

Collection Signage UX Study - Final Report

What we did

1. **Follow-Alongs:** A follow along is a mixture of an interview and an observation. The researcher asks participants to complete tasks and then follows the participant as they go about completing the task. Participants are instructed to talk-aloud as they make decisions and the researcher asks clarification and follow up questions along the way. In May, we conducted follow-alongs with six students (3 undergraduate and 3 graduate students) from English, Business (2 students), OVC, Political Science, and Environmental Sciences programs. We asked participants to show us how they would find the following books:
 - a. *Anne of Green Gables* by LM Montgomery (4th floor)
 - b. *Qualitative Research Methods* 4th by edition Pranee Liamputtong (5th floor)
 - c. *Rethinking Asian tourism : culture, encounters and local response* by editor Ploysri Porananond (3rd floor)

After participants completed the tasks, we asked them the following questions:

- a. What do you think the call numbers mean? How do you think the books are arranged?
 - b. What was the most challenging part of this process?
 - c. Was there a book that was more difficult or easier to find? Which one? Why?
 - d. What helped you find the books?
 - e. What could make it easier?
 - f. Did you look at any of the signs?
2. **Brief Literature Scan:** We scanned library literature for articles on physical collection signage. We found four very relevant results. Below we synthesized the most significant findings from those articles. We recommend you also read these articles.

What we heard from students

- Most of the users who take out books do so frequently. They are accustomed to the system and so find it straightforward. For those users who have never taken out a book there are a lot of steps that require pre-existing knowledge like knowing the call number is required to find the book in the stacks, understanding that the floors are divided by call number, and understanding that books are arranged by subject areas.
- All of the users we spoke with had found a book in the stacks before so they found the process relatively simple.
 - Curiously, when participants were asked to define call numbers very few of them could articulate their meaning.

- *“I totally think you should add the subject to the signs. That would be so helpful. A lot of the time at the desk people will come up and ask us about books on this subject. And because people don’t know that say a lot of the science textbooks are in the same area, we can say these topics they are looking for are probably in the same spot.”*
- *“That might help the students to get a better sense and might encourage people to just go to the shelf and look. I’ve seen that done in my former library. They had that. Like 800 on is Literature, or American Lit, British Lit, and so on..It also might make the students maybe a little more curious about it. Maybe if they see whatever number they will have no idea what it is about, but if they see like French Lit, they might decide to stop.”*
- *“I don’t think it would hurt to make the stacks more accessible in that way.”*
- Similarly, when we showed participants the floor maps located outside of the triple elevators. They had some strong reactions:
 - *“These signs are built mainly to inform people how loud they can be on the floors, not about what they will find there. I know there are floor maps, but when you look at the big maps the first thing you see is ‘Quiet’”.*
 - *“I have sometimes used these. I remember the first time in my first year i found it hard to actually see where I was and picture where to go. So if this was like the other way so you know if it’s a left on here [the map] it would be a left here [in person]. So like changing the perspective of this would be easier.”*
 - *“I wish the maps also had things which helped orient you better, like the 3 elevators or the men’s washrooms, like once you get on the floor you are a bit lost. I usually would have had my phone out while I was looking, but I didn’t this time so i had to resort to the trial and error situation. Also, I didn’t see any maps when I was getting off the elevators but that would be really helpful, I’m sure they are there, but I didn’t see any and so we are just left to our own devices.”*

What we learned from the literature

1. Luca, Edward and Bhuvan Narayan. (2016). Signage by Design: A design-thinking approach to library user experience. *Weave Journal of Library User Experience*. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/w/weave/12535642.0001.501?view=text;rgn=main>
 - UTS Library created “collection ribbon” that colour coded subject areas - point of visual reference - helped users orient themselves while browsing the catalogue and in the stacks (see below).



- Created subject headings that matched students study areas which did not necessarily align with Dewey.
 - Created inspiring, delightful and fun signage.
- 2. Hahn, Jim and Lizz Zitron. (2010). How First-Year Students Navigate the Stacks: Implications for improving wayfinding. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A317309692/AONE?u=quel77241&sid=AONE&xid=9bbb376d>**
- “Classification is a fail point in navigation when students cannot fit the number into a schema of library layout.”
 - “...library classification is helpful in the form of a call number when students comprehend and find a context for the call number.”
 - “...the Undergraduate Library is now outfitted with posters that display the number and then associate that number with a broad subject. These posters help to make the library more accessible to the first year student who is in the process of context seeking.”
 - Strategies that aid in wayfinding:
 - Easily identifiable sources of help -- “staff should be positioned where students are likely to encounter fail points”
 - A logical starting point helps
 - Uniformity in signage
 - “Future wayfinding systems should also include these preferences for general wayfinding: signs which explain layout; signs that help to explain a call number; and signs in strategically placed areas.”
- 3. Carr, A.R. (2006), An Experiment with Art Library Users, Signs, and Wayfinding, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:a2db058c-3826-477f-8777-0d44ac1a67ec>**
- Increased browsing behavior solidified the subjects’ comments on the usefulness of subject headings and material listings in browsing.
 - “The results of this study lead me to believe that an effective approach to a sign system for a small academic library would be the layperson-friendly approach... similar to that used in large chain bookstores. Stackend signage displayed subject headings and the range of call numbers for each shelf unit, while smaller signs in moveable frames displayed listings of the kinds of materials found in that range. This way, those searching for known items in the stacks would have the necessary information for their task (the call numbers), while those browsing would have subject headings to orient them. When searching a particular shelf, browsers would have the temporary signs to help them decide what materials they want, while those searching for a particular call number would probably be so consumed by the task that they may not even notice the material listings.”

4. **Bartlett, Mary Lynne and Emma Kristensen. (2016). *Focus Group Report on Library Digital Signage*. University of Waterloo internal document.**

- Facilitated 3 focus groups with a total of 12 participants
- Participants were asked to share their opinions on various library digital signs.
- The study found:
 - Participants preferred more colourful signage with concise and clear messaging.
 - If using a floor map, highlight main landmarks so participants can easily situate themselves.
 - Signs that reflected a more “traditional library” were seen as negative
 - Participants do not seek out signage, rather they look at it when waiting (in line, for the elevator, for a friend, etc.). Therefore, the location of signs is very important.

What we recommend

1. Stackend Signage

Add subject headings to stacked signage. See some of the literature referenced above for examples and inspiration. We hypothesize that adding subjects to the stack signage could promote browsing. Anecdotally, in speaking with Ask Us Desk staff and in reflecting on my own experience at AUD and RHD, there have been occasions where users have asked where books on a specific topic are located. In other words, some users really do want to browse! Adding subject areas to stack signage will help all users: (1) those looking to browse our books on a specific topic area; (2) those already in the stacks looking for a book; and (3) those passing by whose interests may be piqued.

- **Increase the size of the stackend signage.** Users indicated multiple times that when you are trying to orient yourself in the stacks, you can't see very far down the ends of rows because the signs are all at the same eye level and the font size is too small.
- **Remove the word “Books” from stackend signage.** What purpose is this serving?
- **User test mockups.** As a next step, the UX Team would like to recommend that we work with Tiffany to create a few mockups and then ask users for feedback on the mockups.

2. Other Wayfinding Aids

1. **Reorient the floor map signage** (located outside of the triple elevators) so they reflect the way users are actually facing, rather than oriented to the north.
 - Floor map signage should also be more visible, in places of high traffic, and contain the unique features that would help users orient themselves immediately (ie. washrooms).

- 2. Integrate already created wayfinding aids into the experience of locating a book.** Consider ways that existent Library learning objects like "[How to Read a Call Number](#)" could be more visible and integrated at point-of-need. How can we more seamlessly integrate the online and physical experiences of finding a book? Could digital signage be used for wayfinding purposes?
- 3. Create posters / visual aids to assist in general wayfinding.** Have handouts at the Ask Us Desk or posters in the stacks that visually draw the connection between subject headings, call numbers, and library locations.
 - See article #2 above: "...posters that display the number and then associate that number with a broad subject. These posters help to make the library more accessible to the first year student who is in the process of context seeking."
- 4. Design creative, joyful signage that inspires!** The UX Team would like to encourage the adoption of a more delightful take on our signage. Colour! Delight! Fun! Oh my!