

CAMPUS BOTANICA
Knowledge in the Landscape
Saskia Wolsak
University of British Columbia
CRWR 590
June 04, 2015

Disclaimer: "UBC SEEDS Program provides students with the opportunity to share the findings of their studies, as well as their opinions, conclusions and recommendations with the UBC community. The reader should bear in mind that this is a student project/report and is not an official document of UBC. Furthermore readers should bear in mind that these reports may not reflect the current status of activities at UBC. We urge you to contact the research persons mentioned in a report or a SEEDS team representative about the current status of the subject matter of a project/report".

CAMPUS BOTANICA

Knowledge in the Landscape

A project by: Anna Saskia Wolsak
Course: CRWR590
Instructor: Timothy Taylor
In conjunction with UBC's SEEDS initiative

Project Overview

For my project I am making interpretive botanical signage for campus flora. The goal is to make 120 botanical signs, conventional in appearance, but creative in text. Each sign will have the Latin and English common names of the plant, as well as the Halkomelem or other "folk" names of the plants when applicable (in Japanese, for example, for plants native to Japan). This will be followed by a piece of thought-provoking information about the plant. This text will draw from a wide range of disciplines. It may be scientific, historical, anthropological, poetic, or literary in nature (to name a few perspectives). It may include recipes, prayers, chemistry, or taxonomic anomalies, described from a range of worldviews. The objective is to draw people's attention to the flora around them and to invite them to start thinking about plants from a wide range of perspectives, thereby appreciating the plants themselves while gaining a sense of the campus's biodiversity and the culturally diverse ways of relating to them.

First Nations nomenclature and text

When possible I will try to include Halkomelem plant names and to reference, at times, traditional relationships to the native plants on campus. To this end, I am in communication with Jason Woolman and the Musqueam Indian Band for plant name contributions as well as for contributing to and vetting sign text referencing Musqueam and other First Nations perspectives.

Form

The signs will resemble classic botanical garden signs in size and material. They will be simple, visible, but unobtrusive in the landscape, acting as labels for the species near them. They will be made of plastic, with white letters engraved on a black or red background. They will be either 4x6 or 5x7 depending on the amount of text.

Benefits

My project aims to have both social and environmental benefits.

- Personal psychological benefits: I believe that knowledge of the plants in one's surroundings brings a sense of comfort, self-sufficiency, compassion, and peace of mind. It is also a gateway to broader ecological knowledge and, I

believe, a spiritual experience of connection to one's surroundings and to other, non-human life forms.

- **Respect for biocultural diversity:** Additionally, by providing information from many perspectives, the viewer is encouraged to respect human biocultural diversity – that is, that all viewpoints whether based in poetry, chemistry, traditional aboriginal uses and worldviews, spirituality, ecology, etc. are equally valid.
- **Environmental:** It is generally agreed upon that people will only protect what they love, and in order to love something they need to know about it. The signs will aim to be gateways for such loving and respectful relationships between people and plants, resulting in a deeper awareness and appreciation of the fellow creatures with which we share this planet and upon whom we depend for physical and emotional wellbeing.

Locations

The signs will be scattered over much of the UBC campus. Key areas of concentration will be: the native plant courtyard of the Beaty Biodiversity Museum; the Patient's Garden at the UBC Hospital; the grounds outside Forest Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Irving K. Barber Library, the Student Union Building, along Main Mall, East Mall, West Mall, and University Boulevard. Future locations may include the Museum of Anthropology, the forest outside the Asian Centre, and other key locations. The goal is to label plants in places where there is biodiversity, a high number of native plants, and/or frequent foot traffic.

Process

Locations

The first part of the process was to walk the UBC campus, map in hand, to determine ideal locations for the signs

Species Identification and Botanical Insights

During location scouting I made rough notes of the numbers and kinds of species in each location. I then contacted Douglas Justice, Associate Director of the UBC Botanical Gardens and request a walking tour of campus with him to determine the correct species names. We went out on two two-hour walks, covering most of campus. In addition to identifying the plants, he offered insights and reflections on their histories, taxonomies, and other key characteristics. Mr. Justice is a known expert in horticulture and helped in particular with the cultivars and introduced species on campus.

For identification and interesting notes on local species I went on two additional campus tours, one with Curtis Björk, an independent contractor in vascular taxonomy and co-curator of UBC herbarium's lichen collection; the other was with

Jamie Fenneman, a PhD student in botany and expert in local flora. Both of these botanists are currently authoring a new Flora of BC and are experts in their fields.

Additional Text

To gain insights on the plants from other points of view I also spoke and/or went on walks with the following people:

Linda Jennings: curator at the UBC Herbarium and planner of the native species courtyard at Beaty Biodiversity Museum

Jackie Chambers: ethnobotanists and head of education and outreach at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum

Pierre Johnstone: forest ecologist at the Ministry of Forests, gov. of BC.

Duffy Roberts: professor of literature at UBC, with a focus in ecolit and local narratives

Susan Rowley, co-head of anthropology at UBC, curator at the Museum of Anthropology, and co-curator of *cesna?em, the city before the city*

Jason Woolman: archivist with the Musqueam Indian Band and co-curator of *cesna?em, the city before the city*

Signs manufacturing and design

I went several times to the UBC Botanical Gardens to investigate the most economical way to produce the signs. I spoke with both Daniel Mosquin and Eric Lafountain, looked at different material samples, and made decisions about sign size, etc.

As for stakes, I contacted various companies who produce plant stakes and/or aluminum rods to determine the least expensive way of producing them. I also went to the hardware store to investigate alternate options such as cedar stakes and metal rods. In the end, the quote I ascertained from Precision Signs in New York state was the one we went with.

Design

I met with Derek Tan and Yukiko Stranger-Jones at the Beaty Museum to determine the graphic design of the signs. We discussed font, colour, size, placement and size of text, and word-count. Derek made mock-ups of the signs which I helped assemble, to be able to view them in situ.

Additional funding and marketing

I negotiated with Beaty Biodiversity Museum that in exchange for 40 signs in their courtyard, they would pay for the materials for those signs, as well as provide the services of Derek Tan, their wonderful in-house designer. This included a few

additional negotiations such as the inclusion of their logo on those signs, but the exclusion of their social media handle. Also when the signs are installed all over campus, Mairin Kerr, their social media marketer will document the installation with photographs and publicise the project through the museum's blog and social media platforms.