



DAVID SANDERS / ARIZONA DAILY STAR 2010

The Sapphire Lounge, 61 E. Congress St., is one place University of Arizona students may like to go to if they could just get past North Fourth Avenue.

UA students seek to better peers' perception of area

By Carol Ann Alaimo
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The Downtown Office of Public Perception sounds like something George Orwell dreamed up.

And its logo, done in black and gray, seems suited to Oceania, the fictional nation in Orwell's classic novel "1984."

These local creations aren't a tribute to the late author, though. They're part of a downtown awareness effort aimed at University of Arizona students.

The UA crowd tends to shun downtown in favor of haunts on North Fourth Avenue or East University Boulevard, said Bill Mackey, a local architect and artist teaching a nontraditional elective in the UA's Honors College.

"When they get to the end of Fourth Avenue, it's like, 'What's

IF YOU GO

What: "YOU ARE HERE: Downtown & UA!" an interactive exhibit.

When: Dec. 1 and 2, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 8 p.m. each day.

Where: "Downtown Office of Public Perception," 825 E. University Blvd. (former Malibu yogurt shop)

the point of going further?' They have no interest."

Mackey challenged his students to find out why. After surveying 200 or so classmates, they came up with a list of common impressions.

Some students described

See UA-DOWNTOWN, C8



KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Graffiti such as this seen in an alley along Scott Avenue between Pennington and Congress streets downtown may contribute to some UA students' perception that downtown is "grungy" or "sketchy."

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Jamar Younger

UA-DOWNTOWN

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downtown as fun, unique, artsy, cul-
tured.

Others use far less flattering
terms: grungy, sketchy, a haven for
bums.

Mackey's class set out to investi-
gate perception versus reality. With a
shoestring budget of \$500, they cre-
ated an interactive exhibit that goes
on display in early December.

Among the unconventional offer-

ings: a map of public toilets down-
town with ratings of their cleanliness
and a site where students can search
for downtown venues based on their
romantic status — for example, the
best places to take a date for dinner
or the best pickup bars.

"It's almost like a mock tourism
office for downtown that is geared
toward students," Mackey said.

Katie Dolan, a UA junior and
Phoenix native involved with the ef-
fort, said it's given her a better feel
for what downtown Tucson offers.

"It made me think about what

draws people to places and how they
interact with their environment,"
said Dolan, 20, who is majoring in
English and creative writing

Tellingly, the Downtown Office of
Public Perception, which will house
the exhibit, isn't located downtown.

It's in a former yogurt shop out-
side UA's Main Gate.

"The students thought that if we
had the exhibit downtown," Mackey
said, "no one would come."

Contact reporter Carol Ann Alaimo at
calaimo@azstarnet.com or at 573-4138.

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