.
- All signs will be approved and created by the Signage Subcommittee, under the direction of the Chief Librarian.

Buy-in from the department was essential to implement this project but was initially met with some reservations. Many complained that during the audit process too many signs were removed but not replaced fast enough. Ongoing discussions at department meetings, as well as meetings with

the Chief Librarian, helped fuel buy-in with the department and the entire library at large.

Initially, the authors decided to differentiate between promotional and policy signs in two ways: policy signs would be created without images, with a clear, concise, and user-friendly message in landscape orientation. Consequently, promotional signs would be designed in portrait orientation. This orientation allows for images as well as more text, which is often necessary to describe a new resource or service. The landscape and portrait designations also helped allocate the available plastic sign holders in those orientations.

The new college/library logo was successfully placed on all signs and flyers. In addition to being a branding tool, the logo also provides credibility to signs and helps to distinguish library signs from unauthorized signs posted in the library. Additionally, the authors decided that flyers, which would not be printed in color, need not have the same color-orientated design as the signs. However, in order to provide consistency, they should have the logo.

Once the signs were created, the authors had to determine how many signs would be printed, which is a balancing act of producing enough signs to be noticed, but not too many that would result in clutter. The plastic holders cost approximately \$15.00 each, so it was advantageous to use what was readily available, and the limited space on new bulletin boards also had to be considered. Therefore, a location tool or “signage map” would help determine where signs would be strategically placed.

The Signage Subcommittee created a signage map using the original blueprints of the library floor plans. The purpose of this “map” was to provide guidance and document the specific locations of signage. In the past, signage was placed randomly throughout the three floors of the library, which resulted in clutter, particularly when old or outdated signage was never removed. Since signage reflects the ever changing, dynamic nature of the library, signage needs to be constantly revisited and changed. The signage map was developed as a strategic tool to provide “bump points” (or decision points) where signage should be placed. The signage map had designated “stars” that indicated approximate places where signs would be posted (see Figure 1).

The signage map above helped the authors facilitate and maintain the new methods for displaying signage. The strategy involved several layers, based primarily on signage content.

In order to create more appropriate spaces for promotional signs, bulletin boards were purchased and strategically mounted. These smaller bulletin boards complemented the large bulletin board located in the library lobby and another large standing board previously used to display new books covers that was repurposed and placed in a vacant corridor leading to the reference area. In total, three reasonably priced bulletin boards were purchased. One was placed on an empty wall near the elevator on the first floor. This is a heavily trafficked area, as many students use this elevator to

FIGURE 1 Screenshot of the signage locator mapping tool. (Color figure available online.)

access the second and third floor. The other two bulletin boards were placed at the elevator and stairway entrances to the third floor.

Initially, signs were placed on the bulletin boards using push pins. However, the authors soon noticed that others were removing library signs and posting their own signs using library push pins. As a result, the authors began to staple signs to bulletin boards and placed a small label indicating that bulletin boards were reserved for official library use. This change has proven successful.

The authors also determined that larger policy posters would be placed at the entrances of each floor and in other targeted areas. However, this was done in a limited fashion so not to create clutter or bombard patrons with necessary, but restrictive policies. Similar to the heavily trafficked areas identified for the bulletin boards, the authors placed policy posters at the entrance of the library, by the elevator on the first floor, near the stairs on the second floor that is visible to those entering the second floor and walking to the third floor, and at both the elevator and stairway entrances to the third floor. In theory, these strategic locations should be seen by all students entering the library and each floor.

A few other policy signs, emphasizing the appropriate noise level expected on the floors and regarding cell phone talking, were also strategically placed. For example, cellphone policy signs were placed on

high end tables at the ends of the PC stations in front of the reference desk. Therefore, these policy signs are readily available to librarians to identify for enforcement purposes.

Signs that had been taped on furniture and other surfaces had been removed during the audit process. However, signs in plastic holders continued to clutter the reference desk and remained placed on student work tables throughout the Library. It was decided that signs at the reference desk would be promotional and limited. While signs on the tables would seem to catch the attention of students, it was found that in addition to creating clutter, students needed all of the available space on the tables for books and laptops. As a result, these signs were routinely removed from the tables. The authors also noticed that such accessible signs were also often vandalized. Therefore, the authors decided to remove signs from tables and placed signs in plastic holders on window sills on the perimeter on each floor. As a result, these signs are highly visible but did not take up work space. Computer use policy signs were also placed sporadically on connecting computer stations that line the rotunda on each floor. The authors resolved that such policy signs need only to be placed where the computers were located, and the signage placement did not interfere with work space.

Stage 2: Questionnaire Administration

The authors administered two forms of assessment. They administered an informal questionnaire over two weeks in July 2013 with library faculty and staff ($N=75$). Four signs representing two policy signs and two promotional signs (cellphone and computer use policy, and those promoting calculators and textbooks, respectively) were created in three different font faces; the college approved font (Trade Gothic LT extended, sans serif), Times New Roman (simple serif), and Arial Wide font (sans serif). The sets of signs also had varying degrees of text size and white space, ranging from large text size and very little white space, to smaller text size and much white space. Twelve signs printed in color were displayed on a large table in the library conference room where library faculty and staff voted anonymously for their favorite signs.

Announcements were made via email and word of mouth asking faculty, staff, and work study students to complete the informal questionnaire by checking off the sign they prefer. After two weeks, the authors counted the number of checkmarks and the signs containing the college font received the most votes. Anecdotal feedback from both faculty and staff suggested the most effective signage would benefit from being larger in font size with a balance of text and white space (the middle option).

The second assessment was a formal questionnaire approved by the College's Institutional Review Board (IRB). From October to November 2013, the authors recruited 310 respondents by administering an anonymous

paper questionnaire in the library building and at the Campus Center, which houses student clubs and the college cafeteria. Over the course of ten, one-hour sessions, the authors recruited students to complete an approximately three-minute questionnaire where they were asked to select whether they preferred the “A” or “B” sign designs. The “A” design consisted of older signs that were taken down during the audit the previous year. These signs had been created over the course of many years and contained inconsistent designs and branding, and clipart. The signs also used some punitive, unfriendly language and symbols, namely circle backslash symbol in red. The “B” designs were created by the authors and followed the best practice guidelines developed after the audit. These signs adhered to the signage policy, and were placed strategically in the facility based on consultation with the signage map. The new college brand which had been incorporated in the new library logo, as well as any previous branding, was removed from both “A” and “B” designs so students would not be able to readily identify the new from the old signs. Please see the Appendix for the questionnaire.

The authors primarily surveyed students, all of whom were over the age of 18, while some faculty and staff also participated in the questionnaire. The authors displayed signs (printed in color on letter size paper) on table in both locations (library building and Campus Center). A mix of six promotional and policy sign were used for the questionnaire, including those related to cell phone use policy, textbooks, calculators, quiet study areas, computer use policy, and the new book shelf. Directional signs are almost exclusively permanent, institutionally produced signs and therefore were not included. The “A” and “B” designs of like messages (i.e., both “A” and “B” cell phone use policy signs) were placed side by side. Chairs were made available so students could sit to consult the signs and answer the questionnaire. The last question of the questionnaire provided respondents with the opportunity to enter open-ended comments about signage or any aspect of the library.

For both types of assessment, it is important to note that the samples were not representative of the entire CSI community. Responses from the informal questionnaire were not representative of all library faculty and staff, even though the signs were spread on the table days, evenings, and weekends. The authors could not be certain that all faculty and staff received the announcement or had the chance to select their preferred sign. Further, some library faculty and staff expressed disinterest, so they may not have participated. For the larger, more formal questionnaire, the authors recruited respondents during peak hours (primarily between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.) at the entrances of two different buildings, the library and Campus Center, which were determined to contained the most students during weekdays. It should be noted that the authors did not receive data from weekend or evening students, or from students who may not enter either facility. The authors used mini chocolates and pens as incentives provided upon completion of the questionnaire, and are therefore aware that some respondent

data may be obscured due to such motivating factors. Responses from those under the age of 18 were discarded.

Figures 2–9 give the distribution (in percent) for signage preferences “A (old)” and “B (new)” preferences across all statuses of the college.

FIGURE 2 Overall signage preferences for all respondents in both campus locations. (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 3 Distribution of respondents according to the campus location. (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 4 Breakdown of respondents according to their status in the college. (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 5 Gender breakdown from all respondents. (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 6 Promotional signage preferences: 1L (library building) with 1C (student center). (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 7 Policy signage preferences: 1L (library building) with 1C (student center). (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 8 Preferences to policy signage across each year of student. (Color figure available online.)

FIGURE 9 Preferences to promotional signage across each year of student. (Color figure available online.)

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Of the 310 respondents, 40% chose to answer the open-ended question. Of the 125 respondents, 66 provided answers related to signage, while the other 59 commented on the library in general. The signage related open-ended comments were divided into four broad categories:

1. Design: font, font size, professionalism, brightness, color, attractiveness.
2. Content/Policy: tone, whether kind or hostile.
3. Simplicity: wording, clarity, concise, “less is more.”
4. General: nonspecific comments such as “more signs,” or “...layout is appealing.”

Thirty-six percent of respondents provided comments related to visual material, including suggestions for use of pictures, bright colors, and enhancing the sign’s general attractiveness and professionalism. This high percentage corresponds with the survey results. It became abundantly clear that students prefer images on signs, due to the fact that they are more attractive and prefer both to read less text as well as the “understandable symbolism” of graphics. Another 23% suggested simplicity, writing such comments as “less is more” or “keep it simple.” These respondents also used such terms as “clear” and “concise,” and recommended using few words. These recommendations are in line with the literature. Eleven percent of respondents made comments specific to font size, highlighting the need for the text to be readable. Twenty percent of the comments were more general comments about signs but lacked any specific recommendation or insight. Finally, four respondents mentioned a specific type of policy sign (three regarding noise signs and one regarding the nonacademic use of computers), and another three comments mentioned the tone of the sign, which is a content and messaging issue.

It is significant to note that 40% of students took the time to write in the open ended section and 53% of those chose to comment about signage, which demonstrates a degree of interest in the subject. The authors also noticed that ten of the comments not related to signage voiced concerns about library noise or non-academic use of computers in the library. Dozens more commented that the library needs more computers. While these comments are not directly related to signage, this may imply a level of support for the policies related to noise and computer use.

SELECTED OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

The following open-ended comments provide insight into the reasoning behind why some respondents voted for A (old) signs and while others voted for B (new) signs. Many votes were split between “A” and “B,” as respondents often struggled with their desire for simplicity but gravitated toward

those containing visual imagery. As previously discussed, “B” policy signs did not contain images. Although the data illustrated that respondents preferred “A” for policy signs, one self-identified design student unanimously chose all “B” signs. The design student commented, “Make them modern, clean, and simple,” while another commented, “The B signs seem more visible, concise, to the point!” Additional comments included, “B’s are more convincing. Some A’s are depressing and angry looking,” “B’s are better,” and, “Simplicity is better. All the A’s have too much going on.”

Respondents who preferred “A” signs offered a different approach to the symbolism of signage. One commented that “although, the colored signs are more obnoxious, they capture more attention.” Another wrote, “I like signs with bold text and understandable symbolism. The stop signs works perfectly.” Although the authors disagree with the potentially offensive symbol of the red stop sign, the authors found that 63% of respondents selected the sign with this symbol. Anecdotal evidence may suggest that the red stop (silence) sign may exhibit a passive aggressive tone that students desired in the library’s designated silent areas, where they sometimes struggle with noncompliant patrons. Many students voiced discomfort policing other students. As a result, they may feel that such a strong sign like the red stop sign would deter students from speaking. Another commented, “I do feel in a lot of situations students need visuals to assist them. Most don’t take the time to read.” This comment also revealed that images add value to the signs. However, the literature suggests avoiding clipart (Serfass, 2011; Rousek & Hallbeck, 2011). Therefore more appropriate and realistic images should be selected in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

Comments stemmed from several respondents who wanted signs to be “brighter” and have more colors. Similar comments related to attractiveness. Many respondents equated an attractive sign with one that contained an image. Although attractiveness was not defined by the respondent, many of these people selected “A” signs because of the variety of colors used, as well as the use of images.

Another theme that emerged was the preference of images over text in signage. Most respondents wanted images to accompany text or replace it completely. Many respondents spoke candidly with the authors after completing the questionnaire and mentioned how they do not want to read the text on a sign. They felt that the image should be the primary communication method and the text would follow. They want and expect the image to convey the meaning. Respondents who read signs wanted simple text to accompany an image that would be able to explain a policy, service, resource instantly. Most respondents agreed that an image with less text will grab attention. If there is too much text, or no image, most will not stop to read a sign and it will be simply ignored.

DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates the overall sign preference of respondents. The authors were surprised that the majority of respondents selected the “A” (old) signs.

Sixty-three percent of respondents selected the “A” signs for cell phone and silent study, while 50% of respondents selected the “A” sign for computer use. The authors were pleasantly surprised when respondents selected the new, “B,” signs for calculators and textbooks, which happened to be the only new signs that contained images. These two signs also were preferred by among the highest margins, 56% and 40%, respectively. The authors believe that this signifies a preference for the new “B” design, as long as it contains an image. The “A” signs for calculators and textbooks were similar in design to the “B” sign, except the “A” sign contained outdated clipart images of a cell phone and a juvenile depiction of a textbook. In addition, both calculator and textbook “A” signs were very wordy.

It is important to note that 75% of respondents selected the “A” (old design) for new book shelf. Both signs contained virtually identical messages with one very important exception: sign A (old) had a small clipart image of a book whereas sign B (new) did not use an image.

Demographics

The authors also attempted to analyze patterns in data distribution according to campus location. Figures Two through Four illustrate demographics and related data from the questionnaire, including the breakdown from the location, status at the college, and gender. Overall, the gender breakdown is 54% female and 46% male; however, in 1C, the breakdown was 50% male and 50% female. In 1L, women were the majority (56% women to 44% men) and the majority of 1L students were sophomores (27%). Likewise, freshman students made up the vast majority (41%) of respondents in 1C. Therefore, it should be noted that the 1L preferences illustrated in the 1L and 1C crosstab figures, Figures Five and Six, contained more women and more sophomore students, while the greater preference for “A” signs in 1C responses came overwhelmingly from freshman students.

Another pattern that emerged is that as students continued their studies, their preferences for “A” signs slowly declined. This pattern is exemplified in signage related to cell phone policy. There is a downward slope in preference for the “A” sign for cell phone use for responses from students ranging from freshmen (66%) to senior (57%). This may be due to the increased preference for text-only simple signage, rather than the more juvenile graphic of the screaming cell phone in the “A” sign. The signs promoting calculators and textbooks also increased in preference towards the “B” sign. Respondents preferred the “B” design for calculators from freshmen (73%) to senior (80%), while respondents preferred the “B” design for textbooks from freshmen (66%) to senior (78%). The silent study sign “A” (the red stop sign) had an increase in preference to the “A” sign from freshmen (62%) to senior (70%). This could be due to students’ frustration in

managing noise and their belief that a more direct, familiar, and harsh symbol may help solve the problem.

Regarding textbooks signs, 76% of respondents preferred the “B” sign in 1L (library building) while only 60% preferred the “B” sign in the 1C building (student center). While problematic to assume, the data may infer that respondents in the 1L building have a more vested interest in the library, so they are more interested in seeing actual textbook titles (such as B signs) rather than seeing clipart images of textbooks. Of course there may have been some respondents in the 1C building who are avid library users, so this is merely an inference.

In terms of the silent study sign, 57% of respondents from 1L preferred the somewhat punitive red stop sign design, while 72% of respondents from 1C preferred the “A” design of that sign. The difference in number could be due to a variety of reasons. Perhaps 1C respondents, of which the majority are freshmen, preferred the more aggressive, punitive sign because they are further removed than those who may be inside the 1L building. The almost 50/50 split for silent study signs from respondents inside 1L may represent those who like a balance of gentle, polite, and simplified statements. Others in the 1L building may prefer more aggressive method to managing noise on all library levels.

For signs related to computer use, 54% of respondents in the 1L building preferred the “B” design while 41% of respondents in the 1C preferred the “B” design. The difference of 13% in preference in the 1L building versus the 1C building could illustrate the need for library users to access computers for academic purposes, while the 41% who prefer the “B” signs may not be as well acquainted with the computer use policy in the library.

Regarding the new book shelf sign, 72% respondents in the 1L building preferred “A” signs compared with 28% for “B” signs. Eighty percent of respondents in the 1C building preferred “A” signs compared with 20% who preferred “B” signs. This difference is preference between the two places is not significant, but it does infer that students prefer graphics since the only difference in the new book shelf sign was the clipart image of the book. Other than the graphic, the color scheme was different in the “A” sign, but generally speaking, both signs were very similar (see questionnaire attached, sign #6). In addition, the new book shelf sign was also preferred in the same fashion with respect to gender. Seventy percent of women preferred “A” in building 1L while 81% preferred sign “A” in the 1C building.

Overall Sign Preference

The closest of all sign preferences related to the computer use policy sign. As the sixth figure illustrates, while the old, “A” policy signs were preferred by all students, those who responded in 1L preferred the new “B” computer use

sign. The authors believe this may be because students in the library building use the computers and therefore are more invested in the availability of computers for academic purposes rather than personal use. Also, while the two largest groups of students surveyed were freshmen and sophomores, this sign was preferred evenly among freshmen (50%/50%), and sophomores selected B signs by a small margin of 49%/51%. Yet graduate students overwhelmingly chose B signs for textbooks (92%), calculators (80%), and computer use (77%). However, graduate students preferred “A” signs for silent study (62%) and cell phones (62%). This may reflect the seriousness of graduate students who want a stricter red stop sign to help manage noise in the library. Perhaps senior and graduate students who prefer “A” signs are frustrated by a noisy environment and therefore prefer the more punitive images displayed in cellphone and silent study signs, which they feel are more effective to help control noise.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of the questionnaire, the authors acknowledge that perhaps they should have alternated the order of the old and new signs, rather than consistently placing the old signs before the new. While not necessary, the authors also determined that they could have asked participants how often they visited the library or their primary purpose of the visit. This data would have provided more insight into our users, which could have been tied to their preferences. Additionally, the authors also acknowledge that they captured data from respondents during the weekdays in the afternoon with one subsample during the 5:00–6:30 p.m. timeslot. In the future it would be worthwhile to compare more weekend and weekday preference data, or evening or daytime data, to see if any patterns emerge.

When the authors started implementing new signage, some resistance and a lack of enthusiasm was felt within the department. Some of the authors' colleagues commented that they ignored signage because they felt it was ineffective, and in general, they were not as passionate or interested in revising the current signage. Some felt that since signs were often ignored by students, library faculty should not invest time in creating more signs. Others suggested that the library should only get signs professionally designed. The authors felt that due to budgetary and time constraints, temporary promotional (informational) and policy signage should be (and often has to be) developed “in house.” However, as an exception to this rule is directional signage. Directional signs, which are largely permanent, should be developed at the institutional level, but in consultation with librarians who best understand their users' needs.

The lack of enthusiasm tied with a delay in department buy-in created obstacles. For a signage removal and replacement project to be successful

and progress, there needs to be a general sense of agreement. Although the Chief Librarian directed this project, initially, there was some resistance, and the authors needed to respect the diverse perspectives of library faculty, staff, and student employees. Many adjunct reference librarians, who work evenings and weekends, expressed frustration and felt “out of the loop” regarding communications about the library. Some had noticed the removal (and replacement) of signage, and while a number of adjunct librarians expressed delight, others wished they had been asked for feedback. Another roadblock was a lack of consistency in how the policy signs were enforced. As noted by Yelinek and Bressler (2013), library faculty and staff may feel uncomfortable “policing” noise and other inappropriate behavior such as cellphone talking and eating in the library.

In the case of libraries, signage may be ignored not only by users but also by library staff who may continue to create signage that do not conform to the guidelines outlined in the best practices document. The authors just recently experienced this issue during the finals period. The circulation/reserve desk had ran out of laptops to loan and staff made a black and white sign that read, in all caps, “no laptops,” without including the library logo. While well-intentioned, this sign was neither attractive, user friendly, or particularly helpful. It was also confusing as the sign did not indicate if this was a temporary or permanent situation. Once the authors noticed this, it was immediately replaced with a sign in the new design, using an image of the real laptop that is loaned, and along with the message, “laptops are unavailable at this time, please come back later.”

Generally speaking, buy-in has improved. The readily available templates facilitate making signs on the fly, and as a result the authors have been asked to make numerous new signs. Although this is a positive development, the authors are concerned that they are becoming victims of their own success and are now adding too many signs. Consequently, it was decided that certain promotional signs, such as those promoting the Library’s social media presence, could be collapsed into one sign, and others could be placed in a rotating fashion on designated bulletin boards.

The signage redesign project has expanded to include all types of promotional material, including flyers and brochures, and has also informed the design of the new website. This step was necessary to provide consistency in all library material. The success of the project could stem from adapting to the change in signs and the whole notion of a systematic signage system. However, much of the improvement may be attributed to the continued and expressed support of the Chief Librarian, who has regularly encouraged support for the signage redesign project in department meetings and has acknowledged the project in the library’s annual report.

The survey results shed light not only into the signs preferences themselves, but they also gave the authors an opportunity to know their users better, especially from the open-ended comments. The comments illuminated their concerns and the reasoning behind their choices,

particularly regarding images and policies that affect their user experience, such as noise and computer use.

It was concluded that patrons favored signs with images, which were deemed more eye-catching and may often replace the need to read. Although it was evident that they prefer a more concise message with less text, there were mixed results in terms of tone. Some preferred a more hostile message, which could have reflected their frustration with noise levels and a lack of computers due to nonacademic use. However, such tones do not support a user friendly, learning environment. Overall, the significant preference for the new promotional calculator and textbook signs, as the only new signs that contained images in the new design, illustrates support for the project. This inclination at such a compelling level implies that use of real images with concise wording would result in the most effective sign.

Under the direction of the Chief Librarian, coupled with departmental buy-in, the authors have developed their own distinct “library brand.” By adapting the college brand, they have created their own visual identity. It is important to be visually similar to the college, yet be unique. The authors also encountered the politics of branding through communications with the College’s Design Services Department. As a result, some minor revisions related to the library logo on our signage, promotional material, and website had to be made in order to better comply with college-wide branding policies.

Through this experience, the authors developed a greater understanding of branding that extends far beyond signage and adding a college logo to each sign. Singh and Ovsak (2013) argued that the library’s brand recognition is created through the accumulation of experiences a user has with the library (p. 345). A positive library brand can be achieved through the library’s touchpoints (p. 345). The touchpoints may be user friendly signs, service desks, brochure stands, helpful librarians, a pleasant space, a user-friendly website, easy to understand brochures. The summation of those touchpoints leads to brand equity and an overall positive user experience (p. 345).

Branding in libraries is more abstract than in corporate settings. More emphasis is directed on services rather than products (Singh & Ovsak, 2013, p. 346). Service branding relates to the interactions and experiences a user has in an organization. It is intangible and difficult to measure, unlike product branding, which relates directly to something tangible. Having consistent, user friendly, nonpunitive signs may aid in maintaining a positive service brand.

In the aftermath of the survey feedback, the authors will continue to incorporate images in all new signs, though appropriate images for policy signs remain a challenge. Although the red circle backslash symbol and clip art were often preferred, the authors will continue avoid its use in order to maintain a user-friendly tone and professional design in library signage. However, thicker, more colorful borders in various shades of the college’s colors were added to make signs more colorful and to differentiate one sign from another. This change has also included the use of a red border on policy

signs, which incorporates a color that is eye-catching and associated with a restriction, but is more user-friendly than the circle backslash symbol. We hope the newness of the revised look will make the signs more appealing and eye-catching to our regular patrons, and therefore result in more efficient library signage. These changes are not viewed as setbacks, but rather as part of the process because signs are, after all, living documents.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please confirm that you are over 18 years old.
2. Time of the day?
 - 12:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.
 - 5:00 p.m.–6:30 p.m.
3. Location?
 - Library building (1L)
 - Student Center (1C)
4. What is your status in the College?
 - freshman
 - sophomore
 - junior
 - senior
 - graduate student
 - staff
 - faculty
5. Gender
 - male
 - female
 - self-identify

6. Sign preferences: out of the six signs below, please select an “A” or “B” design from each row. (Color figures available online.)

A design

B design

A design

B design

7. Please share anything else about signage or the library in general.
Thank you.

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