

English 1001

19 September 2017

### The Showcase Spirit Shop

The first building I entered when I toured Marquette back in the spring of 2016 was the Alumni Memorial Union. However, it wasn't the building that caught my eye, nor the Brew. It was the spirit shop. For some odd reason, I have always found great interest in bookstores and spirit shops. I believe this is due to the feeling of inclusivity and comradery I receive while in the store. Everyone and everything in a spirit store are for one team, and I love that. On the surface, the Marquette spirit shop may just look like any other college bookstore. However, the organization, purpose and visual aspects of the store were all created for specific reason. The nature and organization of this spirit shop is designed intentionally as a showcase of community for prospective students and parents. By packing in a large-school bookstore into a medium-school space, they generate a feeling of belonging and pride. Marquette is a school where students know their professors well, connect with fellow students all over campus, and feel like their presence matters. Nonetheless, that is the opposite of what is being conveyed in the store. The overwhelming and anxious feeling regarding the products in the shop is exactly what the university wants. They want the feeling of a "big school" in their bookstore, but a small school everywhere else on campus.

The overall purpose of the spirit store in the AMU is to be one of the first impressions of Marquette. We tend to look at bookstores at face value and their existence as a means of school apparel and textbooks. However, a more hidden and overlooked purpose of the Spirit Shop is to be a showcase and an advertisement when prospective students and parents visit Marquette. The first thing worth noting is that the university staff specifically placed the spirit store in the Alumni Memorial Union, directly across from the Brew. Not just because the smell of coffee

creates a feeling of nostalgia for a lot of people, but because those two places are often the first things you see when you tour Marquette. On your left, you are looking at space that appears to be comfortable, happy and caters to that ever so needed feeling of “home” college students crave. On your right, you have a space where only blue and gold are seen and the sunshine illuminates the whole room. The spirit store serves the purpose to illustrate a unified and prideful school in an attempt to convince parents to pay for their child to go here. The school aspires to present an institution that both the parents and the student have faith in, and a big part of that is a spirit store. With it being one of the first places seen by a lot of families, the fact that it looks inviting, comfortable and containing a diversity of items sets up a metaphor for what the rest of the campus is going to look like on that students’ tour. Without seeing the store, the vision of a school that is one community may be tainted or even discarded as that student continues through their tour.

The purpose of the spirit store is carried out in two ways. The first is the visual aspects of the store. As one walks into the spirit store for the first time they are immediately gazing upon hundreds of options for clothes, blankets, cups, and almost anything else. As addressed earlier, the university staff strives for this to be a showcase for “Golden Eagle” pride, as well as presenting a welcoming setting for the prospective students. Right away, you are met with the employees at the information and checkout desk. Emphasizing the university’s priority in helping students and families as much as possible. As you continue to walk through the store you see the bright sunshine pierce through the big windows, illuminating all the clothes, constructing the feeling of happiness and uncoincidentally associating the Marquette colors and campus with a feeling of happiness and pride. The university wants the store to be one of the cornerstones of Marquette, so that students remember when it comes to that May 1<sup>st</sup> decision date. Another thing

to touch on is the overwhelming number of products within the store. Part of this is to make as much revenue as possible, which is completely understandable, as the store is like any other store. Again, however, there is a deeper meaning as to why there are so many options in the store. They want to express that there is something here at Marquette for every student, but to be able to say that they must prove to students that the spirit shop has something for them. Subliminally, the university wants to make it clear that Marquette has just as many options and embodies the same feeling of happiness as their spirit store.

The last thing that contributes to the showcasing purpose of the store is the organization of it. As you search for your “Marquette Swag” in the store, it’s hard to ignore the fact that it seems extremely overwhelming and in some way very chaotic. In an attempt by the University to make it seem like a “big-school” bookstore with a ton of options in a small space, they unfortunately made it very difficult for certain individuals to shop in it. The space between the racks of clothes and sections are extremely close and hard to navigate through. For instance an individual in a wheel chair or crutches cannot easily shop. This generates the feeling that those people don’t belong at Marquette, even though that was not the university’s intention. The students who came to visit Marquette are ones who desire a medium school with a small school academic program, but want the athletics and school spirit to be that of a big school. To present that in the Spirit Store, the space must be tight to generate that feeling of the “big-school”. This however backfires with the hard to navigate shopping area, which is unfortunately the flaw of the store.

The spirit store is a totally different space when you step back and analyze it with a different lens. There are specific reasons for why everything was built and organized in a certain way, and the intentions of the university start to become clear. The purpose is to be that first

impression for students and the way they constructed the physical space and organized the inside of the store are testimony to that. To see these things allows us to understand the principles and values of the very school we study at. By analyzing these spaces, specifically the spirit store, the university values become clear and we can follow their thought process through the construction of the space. Through this we can start to take the time to understand the deeper meaning of things as simple as spaces.