

Signage and Fear

How can we develop the courage to not hide behind signs?

See the comments below for References

See the comments for a link to our new signs

See the comments for our documentation chart



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Our Signage Audit

Our signage audit consisted of eight clearly defined steps:

1. Created signage committee
2. Documentation
3. Surveyed library staff and faculty to determine signage wants and needs (**First stage of buy-in**)
4. Created new signage drafts
5. Approved by division council (**Second stage of buy-in**)
6. Rolled out trials of new signs (**Third stage of buy-in**)
7. Created and distributed a division-approved Signage Best Practices Manual
8. Full installation of new signs

However, we realized between stages 6 and 7 that while new templates were being used, the **language and tone of newly created signs was largely the same as before the audit.**

A Revealing Activity

We ran an activity during our spring 2020 professional development day where teams of four library employees (consisting of classified staff and faculty) **were given the text of currently existing harsh signs to reword in a more positive way.**

*These images of signs are taken directly from our documentation phase.



Emerging Fears

We found from this activity that while **every** survey collected in step 3 had indicated a strong positive desire for signage changes, the actual act of rewording harsh signage brought to the surface old fears.

The root of these fears lay in communication with students. Most signs had been erected to stave off difficult situations, both one-time occurrences and repeat issues. Apprehension arose about facing those situations again without being able to point to a sign as backup.

Professional Judgement

We now find ourselves taking a detour in our signage audit to **de-tangle the enmeshment of policy, discipline, wayfinding, and signage in the library space.** Our guiding idea moving forward is to champion each library employee's **professional judgement**, and to move away from using signage as a **replacement for conversations with students.**

Interrupting the Cycle

Our goal is to interrupt the cycle of using signs as replacements for conversations. Completing this goal will require **trust** to be radically shown in our spaces. **The goal of our new signage is to communicate:**

- **Trust in our students' agency and growth in our space**
- **Trust in our own case-by-case professional judgement as library classified staff and faculty**

In de-tangling signage from policy, our library is deep in the exciting work of reevaluating how we see our students, and how we see ourselves.