Effective signage and graphics are an integral part of an organized and coherent environment. The size of The University of Texas at Austin campus, its numerous expansions and the separation of the various schools and colleges have contributed to signage and graphics that are inconsistent, loosening the visual threads that hold the University community together and confusing newcomers and visitors to the campus. The University has a responsibility to present a coherent and clearly organized visual environment to its diverse body of users and visitors.

The master plan proposes a well-designed signage and graphics program, that in addition to serving the basic functions of direction, orientation and identification, works with the architectural expressions of buildings and open spaces to contribute to the overall image of the campus. This includes preserving the architectural integrity of campus facilities by providing the appropriate information with a minimum amount of intrusion.

The master plan’s environmental graphics program will define campus areas clearly, provide direction to campus users, protect campus architecture and create a consistent identity. These improvements will also contribute to a visual sense of community throughout the campus.

The University is so large that it can prove daunting to first-time visitors, or even to regular users looking for an unfamiliar building or location. An effective wayfinding system will help avoid user frustration and overcome problems created by campus size.

Five different categories of visual communication will comprise the wayfinding and identification system for the campus: orientation, directional, identification, regulation and pageantry. Consistency among these different types of signs will be achieved through the coordination of elements such as typography, color and design devices. This does not mean, however, that signage will be identical throughout the campus.

The system will allow for signage that responds to its context while maintaining a consistent overall identity.

The University of Texas at Austin is an important resource for diverse groups of users, including many individuals with disabilities. For this reason, it is essential that appropriate signs comply with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This includes direction to accessible building entrances and routes, as well as the clear identification of special facilities, parking spaces, ramps, lifts and special means of transportation.
Orientation Signage | In the 40 Acres, orientation signage will derive its form, color and materials from the surrounding context. In deference to the historical value of this area, signage will use existing architecture as precedent for its design, and signage materials will include cast and cut stone, cast bronze, copper and terrazzo. It will make use of existing (mercury vapor) light sources for illumination. Because orientation signage uses large maps and listings and serves as an impromptu meeting location, it should be incorporated into covered kiosk structures, providing temporary shade and shelter to users.

Orientation signage found near campus sports facilities will be less formal. Materials will be less contextual and more conducive to large-scale graphics, reflecting the need to provide information to large numbers of people. It should also provide shelter and define meeting places for users and utilize signs specific to the area or sporting event as well as colors to convey information in a bold and simple fashion. The scale of these elements will be larger than that of signs found elsewhere on campus.

Orientation elements will also be located in other sections of the campus. The form of these signs will be less contextual than in the 40 Acres, and the scale of signage will vary, depending upon the message and the specific location.

Directional Signage | Directional signage is concerned more with clarity and legibility than with borrowing from its architectural context. Vehicular signage will be presented in familiar forms (post and panel) to enhance motorists’ recognition and perception of the information. Within these recognizably forms, however, the signage may still incorporate the colors, typography, forms and materials of other campus signage, helping to identify campus boundaries and familiarize new users with the graphical language of the campus. Directional signage will use conventional, readily available materials. This will facilitate updating of signage prompted by growth and reconfiguration, as well as simplifying maintenance operations.

Signage along the perimeter of the campus will address traffic moving faster than that inside the campus. This dictates a larger scale and extremely brief, clear information. Within the campus, directional information for both motorists and pedestrians will be presented on a smaller scale. The signs will present information consistently, yet be flexible enough to accommodate large amounts of information at a variety of locations and adaptable for mounting on a variety of substrates (buildings, lightposts and railings).

Identification Signage | The variety of building styles, facilities, objects and people on the campus make it appropriate to use a broad range of identification signage, from ADA-compliant wall-mounted plaques to large freestanding pylons or walls. Building identification signage in the 40 Acres will be modest and functional. Color schemes will be subdued with the signage having as little impact as possible on the building identified. Signage at other locations may assume a more prominent role, with signs integrated into the architecture at facility entrances providing new visual interest as well as orientation.

Regulation Signage | Regulatory signage informs users of rules of conduct, prohibited activities and other regulations. Common forms of this signage include traffic control devices, legal notices and postings, construction signage and barricades, and notices of hazardous areas. Because the campus is used by so many individuals and because traffic and parking will be controlled, there are many regulatory signs. Coordinating and unifying these regulatory messages will be an essential part of the overall environmental graphics program.
Gateways can vary from buildings to sign posts. The master plan has located a vocabulary of future gates that announce points of arrival to the campus.

Gateways are divided into discreet typologies of form that have evolved over centuries to create space-defining portals. Three different categories are suitable for use on the campus: markers and paired markers, archways and gatehouses. Markers are single vertical elements that identify a point along an axis and, through their vertical emphasis, identify its location. Historically, markers have included elements as substantial as an Egyptian obelisk or as delicate as a flagpole. Markers may also appear in pairs to define a portal, to serve as a celebrated interruption in a fence or to support a door that acts literally as a gate. Archways create a frame through which one passes and define a deekway from one exterior space to another. Archways have occupied a position in history that ranges from the Arch of Constantine to the Arc de Triomphe to the Saint Louis Arch. Each of the three examples is unique in its expression and materials, but all are similar in the manner in which they mark a point of passage and intensify the space they define. Gatehouses are a building’s expressive entrance. They use a programmed function in a centralized position to create a significant gateway.

Campus Gateways | While it is inevitable that a campus and its surrounding city will interact and physically overlap, they should be treated as distinct villages that have clear boundaries distinguishing their identity. Gateways to the campus represent a symbolic transition from one environment to the other, and they should convey the impression of entering an academic community.

The current proliferation of poorly made and neglected temporary structures displaying information about various student causes and organizations should be eliminated. Specific structures and places should be created for these temporary advocacy messages. Guidelines will regulate the type, size and placement of such installations and the length of time that they may remain in place.

Main entrances to the University campus are difficult to locate; there are no gates or sign posts to announce arrival on the campus. Clear, memorable gateways show a commitment to the students and help create a sense of place, identifying edges with entry points instead of walls. Gateways also symbolize the University’s greater identity to the city of Austin, the state of Texas and American universities as a whole.

A gateway will be placed at the intersection of University Avenue and Martin Luther King Boulevard, guiding visitors from the edge of the campus past Littlefield Fountain, up the South Mall to the Main Building and the heart of the campus. This gateway, which will consist of vertical elements placed at the two outer edges of the inner median along University Avenue, is one of four that will be placed on the border of the original 40 Acres at the entrances of the South, East, North and West Malls. Parking will be available at the University Avenue entrance.

The Main Building was decorated with flags and bunting when the President of the United States, William McKinley, spoke to a crowd assembled on May 1, 1901.