e-Tools: Using Pinterest Group Boards in the Classroom

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Introduction

Informal learning, participatory culture, experiential learning, and high-impact exercises are considered hallmarks of educational best practices in modern college courses (Bass, 2012). Pinterest group boards allow an instructor to harness all of those principles by creating a forum that helps students find, catalog, share, and critique digital multimedia. Pinterest is especially useful for curating visual content such as photographs, memes, or even business cards. By giving students a platform to collect and discuss the communication of others, this technology allows them to reflect on and envision best practices for their own messages.

What is Pinterest?

Pinterest is a social networking site for sharing digital communication, typically, though not exclusively, in the form of visually-based messages. Akin to having your own shareable collection of online bulletin boards that can be organized by topic, this repository is often used as a digital scrapbook or professional marketing tool. Users can create as many boards as they wish and post materials to these boards by creating visual bookmarks called "pins" (Note: Although the site is free, there is a limit of 200,000 pins per account. While this is unlikely to pose a problem for your course, you may want to make your

students aware). You can also like, re-share, and comment on the pins of other users and assign your students to do the same. The site is searchable so that you and your students can find pins within the particular themes or genres of communication you want them to discuss in class.

How can I get Pinterest for use in the classroom?

You and each of your students will need your own Pinterest accounts to make use of this e-tool. You can access Pinterest easily by going to www.pinterest.com and setting up your free account with an email address and password. In case you already have a personal Pinterest account you would like to avoid using, multiple accounts are permissible for any given individual as long as you have additional email addresses to create them, so you can create a separate account by using your professional email address (your .edu account). Upgrading to a free business account can be beneficial because it allows you to give your account a business name to make it more distinctive and, therefore, easier for students to find and follow you. You might choose a name that includes your own name or initials and the initials of your institution, followed by the words "Course Boards."

Once your account is created, your name and profile picture will appear in the top right corner. If you need to set up your picture, click on the three dots shown in the upper righthand corner of the page, choose "Edit Settings" and then "Profile" from the drop-down menus. Your picture will now appear in the menu across the top of the screen. Clicking on it will open your profile, where you'll see tabs marked "Boards," "Pins," "Tries," and "Topics."

"Boards" are digital containers to help organize your pins into pinboards by the categories you create; "Pins" shows your recent pins; "Tries" shows pins you have tried and given feedback, and "Topics" shows a list of topics Pinterest's algorithm has determined may interest you. This essay will focus on "Boards."

Each student will need to follow you on Pinterest by going to their own profile and clicking on "Following" in the menu at the top of the page. They then click on the add-person icon (the grey circle that contains a plus sign and person-figure), search for the name of your Pinterest account, and follow it. You can then go into "Boards" in your own profile and create your group boards by first setting up a board for each topic you want your students to pin and discuss (e.g., Business Cards, Resume' Tips, Brexit Memes). Then, within each board, click on the add-person icon next to your profile photo to add each of your students as contributors to each board. In this way, each class member can access, view, and contribute pins to the same boards. Each student must then click on the "Messages" icon at the top of the page in his or her own Pinterest account (it looks like a gray, oval "speech bubble" like the ones in cartoon drawings, but instead of words, it contains three dots). There, they will see your invitation to join each of the boards you've created for the course and they must accept each invitation to contribute to all of the boards. You can assign each student points for a certain number of pins to each board. You might also assign them to comment on one another's pins.

To pin to a board, the student simply needs to use the search bar at the top left of the screen to find and scroll through content that fits the theme or genre you've assigned, and then hover the cursor to the top of the desired pin's picture, choose the appropriate board in the gray menu that appears, and click on the red "save" button. Pins will then show up in the group board as having been pinned by that particular student. Some pins may have comments that need to be deleted or edited. To do so, simply click on the pin's edit button (the pen icon) and it will pull up the box with the text to be deleted or replaced.

How can I use Pinterest in the classroom?

Pinterest is a social media platform that allows the curating and archiving of various forms of digital multimedia. More specifically, Pinterest can be used in online or face-to-face courses to achieve each of the aforementioned, vital elements of the modern college course:

1. *informal learning*. Theoretical conversations or discussions of best practices in communication can be grounded upon real-world sample materials students individually locate, analyze, and prepare to discuss. Topics for discussion might include color choices for business cards (nonverbal communication) or even potential impacts of Brexit memes (persuasion; political communication) or memes about stereotypes (communication and gender; intercultural communication).

2. *participatory culture*. Students can pin photographs or videos that contribute fodder for class discussions, or they can collectively contribute articles or blog posts to share as

readings for a course. Group boards also allow students to share sources for speech and project topic ideas, or for students in group projects to collaborate on the collection of such materials. Students can even "Reply" to one another's pins.

3. *experiential curriculum.* Discussion of materials students have pinned to group boards employs a collaborative, experiential process that can be used as scaffolding for assignments and programmatic assessments in which students will craft their own professional communication materials (e.g., business cards, resume's and bios) or a capstone-level portfolio project. Student discussions can analyze the evaluative criteria class members applied in choosing their pins; then synthesize the criteria of the class, as a whole; and apply those criteria to enhance their own messages.

4. *high-impact practices.* Pinterest allows for students to reflect on real-world examples of communication and to receive frequent feedback from the instructor and from one another. Debriefing students' pins can create connections between the examples they found and criteria for best practices regarding various communication constructs such as visual communication, credibility, persuasiveness, nonverbal communication, and impression management.

Conclusion

Pinterest group boards provide a unique, user-friendly approach to sharing and discussing digital messages. Students have reported finding Pinterest activities both useful

and engaging. In fact, many reported that they had already enjoyed Pinterest prior to using it for class, so employing it to achieve course learning goals was seamless and even fun.

References

Bass, R. (2012). Disrupting ourselves: The problem of learning in higher education. *Educause Review*, *47*(2), 23-33.