

Cynthia Dudenhoffer

# Pin it!

## Pinterest as a library marketing and information literacy tool

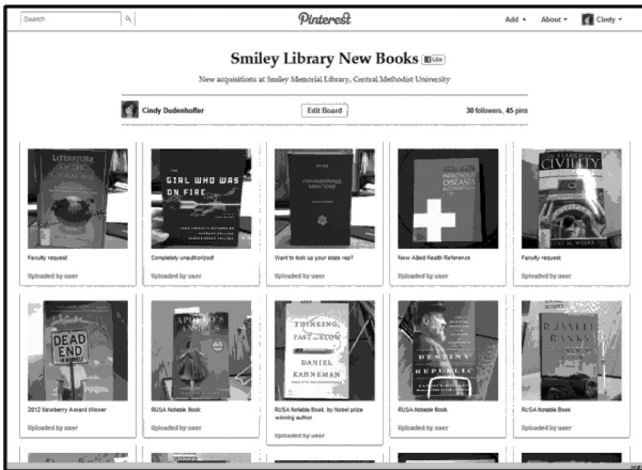
Central Methodist University (CMU) is a small liberal arts college in rural Missouri, with around 1,200 students enrolled on the traditional campus, with another 1,500 or so enrolled in online and distance education courses. As our enrollment shifts from face-to-face contact with students to a virtual environment, the library is continually seeking ways to reach out not only to the on-campus faculty and students, but also to the nontraditional learners, in an accessible and appealing way. One of the most recent attempts has been through the social media tool Pinterest.

Pinterest allows members to “pin” items or images found on the Internet to a “pinboard,” which can then be easily shared through an e-mail link or by following the creator. The boards are publicly viewable so no login is required, and the boards can be constantly updated. This type of tool lends itself very well to sharing information to visual learners and traditionalists alike, and can be maintained by library staff quickly and easily. Library faculty can also use Pinterest to create “research portals,” or visual representations

of ideas used to kick off the research and writing process.

### Marketing new books and videos

Like many small private colleges, CMU follows a subject area acquisitions model based on faculty allocations. In other words, to help the two library faculty collect materials relevant to the curriculum, a portion of the acquisitions budget is given to each academic division. The divisions then select materials they think relevant and send these recommendations to the library director for possible purchase. The model works fairly well overall, especially since CMU has no subject area reference librarians; all purchasing is done by the library director. One of the problems, though, is the fact that faculty want to know who is purchasing what and when it has been added to the collection.



Smiley Library New Books pinboard. Visit this article online for detailed images.

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In the past, after acquisitions were added, we used the ILS to generate a report of the newly added items and sent this document out over e-mail. The report is a massive, unappealing list of titles and publication information, sorted by LC call number so it is roughly grouped into subject areas. The list clogs inboxes and is rarely used. After discovering Pinterest, a new option presented itself. We created a new pinboard titled “Smiley Library New Books.” As each item is processed and added to our new book collection, a photo is taken of the item and is added to the pinboard. An annotation about the item can also be added.

Using Pinterest in this way is especially helpful, considering our acquisitions model. The visual representation allows faculty to quickly locate their own recommendations, while seeing what other departments have selected. Also, adding an annotation allows library staff to tag the items with the name of the recommending faculty member or division, as well as providing the ability to add content notes, awards the item has won, or just general pithy comments to attract attention to the item. None of these options was available using the ILS-generated new book list.

CMU also maintains a popular DVD collection, funded by the student government association on campus. This collection is constantly changing and is used very heavily by students. Creating a pinboard became a logical way to market the collection. Student requests for new releases are constant, so the ability to quickly and easily push out available

titles is a great help. This outlet cuts down on repetitive questions asked of staff and provides an excellent visual representation of what is in the collection. The link to the new videos pinboard is also available on the library’s homepage.

Another feature that adds to the value of this tool is that once a new pinboard is created, the link for that particular board remains static. In other words, we created the library’s Pinterest account, then created the related boards. The URL for the board never changes, regardless of how much content is added to it. The URL can be added to the library Web page (as ours is), and it can be left alone. No updating, no configuring PDF lists. The Pinterest site hosts all content, so no updating is needed, definitely a boon for a library with very limited staff.

We have chosen to use the Pinterest iPhone app to manage content for the new book and new video pinboards. As each item is processed and ready for a final check, the technical services assistant or a work study student takes

a picture of the item using the app. An annotation can be added at this point, then the item is automatically added to the appropriate pinboard. The only difficulty in using this method is the person pinning the items to the board must use the iPhone associated with the library’s Pinterest account, which happens to be the director’s iPhone. But since our library is small and all the staff are in regular communication, this has not been a problem. Pinterest allows for many types of “pins,” so libraries not wishing to take their

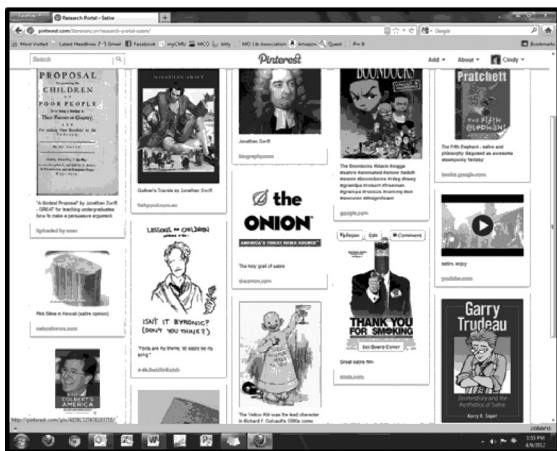


Pinterest links on CMU Library homepage.

own pictures can pull images from Amazon or any other source that provides cover photos. When creating a Pinterest account, a "Pin It" button can be added to the bookmarks toolbar

an information literacy program embedded within beginning composition classes and writing seminars. Information literacy (or fluency, as we call it) was also included as a curricular core competency in a redesign of a general education course about three years ago. Since the inclusion of this competency, the library faculty, working closely with the English Department, continually endeavors to make information literacy interesting and applicable to all students. Incorporating activities using Pinterest has not only afforded opportunity to create engaging assignments, but has also provided opportunities for student to develop transliteracy skills. The activities are also easily translated into online assignments for our distance learning students, adding the extra benefit of

a stable curriculum in both traditional and online settings.



Satire research portal on Pinterest.

in the Mozilla Firefox browser, allowing for easy pinning of book covers or other materials.

Though marketing these collections with Pinterest boards is new to our library, it has been well received, especially by students. The accessibility and rapid updating of the boards is very popular, and, as previously mentioned, we have seen a decrease in routine questions regarding what has just been added. Smiley Library is just entering the spring round of faculty allocations and requests, so we are hopeful that this new method of marketing and outreach will be embraced by faculty, as they will now have the ability to immediately see new additions to the collections.

As of the end of April 2012, "Smiley Library New Books" has 85 followers, and the "New Videos" board has 74 followers, which is a strong number since the boards have only existed for a short time. We hope to steadily increase this number; the library plans to aggressively market the boards at both library and campus orientation events in the fall semester.

## Pinterest and information literacy

Like many universities, CMU has created

## Research portals

At its most basic level, Pinterest is a collection of visual images. Users collect images from the Internet and group them under a title of their choosing. Images can be annotated with supplemental information. The idea of grouping visual information around a topic led to the creation of some unique assignments in CMU's beginning composition classes.

Students create a Pinterest account and are asked to select images that related to the term *satire*. Each student is responsible for his or her own pinboard, and is asked to share the board via the course management software. Because a term like *satire* has a broad definition and can be interpreted differently by different people, this topic was a perfect test run for the application. Students gather images from a huge range of sources, from Jonathan Swift to *The Colbert Report*.

Students are then asked to explain why they chose these images to represent satire, either by in-class presentation or, in the online class environment, as a discussion board

post. In the next step, students craft their own definition of satire, which is the focus of the first assignment in a scaffolded set of papers completed throughout the semester.

At the conclusion of the assignment, students have developed both traditional information literacy skills and visual literacy skills by using images to build an argument. Similar processes have been used on topics such as American culture by decade and rethinking perceptions of college life. Collecting visual images via Pinterest allows the easy juxtaposition of ideas based on what students perceive through popular culture versus what is found in reality. This juxtaposition and the ease of accessing Pinterest as a visual aid provide excellent opportunities for critical thinking and discussion.

### Educational technology

Pinterest is also being used in the campus educational technology course. This course is designed to introduce future teachers and education majors to a range of technological options that can be used in the classroom. Taught as a hybrid online/traditional course, students must use technology independently to create lesson plans in their subject area. Students are also asked to consider different kinds of learners and learning styles, such as visual, auditory, etc.

In one assignment, students were asked to create a fully formed lesson plan that would appeal to visual learners. The content could be for any age group and any subject area, but it must have a strong visual element and incorporate technology in a meaningful way.

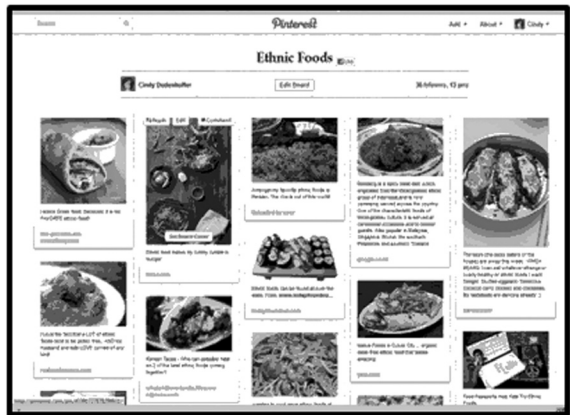
Pinterest has strong appeal for visual learners and several students chose to use it as a curricular tool for this assignment. For instance, a history education major chose to create a pinboard of generals active during the Civil War. Another chose to teach a lesson on ethnic foods. This lesson asked the students to create a “food passport”: images

of different dishes and recipes from all over the world were collected via the pinboard. Students earned “stamps” in their passports by finding dishes from a variety of countries, or by trying dishes from different regions. The visual nature of Pinterest and the ease with which images can be found and freely shared makes it an excellent tool for this kind of assignment.

In previous iterations of this assignment, students printed images and assembled poster boards or displayed sets of images via PowerPoint. Pinterest allows students to capture images digitally, share them easily, and retain materials for use in future classes.

### Copyright issues and the future

It can be a potentially dangerous move to integrate social media into curriculum. Since these tools and sites change so rapidly, it



Food passport assignment pinboard.

can be difficult to create stable activities based on social media. Pinterest has also been attacked by artists and photographers worried that the image sharing site violates copyright laws. Pinterest recently changed its terms of service and acceptable use policies twice to address some of these issues.<sup>1</sup> Cold Brew Labs, Inc., the company that owns Pinterest also released a statement affirming that, “Our goal at Pinterest is to help people discover the things they love. Driving traffic to original content sources is fundamental to that goal.”<sup>2</sup>

While the future of Pinterest might be somewhat uncertain, perhaps the problems the site is facing can be used as a teachable moment: “Class, let’s discuss the ethical use of information and images found on the Internet.”

The concerns over copyright did not hinder use of Pinterest in the library or in classroom settings at CMU, but it did provide the opportunity for discussion. This issue, along with information about Creative Commons licensing and the proper way to credit or cite Internet sources and images, is now included in the curriculum of our Educational Technology course.

While Pinterest has only been a part of coursework and marketing at CMU for one semester, students and faculty were quick to embrace its use. The number of followers viewing the library pinboards has already outpaced usage of the text-based lists. Students in Educational Technology used Pinterest to put a new spin on a visual literacy assignment.

After a successful test run in one course, the library staff hopes to further integrate the use of Pinterest into information literacy activities, building on the satire assignments used this year. The library pinboards will be included in orientation activities for new students in the fall semester, which should drive even more traffic to the boards and create a new cohort of students that recognize Pinterest as the prime location for new materials. The library staff also hopes to integrate catalog information into the boards to further facilitate usage. As long as interest in Pinterest remains high, this tool will remain a valuable way to present information in a visually appealing and easily accessible format.

### Notes

1. Cold Brew Labs, Inc. *Pinterest Terms of Service*. Terms of Service, San Francisco: Cold Brew Labs, Inc., 2012.

2. Haley Tsukayama, “Pinterest Address Copyright Concerns.” *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2012. *W*

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