

Improving Educational Signage for Sustainable Waste Practices

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Introduction

Responsible waste management practices are essential to the overall health and sustainability for an ecosystem, or in the case of this project, a campus. Central Washington University (CWU) has explored ways to improve the campus's efficiency of both recycling and composting in order to limit excess waste going to landfills. One way the campus has done this is putting up educational signage regarding sustainable waste management practices. This project aims to increase both awareness and knowledge about sustainable waste management that will have both have short term benefits on campus, but also long-term benefits with a society of young individuals who understand why sustainable waste management is important.

Signage is designed to help improve the behavior around sustainable waste management while fundraising for an industrial grade composter continues.

CWU Climate Action Plan

CWU has committed to becoming a zero-carbon campus no later than the year 2050. This plan has many facets, including energy efficiency maximization, transportation efficiency, and waste management. One of the main goals of this plan is to reduce landfill waste by 25% by 2030. A main tool for this plan is acquiring an industrial grade composter. More educational signage like this project could help the campus achieve this goal with a fully informed student body that is not only responsible but directly involved in the sustainability of the campus. Educational signage alone will not achieve this goal, but it is an important tool.

Decision on Location

The initial installation of education signage occurred in the Student Union Recreation Center (SURC). Signs were put up above all waste receptacles in an attempt to increase recycling and reduce landfill waste. For the second phase, several buildings were considered for the expansion of educational signage under the criteria of largest amounts of foot traffic and largest amounts of waste.

Both dorm buildings and academic halls were considered, but in the end, it was determined that the best combination of the 2 criteria was the Brooks Library. This is a building that has huge amounts of foot traffic from students and community members. This area also has large amount of food waste as students consume their meals while they study in the library. This combination made it crucial to insert signage into this building.



Figure 1: Examples of educational signage, designed by the sustainability office, expressly outlining what is acceptable to compost/recycle/throw away on the left, center, and right, respectively.

As shown in Figure 1, the signs are colorful and flashy in a way that grabs attention from passing students. These signs expressly inform the reader what is and is not acceptable to put into that specific bin in a way that encourages positive behavior and change rather than punishing or condemning poor behavior. This approach aims to appeal to the sensible side of students to make the changes they now know are important and necessary.

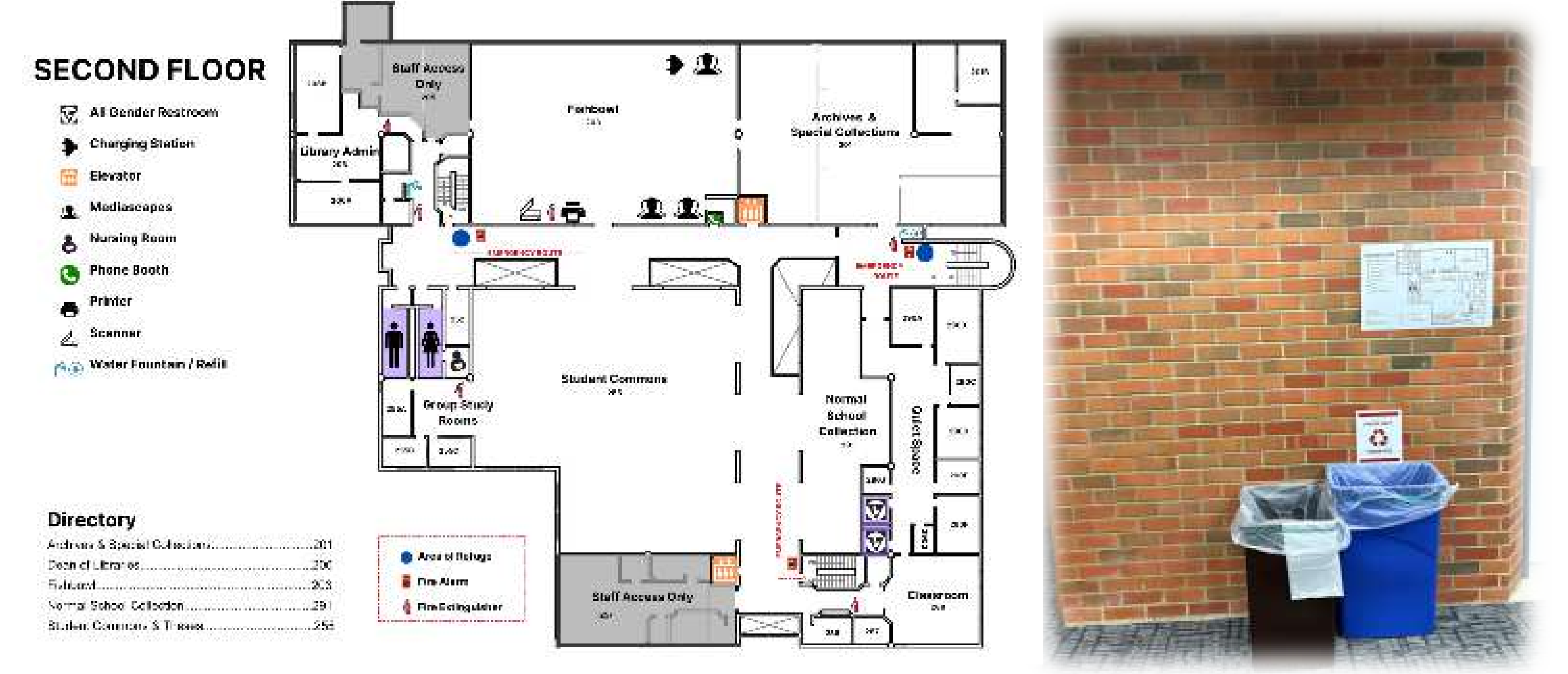


Figure 2: Map of second floor of Brooks Library on CWU campus with area where the signage will be installed marked with a red circle. A picture of the area is shown at the right.

Figure 2 shows the floor layout of the second floor of the library. One of the areas signage will be installed is next to the northern elevator which is shown in Figure 2 on the right. This space is frequently passed by students and is near the stairs. The signage will be put in the places that have the most foot-traffic from student as well as the most output of waste, regardless of waste types. One section of signage on each floor will be installed designed to catch the eye and encourage thoughtful consideration of how student, and other attending members of the library, should dispose of their waste.

Recommendations

Three additional high traffic areas were identified as good candidates for educational signage expansion:

- Dorm buildings:** The residence halls have the highest number of regularly occupants during the academic year. Students also eat in their rooms as well as in common spaces in the dorms. For both of these reasons, all of the dorm buildings would be great additions to the list of buildings with current signage.
- Athletic stadiums:** The athletic stadiums on CWU's campus hold events where large amounts of waste are generated. Educational signage along with receptacles for recycling and compost at sporting events could lead to a more sustainable campus. This would be a long-term project that would likely require additional funding.
- Large educational buildings:** The larger educational buildings where classes are regularly taught and attended have large amounts of both foot traffic and waste. Inserting signage in these areas could help increase the amount of recycling, thereby decreasing landfill waste.

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References

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