# Cal Arts Wayfinding

## Narrative Report with Photos and Commentary

Sharon Toji and Ullrich Hepperlin
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# Narrative Report

**Task One:  Wayfinding for accessible restrooms.**

Our first task was to locate all the restrooms that are being used by the public, and determine how visitors and others could be directed as efficiently as possible from the inaccessible restrooms, which comprise the majority of the sanitary facilities, to the few accessible restrooms that are currently available.

The major obstacle, we found, to designing the signs so that they would have clear and easy to follow directions, is that the layout of the facility is so complicated. In most cases, even the people who have worked for some years in the main academic complex do not quite understand where the various "blocks" begin and end, and this is compounded by the fact that there are corridors that divide two blocks, with some overlap. In many cases, there are not any really clear delineating points, such as doorways or arches where it would be simple to mount an overhead sign and indicate that you are entering a different block. The only clue in many cases are the very small room numbers, some of them quite high on the doors, that begin with the block letter designation.

Consequently, when we would ask for directions to a specific block, we would often be met with a puzzled look, and were sometimes pointed in the wrong direction completely.

Although there are helpful maps mounted at various locations, they do not serve ADA or Title 24 purposes, because of the very light lines and map labels, and the fact that most of them are mounted so high that no one in a wheelchair or less than about 5 feet six inches would be able to use them.

Consequently, we think that there are several components to a successful Wayfinding System that will solve many problems, the first being directing people from inaccessible to accessible restrooms.

However, as long as we are aware of these components, and understand that they must all be implemented for a truly workable system, we can begin with one of the simpler components. The system can begin to work, and the pieces of the puzzle can be filled in as the budget allows.

We are going to show what the components are, starting with the most basic one, and the most complicated:  Interior floor plans that serve as a floor directory with directional modules.

**Component One:  Floor Directory with Directional Modules.**
This is the component on which all the others depend. The sample drawing is conceptual, and is obviously open to discussion and alteration, but the purpose is to enable building users to see, at a central location such as across from an elevator and near a major stairway, the entire floor layout, with some of the most important destinations labeled, and the different blocks also clearly labeled. In addition, the accessible restrooms on that floor are clearly marked, so that anyone needing such a restroom can easily map out the path of travel to get there.

In addition, there are large modular strips pointing in each direction, with important destinations on each strip.

It should be noted that floor directories like this are dependent on more detailed directories that should be obtainable at the reception desk in the main entrance lobby. It is also helpful if the website has some kind of alphabetical directory so that anyone planning a visit can pinpoint which part of the facility they will be going to.

Obviously, a similar floor directory would be placed somewhere near the main entrance. Other directories should be located at junctions where the different blocks veer off from the central "A" block, and major stairwells and passenger elevators also should have a directory nearby.

**Component Two:  Block Identification**

These are simple signs with large block letters and most of them would probably be blade signs, mounted high above transition points between the different blocks. Others might be mounted on the wall above doorways. Still others might have arrows, where one hallway functions as a conduit between two different blocks.

Having these large block identification indicators would go a long way to getting people efficiently around the facility, since the intent is to identify most rooms along the main corridors by block letter, followed by the floor indicator number and an additional two-digit number.

**Component Three:  Room and Exit Identification**

It is the intent to identify every room by a number, and that is indeed a good plan in terms of wayfinding needs and various security and maintenance needs. Even first responders can more easily find rooms if every room has a number.

However, the general public is not directed to room numbers in many cases, and almost no one finds restrooms or exits by looking for numbers. In looking at the many events at CalArts, we find numerous references to room and facility names with no room number or block references. The U.S. Access Board specifically recommends that certain destinations always be identified by a "name" such as "Restroom," "Exit," or "Auditorium." This is the preferred tactile designation, but the number can also be included on the sign, in visual format.

In other cases, the tactile number is preferred. Every single room is not a major destination, and in some cases, using the number allows changes to be made easily in the function of the room. For rooms such as electrical rooms that the Fire Department wants to be identified, they would much prefer a tactile room number adjacent to the door with a large, easy to read visual "Function" sign such as "Electrical Panel Room" directly on the door.

Although the restroom signs are certainly part of the room identification signs, since they are the major topic of this report, we are including them in their own section.

Although the Exit Signs are not part of this particular phase of work, they are required by the state fire code as well as both the federal ADA standards and Title 24, so it would be well to plan to add them as soon as possible to the list of signs that should be completed and installed.

## Component Four: Public Restroom Signage

This is the most important part of the current Phase, and is presented as a package of signs that fulfill the legal requirements for restroom identification, whether the restrooms are accessible or not. In California, this consists of two signs, a geometric symbol sign for the restroom door, and a wall sign with tactile characters and braille.

We have used the door sign as the "canvas" to display the wheelchair pictogram, "ISA" or "International Symbol of Accessibility" for those restrooms that are accessible. Since we believe all the restroom doors are painted or stained a dark color, we are using all light colored geometric signs. There is no requirement for symbols or other identification on these signs, so for inaccessible restrooms, we are leaving them blank.

The wall signs are very simple. To set the white signs off against white walls, and make them easier for those with vision impairments to locate the signs, we are including a charcoal accent strip along the left side of the sign. This is a simple and inexpensive graphic treatment, but does give the signs an elegant "gallery" look and feel that is appropriate for an Art Institute and also does serve an accessibility purpose. Studies have shown that a major problem that persons with impaired vision have, is in locating where there are signs on walls. Some sort of defining color strip or frame helps solve that problem.

The third part of this component is the sign that is located near the inaccessible restrooms. So that the first message that people in wheelchairs may read is the sign notifying them where the nearest accessible restroom is located, we have decided to make that sign in charcoal with reversed out white print, along with the white on blue ISA. The hope is that they not waste time going all the way to the inaccessible restroom door to find that they need to go elsewhere. However, in case there is any confusion, there is also a sign stating that the nearby restroom is not accessible.

The fourth part of the component are the "bread crumb" signs. These are the signs that get the person traveling in the correct direction to the accessible restroom. Sometimes the ISA with an arrow begins the path of travel, or sometimes they are directed to a specific Block, or to the elevator.

There are also some signs that are to be placed at elevators. These not only serve as part of the "bread crumb" path but also can inform visitors who are disabled of the general location of accessible restrooms. In addition, there are a couple of other signs that can be placed at major points of entry that inform people where the accessible restrooms are located.

**Conclusion**

We think this package, when completed in a manner fairly similar to what we have presented for this initial phase, will greatly improve the experience of all visitors and new students and employees as they strive to find their way around this complex facility.

# Photos of Existing Campus Path of Travel and Signage With Commentary







The kiosk at the entrance to the campus does not offer any particular guidance to those who need accessible features. The pedestrian path does have a blue cross-hatched area, but on the other side, it does not lead to the main campus entrance. Without proper directional signage and maps for autos and pedestrians, access is something of a guessing game.



This ramp appears at its entrance to possibly provide access to one of the buildings, but as you look further, it seems to be rather steep. If it is accessible, there should be a sign identifying it.

Directly below is a photo of what looks to be an outdoor amphitheater, but there is no visible access.





The accessible walkway to the entrance of the main building, which is actually on the third floor, is not properly marked.

Our initial report does not deal with the exterior wayfinding, but is should be dealt with immediately upon completion of the interior sign program.

Starting with the main entrance to Floor 3, we notice there are no accessibility signs, although there are the necessary automatic door signs.

As we enter the main lobby, there is a reception desk but the sign, located on the counter rather than above it, where it would be much more visible, is almost impossible to see. Furthermore, the counter itself is not accessible, and when we asked, we found that there were no maps available.
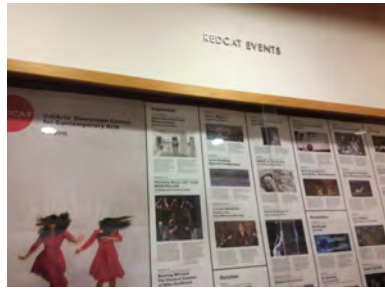
On one wall we can see there are upcoming events publicized, but again, the sign is almost invisible because of low contrast, glare, and the fact that it is too small to meet ADA requirements.
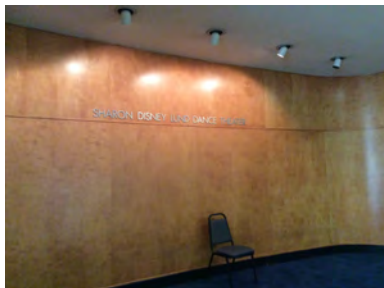
The same goes for the names of the various performance spaces. You can barely see the signs, even though the contrast is a bit better than with the event wall sign. And, there is no corresponding tactile sign at the door to the auditorium itself.
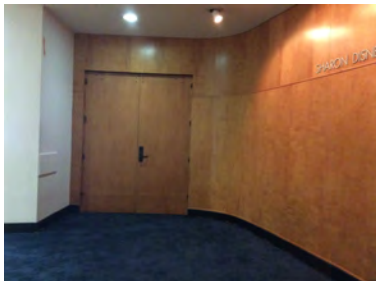
In short, anyone arriving for a performance may find some difficulty in finding where to go, and that is even the case for people who don't have a vision or hearing problem.

We think that our sign program will solve many of these problems, and encourage the college to complete as much of the plan as possible, as quickly as is practical, given both time and funds to get the work done.

There are numerous problems with the existing signs. Some are actual noncompliance and others are just issues that make signs less accessible although they don't violate any actual standards other than common sense.



Since red and green appear to be about the same shade of grey to about 8 percent of the male population, it would be better to choose other colors for the Evacuation maps. The first photo also has text to identify the location in the building, but it is too small to pass visibility standards. The second sign has a glossy cover, which makes it not compliant.



The third sign has some important information about emergencies, way too high for such small text. Although the entrance to the library does have a large, contrasting sign, there is no corresponding tactile sign.



The last photo shows what is the major means of door identification throughout the facility, a tiny visual sign way far above the finish floor, and no accompanying tactile sign.
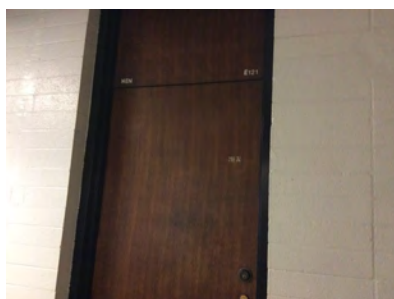


The last issue, which is only illustrated by the absence of signs, is that the different blocks are not identified in most of the building. Our program does remedy that by adding large signs that can be seen from many vantage points, as well as with clear floor plans that show the different blocks on each floor.