



**CLOUD GEHSHAN ASSOCIATES**

Design Consultants

400 Market Street  
Suite 300  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

TEL 215 829 9414  
FAX 215 829 9066  
[www.cloudgehshan.com](http://www.cloudgehshan.com)



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# The College of New Jersey

Exterior Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan

13 June 2011





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Client/Project		Project No.
The College of New Jersey		09212000
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04.27.10	06.13.11	N/A





Introduction

The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) is a highly selective institution that has earned national recognition for its commitment to excellence. Founded in 1855, TCNJ has become an exemplar in public higher education and is consistently acknowledged as one of the top comprehensive colleges in the nation.

Cloud Gehshan Associates was retained by the college to prepare an Exterior Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan, which will identify signage and information needs. The Master Plan will provide recommendations and a foundation for the eventual design and implementation of a campus wayfinding and information system.

Plan Intent

This master plan establishes guidelines for the development and implementation of a systematic network of informational elements at The College of New Jersey. It includes observations and recommendations for the wayfinding strategy, sign system components, operational policies and "non-sign" elements that comprise a comprehensive wayfinding system.

Stakeholder Involvement

Over a period of several months, CGA documented existing conditions related to signage and collected information from a wide range of individuals including staff, faculty and students.

Documentation of the findings included photographs of existing conditions, field observations of college operations, surveys, interviews and videotape of major approach routes to the campus.

The following groups have given their time and input along the way to make this signage and wayfinding plan inclusive and comprehensive:

- Admissions
- Alumni Affairs
- Athletics
- Campus Police
- Career Services
- College Art Gallery
- Development Office
- Differing Abilities Services
- English Department
- Facilities Management, Construction and Campus Safety
- Members of the student body
- Office of Alumni Programs
- Office of Campus Planning
- Office of Conference and Meeting Services
- Office of Public Affairs
- Office of the Associate Vice President for Administration
- Psychology Department
- Records and Registration
- School of Art, Media and Music
- Student Affairs
- TCNJ Library

Many thanks to the dedicated staff of The College of New Jersey for their assistance and invaluable information.

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Student Work

In the spring of 2008, senior graphic design students at The College of New Jersey were asked to design a wayfinding system for their campus. The students had to develop what they felt were appropriate sign types and location plans, as well as brochures and map designs to aid navigation. It was the students’ first wayfinding project, and in many cases, their first attempt to draw to scale.

The results of this senior-level project were lively and spirited, with colorful and varied results. The students drew primary inspiration from TCNJ’s colors, with many finding creative ways to integrate other aspects of the College into their designs. For example, several students utilized the logo’s “shield” shape in their sign designs. Other designs were driven by the Lion mascot or the Green Hall Clock Tower, a campus landmark. Some even drew inspiration from the architecture on the campus, which in turn directed their choice of materials.

Many of the students included type studies in their wayfinding systems, but more color studies should have been encouraged. Axonometric map designs were prominent throughout the projects. Students utilized a mix of Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator tools to show signs in specific contexts, whether along roads, in front of buildings, or in a variety of other locations around campus.

Clearly, maps were a focus of each student’s submission. Their efforts toward creating maps of the campus were evident, as many of them were presented with clarity and scale intact. Maps were included in brochures on “getting around TCNJ,” another aspect of the wayfinding system project.

The brochures colorfully depicted each student’s unique map design, and many realized the importance of a good map when attempting to navigate the campus on foot or by bike. Students focused on presenting the campus in a way that encouraged biking or walking, instead of driving, to destinations on campus.



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Student Work

Aluminum, Velcro, and stone were some of the materials specified in the more thorough wayfinding plans. Attention to which materials were used in which context—and reasons why—were in the most detailed projects. The usability of the signs in each of the systems presented, in particular to safety issues surrounding each of the sign types, should have been considered more carefully.

A wide array of sign types were studied and included for the wayfinding system projects. Signs types included directional, building identification, banners, event signs, and emergency call stations. Banners in particular received a lot of attention in many of the students’ projects. Some students recognized a wayfinding sign system’s important role in branding and creating an identity for the campus, and took the project a few steps further to include merchandise. One student included t-shirts and coffee mugs that corresponded with his signage design.

If The College of New Jersey wishes to pursue projects similar to this in the future, there are a few improvements that could be made. We would suggest that the students create full-size mock-ups of their sign designs to test them in a real-life setting: students would be able to see how their text and image selections fare in the “real world.” We also feel that more focus on special needs users—the disabled, elderly, ESL, etc.—would be beneficial for the students to consider and integrate into their work. Studying guidelines and standards for safety and accessibility would be helpful for the students and their eventual designs. Ensuring that users of all capabilities can gain information from our signs is a major consideration for our designs.

Lastly, for students to create a truly professional-looking wayfinding system, we would suggest that they conduct research by reviewing industry materials, such as SEGDesign magazine or other environmental graphic design publications. By simply reviewing current sign systems or reading why top designers made particular aesthetic choices, students can gain knowledge that they can apply to their designs.



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