



South Campus Neighborhood Project

Signage & Wayfinding

CONCEPTS

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Anthropology 483: Field Methods in Ethnography

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Resilient Cities Initiative
Institute for Sustainable Development
California State University, Chico

The South Campus Neighborhood Project

The South Campus Neighborhood Project is an award-winning neighborhood improvement planning effort coordinated by the Resilient Cities Initiative at California State University, Chico and the Public Works-Engineering Division at the City of Chico, CA. The project is focused on the public rights-of-way in Chico, California's South Campus Neighborhood, a six by seven square-block area bound by 2nd Street to the North, 9th Street to the South, Orange Street to the West and Salem Street to the East. Immediately adjacent to both downtown Chico and the University, it is Chico's oldest residential neighborhood and was laid out by the town's founder, John Bidwell, in the 1860's.

The neighborhood today is densely populated with university students and is also home to a number of small businesses, restaurants, bars, churches, community organizations, a school, a fire station, a police station, a railway station and transit center. Given its location, population and mixed uses, the neighborhood faces a unique set of circumstances and challenges. This three-year project aims to assess existing conditions and to develop and refine neighborhood improvement concepts to address a range of identified issues. The neighborhood improvement planning process is focused on concepts for complete streets and public works that will enhance public health and safety, quality of life, sense of place and environmental sustainability.

➤ *More information can be found online at <http://scnpchico.com/>*

City of Chico Public Works-Engineering

The overall Mission, Vision and Goal of the City of Chico Public Works Department is to provide the best possible Quality of Life through our abilities to protect, plan, construct and maintain the physical assets of the City. This is achieved through teamwork, integrity, professionalism, innovation, respectful customer service, value to the citizens of Chico, accountability and stewardship of the City's infrastructure and public resources. We serve the public in a manner that supports the rich heritage of Chico, as well as progressing into future improvements desired by the community in a sustainable manner. We continue to look for new technology that assists in meeting these goals so that we can operate at the most efficient level and continue to be at the leading edge of modern standards.

Our Mission, Vision and Goals include ensuring public safety through detail oriented and strategic improvements to mitigate unsafe operation and use of our Public property; Providing safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation systems to enhance the City of Chico's economy and livability for all modes of transportation; Efficiently and effectively providing a reliable, sustainable and cost effective sanitary sewer and storm water collection system for our residents and businesses in-line with our overall Mission and Vision. We are stewards of the natural environment and through responsible practices, we construct and maintain our natural environment to the highest of standards. We will continue to make the City of Chico a leader in sustainable and clean practices so that our residents can experience the quality of life that is desired for an infinite length of time.



The Resilient Cities Initiative

The Resilient Cities Initiative (RCI) is an interdisciplinary university-community partnership program established by the Institute for Sustainable Development at California State University, Chico in 2016. The RCI connects real-world community sustainability projects – identified and funded by partner agencies – with faculty expertise and student innovation from departments and disciplines across the University’s academic colleges. The RCI recruits partner agencies through a competitive selection process and matches projects with existing courses across the university’s curricula. Partner agencies are able to harness incredible momentum for their projects in large part because the partnership is realized on a bigger scale than more typical one-off university-community projects. Faculty are able to opt-in and augment their existing curriculum with real-world projects that have been identified, funded and supported by the leadership and staff of the partner agency – ultimately delivering their students’ work for consideration and implementation.

The RCI is a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Network, a nationwide network of over 25 universities that have replicated the highly successful Sustainable City Year Model that was established at the University of Oregon in 2009. The model is based on university-community partnerships with a defined geographic and temporal scope, focused on advancing sustainability and the social good, leveraging the multidisciplinary knowledge and capacity of the university to ‘move the needle’ on pressing community issues. The RCI directly engages hundreds of CSU, Chico students each academic year, providing impactful opportunities for them to put theory to practice in their own community and region, connecting them with decision-makers in practitioners in their fields of study, and helping develop the next generation of workforce professionals and leaders.



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Executive Summary

1. There are many missing, ineffectual, and vandalized street signs in the SCN.
2. Tamper-proof designs for new signage could prevent thievery and vandalization, and the use of tack-welding and increased fines for stealing could be a part of this.
3. Sustainable materials could be used for new signage to raise awareness and combat heedless wastefulness.
4. Signage could be added that puts the public in contact with those who have the power to fix missing or vandalized signs, and to direct the transient population to helpful resources for shelter and rehabilitation.
5. Signage, parking meters, and crosswalks could act as additional infrastructure for solar- powered or LED light and combat feelings of danger.
6. Removal or reduction of “For Rent” signs in windows could help to add a sense of pride and ownership to the SCN.
7. The city could work on helping implement a rewards system between property owners and students that encourages proper upkeep of properties, especially those that are historic and important. These properties should be maintained and cared for, as they may become sites with signage and regular visitation. Upkeep can include but is not limited to things such as regular repairs and holiday decorations.
8. Historic signage and plaques can be added to locations such as Gage House, Madison Bear Garden, Kendall Hall, the Train Depot, congregation Beth Israel, and the former sites of Chinatowns and the Diamond Match Factory. This is by no means an exhaustive list and other areas for plaques can be found in the Neighborhood History Report.

9. Content for plaques can include portraits of historic figures, Sanborne Fire Insurance Maps, old maps and photographs of the town, information about architectural origin and style, as well as biographical and factual information about individual's lives. Other possible content for plaques include the political, economic, and social development of the SCN over time.
10. Plaques could give ecological information about the mature urban forest, and the meaning and treatment of trees throughout time in the SCN.
11. A walking tour could be created to link together the signs and plaques, and create a mappable, nonlinear route for individuals to follow.
12. The use of holiday celebrations such as a traditional Chinese New Year parade or holiday decorations on houses could help create a sense of cheer and community interconnectedness in the SCN.
13. Historical facts and trivia about the SCN could be posted on poles with LED and Solar lights to create more brightness and pique historical interest.
14. A metal archway on West 2nd and Ivy would be an ideal spot to signify the location and label the area as the "South Campus Neighborhood District." It could also serve as a clear beginning and map distribution center for a walking tour.
15. Public art in the form of sculptures and murals could depict historical figures or events and be completed by local artists or CSUC art students.



Introduction

As stated in the existing reports, the South Campus Neighborhood (SCN) is a six by seven square-block area bound by 2nd Street to the North, 9th Street to the South, Orange Street to the West and Salem Street to the East. The Neighborhood History report also explains that it was the location of

historically significant homes, schools, churches, mature urban forests, and was home to early Chinese immigrants and a Jewish community. Despite now being a quintessential college neighborhood filled with life, history, and untapped potential, it is nonetheless a problematic area in which to live, and travel through.

Previous reports have detailed the multiple problematic facets of the neighborhood, but this report will be delving into the particular problem of signage and way-finding. It is however almost impossible to ignore some of the more pressing issues observed and described by students in Anthropology 483 (Ethnographic Methods) and Anthropology 495 (Applied Anthropology), the result of a semester-long examination of the SCN. Primarily, the issues of cracked and broken sidewalks, poorly maintained trees, and dangerously insufficient street- lighting were consistently mentioned by every investigator. These main problems are best understood in terms of their relationships to one another and bear directly upon the issue of renovating the SCN, quite independently of signage and way-finding. In an effort to avoid repeating observations made in previous reports, these problems are not the focus of this report.

Signage and way-finding came to mean many things to each investigator for this project, as both a way to discuss the process and observations associated with moving through and navigating the SCN, and as a way to pay tribute to and honor the rich history of the neighborhood. While neither of those meanings



were exact interpretations of the definition sought after by the SCNP or the City of Chico, students nevertheless produced useful and relevant information.

That being said, the specific definition of signage and way-finding as explored in this report seeks to make visible statements about the character of the neighborhood, and propose straightforward concepts regarding content, form, and branding of all potential signage. To accomplish this, the report draws on the ideas and information presented by the student participants as well as additional resources for reinforcement.



Methods

In total, nine students from two combined classes (ANTH 483 and ANTH 495) spent their semester exploring the practical realities of conducting original ethnographic fieldwork in the SCN. The student author of this report is currently an advanced undergraduate earning a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology, with a certificate in applied anthropology, and a minor in environment and development.

For the most part, methodology consisted of multiple in-depth interviews of residents, historians, and business owners in the SCN. There was an emphasis on building trust and relationships with informants in order to gain access to their unfiltered opinions and suggestions. Other in-person fieldwork consisted of informal interactions with peers and SCN residents, as opposed to formal, structured interviews. In either case, the students obeyed the tenants of anthropological philosophy by giving their informants an alias when requested and being careful to eschew inappropriate and insensitive questions. Those who conducted more informal fieldwork used participant observation to blend in with and understand their peers.

Another approach utilized by some were anonymous surveys to gain a wider consensus of opinions and suggestions about the SCN. The website [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) was used to create free surveys whose URLs were then distributed to various Chico social media pages across Facebook and Instagram, as well as being handed out in hard copy form on campus. The survey responses were then used to support data from more in-depth and face-to-face interviews.

These surveys asked general questions about the level of public knowledge regarding the neighborhood's history, whether participants would like to see it better represented in signage, and if so, how they would like to see it represented. These combined methods make up the bulk of the information presented by students regarding signage and way-finding.

Findings

The findings and suggestions put forth about signage and way-finding by students and informants fall into two main categories. The first category “**Existing Signage**” stems from the fact that some preexisting signage is ineffectual and does not do an adequate job of alerting pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers to where they are and what they should be doing. The first category deals with how existing signage can be improved as far as functionality, whether that means adding more or fixing what is already there.

The second category “**Potential Signage**” came about in light of many students who made note of their own and their informants’ observations that the unique history of the neighborhood is not entirely visible and is not easily appreciated by your average resident or passersby. The second category consists of observations and suggestions as to how signage can shed light on history and evoke a sense of pride and ownership - for not just the SCN residents, but all of Chico.

I. Existing Signage: Problems and Solutions

Pre-existing areas that were identified as problematic in terms of signage include the dangerous yield signs on 4th and Hazel, which could easily be confused for a four-way stop and be responsible for a car

accident. A similar problem was noted on 4th

and Orange and 4th and Cherry, where yield signs had the potential to be confused for a four-way stop.

Other areas of ineffectual signage on 5th and Ivy were described as being too small, and difficult to read.

This kind of signage only adds to the element of danger and heightens concerns about being unsafe that already exist in the SCN.

Some areas were described as missing signage altogether. Multiple street corners have missing signs, such as those that spell out CHICO (Chestnut, Hazel, Cherry, Ivy, and Orange). Other areas that were noted as lacking in signage included Chestnut and 3rd, Chestnut and 5th, Chestnut and 6th, Normal and 4th, Cherry and 6th, Cherry and 7th, Hazel and 7th, and Ivy and 6th. Further research needs to be collected regarding the type and nature of the missing signage in these locations, as the student observations on this topic were not sign-specific.

Many students pointed out that missing signs are no accident, and that many a fraternity bedroom has a street sign displayed proudly on the wall. While sign-stealing may be a popular fraternity recreation, it exacerbates feelings of unease and confusion when engaging in navigation through the neighborhood.

Not only does it contribute to a general sense of decay, many business and property owners are concerned that missing signage depreciates their property value and does little to change the perceived decrepitude of the neighborhood. Missing signage may also be a part of the reason why many informants put more confidence in their personal GPS systems than they do the signs and signals around them.



In order to combat this problem, it might be useful to consider more tamper-proof, and thief-proof sign designs when replacing signage. This could include something with an alarm built in to discourage thieves, and alert pedestrians or law enforcement that a crime is occurring. A more feasible option would be to increase both the fine for stealing a sign, as well as the reward for finding one. Still another possibility is to change the engineering of signs so that the bolts holding the signs to the poles will be tack-welded together, which could be effective at deterring thieves and inexpensive.

Many informants expressed frustration towards the City of Chico for being slow to replace missing signs after being notified. Regardless of the problems faced by the City, the perception most people shared is based in reality. Since it is possible that these frustrations were due to an error in communication, the public might benefit from signs that display contact information of the appropriate City departments which could be contacted in the event of a stolen sign, or similar act of vandalism in the neighborhood.

Although waste-management and the transient population may not appear to be particularly relevant to signage and way-finding, many students feel that these problems could be at least helped minimally by signage. With trash and litter being as prevalent as they are in the SCN, students suggested that future signage could be made out of recyclable and sustainable materials in an effort to mitigate and reduce the neighborhood's waste and carbon footprint as much as possible. The transient population that is known to occupy depot park could also benefit from additional signage. Many individuals in that population struggle with drug addiction and signage could direct them towards shelters and areas where they could receive rehabilitation, thereby potentially contributing to improved public health.

Students and informants are no strangers to the fact that sexual assault, crime, and physical violence occur regularly in the SCN. While signage may not remedy the structural roots of these problems, it was suggested by students that signage be put up that clearly informs of agencies or offices to contact in addition to Emergency 911 in the aftermath of sexual assault or violence. This idea could be very effective at assisting people contact resources that will help them deal with trauma.

In a similar vein, many students felt that signage could contribute to feelings of safety by contributing to and increasing illumination that is largely missing from the neighborhood because of damage to existing street lights. Signage could act as additional infrastructure for solar- powered lights that come on at night and add more low-level lighting to dark streets. Flashing or solid LED lighting or solar-lighting could also be used to add further illumination to crosswalks and parking meters.

Other suggestions dealt with more intangible aspects of pre-existing signage, such as a general sentiment that the neighborhood's residents and property owners lack a certain sense of pride and ownership in their properties. While it is unavoidable that the SCN is a prime area for student-housing; the growth of the university, rental proliferation, and landlords who are not Chico residents detract from the sense of responsibility felt for the neighborhood. In particular, conspicuous "For Rent" signs in every other window act as a constant reminder of the impermanence and unaccountability associated with college housing and living. It was suggested that property owners work to advertise through different methods, in order to prevent this feeling.

Aside from the indifference that many students and residents feel towards their homes in the SCN, there is a complete disregard for care and maintenance of certain properties. Garbage piles up on the sidewalks, regular partying takes its toll on the interiors of residences, as well as their visible facades, and this contributes to the feelings expressed by many of living in a sub- par, unkempt neighborhood. The homes that fall into disrepair are often those that are the most historically significant, which contradicts the goal of enhancing or even maintaining the history and character of the neighborhood.

A solution proposed by many would encourage student residents work with property owners to create a rewards system, where by following certain rules and doing their part to maintain the quality of properties, more short-term residents have more of an incentive to participate in a meaningful way, drawn by either financial reward or other kinds of emoluments.

Related to the idea of a rewards system between property owners and students is the idea of encouraging residents to add holiday decorations of their choice to further enhance a sense of pride and participation

in the community. Although these last few suggestions are not the responsibility of the City of Chico to solve, they are still valuable and related to the concepts of belonging in a place and allowing the true character of the SCN to be made more visible.



II. Potential Signage

While it is clear that existing signage falls short in some ways, it is also necessary to discuss the possibility of signage that acknowledges the history of the SCN and solidifies its rightful place in the National Historic Register (NHR). Even with the rich historical background present, students and



informants observed ignorance on part of residents and students who were unaware of this history, but who expressed eagerness and desire to know more. The few informants who did have knowledge of the history felt that it was either invisible or misrepresented.

One reason for this general ignorance is a shortage in historic signage. Specific locations that could use more historic signage include Gage House on 410 Normal Street, the Madison Bear Garden, and Kendall Hall. These structures make up the oldest houses in the neighborhood too, such as the home of notable historical figures like Frank Lusk, who had a hand in financing Chico's first Normal School - that is now the California State University at Chico.

These are just a few key locations, and one need only refer back to the Neighborhood History Report to find historical residences and locations that would benefit from signage. Such locations and residences would greatly benefit from informational plaques that detail the lives of the residents who lived there, show portraits and pictures when appropriate, and explain the kind of lasting impacts they made on Chico. Another acceptable topic for plaques includes type and origin of the architectural style of certain buildings.

The urban forest is another treasured and unique aspect of Chico and could also benefit from plaques that identify old-growth trees and explain the origin of customs such as the 19th century, two-day festival

which celebrated beautiful trees. Like more conventional street signs, these plaques could be made from tamper-proof, and sustainable, even local materials.

The location that was previously the site of the diamond Match Factory could also display plaques that explain the effect of the factory on the economy and infrastructure of Chico, and the Train Depot would also benefit from plaques that explain the Depot's relationship to the lumber industry in Chico.

Other viable candidates for plaques and signage include the original sites of Chico's Chinatown's and businesses outside of the SCN where Chinese immigrants lived, went to school, and worshipped. Today these locations bare little to no resemblance to their appearance when Chico's Chinatown experienced peak populations, so it is particularly important to add some kind of indication that they existed and played an important part in the formation of the community. Multiple plaques would be required, as there were multiple Chinatowns that coexisted with each other but were established in different time frames.

Content for plaques and signage could include treatment of the Chinese immigrants by anti-Chinese Chico residents, informed by what we now know about the treatment of immigrants throughout Chico's history, as well as today. Plaques could also contain imagery and content related to the customs of Chinese immigrants, such as their New Year's celebrations, places of worship, and participation in the local economy. Although information regarding Chico's Chinatown exists in academic spheres and in the Chico Museum, informants from anonymous surveys expressed that they were largely unaware of that period in Chico's history.

Less relevant to signage and way-finding was the suggestion by certain informants that the city take part in and organize a Chinese New Year celebration in the SCN as part of the annual Christmas Tree Lighting and Christmas Preview events to celebrate and honor the former Chinese residents of the Chico community. Yet another possible location for a historic plaque would be congregation Beth Israel, as place to display any known information for Chico's historic Jewish community.

In addition to plaques that provide information corresponding with historic residences and locations, signage could direct people on a walking tour that would encourage residents and visitors alike to follow a map or brochure of the SCN that includes specific historic locations and directions to visit each of them.

It was suggested by informants and students that a walking tour would work best in an undirected, non-linear format that allows participants to follow whichever route they please and view locations in any order. This tour would be an ideal way to link all the plaques together by theme and form, in order to make an individual's location within the tour and neighborhood more apparent.

One high traffic, recognizable location in the SCN is the intersection between West 2nd and Ivy. This area marks the entrance for many people into the neighborhood, and Ivy street is the location for many historic residences that now serve the purpose of housing the university's Greek life. This intersection could benefit from a metal archway that signifies the neighborhood as the "South Campus Neighborhood District" or welcomes people into it. This metal archway could be made of recycled and sustainable materials such as scrap metal and created by CSUC students in the manufacturing and technology courses who specialize in welding and fabrication.

The area could also function as a clear landmark and starting point for a walking history tour and have a small kiosk on one side with a map of the SCN or brochures for anyone hoping to participate in the walking tour. This archway serves a functional purpose as a landmark, signifier, and as a way to enhance a sense of place and belonging.

Other possibilities for signage that provide less of an in-depth perspective are entertaining trivia and facts displayed on poles that provide infrastructure for solar powered light, as mentioned earlier. These facts could be quick, attention-grabbing sentences that pique the interest of those walking by and may inspire them to learn more. For example, signs could contain statements about the SCN being Chico's oldest neighborhood, or that CSU Chico was previously named the New Normal School.

Facts such as these might serve the purpose of encouraging people to do their own independent research about where they live and through which they regularly commute. Informants also suggested that signage



take on the form of Greek letters in areas and residences that correspond with fraternities and sororities, as well as signs or plaques that contain information and history of each Greek institution.

Other possible options that add to the sense of place, historical character, and overall beauty of the neighborhood include public art that could be completed by university students or local artists.

Sculptures or murals would be creative way to bring history to life and add beauty and character to the neighborhood.

Possibilities for sculptures include depictions of figures such as the Bidwells, Chinese immigrants, or Oscar Stansbury. Murals could depict places, or events, and possible subject matter for a mural could be a depiction of one of the Chinatowns during a period of peak population and activity. Buildings with sparse walls and empty lots could benefit from visually pleasing, historically-oriented art such as sculptures and murals. The overall morale and historical awareness of residents could increase in seeing the neighborhood become brighter and more interesting.

Conclusions

Signage and way-finding in the SCN is both a practical concern when it comes to safety in navigation, and an avenue through which to explore the neighborhood's rich history.

Missing signage is a major issue both in terms navigation and property value, and this should be dealt with before any superfluous signage is added.



Areas requiring immediate attention due to missing and ineffectual signage include the street corners of the streets spelling out CHICO, Chestnut and 3rd, Chestnut and 5th, Chestnut and 6th, Normal and 4th, Cherry and 6th, Cherry and 7th, Hazel and 7th, and Ivy and 6th, and the intersections of 4th and Hazel and 4th and Orange. If any new signage is to be added, aforementioned measures should be put in place to make sure it is not so easily vandalized and stolen. Additional street signs could be made out of sustainable material to combat the issue of neighborhood trash.

Signage addressing social issues of sexual assault, crime, and the large transient population is another option that has been largely unexplored but may have the power to bring about positive change. The concern over the lack of lighting in the area was a recurring issue for many who contributed to this project, and signage as a platform for solar powered or LED light is one way to combat feelings of imminent danger.

Since one of the goals of new signage and way-finding is to enhance and bring out the character of the SCN, historic residences and other areas with signage might benefit from a rewards system between property owners and residents where occupants take care of historically significant places and help keep them presentable, especially with the additional attention and

interest that signage or plaques may bring to the neighborhood. Other more difficult-to-enforce suggestions that fall into this area of character enhancement include the use of holiday decorations to create a welcoming atmosphere, shared sense of community, and Chinese New Year parade in the SCN.

Signage also needs to reflect the rich history of Chico and the SCN. There are many potential locations that would benefit from signage in the form of plaques, and several of these locations have already been identified in this report for potential signage content and historic value. Content for plaques could take on the form of portraits and photographs of historic figures, city maps and Sanborne Fire Insurance Maps, and historical information about the economic, political, and social changes that have shaped Chico through the years.

Much information exists about the Chinese Immigrants in Chico, and their stories represent a teachable moment and historic lesson about the treatment of immigrants in the past and present. These plaques could follow a common theme in design and work together to form a non-linear walking tour where each site and plaque serves as a single stop on the tour.

Aside from informational plaques, other forms signage could take on include light poles with LED or solar powered lights that hold signs with trivia and facts that act as quick attention- grabbing information. These could be functional light sources, as well as inspiration for students and pedestrians to do further research into the history.

The well-known and high traffic interaction of West 2nd Ivy would work well as an area for a metal archway that signifies the area as the “South Campus Neighborhood District” and as a place to mark the beginning of a walking tour. Other more aesthetic improvement to the neighborhood includes public art in the form of sculptures or murals of historic figures and events and could be completed by art students at CSUC or other local artists. Greek life in the neighborhood could also be celebrated through metal lettering to correspond with each fraternity or sorority and provide historical information about each institution.

The South Campus Neighborhood will benefit immensely from a series of improvements to signage and way-finding, both in terms of practical changes and cosmetic fixes.

Many of these improvements stem from a series of interrelated problems that work against the creation of a shared community and space that is valued by residents and owners alike. Missing signs, vandalism, litter, and poor lighting create the sense that the SCN is not a place to spend enjoyable time and discourages people from looking into the history that lies beneath the surface.

Some of these problems have straightforward solutions, such as replacing a yield sign with a stop. Others are much more complicated, and the goal of getting students to treat historical homes with respect and doing justice the stories of some of Chico's first immigrants will require thoughtful care and consideration. But these are by no means impossible achievements, and the SCN could soon be the safe, historically representative place that it has the potential to be.





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