Eller College of Management

MIS 111 Freshman Honors Showcase

Pinterest in the Classroom

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Executive Summary

Pinterest, a social media site that allows users to create virtual bulletin boards, is not usually classified as an educational tool. Through our project, we aimed to change this common perception and show the many benefits of incorporating Pinterest in the classroom. By using this visual bookmarking tool, instructors can create community boards where both students and themselves can “pin” any material they find online that relates to the course, such as articles, videos, and images. Students can organize and visualize content, which boosts creativity levels and stimulates the mind. This will encourage participation, and spark interest amongst students, without cutting into valuable lecture time.

As an already popular networking site, Pinterest is sure to attract a wide range of users. With its platform in the web, androids and IOS, it is available to anyone with a PC, MAC, or Smartphone. With an easy to use program and unique searching engine, finding creativity has now been made easy. To get started the user must create an account which may be made by the user’s email account and password, or by linking the user’s Facebook account to Pinterest. With all of the new features made accessible to the Pinterest user, letting classmates know of an idea is easier. Other than being notifies when a new pin has been added to a follower’s board, Pinterest has recently introduced messaging. Now users are able to message one another through the site or app, just like Facebook’s messenger. Messages can be sent from one person to another or it can be done through a multiple group chat. Sharing your creativity is only a click away.

Professor Scott Selisker, the instructor of our primarily chosen class, had a generally positive feedback on the product and the concept of using it in the classroom. Pinterest would have a relatively easy learning curve, with no extra technical requirements above what’s currently required. Furthermore, it is a free product, that has a considerably lower risk factor than most other products that the university uses at the moment. The use of the product would also not violate neither the FERPA, ADA, or the Rehabilitation Act; and would not pose a privacy threat to the students, or their professors.

In order to complete our project, we had to evaluate it and its instructional activity such as what college and class it was going to benefit the most if implemented. Also, we outlined the different ways a professor can adapt to grading a student’s work through the use of this social media site. We suggest ways to be used in and out of class for example, group projects that would consist for the students to get together and create their own board with different pins relating to a specific topic. Our proposed activity is one that will innovate the honors college experience by allowing students to go to a more creative site and discover different interesting links and stories, rather than the current very primitive Desire to Learn website.
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1. Introduction

When looking for creative ideas, whether it is fashion, design, homework, or simply a new project, surfing the web is guaranteed the inspiration needed to spark the creativity in someone. Having the possibility of searching for ideas is the benefit of the Internet. Searching for ideas while saving them in a personal board, giving the user the ability of going back and recovering their searches is the benefit of Pinterest. Pinterest is an online board where users can pin everything from pictures, ideas, recipes, and projects. When pinning an item, the item is saved to a personal board found on the user’s profile. This gives users the advantage of finding exactly what they liked over and over again. As the Pinterest’s mission statement clearly states, “Pinterest is a place to discover ideas for all your projects and interests, hand-picked by people like you.” For this year’s showcase, we would like to display the benefits and opportunities that are given to students by using Pinterest in and out of the classroom. Known as an easy organization tool to use, Pinterest brings visual creativity to students for an easy-to-learn experience (see Figure 1).
Figure 1: Benefits of Pinterest

II. Product Assessment

The chosen target market in a broad aspect was students and professors. In a more specific aspect, we choose the Honors Seminar titled “Encounter: Ethics and Science Fiction” with Professor Scott Selisker. We focused on this class mainly because the professor likes approaching his class by teaching with technology. As students we are aware that we rely on the Internet for ideas, unless a design and art major, creativity is not 100% implemented in college projects. Pinterest is a free service and only requires for the user to create an account. The difference between searching ideas or pictures in Bing, Google or any other search engine, is that Pinterest gives the user the opportunity of virtually pinning, in other words bookmarking, an idea and saving it onto a digital board. This digital board is easily accessible to the user as it is placed on their profile, making “searching” a faster process. As a student, anything that is easy and fast is sure to be beneficial.

Everything began with a Pin. Pinterest was created on March 2010 by CEO and co-founder, Ben Silbermann, along with designer Evan Sharp. Ben Silberman graduated from Yale University and before starting Pinterest he worked for the company Google in Customer Support. Evan Sharp graduated from The University of Chicago and previously worked for Facebook as a product designer. With Ben’s idea and Evan’s design, Pinterest was born. Its headquarters is located in San Francisco California and this privately held company is valued at $11 Billion as of March 2015. A number that is sure to change since Pinterest has recently offered advertising. Another feature that Pinterest is currently working on is called “Action buttons”, where the user is able to shop directly within the site. The company does not rely much off advertising; small investors are included in the financials of the company but not much can be asserted. Besides its headquarters, Pinterest has 9 different offices located across the world and is available in more than 30 languages. This includes Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Tokyo,
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Considered as part of the Internet Industry, Pinterest has 3 platforms including the Web, Androids and iOS, making it accessible to a broader public. The easy access to this organization tool is available on mobile devices for any phone though the Pinterest App or directly through the web by using a PC or Mac. An account is required for the usage of Pinterest which can consists of the user’s email address and password or the user’s Facebook account. After making an account or linking Facebook to Pinterest, the user is now able to beginning the process of “Pinning” and creating “Boards”. It’s unique searching engine gives you exact results to help you find what you’re specifically looking for. Don’t know what you’re looking for? Pinterest lends you a hand in establishing your creativity by the suggesting searches, from “hot trends” to “last searched”, Pinterest helps you understand what you want to create.

Another great benefit of using Pinterest is that it lets you share your ideas with other classmates. This can be done by clicking the sharing button to share directly to a social network like Facebook or Twitter. Another way of letting classmates know of your ideas is by adding them as followers to your boards. Every time a user adds a pin to a board, the followers will be notified of the new edition that was made to the board. A new feature that was recently added was the ability to direct message a friend/follower through the app or phone. The messaging option is available from a two-person conversation up to a group chat of multiple people. Another unique feature is that the boards can be put on private of public. The user has the availability of when and to whom to show the boards to. This app lets students share and organize their creative idea for their future projects. The fact that once you come across something you like; you can save it for later knowing that you will always have a place to refer back to it.

Universities across the country are already using Pinterest in a variety of different ways and for all types of subjects (see Figure 2).
Figure 2: How Different Universities are using Pinterest

III. Proposed instructional activity

After we completed our product assessment we were able to start thinking about how we were going to turn our application into an educational tool and apply it to a certain college and classroom. Pinterest as our product we decided that it is a very versatile application and can be used in several different subject areas, especially since our projected target market are students and professors. However, we decided it was better if we targeted a smaller class rather than a large general education course with hundreds of students. After deliberation, we chose a lower division honors colloquium course that is mandatory for freshman honors students. HNRS 195J: Encounter: Ethics and Science Fiction taught by Professor Scott Selisker who teaches at the department of English, we thought would be a good course in which we could implement our product into. This instructor we were told was very open minded about incorporating different innovative teaching techniques into his classroom and new technology that could benefit him and his students. Also, we were told that in his colloquium course he had many discussions with his students on various books they read throughout the course of the semester, and with Pinterest we figured since it contains all types of information on various topics that this professor could easily find different interesting ways of leading discussions in his class through the use of Pinterest.

Within the website of Pinterest there are many different subjects you can search for. Our proposed instructional activity is that Pinterest is a social application in which students and teachers alike can create a “board”, which is a type of folder in which you can store several different images, stories, and links that all relate to the topic of your board. In this board, that the professor can choose it to be private to only him and the people he selects or not, he can assign different tasks for his students to read and explore further into the readings. Also, as a professor instead of googling links he can “pin” it to his board – when you pin something it means you save it directly to your board -- this saves the
professor the trouble of having to find the link later on when he wants to show his class. Besides assigning readings through Pinterest a professor can assign group projects and ask the students to create a board relating to a topic given to them. Just how the professor can share his board with students the students can share it with themselves, and with the latest Pinterest update where you can chat with different people groups can much easily communicate, and pin different things to ultimately create their final board.

Some assessment criteria a professor could use is the amount of pins a student puts on their board and the description of why they chose that pin to be on their board over the various other pins on that subject. Pinterest allows for a user to add a description of their own when pinning something to a board. Also, the students work can be evaluated by viewing the amount of creativity that is displayed on their board of that is what was required of them to complete. Pinterest is known as an application where you can be as creative as you want, whether it is planning for a party, making food, or new do it yourself projects, this is where you go to find those. Now if incorporated in a classroom another thing it will be known for is education and how it is helping students get creative with their projects. Lastly a student can be graded by how well they present their board to the class and if what they choose helped them gain a better understanding of the assigned topic. Although Pinterest does not have a specified section for grading since it is mainly a social media site a professor can grade upon what I mentioned above, or ask students to comment on a pin and then check who replied or did not reply for that day.

Our goal by adopting Pinterest into the classroom is to give students a more creative way to search for and see information rather than using D2L. We aim for students to be able to better understand information and retain it because of the layout of Pinterest. When looking at Pinterest the different pins and images catch your attention and appeal to the eye which makes the students more interested in reading what they have to read. Also, the professor during his lecture could keep his class
attentive throughout the whole period by not only discussing the story but showing different links and images found on Pinterest. Since this is the 21st century and most young adults spend half their time on social media many are already familiar with this application and we feel they will get excited about seeing their professors use it in class. Students will feel that class is not just a traditional “boring” environment that many can not focus in, but instead an innovative one where different techniques and technologies are accepted and if not encouraged to be used in order of trying to make a student’s learning experience successful.

The course that we selected to model the many uses of Pinterest as an educational tool is entitled “Encounter: Ethics and Science Fiction” and is instructed by Mr. Scott Selisker. This class is a part of the Honors College First Year Seminar Program, which requires first-year Honors College students to take a unique, out of the ordinary, colloquium during their first semester at the University of Arizona. This specific seminar focuses on how science fiction can be used to draw similarities between the different sciences such as humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences. The students in this seminar also study different pieces of science fiction literature by top authors in this specific genre. It is a smaller class that is driven by discussion amongst the students and the instructor, which made it a desirable choice as far as implementing new technology such as Pinterest.

The Honors College prides itself on being an innovative institution and promoting the use of new technology in the classroom in order to enhance the “Honors Experience.” With this in mind, we decided that introducing the educational features of Pinterest in an Honors environment would allow us to work with professors who embrace new instructional tools and technology as well as provide us with useful feedback. “Encounter: Ethics and Science Fiction” stood out to us while we were brainstorming possible candidates because the nature of the course encourages creativity and there is a lot of online material available that revolve around the novels that the students studied. For example, when we presented our
product proposal to Mr. Selisker, we created an example Pinterest board that included different academic papers, pieces of art, and interviews that were conducted with the author regarding her novel. Since this specific class studies books that are considered highly influential in the science fiction genre, students can easily find an abundance of information on the text they are reading.

Pinterest has many different features that can be used as an instructional aid. In our proposed class activity, professors can use Pinterest to create new assignments and to modify existing tasks as well (see Figure 3). When an instructor assigns a group project, each different team can create their own board that corresponds to the focus of their project. Group members can visually brainstorm ideas or pin sources that they are using to their board so that everyone has easy access to these materials. Pinterest can also be used to make class discussions more interactive and interesting compared to D2L discussions forums that are not as visually pleasing or engaging. An instructor can post some sort of text or image and ask his or her students to comment on the pin and express their ideas about the post. Plus, students can easily interact with each other through Pinterest’s messaging service.
Figure 3: Ways Instructors can use Pinterest

Source: 16 Ways Educators Use Pinterest, Online Universities, Web.
IV. Feasibility and Design Assessment

The specific class we chose, was the HNRS 195J: Encounter: Ethics and Science Fiction Fall 2015. We chose this class, because it is relatively flexible, small, and the students are all honors students. It is important for the “prototype” class to have these characteristics, for multiple reasons. Due to its flexibility the class could accommodate new exercises, that would be based on Pinterest. Since it’s small and all of the students are honors students, the class is easier to manage, and it is essentially easier for the professor to implement new tools into the lessons. The class we chose is taught by Professor Scott Selisker, a young and enthusiastic professor. The interview with Professor Selisker went well, and his feedback was generally positive. He also provided some very valuable feedback on what the strengths and weaknesses of the product are, and what is important for him as a teacher when evaluating a new tool for teaching. One of the important aspects of a new product that he would be looking for in a new product for example, is the availability of some kind of general overview for teachers. This would allow him to quickly see, who participated and in what manner, and thus would allow him to grade things appropriately and efficiently. Further notices he made were regarding the privacy functions of the application, which are necessary for it to pass the requirements of FERPA. Furthermore, he was interested in how commenting, posting, and other interactions on the website work. His response was generally positive since the user interface of Pinterest is relatively simple and easy to use, most if it is self explanatory for students in today’s society. Professor Selisker’s response changed our view of the application and its viability in the classroom since Pinterest truly doesn’t have the same teacher overview as for example D2L has. However, one can still see when and by whom comments and posts were made, so one can still check whether everyone has done the work.
Even though there are certain requirements for Pinterest to be able to be used as an educational tool, on the current University of Arizona campus, most are required already by previous tools. Although there is an app for Pinterest for mobile devices, it is not required to access the website. Any internet capable device should suffice to use Pinterest, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktops at home. There are also no specific system requirements, since the website does not have 3D effects or complex animations, neither is it memory intensive due to the efficient loading technique it uses.

One of the large strength of Pinterest as a tool is it’s easy learning curve and self explanatory design. The name itself grasps the main concept of what one can use the product for, namely to find ideas, and pin them to different boards to save for later. One can do this simply by typing in a few keywords into the search bar then once an interesting idea, article, or picture is found, one can click on “Pin it” and chose the board to pin it to. The hardest part would be for both students and the professor to register and set up the boards they want to use later on in the semester. This however is not overly complicated either, and one should be able to do it without special training in less than 20 minutes. This learning curve, is possibly further reduced for some students, since Pinterest is already a globally used service, and thus it is likely that some people have already been exposed to, or are even frequent users of the product.

Pinterest is a free service, there is no required fee for any form of usage, installation, or else. Since the University of Arizona provides network services on its campus, thus there is no extra fee for internet usage while on the UofA campus. This is a positive aspect for the product since it does not require any monetary devotion, from the school or the professor, to integrate it into the classroom as a teaching tool.
Pinterest is a huge company on a global scale, valued over 5 billion US Dollars. The company is not only large, but currently is one of the fastest growing social networking sites on the planet. “Pinterest’s registered users’ growth rate is higher than all other social platforms with 57% and the second-fastest growing social platform in active users with an 111% growth rate in the last six months,” (Lior Ronen 2015). This suggest, that in terms of reliability this translates into a very stable, and reliable service. With over 40 million active users, the company not only has a reputation to uphold, but has the funding and resources to maintain their stability as well. The growth rate of the company is important to note, since it shows that the company is not in a recession, but is rather still gaining momentum, further reducing the possibility of foreclosure, or service disruption (see Figure 4). While the likeliness of longer periods of service disruption are minimal, some of the university’s services can also serve as a replacement for some durations. Desire to Learn, shortly D2L, is a service currently used by the university for similar purposes. If Pinterest were to be unavailable, D2L could be utilized again for that time.

Figure 4: Growth in Active Users Over the Last Year

Source: *Pinterest and Tumblr are the Fastest Growing Social Networks*, GlobalWebIndex, May 2015, Web.
Pinterest would not be receiving any information regarding a student’s educational record, since it would merely be used for group activities and brainstorming. While the students would be able to see each other’s findings that they pinned onto the board, no grade or other educational indicator would be stored on Pinterest. The boards the students would post to, would also be private, and thus not accessible to anyone outside the class. Because of this the use of this product would not violate FERPA regulations. To register for the product, the student needs to give his email address, age, and full name. This information will not be sold to third parties and will be kept confidential. Furthermore, while in our view Pinterest would not be used to post one’s own work, but to find ideas and articles relevant to a topic, it works as any other social media website. There is no shared ownership of posted material, but the risk of people copying someone’s work without proper credit exists, this however is reduced since the boards that the students were posting to would be private. As for the ADA and Rehabilitation Act, the application does not have special accessibility functions. Nevertheless, everything that can be done on Pinterest can be done in real life as well, it is simply easier and more effective using the application. This means that it wouldn’t be overly difficult to accommodate students with disabilities and involve them in the projects also.
V. Next Steps / Future Work

In order for instructors to get the most out of Pinterest, it is important for them to understand all of the different elements and how to properly use them. While Pinterest is relatively easy to use, there are many features that go unused by “pinners.” Before implementing this technology in a classroom setting, a crucial next step would be holding an informational training for the instructors. If the professors do not have a clear understanding of the site, then their students will probably have a difficult time with the new technology as well. Prior to the faculty training, we would create a presentation with examples of the different features that can be used in Pinterest and sources that the instructors can refer to whenever they need a quick solution to a problem they are having or when they are in need of activity inspiration.

If the instructor feels comfortable enough with Pinterest to teach his or her students how to use it, then he or she can move forward with the implementation process on their own. However, we would be able to go into the class and hold a similar information session with the students and address any questions or concerns. We decided that it would be important to continue to communicate with the instructors and collect any feedback that they have throughout the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, we would ask both the professor and the students to complete a survey so that we would be able to determine the success of Pinterest in the classroom. If the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the people involved felt like this technology was beneficial towards their achievements in that class, we could introduce Pinterest to other professors across the university.
VI. Conclusion

Pinterest is not commonly thought of as an educational tool that students use in the classroom. When our group was assigned this social media site as our technology to work with, we wanted to change this perception. Pinterest is a powerful, visual bookmarking tool that can be used to organize ideas and find material relevant to any subject of study. The social aspect of the site makes it ideal for students in this day and age, but it does not contain the same graphic content you might see on another site such as twitter. Pinterest visualizes content that would normally be listed in plain text, which appeals to students and encourages participation. By incorporating it into different classroom activities like group projects, students can share and discuss ideas, papers, and images that relate to their coursework. Since Pinterest was not created to be an educational tool, it does not have all of the grading capabilities that sites like Desire2Learn has, but through innovation, it is more technologically advanced and promotes creativity amongst instructors and students alike. It’s diversity allows it to be used across hundreds of different subjects, whether it is used by Fashion Merchandising students or by students reading science fiction novels. By tracking the success of implementing it in a class, we can assess whether or not to expand the use of Pinterest across classes here at the University of Arizona.
Bibliography


Selisker, Scott. Personal Interview. 18 November 2015.
Appendix

A. Email conversation between Professor Scott Selisker (Instructor of the course we modeled our project after) and Group Member Marton Szep:

Dear Scott,

I'm Marton from your Honors Seminar class, Ethics in Science Fiction. Since I'm a business major, I'm also enrolled in MIS 111 HNRS, where we are doing a project in which we have to propose new technology to be used in our class. We got split in groups of four and got assigned an application, or website which we have to find ways for, to use in an existing class. I believe this is explained in more detail in Dr. Newman's letter, which I have attached to this email. My group got the application/website Pinterest, and I was thinking that it would be a viable tool to use in your class. I would like to schedule some time, where my group and I could meet you, and tell you more about the product. Could we meet you next week during your office hours, or is there a more convenient time for you?

Thank you very much for your time in advance! I am looking forward to your reply.

Best regards,
Marton Szep

Hi Marton,

Yes, this sounds fine, if you're referring to November 18th (I'm taking the holiday tomorrow to catch up on some other deadlines from home). I'll be there 1:30 to 3:30 in Modern Languages 470, in the corner of the building nearest to the 2nd Ave parking garage.

Best, SRS