

Library Space and Signage Kindness Audits: What Does Your User See?

Ruby Warren
ruby.warren@umanitoba.ca
User Experience Librarian
Elizabeth Dafoe Library
University of Manitoba

Carla Epp
carla.epp@umanitoba.ca
Section Head/Hospital Librarian
Victoria General Hospital Library
University of Manitoba

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of how the University of Manitoba Libraries adapted the concept of a "kindness audit" to identify and document space, usability, and signage concerns and successes across all 20 system locations. The paper includes background on the development of the space experience report methods and potential methodological alternatives when they may be appropriate. Emphasis will be on practical, low-cost assessment, and the right of users to be comfortable and self-navigate in library spaces. The results of the kindness audit identified several major trends overall: use of inconsistent homemade signage, outdated signage for technology and exits, lack of sufficient electrical outlets, and inaccessibility issues at service desks. General recommendations for adapting kindness audits at other institutions are to ensure staff buy-in for the project and do prior planning. As a result of this exercise, a number of improvements have already taken place at the University of Manitoba Libraries. Some benefits of the audit have included safety improvements and enhanced documentation for space-related lobbying efforts at the Libraries.

Keywords

space, usability, signage

Introduction

There are many factors that affect how users experience a library. Some are related to customer service, some are related to how much a user already knows about libraries and how they tend to work, and others are related to how the physical space actually

functions. This paper will focus on the physical aspects of library space (including wayfinding, space usability, and signage) and how these aspects of a library affect the library user's experience. Wayfinding is "how human beings orient themselves and choose paths within a built environment" (Barclay & Scott, 2012, p. 37); it describes how our users move through our spaces to find the things they need. Space usability involves observing the way users perceive and interact with a space, as well as the spatial features and access barriers that may assist or prevent users from interacting with a space as intended. Signage encompasses all displayed text and images that users reference in a space for directions and clarity. Library staff need to care about signage, wayfinding, space layout, and accessibility because all of these factors directly and immediately impact the library users' experiences before they have even used our services. Signage is everywhere in libraries, and while good signage will direct and inform users, ineffective signage will misinform, frustrate, and overwhelm users. Yet in many places, library staff have no reliable, low-resource method to assess these items in order to improve the user experience.

Kindness audits are one form of library assessment that has come to the fore in recent years. A concept brought forward in Stephens' HyperlibMOOC class of 2013 and implemented by Hardenbrook at Carroll University, a kindness audit examines the way users experience your library (Hardenbrook, 2013). Led by a small amount of people, this is a low-cost review of the positivity, usability, and welcoming attitude of a space. Olin and Hardenbrook's (2015) subsequent ACRL presentation on their individual kindness audit methods and priorities showed the broadness of the kindness audit concept: they could be done by multiple people or one person, librarians or student workers. In Olin and Hardenbrook's methods there is a potential solution to the need for consistent, repeatable assessments of signage, space usability, and wayfinding. While the kindness audit's initial flexibility, general low cost investment, and idea of looking for positive or negative experiences was the initial inspiration, the University of Manitoba Libraries wanted a firmer template to structure the methods of staff evaluators. As such, this assessment incorporated ideas and priorities taken from other instances of library signage and space assessment referenced in the literature—for example, accessibility standards and the signage audit ideas of Stempler and Polger (2013). In late 2014, two members of the University of Manitoba Libraries Assessment Committee decided to embark on a project to assess and catalogue the positive and negative space and signage findings at all 20 University of Manitoba Libraries locations. The University of Manitoba is a large public university in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada with a student population of approximately thirty thousand and a staff and faculty population of approximately eleven thousand. The libraries serve these populations along with a diverse population of students, staff, and community members at library locations situated in each of the city's hospitals.

The two University of Manitoba Libraries staff who undertook this project decided to combine the ideas of a kindness audit and a signage audit in order to perform a comprehensive assessment of where the library user spatial experience could be improved at both an individual location level and at an institutional level. A review of available research and signage/space standards was conducted in order to create

standardized tools for guiding and reporting these assessments. The goal was to prepare and implement a standard procedure to evaluate the wayfinding, signage, and user experience at all University of Manitoba Libraries locations.

Literature Review

There is a need for research into methodologies for evaluating spatial experiences in libraries, particularly regarding methods that can be used cyclically with nominal staffing or budgetary impact. However, there is adequate research available on the process of space and signage design, as well as some examinations of the connections between wayfinding, signage design, and user experiences. This research supports the criteria we established for evaluating spaces at the University of Manitoba Libraries, and provides a solid introduction to potential space experience issues that evaluators will likely encounter, as well as (in some cases) potential solutions to those issues.

Wayfinding

The literature available on wayfinding in libraries emphasizes the remarkable importance of intuitive wayfinding. In this increasingly self-serve cultural climate, our users, as Bosman and Rusinek write, “have a right to use the library without having to ask for assistance” (1997, p. 72). Library values such as equality of access and user privacy make it especially important to prioritize comfortable, independent user access because making wayfinding intuitive eases frustrations for “users who may already experience library anxiety” (Mandel, 2013, “Problem Statement”). Although a user’s comfort with wayfinding may improve the more frequently they navigate the space (Li & Klippel, 2012), there are a number of factors under our control that can be developed and modified to assist new users in navigating our systems and resources. These factors should be observed, documented, and improved upon whenever possible, as a user with anxieties or specific information needs may become so focused on their expectations that they miss occasional wayfinding cues or signage (Mandel, 2013).

Space arrangement and design has a strong impact on wayfinding, and it is from spatial issues that many wayfinding and accessibility problems arise. For example, in addition to maintaining paths of travel to “primary functions” of the space for accessibility reasons (see the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design), it is important to make those paths of travel and “primary functions” visible and easy for users to spot. When sight lines are blocked for a user, whether that sight line is to a service desk or to their expected travel path to another location, it makes it difficult and frustrating for a user to find their way through the space (Garling, 1983). Maintaining sight lines, whether with lower furniture or broader aisles, should therefore be one of our priorities when designing or evaluating travel pathways. There are additional advantages to this: keeping lines of sight and wayfinding paths open encourages users to pay attention to and interact with staff (Adamson, 2002).

Simplifying navigational paths makes for a less frustrating user experience, so simplifying our spaces in general can assist in wayfinding and making spaces

accessible for new and overwhelmed users. Crowding entrances, service areas, and navigation points like hallways or shelving junctures with pamphlets, posters, and decorative plants can be “distracting, especially [...] where patrons are [...] focused on finding their way” (Fawley, 2012, p. 414). Having so many things to focus on in an area causes a sort of visual noise, preventing users from locating the sign, path, or object they need.

The more complex the space becomes and the more functions the space seeks to provide, the more difficult it becomes to navigate (Li & Klippel, 2012). To determine if a space is complex in layout or organization, Li and Klippel state that you need to consider “aspects [such as] the size of the environment, the number of possible destinations and routes, and whether routes intersect at right angles or not” (2012, p. 24). Hahn and Zitron, in their study of first-year student stack navigation, note that “fail points of navigation include areas where the logical flow of the stacks may be broken due to building layout or building overcrowding [and] locations that do not feature service points” (2011, p. 33). Complex layouts provide more opportunities for navigational fail points, making wayfinding more and more difficult.

As these researchers identified wayfinding problems, other researchers found solutions. Researchers Garling (1983), Barclay, Bustos, and Smith (2010), Schwartz (2014), Bosman (1997), Schoonover (2014), and Hahn and Zitron (2011) all advocate for the installation of maps to combat complex layouts, highlighting potential installation points in main entrances, elevators, and elevator waiting areas. These maps allow users to adjust their mental models of a space prior to navigating it, allowing those with destinations in mind to identify and locate those spaces, items, or services with minimal frustration. Simplifying these maps by connecting call number ranges to broad stack areas, for example, (Hahn & Zitron, 2011) can make it even easier for users to self-navigate (Schoonover, 2014).

Signage

Simplified signage in general can be helpful to users attempting to self-navigate. Larson and Quam, in their article on digital signage, note that “ubiquitous sign and media saturation has challenged us to design and maintain effective signage” (2010, p. 36). This saturation of information present in life outside the library is unfortunately aggravated by library spaces full of outdated, crowded, and mismatched signs. Beginning with a general goal of “making wayfinding work with the fewest possible signs” (Barclay & Scott, 2012, para. 6), signage simplification efforts should incorporate sign content and design as well.

The literature supports simplifying and standardizing signage design in libraries, indicating that consistency in signage supports intuitive and independent wayfinding (Hahn & Zitron, 2011). Researchers overwhelmingly argue in favour of libraries using infrequent signage (Barclay & Scott, 2012; DiMattia, 2005; McMorran & Reynolds, 2010; Schmidt, 2013; Serfass, 2012) that is strictly positive in tone and presentation (Polger & Stempler, 2014; Schmidt, 2015; White, 2010). Using high contrast for better readability

(Schmidt, 2015; Serfass, 2012), with large fonts (Polger & Stempler, 2014; Schmidt, 2011; Serfass, 2012), and without much in the way of attached illustration (Howe, 2014; Polger & Stempler, 2014) is consistently argued to provide the best user experience. A commitment to visual simplicity can prevent users from losing the relevant information that the sign was intended to convey in a flurry of visual information (Howe, 2014). While black and white signage is preferred by researchers like Schmidt (2015), multiple researchers also note that signage could potentially be colour coded to assist users in navigating to sections or collections in the library (Li & Klippel, 2012; Stempler, 2013).

Available research indicates that library signage should avoid jargon, including jargon that some might find ubiquitous (and therefore obvious). For example, O'Neill & Guilfoyle's 2015 study indicated that students looking to find assistance in the library preferred the terms "help" and "research" over the library terminology of "reference". This conclusion is supported by other researchers and institutions; Mitchell et al. report that their institution "chose 'Research Help' over 'Reference Desk' in an effort to move away from library jargon that students do not use or understand" (2011, p. 369). Mandel adds call number signs to the list of "signs labeled with library jargon", dismissing jargon-loaded signs and indicating that they "are not effective wayfinding aids" (2010, para. 5). These are conclusions that could be surprising to library professionals immersed in library terminology.

Sign content is important, but available research also emphasizes the importance of sign presentation and location. Signs should be placed in positions where they are easily visible and readable (Barclay & Scott, 2012), with a particular emphasis on signage at "decision points" (Serfass, 2012, p. 5) or places where users need to make navigational or usage choices. In addition, it should be presented in a professional manner, with libraries avoiding the display of handwritten or damaged signs (Barclay & Scott, 2012). Serfass recommends the use of wall-mounted holders for signs that need to be frequently replaced or updated (2012), and other researchers advocate that library staff conduct a regular review of available signs (Polger & Stempler, 2014; Schmidt, 2011) to maintain signage consistency, accuracy, and quality.

Space Use

As evidenced above, wayfinding and sign use are occasionally mentioned in the library literature, but there is less available on the ways that the physical user experience of a library can influence user attitudes and experiences. A library with a good spatial user experience combines positive "lighting, collection arrangement, service points, signs, and study areas" (Bosman & Rusinek, 1997, p. 71) as these attributes lead to a more satisfying interaction with the library and encourage repeat users. Of course, as Fawley states, this also means that "outdated or inefficient signage, confusing wayfinding, and uncomfortable seating can make an in-person visit frustrating and unsatisfying" (2012, p. 414). Small spatial changes can have dramatic effects on user experience, as noted by Jones et al. in their 2011 work on using spatial planning to increase collection usage. They noticed a "dramatic increase in browsing collection circulation after [...] shelving was reconfigured" (Jones et al., 2011, p. 112). The power that small adjustments to

space and signage have on usage indicate the importance that slight obstacles can have to the overall user experience of library spaces.

The Role of the Kindness Audit

First described to him by Stephens in a HyperlibMOOC class, the kindness audit Hardenbrook describes combines and blends the above fields of study into a simple, scalable exercise in asking a series of questions: “Is the signage positive? Are your service desks welcoming? Can users find their way easily? What obstacles do your users encounter?” (Hardenbrook, 2013)

The above kindness audit relies on the individual conducting it having accurate assumptions about what constitutes a positive wayfinding experience, usable and pleasant signage, and usable and pleasant spaces. The assessor’s assumptions inform their decisions about what makes signage “positive”, what constitutes easy wayfinding, what counts as welcoming, and what counts as an obstacle. By reviewing the available literature in the fields of wayfinding, signage, and space usage, the researchers at the University of Manitoba Libraries hoped to provide firmer guidelines for aspiring spatial user experience evaluators, while building on the kindness audit’s consolidation of these fields into a single manageable assessment process.

While this literature review demonstrates that previous researchers have investigated the possible effects of various spatial and signage choices, there is a need for further work in the literature regarding the process of evaluating and correcting library signage and spaces, especially at a large-scale institution with multiple service locations. This paper seeks to provide a structured, consistent, and replicable method for evaluating library signage and spaces with minimal budgetary and staff investment.

Methods

Selecting Participants to Assess the Space

The first methodological decision to be made was who would be performing the space assessments at the University of Manitoba Libraries locations. It is important to note that someone who works at the location being assessed, or even someone who is very familiar with that location is not the ideal candidate to assess it. From Olin and Hardenbrook’s (2015) kindness audit experiences, it became clear to the researchers that once a person is acclimated to a space, he or she is no longer able to see the space as it actually is. Things that are confusing or cause issues for a new user could be missed by someone who understands how the space is laid out and how it is intended to work. This leaves two options for effective space researchers: users who do not frequently use the library in question or library employees from other locations. A user who does not frequently use the library will provide an honest viewpoint that is true to the experience of a new user; however, there are a number of drawbacks: recruitment time, cost of incentivizing users, and the time and labour needed to train volunteers on what to look for and how to assess it. The second option of using library staff from other locations is enticing due to the low cost of implementation and carries

the additional advantage that they will be more familiar with institutional goals for space usage, but these researchers can be difficult to recruit. Staff researchers also arguably provide a less “pure” user perspective as they come equipped with at least some background knowledge of signage and equipment, as well as an intuitive understanding of how libraries work. (Olin & Hardenbrook, 2015) After considering these points, the assessment of University of Manitoba Libraries spaces was performed in the end by library staff unfamiliar with the locations being assessed. Two staff researchers volunteered to complete the bulk of the assessments; both staff had been university employees for approximately six months and had never visited most of the library locations. Both staff researchers completed each assessment to ensure that issues were addressed from multiple viewpoints; although a space experience issue might go unnoticed by one of the researchers, their combined reports allow for a fuller picture of the issues at each location. When the two locations these staff members worked at regularly were up for assessment, an alternate member of the University of Manitoba Libraries Assessment Committee who was not particularly familiar with either location was asked to perform the evaluations.

Data Collection Instrument

In order to design a standardized and organized method to approach this project with, the researchers drew inspiration from signage audits of Stempler and Polger (2013). The researchers developed note sheets to organize and guide researcher observations (see Appendix A for a sample note-taking form), dividing note areas into standard sections of a library (entranceways, service areas, study areas, computer areas, and stacks). Standard sections of a library space were designated in order to make the assessment process more manageable in large libraries, with the additional function of structuring observations in a format for researchers to easily compare notes from different locations. These subsections of a library location then had guiding questions for researcher observations, asking for notes on whether a space is navigable, welcoming, and positive, and prompting researchers to identify specific obstacles to using a library subsection as intended. The guiding questions were designed to reflect research regarding wayfinding, signage, and space usage, and criteria for success were pulled from research results and best practices guidelines in each field (the literature review provides a good summary of this information).

The next decision was whether or not to supplement notes with photos of the space. In his initial post, Hardenbrook (2013) documented issues and successes with photographic evidence. In our study, photos were collected of spaces, but only when a particularly good example of a space experience issue or success was found. The original intent of the researchers was to use these photos as evidence of a noted issue and to help identify tricky issues in a space that may not be easy to explain to staff in a report. In the end, photos weren’t used in reports, as most issues could be explained in text. Staff were encouraged to request clarification and/or photos from researchers if necessary. These photos were then collected and used in staff training sessions. These sessions used collected aggregate information from space experience reports to instruct

staff on how to improve a library space in terms of wayfinding, signage, and user experience.

Data Analysis

Individual location analysis

Following an assessment, there were decisions to make about which method to use to present the results of the evaluation. It was decided to create a standardized report format to disseminate results to staff and managers at each location. This involved breaking the noted issues from each library into low, medium, and high investment projects so staff could determine what resources would be needed to address a certain issue and whether it would be something to address in the short or long term (see Appendix B for the example form). This standardized reporting form, which required evaluation of noted issues and adjustments in subcategory, meant that as the assessing researchers gained experience they became more capable of subdividing and categorizing issues as they took notes.

It was decided to include library assets in the report as a way of congratulating library staff on what they were doing well in their spaces, so that the space experience reports did not feel like an attack (only mentioning problems), but was instead a holistic assessment that considered the positives and negatives of all assessed areas. This also provided a good baseline for continuation of the project in future years. Future reports can be compared to the original to see where libraries have managed to grow or maintain spatial assets, where improvements to issues have been made, and where changes could still provide an improved user experience.

Systemwide analysis

An important part of the project was to determine what to do with the massive amount of space evaluation information that was collected. Of course, each location and head librarian was provided with the report written on their space and given the opportunity to use this information to improve their individual spaces. However, this did not provide any information on systemwide trends or provide insight into where management might want to place their energy or money to improve space and signage experiences across the system. Some trends were apparent to researchers simply from observing all of the spaces, but a more reliable method was needed to confirm these impressions.

To identify trends the researchers decided to create a spreadsheet and categorize the notes taken about space issues at each location into one of nine categories (see Appendix C for sample spreadsheet). The categories chosen were as follows:

- homemade signage: signage that was made by staff that needed replacing, modifying, or updating.
- professional signage: signage ordered from a manufacturer that needed replacing, modifying, or updating.

- safety/accessibility: items that affect staff or user safety in the space, or items that are not accessible according to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards (for example, service desks that are inaccessible by users in a wheelchair, uncovered electrical outlets, etc.).
- service desks: issues surrounding service desks like desk location or layout.
- equipment/furniture: issues regarding equipment (for instance, in a location that is inaccessible, not labelled, broken, etc.) or general furniture usability (for example, in disrepair, layout issues, insufficient furniture available).
- shelving: issues with shelving (location, amount, disrepair, etc.).
- layout: how the library is laid out and whether the location of items is intuitive and self-navigable for users.
- space partner relations: user experience issues that require library staff to liaise with partner staff/management to find solutions.
- signage placement: problems caused by signage placement (the content and presentation of a sign was acceptable and easy to understand, but the sign was located in a place the negatively impacted its usability).

Each individual report was reviewed by a member of the research team, and every issue identified was classified into one of the previous trend categories. Although some issues could have easily fallen into multiple categories, evaluators collaborated on categorization to make sure to consistently place noted issues in the category that best described them and to only count issues once. For example, a wheelchair inaccessible service desk could be counted as a safety/accessibility issue or a service desk issue, but safety/accessibility is the better description of the problem, as the desk might be acceptable by all other measures of space experience. The spreadsheet was then used to count issues on both the issue level and the location level so trends could be seen across which issues came up most frequently and also in which locations might need the most investment.

Results

Most of the locations assessed had identified issues with homemade signage, including signage that was cluttered, outdated, inaccurate, or damaged. This is what led the researchers to develop further training resources for staff-created signage, including guidelines and demonstrations about the relative ease of reading low versus high contrast signage, clip-art-covered versus clear signage, and peeling/faded signage versus laminated or acrylic-covered signage. The researchers were surprised to note that homemade signage issues often included damaged or illegible end panel signage containing call numbers or directional aides. The institution was asked to investigate standardized end panel signage holders for all locations, as well as create a standard end panel signage template for use at all locations.

Almost all photocopiers and change machines needed updated signage (this is referring to both the signs that came with the machines and the signs that were added to replace original signage). They were worn, peeling or faded. Emergency exit signage was in a similar state to the photocopiers and change machines. Much of this standardized

signage was in terrible condition, leading to recommendations that replacement should happen on a large scale. It was also recommended that management work to determine what (if any) new standards there were for emergency exit signage either from a legislative perspective or an institutional perspective.

In addition to frequent signage concerns, a large number of locations had technology-driven spatial problems. Many locations did not have enough electrical outlets or outlets in the right places for student workflows. Some locations had outlets that appeared dangerous (i.e., outlets with exposed wires or outlets positioned so cords posed tripping hazards). There was also technology which was outdated or bereft of any explanatory signage collected and stored at a number of locations. This equipment was frequently unidentifiable to the average user, and it was often difficult to tell if it was meant to be used or had simply been shoved into an out of the way corner of the library. These machines included microfilm readers and VHS players and had the effect of making those corners of the library look both unwelcoming and unusable.

A number of locations had spatial issues simply due to the layout of their buildings or collections. In one location, for example, the collection seemed to stop abruptly before continuing two rooms over. These layouts do not allow for intuitive wayfinding, and can pose difficulties for even a library-savvy user. In the absence of a budget to drastically reorganize the library space, it was determined that many locations would benefit from professionally produced maps to indicate the layout of space and location of items to users entering the library.

Smaller locations often had service desks that were makeshift or poorly laid out, with some being entirely inaccessible for shorter users or users with assistive devices. In instances where service desks were divided (for instance, a regular desk and a reference desk), researchers recommended clear, plain-language signage indicating the desk's intended purpose(s). The researchers also submitted recommendations to make note of makeshift and inaccessible desks and schedule them for replacement according to the severity of the accessibility issue.

Discussion

Planning

The importance of pre-planning the scope of this spatial assessment cannot be emphasized enough. Examining available resources (for example, the date by which study completion is needed and the number of staff available to conduct audits) allowed realistic decisions on whether to assess all the branches in a system or to begin with a pilot project at one location. This pre-planning also allowed the researchers to promote the purpose of the assessment and lessons about positive spaces and signage from the literature before research began in earnest. Increased promotion of the study seemed to lower staff anxiety levels and perceptions of being judged.

Adding and emphasizing space successes to the project notes and reports also contributed a great deal to obtaining staff buy-in. Framing the research as a way to document space successes in addition to areas that may need improvement minimized the amount that staff (who often have had to “make do” and create solutions without prior knowledge regarding signage and spatial best practices) felt criticized and brought them into the process as partners. Taking an extra moment after completing the space review to have researchers ask for issues staff have noticed in the library also seemed to have a strong positive effect on staff perceptions of the project.

Standardizing all processes before beginning simplified the assessment process. Note-taking forms and procedures ensured that locations received equal, organized scrutiny. Having consistent, thorough reports available as well not only helped to convince decision makers of necessary changes, but also enabled thorough follow-up. When this process is repeated (as no space is static and all spaces can develop user experience problems), the standard report format will allow for easy comparison of spatial issues over time. In the rush of day-to-day operations, it can be easy to forget the importance of user experience and usability. Offering cyclical audits and training opportunities keeps the need for better spaces and signs a priority—and creates better environments for users.

Staff Buy-In

It was also important to consider staff buy-in for this project. When designing our methods, there was strong consideration given to the alternatives of informing staff of assessment times or performing “surprise” assessments. It was determined that staff were more receptive to the project itself, and to any suggested changes, when they were privy to the date and time of the assessment, as they felt more involved in the process. Researchers always made sure to ask library staff if they had noticed any space experience issues that they wanted highlighted in the report and later mentioned that this was one way to make sure that long-standing issues stayed on the radar of upper management and other stakeholders. The report could also be used as a push for projects that were stalled as it was another piece of evidence that a spatial issue needed to change. After the assessment walk-through, staff were encouraged to contact researchers if they remembered additional space issues.

Staff buy-in was more of an issue than the researchers expected. Within a collegial university atmosphere, it was perceived to be intrusive for colleagues to come in and “pass judgement” on another colleague’s space. As mentioned above, it proved important to be careful to ensure staff was aware of the assessments being completed and given information on why and how assessments were being performed and reported.

Limitations

This study was unfortunately limited in that there were not adequate resources available to train and incentivize enough users to evaluate all system locations. Choosing

employees unfamiliar with each location mitigated the possibility that issues would be missed due to familiarity with the space, but in an ideal environment the researchers would have preferred to have the perspective of a library novice.

Conclusions

This project allowed the researchers to develop standard procedures for staff at our institution to assess the spatial experience and usability of any of our locations. It informed the researchers of trends happening in spatial user experience across the system of libraries, which alerted management to training needs and spatial priorities. The production of standardized forms assisted the researchers in ensuring reports on locations were organized and easy to understand by all staff members who wished to learn from them and minimized training time necessary for the fill-in researcher. It also ensures consistency in questions asked by researchers examining spaces when the project is completed again in 2017 and on a biannual or triannual basis thereafter.

As the research team moves forward it has become clear that organizational priorities should shift to supporting staff as they attempt to correct noted spatial issues. Other institutions or libraries following this methodology may find a focus in this area similarly beneficial. Methods of support that the University is investigating and using include: literature-based internal training in the design of usable spaces and signage, the creation of text resources and guidelines for staff to consult when implementing suggested changes, and the provision of individual consultations with researchers and staff at various locations after an assessment is completed. When the researchers created their own resources and guidelines for creating usable spaces and signage, they also made sure to consult the provincial accessibility act, and local municipal signage and space standards (Accessibility for Manitobans Act, 2012; City of Winnipeg, 2010).

These signage guidelines have been used by several libraries to replace end panel signage with poor visibility as well as damaged or cluttered homemade signage. Staff members expressed gratitude for firm guidelines on colour use, number of signs, diction, font size, and placement height for best visibility—a number of locations communicated that a lack of knowledge in best practices had led to previous unusable signage. Reports have also driven safety improvements, including movement of cords and equipment, and several libraries with difficult layouts are investigating the creation of maps for improved wayfinding. In addition, many libraries have expressed the intention to use their report as support in lobbying their associated faculty or college for spatial improvements outside of the libraries' control (for example, the construction of elevators for greater accessibility).

The information gathered in this assessment research has been collected in individual reports and an overarching trends document. This trends document has been provided to management as they engage with strategic planning and budgeting practices, and individual reports have already begun to have a smaller scale impact on individual locations. A number of library locations have removed and replaced outdated signage

and made small layout changes, and still more staff have attended training sessions on usable space and signage design. It is anticipated that this increased awareness of spatial usability and space experience will decrease the number of space issues noted during the next round of spatial experience assessments in 2017. The researchers believe that reviewing spaces on a biannual or triannual basis going forward will keep smaller spatial experience issues from recurring, and will provide substantial documentation of large-scale issues to support future lobbying for institutional support.

References

- [Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#). (2012). The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.
- [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#). (2010). The United States of America Department of Justice.
- Adamson, M., & Bunnett, B. (2002). [Planning library spaces to encourage collaboration](#). *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 90(4), 437-441.
- Ahn, I. (2011). [Contents development of library signage manual in Korea](#). *International Journal of Knowledge Content Development and Technology*, 1(2), 15-27.
- Barclay, D., Bustos, T., & Smith, T. (2010). [Signs of success](#). *College & Research Libraries News*, 71(6), 299-333.
- Barclay, D., & Scott, E. (2012). [Directions to library wayfinding](#). *American Libraries*, 43(3/4), 36.
- Bosman, E., & Rusinek, C. (1997). [Creating the user-friendly library by evaluating patron perceptions of signage](#). *Reference Services Review*, 25(1), 71.
- [City of Winnipeg 2010 Accessibility Design Standards](#). (2010). Winnipeg.
- DiMattia, S. (2005). Silence is olden: some patrons long for a noiseless sanctuary. Others, including many librarians, go to noisy lengths to reject the stereotypical shushers of old. Is there room for the sound of silence in a bustling, modern library? *American Libraries*, 36(1), 48+.
- Fawley, N. (2012). [Appearances do matter!](#). *College and Research Libraries News*, 73(7), 414-415.
- Garling, T., Lindberg, E., & Mantyla, T. (1983). [Orientation in buildings: Effects of familiarity, visual access, and orientation aids](#). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 68, 177-186.

- Hahn, J., & Zitron, L. (2011). [How first-year students navigate the stacks: Implications for improving wayfinding](#). *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 51(1), 28-35.
- Hardenbrook, J. (2013). [Examining library spaces through a kindness audit](#). *Mr. Library Dude*.
- Hardenbrook, J., & Olin, J. (2015). [Killing it with kindness, incorporating sustainable assessment through kindness audits](#). *ACRL 2015*.
- Howe, N., & Wilsher, W. (2014). [Creating clear and simple signage](#). *Library Journal*, 139(15), 19.
- Jones, D., McCandless, M., Kiblinger, K., Giles, K., & McCabe, J. (2011). [Simple marketing techniques and space planning to increase circulation](#). *Collection Management*, 36(2), 107-118.
- Larson, K., & Quam, A. (2010). The modernization of SIGNS: A library leads the way to networked digital signage. *Computers in Libraries*, 30(3), 36-38.
- Li, R., Klippel, A. (2012). [Wayfinding in libraries: Can problems be predicted?](#) *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries*, 8(1), 21-38.
- Mandel, L. (2010). [Toward an understanding of library patron wayfinding: Observing patrons' entry routes in a public library](#). *Library and Information Science Research*, 32(2), 116-130.
- Mandel, L. (2013). [Finding their way: How public library users wayfind](#). *Library and Information Science Research*, 35(4), 264-271.
- McMorran, C., & Reynolds, V. (2010). Sign-a-palooza. *Computers in Libraries*, 30(8), 6-9 & 47.
- Mitchell, M., Comer, C., Starkey, J., & Francis, E. (2011). [Paradigm shift in reference services at the Oberlin College library: A case study](#). *Journal of Library Administration*, 51(4), 359-374
- O'Neill, K., & Guilfoyle, B. (2015). [Sign, sign, everywhere a sign: What does "reference" mean to academic library users?](#) *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41(4), 386-393.
- Polger, M., & Stempler, A. (2014). [Out with the old, in with the new: Best practices for replacing library signage](#). *Public Services Quarterly*, 10(2), 67-95.
- Schmidt, A. (2011). [Signs of good design](#). *Library Journal*, 136(2), 17.
- Schmidt, A. (2013). [Making spaces](#). *Library Journal*, 138(16), 25.

- Schmidt, A. (2015). [Positive signs](#). *Library Journal*, 140(14), 25.
- Schoonover, D. (2014). [Stories from the stacks: Students lost in the labyrinth](#). *Journal of access services*, 11(3), 175.
- Schwartz, M. (2014). [The way upward](#). *Library Journal*, 139(13), 20.
- Serfass, M. (2012). [The signs they are a-changin'](#). *AALL Spectrum*, 16(6), 5-6.
- Stempler, A. (2013). [Navigating circular library stacks: A case study on signage](#). *Reference Services Review*, 41(3), 503-513.
- Stempler, A., & Polger, M. (2013). [Do you see the signs? Evaluating language, branding, and design in a library signage audit](#). *Public Services Quarterly*, 9(2), 121-135.
- White, L. (2010). [On my mind: Better none than bad](#). *American Libraries*, 41(8), 23.

Appendix A – Sample Note Taking Form for Researchers

| | Yes/No | Why | Suggestions for Fixes |
|---|--------|-----|-----------------------|
| Is the entranceway identifiable? (Can a new user identify that this is the ___ library?) | | | |
| Is the entranceway welcoming? (Well lit, navigable, comfortable, etc.) | | | |
| Is signage in the entranceway positive? (Avoiding negative words & imperative orders, user-friendly vocabulary etc.) | | | |
| What obstacles towards using the library might a user encounter in the entryway? | | | |
| Are the service areas identifiable? (Can a new user identify what this area is for?) | | | |
| Are the service areas welcoming? (approachable desks, well-lit space, etc.) | | | |

| | Yes/No | Why | Suggestions |
|--|--------|-----|-------------|
| Is signage in the service areas positive? | | | |
| What obstacles towards using the library might a user encounter in service areas? | | | |
| Are the stacks welcoming and navigable? (subject areas identified, well-lit, spacing, etc.) | | | |
| Is signage in the stacks positive? | | | |
| What obstacles towards using the library might a user encounter in the stacks? | | | |
| Are study areas welcoming and navigable? (Spacing, lighting, both quiet and conversational spaces identified) | | | |

| | Yes/No | Why | Suggestions |
|---|--------|-----|-------------|
| Is signage in the study areas positive? | | | |
| What obstacles towards using the library might a user encounter in the study areas? | | | |
| Are public computers identifiable and welcoming? | | | |
| Is signage in the computer area positive? | | | |
| What obstacles might a user encounter in the public computer area? | | | |
| Could a user self-direct through the entrance, to a way to access the catalogue, to the stacks? | | | |

| | Yes/No | Why | Suggestions |
|--|-----------|-----|-------------|
| Could a user self-direct through the entrance to service areas? | | | |
| What aspects of this library are most welcoming and comfortable for users? | | | |
| What aspects of this library are most uncomfortable and off-putting for users? | | | |
| Redundant Signs | Reasoning | | |
| | | | |

Appendix B – Sample Library Space Experience Report Form

Library Space Experience Report

Date Completed:

Evaluators:

Objective

To evaluate the user experience provided by our library spaces from the viewpoint of someone unfamiliar with the location. This includes evaluating aspects of the library that are welcoming and support independent navigation. It can be difficult for someone who is accustomed to a space to view that space as an outsider does. This evaluation is intended to support further investigation into these areas, and provide documentation of potential space concerns for libraries to consider.

Scope

Library spaces are evaluated based on the user experience of spatial arrangement, wayfinding, signage, and library furniture and objects. Recommendations are broken into three categories according to investment of time and/or monetary expenditures necessary for implementation. Some identified issues may have multiple potential solutions, at varying levels of investment. These solutions are not necessarily meant to be combined, and are also not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Low investment solutions require minimal use of library funds and/or staff time. They could be addressed in the short term.

Medium investment solutions require some use of library funds, or a significant amount of staff time to implement.

High investment solutions require significant use of library funds. These will likely be longer term projects.

Methods

Two members of the University of Manitoba Libraries Assessment Committee reviewed the library, beginning in the entranceway and moving through service areas, study areas, the stacks, and public computer areas. For each area, the following questions were considered:

- 1) Is the signage in this area welcoming and positive? (Avoids negative language like “no”, “do not”, etc.; is well placed and readable)
- 2) Is the area welcoming and navigable by new users? (Includes approachability, lighting, pathfinding, etc.)
- 3) Is the area identifiable? (Could a new student tell what this area is for?)
- 4) What are the obstacles a user might encounter when trying to engage with this area of the library?

The notes of both Assessment Committee Evaluators were compared and compiled into a single report, with suggestions for improvements or areas for further exploration.

Greatest Assets

Highest Impact Opportunities

Entranceway

Areas of Success

Areas of Opportunity

Low Investment Solutions

Medium Investment Solutions

High Investment Solution

Service Areas

Areas of Success

Areas of Opportunity

Low Investment Solution

Medium Investment Solutions

High Investment Solution

Stacks

Areas of Success

Areas of Opportunity

Low Investment Solution

Medium Investment Solutions

High Investment Solution

Study Areas

Areas of Success

Areas of Opportunity

Low Investment Solution

Medium Investment Solutions

High Investment Solution

Computer Areas

Areas of Success

Areas of Opportunity

Low Investment Solution

Medium Investment Solutions

High Investment Solution

Questions?

Email the evaluators at:

Appendix C: Trends Report

| Number of Recorded User Experience Issues by Location and Category | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|----------|--------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Homemade Signage | Professional Signage | Safety/ Accessibility | Service Desks | Equipment/General Furniture | Shelving | Layout | Space/Partner Relations | Signage Placement | Totals By Location |
| Location 1 | 8 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 29 |
| Location 2 | 10 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 23 |
| Location 3 | 6 | | | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | | 19 |
| Location 4 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 3 | 2 | 2 | | 18 |
| Location 5 | 16 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | | 1 | 4 | | 31 |
| Location 6 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 23 |
| Location 7 | 17 | 7 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5 | | 2 | 37 |
| Location 8 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | | 21 |
| Location 9 | 15 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | | | | 25 |
| Location 10 | 9 | 2 | | 1 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 23 |
| Location 11 | 22 | 4 | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 29 |
| Location 12 | 14 | | 3 | 1 | 2 | | 5 | 1 | 4 | 30 |
| Location 13 | 55 | 12 | 16 | | 2 | 3 | 8 | | 1 | 97 |
| Location 14 | 14 | 7 | | | | | 2 | 1 | | 24 |
| Location 15 | 15 | 2 | 1 | | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | 24 |
| Location 16 | 8 | | | | 1 | | 3 | 1 | 1 | 14 |
| Location 17 | 15 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 40 |
| Location 18 | 14 | 1 | 1 | | | | 2 | 3 | | 21 |
| Location 19 | 15 | 1 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 20 |
| Location 20 | 5 | | 2 | | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 14 |
| Location 21 | 4 | 2 | | | | | 5 | 2 | 5 | 18 |
| Totals By Issue | 288 | 52 | 41 | 16 | 18 | 31 | 56 | 40 | 38 | |