Is This the Library?
Applying User Experience and Ethnographic Methods to Assess Library Wayfinding

The Problem

The purpose of the wayfinding project was to improve ease of navigation throughout the main campus library; to increase the visibility of key service points such as classrooms, service desks, elevators, stairs, and restrooms; and to learn how students use library spaces for both group and individual study.

Purpose

Research

Preliminary preparation included reading case studies of other library wayfinding projects, consulting with the Department of Architecture on wayfinding user research activities and graphic communication, and conducting an audit of the library's existing navigational resources.

Methods

To gain an understanding of our end-users needs, behaviors, motivations, and pain points, we collected data on employee and patron perspectives toward the library's current space and signage using the following user experience and ethnographic methods: library staff and faculty stakeholder interviews, student interviews, navigational study using GoPro cameras, sign audit, observation of public spaces, and prototypes.

Findings

Analyzing the qualitative data collected by these user experience and ethnographic methods, we found:

- Our end-users perceive the building as intimidating and difficult to navigate.
- Undergraduate students heavily use the library as a study space and a way station between classes.
- Users were unaware of several of our key resources, services, and collections.
- Current naming conventions—specialized room names, floor numbering—were inwardly facing and confusing to end users.
- Users conflated reference, checkout, and other desks in large part due to lack of signage and unclear acronyms/customized language.

Implementation

The practical implications of our project are to facilitate easier navigation of the library's spaces, services, and resources, by students, faculty, and staff; and to use signage to connect with users more directly. With our findings in mind and with the assistance of product design and interior architecture students, we created a sign inventory and a coded sign map to show the location of the types of signs that needed to be updated and installed. The inventory included floor maps, elevator maps, continuous directional signage, wall directories, and exploded maps. Under the guidance of the team and with consultation with the university's central communication and marketing department, the students designed signs and revised our Find-It-Fast brochure with map to mirror the design and information found on this new signage.

Next Steps

Navigational Studies & Prototype Testing