Problem description

Ever had trouble figuring out which way the door opens? Think that you got it, but you actually didn’t and end up walking right into the door! You are convinced it’s a pull when it is actually a push to open the door. Well, you are not alone. Poorly designed doors are everywhere!

This brings me to my pick of Bad designs in the Georgia Tech campus. If you have been to Clough Commons, you know that the building has two entrances. Both have double doors. All the doors facing the outward of the building function through the pull action as shown in picture 1. They have push bars on the inside to push them open as shown in picture 2.

However, on the starbucks side of Clough, the door used to exit has a very interesting thing going on. Look closely at Picture 2. The inside door, which needs to be pushed open, has the same handle which is used to “pull” open the door!!! I have seen several students struggle everyday. Even though you may be a regular at the place, your mind is trained to identify this handle as pull action. What makes a bad situation worse is that the door right in front of it has the push bar! Why can’t we have the same thing everywhere? Why can’t we make it easy to use especially since we have done it for the other door?

The door by itself is simple and easy to use, but the choice of handles complicates the situation resulting in several confused students. Although many people are frustrated by this door everyday, there isn’t even a sign or a sticker that clarifies this for the user. It clearly violates the Universal Design principles of Simple and Intuitive Use as well as Perceptible information. For all these reasons, I vote this to be a Bad design.
Proposed solution

An ideal door is one in which the user knows how to use the door just by looking at it. Whether it is pull or push is intuitive for the user or at the very least clearly identifiable. The best solution would be one in which the door handle affords the way in which it is to be opened – push or pull (figure 3).

However, another way to fix this issue would be to use stickers as the doorway (even though use of stickers defeats the purpose of a successful design). This is a quick fix to eliminate confusion to existing doorways.

Swinging doors that open both way is another way to solve this problem (picture 5). Most building these days use Automatic doors and even, revolving doors (picture 6).

Whilst all of these are incredible solutions, for GT campus, the initial initiative would be to standardize all existing doors. With that I mean using the same kind of handles/action for Push or Pull all across campus to reinstate consistency. For any new buildings that may be constructed, they can explore the use of one or more of these solutions that follow the principles of Universal Design.