

Delivering The Right Message

Thesis: The effectiveness of sign board and ashtray positioning is based on the way in which student smokers interpret and carry themselves in accordance with the signifier and signified maxims.

Purpose: To explain to the students how they have been effected by the space around them in the smoking areas, which might help them in making conscious decisions in the future.

Audience: Red Rocks students who smoke or hang out at the smoking areas. I've used a concept most of the students know to explain my idea. Since English 121 is required for most of the students in the first year, I expect them to know about the signifier and signified of signs.

Outline:

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 - b- Signifier and signified
 - c- most crowded zones
- West entrance
 - a- Rush hour
 - b- describing the environment
 - c- Ashtray positioning
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 - g- Example of misplacement (a bench)
 - Breezeway
 - a-Rush hour
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 - c- Ashtray positioning.
 - East Entrance
 - a- Ashtray positioning
 - b- Absence of signs
 - c- Describing the environment
 - Conclusion
 - a- Importance of effective signs
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To reduce the student's exposure to second-hand smoking, six smoking sites have been set aside by the college. The appeal and accessibility of some of them are way better than others, which causes the amount of smokers to perceptibly vary between them. The effectiveness of sign board and ashtray positioning is based on the way in which student smokers interpret and carry themselves in accordance with the signifier and signified maxims of language use proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure. Of these six smoking zones, the west entrance and the breezeway entrance stand apart from the others due to their crowdedness.

West Entrance:

The west entrance smoking zone has been found to be crowded during the day. Many students find the area conducive for playing hacky sack. Students who draw fun from skate boarding also find this site a good place. Even music is present in this side of the school. Many students crowd around big CD system players from which loud music plays. On the system sides are big speakers which assert their presence with loud music that drowns the voices of those near them. Many smokers at the west entrance find pleasure accompanying their smoking spree with loud music. The frenzied activities of the west entrance are epitomized by the smoking fraternity. Like members of a large organization at break, the smoking students form small crowds as they smoke their cigarettes in utmost pleasure.



Fig. 1 The ashtrays at the west entrance

The west entrance area has four big ashtrays to cater for the mess caused by students who crowd the area during the day. Awkwardly, two of them are barely three feet from the door, which you would see as a violation to the state and the college regulations. The "Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act" states that " (7) 'Entryway' means the outside of the front or main doorway leading into a building or facility that is not exempted from this part 2 under section 25-14-205. 'Entryway' also includes the area of public or private property within a specified radius outside of the doorway. The specified radius shall be determined by the local authority or, if the local authority has not acted, the specified radius shall be fifteen feet." Which, in general, means smoking is prohibited within fifteen feet from the main entrance unless it is stated by the local authority. Some local communities, like Red Rocks College, have taken the initiative to strengthen those laws, even to as much as 50 feet from the doorway. However, the state regulations regard the main entrance only, which doesn't make sense, because all the entrances are used by the public and the students who deserve a clean air in their way to classes. At Red

Rocks, the main entrance and the east entrance both have 50 feet non-smoking areas. However, the west entrance doesn't have any sign and the ashtrays are just by the door.

Littering stands out as another disturbing scene in the west side. By afternoon, you see pop-corn, fruit peelings and worse, the cigarettes filters on the floor. None of the other smoking areas have as much littering as the west entrance. There must be something about the environment that encourages littering. Compared to the other smoking areas, this side has a unique playful and noisy environment, which ostensibly encourages the carelessness and littering. The work to be done every evening in cleaning the area reveals the manner in which students can be ignorant to the obvious. In the afternoon, the scene is a sorry sight when one comes face to face with its mess: pop corn leftovers are scattered all over, with cigarette butts and sticky chewed gums laying about the floor following the previous day's activities of the West entrance area. The janitor who cleans the area has over time learned to bear with the carelessness of students and finds strength to clean the area each evening without a knot in his heart. When I asked him if the area is always messy like this, replied, "yea, they are just kids". Even though I like his attitude, I don't think that's an excuse for them.

A bench with a wooded short fence around it stands only 100 feet from the entrance whose significance is not justified since very few students find time to hang around it. Noticeably there is not even a single ashtray near or around it that proves its presence is of no value to the daily crowded place. There stand six tables, each with chairs. Four of the tables are adorned with umbrellas.

Breezeway Entrance:



Fig. 2 Ashtrays by the hallway and Elect. Lab at Breezeway Entrance

The breezeway entrance is the second most crowded place in the college where smoking is allowed. The entrance has five ashtrays and four trash cans aimed at putting the problem of dropping filthy cigarette butts, gum and other trash on the floor under control. The college's efforts here to cater to the smokers while at the same time saving the environment at this point always abates since it is hard to find anybody smoking in this area in the morning session. In the morning and the afternoon school hours a few students hang round the entrance, which makes the number of the trash cans and ashtray appear to be more than what is needed. However, in the evening session the number of ashtrays makes sense, because a large number of the older students come to smoke here. The smoking does not however take long since most of them allowed for only a ten minutes' break. The same issue, as the west entrance, appears here; three ashtrays are just by the doors and one by the hallway.



Fig. 3 Ashtrays by the Construction Lab and Construction Technology Offices at Breezeway Entrance.

East Entrance:



Fig. 4 A non-smoking sign by East Entrance

The last major entrance area, the east, has one ashtray which is more than a hundred feet from the entrance. This is an evidence of a misplaced effort to cater for smokers since only a

negligible number of smokers come here to smoke. The manner in which the entrance has been concealed by the trees from easy view accounts for its underutilization. Moreover, failing to provide a sign leading to the ashtray makes it hard for the over zealous smokers to see it. Failure to install such signs in the east entrance is the major reason why oblivious smokers have insisted on smoking around the gate despite the warnings from numerous mini boards that it is a no smoking zone.



Fig. 5 The only ashtray by the East Entrance.

In any society, warnings and the manner in which we want people to conduct themselves in a particular area hugely depend on how effective sign boards or other images communicate effectively. Therefore, signs in an institution that aim to make students behave in a particular manner are inevitable. They carry in them the most powerful tool of communication: language. To study how these signs carry out their intended functions is semiotics. In this regard, Ferdinand de Saussure's propositions of the signifier and the signified in language use come in

handy. The signifier is the image or the message that sign carries while the signified is the concept that the sign is trying to put across to us.

The images of ashtrays and trash cans around the entrances discussed above are the signifiers. They signify that students should not litter the compound and smokers should make use of the insofar as managing pollution is concerned. However, the misinterpretation that emanates is one where the students continue to smoke and litter the compound around the West entrance with cigarette butts, pop corn and chewed gum.

Again, people can never interpret or identify the signified concept from a non-existent signifier. For instance, at the west entrance the ashtrays are just by the door and there are no signs prohibiting smoking. All that leads to smoking by the door and mess on the floor. The matter becomes worse in marking smoking zones, if there are signs that aim to prohibit smoking in one area and alternative signs indicating where to smoke are missing. Taking the case of the east entrance for instance, the college has put in place very communicative sign boards indicating that smoking at the entrance is prohibited for a distance of 50 feet but fails to provide a signs that directs the smokers to the ashtray located more than a hundred feet from the entrance. The outcome in this case becomes obvious: since the smokers must smoke and they have not been directed to the smoking areas, they ignore the no smoking signs and smoke at the gate.