

1 Introduction

About the Music Library

The Music Library at UH is a small, academic, performing-arts library located in the Moores School of Music.

- Serves ~600 students and ~80 faculty
- 9% of UH Libraries checkouts
- UH = 42k+ students overall

Project goals

- Systematic review of library signs
- Understand how space is used
- Standards and guidelines for signs
- New sign design templates

2 Methods

Surveys

- Part of a 3 year assessment project
- Data on user familiarity with service, their perceived importance, and service quality

Sweeps

- Space broken into “zones” for ease
- Zones swept at regular daily intervals over 4 week period
- Sweepers noted number of people in zone, types of studying taking place, computers being used, etc.

User interviews

- “Free coffee” table set up in the library
- Users asked if they have 10 minutes to spare, then asked questions about the library, their use, pain points, etc.
- Users then asked to attempt to find a random book in the library stacks

Sign audit

- Existing signs photographed, categorized, and described in a table
- Signs were marked for deletion or updates
- Signs that needed updates were then categorized into what types of update were needed

User-centered space assessment in a small academic library

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3 Results

Surveys

Most important library services are:

- Printers
- KIC scanner
- Music scores
- Computers
- Music Library website

Sweeps

- Most popular space consistently computers and table space
- Most common study style was studying alone in a group
- Library is usually the busiest on Mondays and Wednesday

User interviews

- Music Library users basically only use the Music Library
- Difference between circ stacks and reference stacks is not clear
- Only 1 user could find a book when given a random call number
- Inconsistencies b/t online catalog and library signs

Sign audit

- 70 signs in the library (12 permanent, 58 temporary)
- Sign categories: Titular, Directional, Informational, Command, Warning, Label, Promotional
- 8 signs marked for removal, 21 signs marked for update
- Remaining signs will be updated once new sign templates have been created

4 Discussion

Biggest user frustrations

- Finding items in the stacks. Different stacks for reference, circulation, scores
- Down-time for printers earlier in the year

Sign updates

Sign audit revealed 4 major categories of sign updates:

- Signs with negative language
- Playful opportunities for signs
- Signs needing full redesigns
- Signs relating to stack UX

Of these four, stack UX signs were identified as the most important to work on

Long-term improvements

- Simplifying stack UX with call number signs and more
- Consistent sign style - clear, concise, visually interesting, accessible (about 5 - 6 different styles currently exist!)
- Use signs to raise awareness about other library services (e.g. closed stack CDs/DVDs)
- Clear sign procedures and policies - when to make a sign, how to make a sign, easy-to-use sign templates

References

Luca, E., & Narayan, B. (2016). Signage by Design: A Design-Thinking Approach to Library User Experience. *Weave: Journal of Library User Experience*, 1(5). doi:10.3998/weave.12535642.0001.501

5 On-going work

Additional sweeps

- More sweeps completed in Oct 2018
- Some changes made to sweep, e.g. removing Saturday sweeps
- Analysis is on-going; sweeps likely to become standard assessment

Stack UX

- Team has focused work on improving experience of finding books in the stacks
- Work includes: Differentiating stack types with clearer signs, new map signs for orienting users

Sign prototyping

- Sign update work is iterative, prototyping being made now
- Prototype testing set for early 2019
- Prototypes will be updated/finalized based on testing data

6 Lessons learned

Extended timeline

- Initial goals planned for completion sometime by 2018 year-end
- Project remains incomplete with no clear endpoint
- Space assessment is continuous and best done systematically

Arts-focused libraries lessons

- Space is a limited resource
- Arts-focused libraries are often questioned as to if they are appropriate use of space
- Arts libraries can demonstrate utility as physical spaces with systematic, user-centered space assessment

Larger academic libraries

- Some methods are more difficult to scale to larger academic libraries (e.g. sweeps)
- Small academic branch libraries can be “laboratories” for new space analysis strategies that can be adapted to larger libraries