Reframing Pinterest:

Information Literacy for Interior Design Students

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Abstract

This paper discusses providing information literacy to interior design students, specifically how over a few years, and several assignment iterations, we moved from a more traditional one-shot library instruction session to a creative ACRL Framework-inspired assignment using Pinterest as the medium for the students' professionally relevant research project. The outcome of our instruction relied on flexible assignment planning, collaboration as faculty and librarians changed roles, and a focus on information literacy skills needed by professional designers.

Keywords: Pinterest, information literacy, library instruction, interior design, professional disciplines, faculty-librarian collaboration, assignment design, iterative design, ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education

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Introduction

In recent years, faculty in the interior design program at Baylor University have expressed concerns to the librarians about their students' ability to do quality research and create original designs. This concern sparked a collaboration to design - and redesign - information literacy instruction and research assignments that applied threshold concepts from ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL Framework) and which also used the social curation site Pinterest. Embracing the use of Pinterest by design students proved central to the success of this endeavor. While some faculty in the department viewed widespread Pinterest use as the root of the "research problem," teaching the students to use the tool responsibly in order to do design research was much more effective (and realistic) than banning use of the tool. Since its launch, Pinterest has become an important aspect of the work of professional designers. In a significant study of how professional designers use Pinterest, Scolere and Humphreys (2016) discovered that through their Pinterest boards, designers signal their professional status, aesthetics and identity, and produce creative value through their curatorial practices. Therefore, it is imperative to teach students the skills they will need to be information literate, not only as students, but also as professionals.

In this paper, we will discuss how we taught information literacy to interior design students, specifically how over a few years, and several assignment iterations, we moved from a more traditional one-shot library instruction session to a creative framework-inspired assignment using Pinterest as the medium for the students' professionally relevant research project. Because our instruction spanned the course of a few years, it was essential that both the faculty and librarians maintained good relationships in order to help this collaborative project succeed. The first section lays out the context in the library literature for teaching with Pinterest and for how

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information literacy instruction has been provided to art, design and, specifically, interior design disciplines. The second section details what we taught to the interior design classes, and particularly how that instruction changed through each iteration. We end with a discussion of what we learned from this project and what we determined to be best practices.

Literature Review

Pinterest in Libraries

As academic libraries strive to find new ways to promote their collections and services to their communities, they are increasingly aware of new web technologies and social media spaces. When Pinterest launched in 2010, it did not take long for libraries to see the value of a visually-rich social media technology for outreach, marketing and promotion (Thornton, 2012; Dudenhoffer, 2012; Hansen, Nowlan, & Winter, 2012; Gilman & Vincent, 2013; De Jager-Loftus & Moore, 2013). Many of these early studies discussed how to use Pinterest as a teaching tool. Dudenhoffer (2012) documented an assignment in an English composition class in which students curated boards around an assigned topic to present to their classmates. Gilman and Vincent (2013) described efforts to use Pinterest as a collaborative tool when working with studio architecture classes. Gilman and Vincent's early attempts not only encountered technical challenges, but also raised concerns of image use and copyright, which is a perennial issue in the literature about information literacy instruction in art and design disciplines.

Information Literacy with Art & Design Disciplines

The information needs of art and design students have long been a subject in the library literature. Art and design students, particularly those in studio classes, rather than history classes, need instruction on how to search for and access images (Bennett, 2006) as well as a

wide variety of print and online information sources to "inform their creative projects" (Greer, 2015, p. 85) and "to stimulate their creativity" (Zanin-Yost & Tapley, 2008, p. 40). According to the literature, many librarians have established information literacy instruction for art and design studio classes and programs by various methods. Some of these methods include working with university general education committees (Walczak, Sammet, & Reuter, 2010), mapping specific information competency guidelines to course learning goals (Greer, 2015; Vecchiola, 2011), scaffolding instruction throughout a department's curriculum (Greer, 2015), and through initiating outreach to and being embedded within the artists' studio spaces (Leousis, 2013). In a more recent article, Garcia and Labatte (2015) explained how they were able to effectively use the ACRL Framework's threshold concepts to structure their information literacy instruction, finding that the concepts were relatable metaphors for the creative process. The literature also demonstrates that any art and design-related information literacy initiative thrives through close collaboration with the faculty. Faculty can provide the students the context for why research is important to the creative process and can invite librarians to become embedded in their creative spaces (Leousis, 2013). Librarians need to have a good collaborative relationship with their faculty counterparts in order to match the information literacy standards and concepts to be taught with the course learning outcomes, (Garcia & Labatte, 2015; Greer, 2015) especially in these disciplines where the product of research does not end up being a traditional research paper.

Information Literacy with Interior Design

Alessia Zanin-Yost (2012) has published the only article in the library literature documenting a plan to incorporate information literacy in an interior design program. Assigned as a liaison to the interior design program in 2005, Zanin-Yost sought faculty perspectives and

cooperation early on, knowing that their partnership would be key in establishing a program of information literacy. In their planning, they emphasized the need to teach these students both academic as well as professional skills.

> Both the faculty and the librarian had to make a distinction between what students needed to succeed academically, such as how to cite resources, and skills they would need after graduation, such as where to find information about local historical preservation. The faculty and librarian focused their discussion on how to develop assignments that provided skills in both areas. (Zanin-Yost, 2012, p. 453)

One of the more successful assignment redesigns was changing a traditional research paper into a client contract proposal, which combined critical thinking, writing, and research skills with information needs relevant to the students' future careers (Zanin-Yost, 2012, p. 454).

Assignment Development

First Iteration of the Assignment

The department of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) at Baylor University is diverse, comprised of five programs - General FCS, Apparel Design & Merchandising, Child & Family Studies, Nutrition Sciences, and Interior Design. As the library liaison to FCS from 2007-2015, I (Filgo) provided library instruction for the Nutrition Sciences and General FCS classes, particularly the research methods classes in these programs. In the summer of 2011, however, I was contacted by a lecturer in the Interior Design program. She had recently graduated from a researched-based design master's program and wanted to introduce the basics of interior design research to her students in the Fundamentals of Interior Design class. This class was an

introductory interior design class, required for majors, and served as a prerequisite for upper-level courses and was primarily comprised of first-year students. As we talked about her goals for the class, I learned that, like many instructors, she wanted her students to get their hands on library materials, so she was developing a scavenger hunt through the library for her students. Having seen my share of not-so-successful faculty-planned library scavenger hunts over the years, I offered to create one for her, so I could carefully construct questions that would avoid common library scavenger hunt pitfalls. In the exercise, the students would be led through both the physical and digital tools that were introduced to them in the class period. The students searched through digital art and design encyclopedias and article databases and they also went into the stacks to look at the print magazines. They found the sections of the library that contained relevant art and design books, our information desk, and also our flatbed scanners. At the end of the assignment, as an engaging bonus question, they were asked about which area of the library they thought could most use an interior designer's critical eye for a makeover. The instructor was pleased with the exercise, and so for the next two fall semesters (2011 and 2012) I taught the class using the scavenger hunt. However, in 2013, this lecturer left for a job at another university.

Second Iteration of the Assignment

In the summer of 2015, I was contacted by a new lecturer with a similar story – she was beginning her second year of teaching this particular class and was disappointed by what the students knew about design research. Her observation was that they did not know how to do research beyond searching Google and Pinterest, which had grown in prominence among designers over the previous few years. I agreed to teach an instruction class the next fall and to refresh the research guide and assignment. She had gotten a copy of the scavenger hunt, edited it

with some suggestions and sent it to me to help. As I looked it over, I realized it was going to

need more than just her edits. The assignment referred to systems we no longer had (our

Aquabrowser interface, for one), and in some cases did not make sense because the content of

the databases had changed. For example, I had asked the students to look for a certain design

magazine both digitally and in print and to compare them. Our digital version only had the full

text in HTML, with no pictures, which is problematic when it comes to the content of heavily

picture-laden articles. Through the exercise, the students would learn how to search for topics in

the database, but also be able to find the full text with pictures in the print version if necessary.

However, in refreshing the assignment, I discovered that many of our design magazines were

now available in PDF full text, pictures and all. Clearly, I needed to do a major assignment

revision.

About the time I was considering how to revise the assignment, I had also been

investigating the ACRL Framework, where I had been struck by the frame "Authority is

Constructed and Contextual." The framework states that "learners who are developing their

information literate abilities … recognize that authoritative content may be packaged formally or

informally and may include sources of all media types" as well as "acknowledge they are

developing their own authoritative voices in a particular area and recognize the responsibilities

this entails, including seeking accuracy and reliability, respecting intellectual property, and

participating in communities of practice" (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015).

In the research into the underlying threshold concepts which became the foundation of the ACRL

Framework, Townsend, et al (2011) noted that an understanding of authority as both created and

contextual "enables students to critically examine a source – be it a Wikipedia article or a peer-

reviewed conference proceeding – and ask the relevant questions about its origins, context, and

suitability for the information need of the moment" (p. 863). When reviewing this particular

frame, the academic discipline instructor's concerns about Wikipedia seemed similar to the

interior design instructor's concerns about Pinterest.

As I considered how to provide instruction for a professional design discipline, I was

particularly interested in the idea of authority being recognized differently in specific

communities or contexts as well as the idea that depending upon a person's information need,

unlikely voices, such as someone besides a traditional academic researcher, might end up being

authoritative. The majority of these students would graduate and move into the professional

world, while only a few might pursue advanced academic study. Would an authoritative

resource look different in these different contexts? Could they consider an established designer's

Pinterest page as authoritative as a scholarly article in an academic interior design journal? How

would they evaluate a Pinterest page in looking for authoritative information? These were the

questions that I began to ask myself as I was planning instruction for this class. The answer I

came to was that interior design students can indeed find authoritative content both in library

databases and on Pinterest; however, in both cases they need to learn how to search effectively,

how to evaluate the information critically, and how to cite or give credit to the authors or creators

of the information.

I decided that the class should investigate Pinterest more carefully. I also decided that the

students needed to become thoughtful and dynamic Pinterest users, in order to present

themselves as emerging authoritative voices within their profession. Ultimately, for this

assignment, the students would need to use Pinterest as creative researchers rather than as

passive consumers. I broached the idea with the instructor, and she agreed with the approach.

With her approval, I ended up scrapping the scavenger hunt and designing a library assignment

using Pinterest as the medium for presenting interior design research. The assignment I designed

was for the students to create a Pinterest board with a minimum of five pins on a topic from a

pre-selected list (which included notable designers, architects, historical time periods, and other

important concepts in interior design). The pins needed to

   1) be related to the topic
   2) use a picture that is labeled for reuse and
   3) have a description explaining
         a) what the image was and how it was related to the topic and
         b) include a citation or link to a library resource which further explained the topic.

The boards would be evaluated using a simple yes/no rubric that indicated whether they met

these requirements.

   To introduce the assignment in class, I started with a discussion on authority. We

examined a variety of resources about Frank Lloyd Wright – from a Wikipedia page, an

encyclopedia article, a book, a scholarly article, popular magazine articles, and the Frank Lloyd

Wright Foundation website. We also examined the type of information you can find when

searching for Frank Lloyd Wright on Pinterest. We discussed which resources might be more

authoritative than others and for what reasons. From there, we segued into a discussion about

Pinterest itself – how does authority work on that site? People might pin their own images, or

they might pin from another website. They also might re-pin from someone else's pin. Digging

through the layers of Pinterest to find where the image originated can be a challenge, but

ultimately, it is a useful exercise when evaluating the authority of the pin. After our conversation

about authority, the class also received some instruction on the library databases related to art

and design, as well as some tips on how to find images that are labeled for reuse.

When the assignments were completed and turned in, the results were underwhelming. All of the students had descriptions for their pins; however, they were of varying quality and a few students had re-pinned images and not changed the original description. Only five students linked or cited library resources in their descriptions (see Figures 1 and 2). Ten out of eighteen students did not pin images that were labeled for reuse, instead re-pinning images from the website they linked, or simply re-pinning from a Pinterest site search. After evaluating the assignments to send to the professor for a grade, I realized that I would need to restructure how I taught the class in the future, as the students were not grasping some of the concepts. In reviewing my instruction, I did note a few things that I thought might have had an impact on how the students performed on this assignment. One was that I do not think that I had left enough time to spend on how to find images labeled for re-use. The other was that the professor had to leave halfway through the class (to meet a guest lecturer speaking in her department that evening) and that left me to introduce and field questions about the assignment to the students on my own. Ironically, in that particular instructional context, my own authority was diminished without the professor's presence.
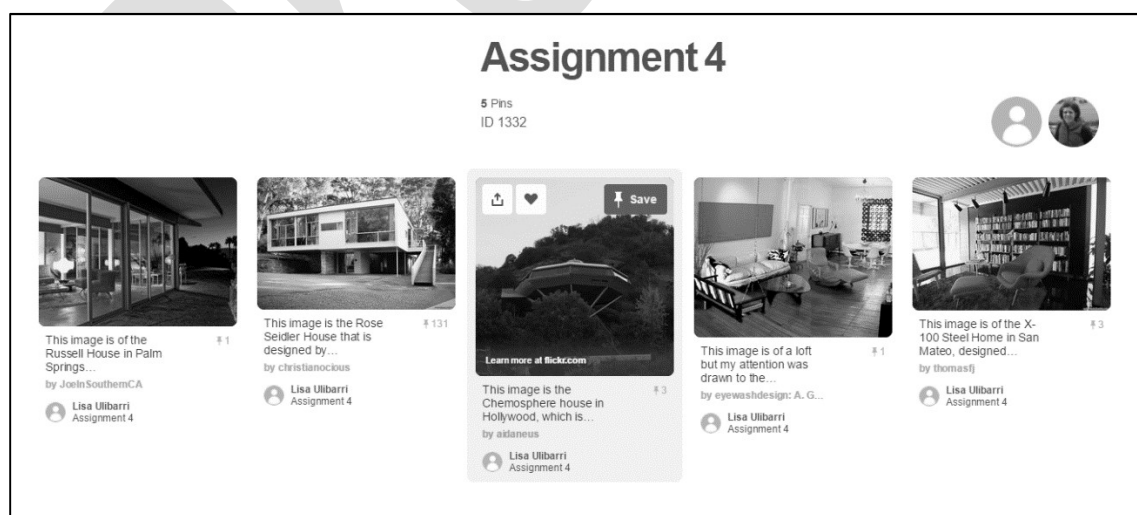

Figure 1 An example of an excellent Pinterest board submitted by a student
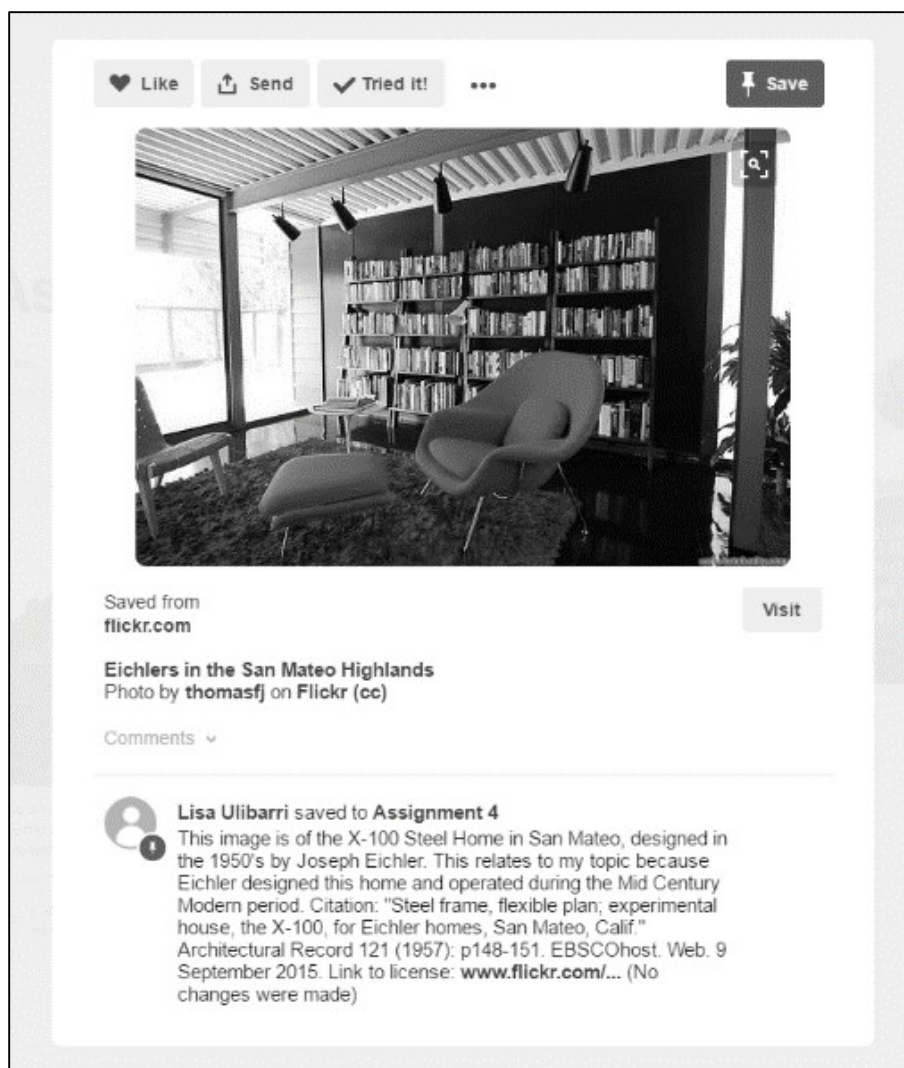
Figure 2 Close up of one pin that includes all the elements of the assignment

However, I did not have the chance to teach the class again, as hires at the library brought new librarians into our department. After we evaluated the departmental liaison assignments, the FCS department was reassigned to my colleague Megan Martinsen.

Third Iteration of the Assignment

When I (Martinsen) took over as liaison to the department I spoke with Filgo about instruction she had done for the departments and the Pinterest assignment for interior design caught my attention as something exciting I hoped to continue. In discussing the instruction for the interior design class and the assignment, Filgo outlined what she had taught previously and

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together we looked at some of the students' boards. She was frank in her assessment of the results as lackluster, and told me the concerns she had about not having enough time to teach about searching for images. I hoped to be able to address these concerns in redesigning both the instruction and the assignment.

As part of the transition from one liaison to another, I made a point of talking to all the professors with whom Filgo had built a relationship as an effort not to lose any of the valuable connections she made. When I spoke to the professor teaching the interior design class, she shared my desire to continue the project, as she remained concerned about the students' ability to do quality research. She further explained that the department as a whole was focusing on getting students to stop conceiving of research as typing keywords into Pinterest and using any images they found there. In addition, they were trying to combat problems of students simply copying designs they found online instead of collecting inspiration from multiple sources and then creating original designs. While the professor liked the concept of Pinterest assignment, she was concerned it may have been too advanced for the students' research.

With these concerns and considerations in mind, I decided it was best to shift the focus of the assignment to a different frame from the ACRL Framework. Instead of "Authority is Created and Contextual" I decided to shift the focus to the "Information Has Value" frame. The "Information Has Value" framework states that "Learners who are developing their information literate abilities give credit to the original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation" and also "respect the original ideas of others; value the skills, time, and effort needed to produce knowledge; and see themselves as contributors to the information marketplace rather than only consumers of it (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). I chose to focus on this

frame because of the interior design department's concern with getting students to produce

original designs and to use quality sources for their research and cite them well.

As I was planning my instruction and the assignment, I also learned of a few changes to

the class format that I needed to consider. First, the class would now meet four hours a week

instead of two and a half hours a week. This change helped to alleviate my concerns about

having enough time to cover the material that Filgo had to cover only briefly the year before.

Second, the enrollment in the class was much larger and as a result the professor was hoping to

streamline assignments to alleviate grading stress. As a response to that, we decided that the

Pinterest assignment would cease to be a standalone project and instead became the first step,

that of client research, in the semester's large final project. As such, the students were given a

brief about the client for whom they would be designing their semester project, and the new

assignment required students to pin 10 pins to a Pinterest board that reflected their initial

research about the client. This research needed to include information about the client's condo

location, family and cultural considerations, and concept development based on an aspect from

nature that reflected the environmental considerations in the client's location. Changing the

assignment to focus on professional design activities was something Zanin-Yost (2012) also

found beneficial in restructuring information literacy instruction for design students.

Like the previous iteration, pins had to be images labeled for reuse and the description of

the pin needed to briefly explain the image and contain a citation for research that further

explained the concept in the image. As a measure to prevent students simply searching Pinterest

for images, this iteration of the assignment also stipulated that none of the images could be re-

pinned from other Pinterest accounts. Like the first iteration, the assignment was graded on a

rubric that reflected these requirements.

Because the class was now two hours long, on the day of the instruction session I was able to cover more. I started the session with a tailored one-shot session on finding and using library resources. Next, I covered ways to search for reusable images, focusing on using the advanced search features in Google images. Then I transitioned into a discussion on some of the shortfalls of Pinterest. To facilitate this discussion, I created a Pinterest board called "The Pitfalls of Pinterest as Highlighted by Ryan Gosling" (see Figure 3) which highlighted Pinterest's biggest problems for research: pins that have dead links, pins that have false information in the description, pins that have no information in the description, pins that link to a site that has nothing to do with the pin, and the random pins that can come up when using the Pinterest search feature. The class then discussed these pitfalls together and students shared times that they had personally come across some of these pitfalls. From there, I encouraged the class to re-conceive of how they use Pinterest for research, thinking of it as a digital corkboard, not as a search engine. I asked them to go out and find the images and information they need from reputable sources and then use Pinterest as a place to store those images and information instead of using it as a place to look for content. The students then transitioned into a discussion of why it is important to use images that are labeled for reuse and why it is important to cite the information we use. After the initial instruction session, several students met with me to discuss the project further and ask questions.
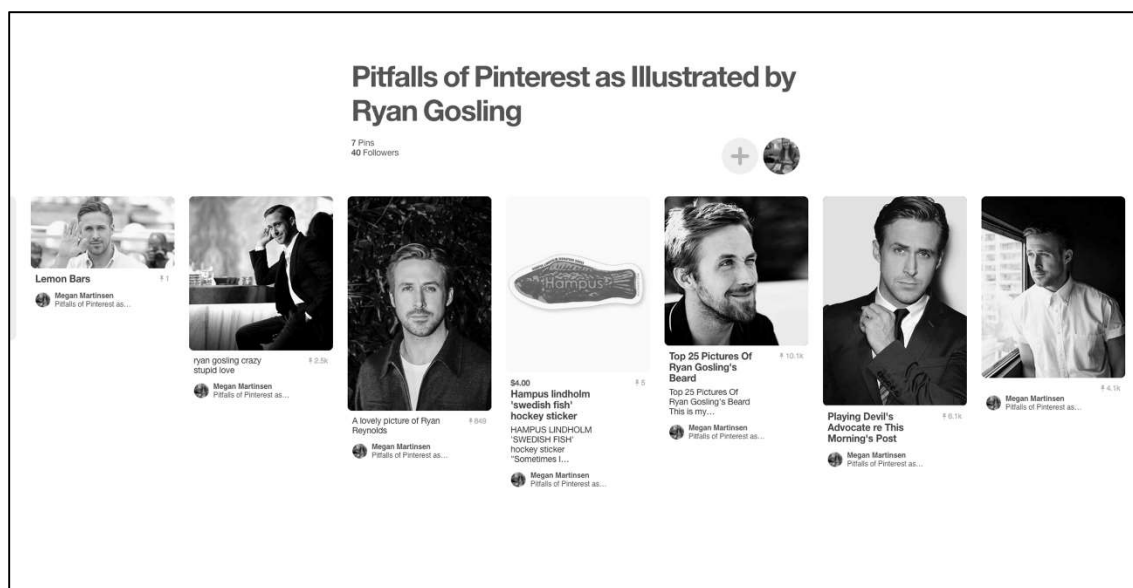
Figure 3 Pitfalls of Pinterest board

The projects students turned in were of a higher quality during this iteration of the assignment (see Figures 4 and 5). The rubric for the portion of the assignment I graded awarded 10 points (1 for each pin) for having original pins not re-pinned from another account and 60 points (6 points for each pin) for the image being labeled for reuse and a correct citation for both the image and the information. Of the 35 students in the class, 28 students scored above a 90% on the assignment, 14 of those students scored a 100%. Students were also awarded points for the relevance of each pin to the final project; however, this section was graded by the professor and the scores are unknown to me, though she mentioned in conversation later that she was happy with the results. The professor and I credit the higher quality assignments in large part to simply having more time to explain the assignment and discuss the topic as a result of the longer class period. But we also suspected that shifting the assignment to the "Information Has Value" frame also contributed to the higher quality work. Students seemed to find the "Information Has Value" frame easier to grasp, possibly because they are receiving similar messages about the importance of citations and quality sources in their other classes. The faculty member and I

discussed that while in many cases the information about citing sources and doing quality

research was not necessarily new, students simply had not extended that knowledge from one

course to another or fully appreciated that they need to use those skills in their interior design
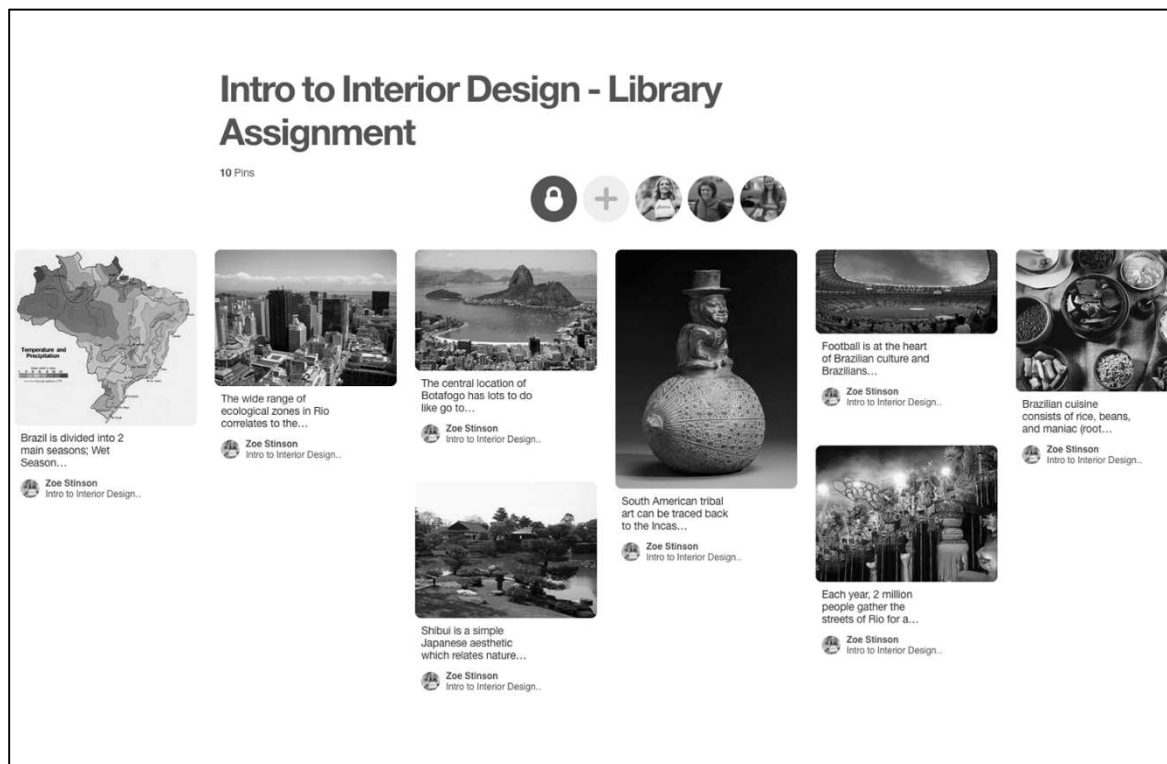
research.

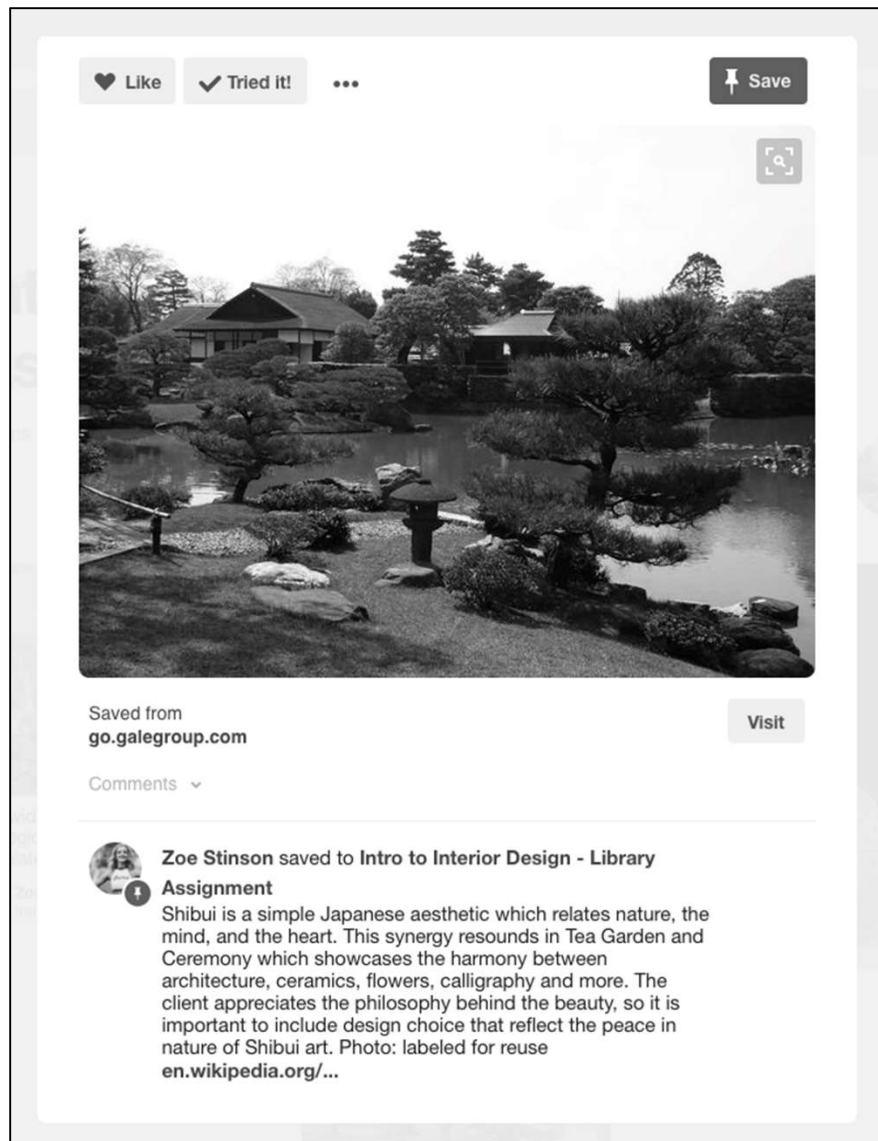*Figure 4 Example of a student assignment from the third iteration*

Figure 5 Close up of one pin including the assignment elements

Discussion

Collaboration & Iterative Research Assignment Design

   This project would not have happened were it not for collaboration. First, it required

collaboration with faculty. Throughout the project, we listened to the faculty's desired learning

outcomes and their concerns about student learning as these changed over time; and between

faculty members teaching the course, we changed the assignment to match. By mirroring faculty

concerns and learning outcomes in each iteration of the assignment, it became an increasingly more successful assignment over time, and the faculty members remained pleased with the librarians' involvement in the course. This nicely highlights the importance of working closely with faculty and when faculty changes take place, making concerted efforts to continue course collaborations while listening to the new faculty member's unique concerns and desires.

We also relied on collaboration between librarians. Because a new librarian took over the departmental liaison role, the assignment could have ended, but as a result of collaboration between the outgoing and in-coming liaison librarians, the project continued to evolve. A departmental switch between librarians can provide a unique opportunity to have fresh eyes on a project while not having to start the faculty relationship, or the project itself, from scratch. But these benefits are only possible if the librarians make an effort to share information and collaborate with each other.

Embracing Social Media Tools

While many of our conversations with faculty in the interior design department expressed concern that Pinterest was decreasing the quality of student research, it was important that we did not view Pinterest itself as the problem. The real problem was the way students were using Pinterest. Using Pinterest as a design search engine or exactly copying design images they found on Pinterest in their own work were the practices that concerned the faculty. These practices were troublesome and faculty concern was certainly justified, but they were not problems inherent to Pinterest. This was an important distinction to make. Had we fallen into the trap of thinking Pinterest itself was the problem and banned students from using it for research, student research may have improved but they would be less prepared for careers as professional designers. As Scolere and Humphryes (2016) discovered, Pinterest plays an important role in the

public curatorial work of professional designers. Therefore, it is likely that students in the

Interior Design program will go on to use Pinterest in their professional careers. If Pinterest had

simply been banned in the classroom, those same poor habits using Pinterest may have gone on

to plague their professional lives. As a result, it was much better to embrace Pinterest and teach

the students to use it well instead of banning it outright. By helping students re-conceptualize

how they use Pinterest in their design work, we were able to help student research improve and

help them gain professional proficiency in a tool they are likely to encounter. It is also worth

noting that the use of Pinterest for a class assignment generated excitement among the class that,

we think, led to the students paying greater attention to the information literacy instruction the

librarians were giving.

Information Literacy and Frames for Design Disciplines

These assignments illustrate the flexibility that the ACRL Framework for Information

Literacy provides for library instruction to a variety of users. The frames are useable and useful

outside of traditional academic contexts. For example, frames such as "Scholarship as

Conversation" and "Searching and Strategic Exploration" were useful as relatable metaphors for

the creative process for art students (Garcia & Labatte, 2015), while we found that "Authority is

Constructed and Contextual" and "Information has Value" were useful platforms to discuss the

information literacy concerns of professional designers. The flexibility of the frames was also

useful as we transitioned from one version of the assignment to another. When we found that

while "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" seemed like an appropriate frame for this

assignment, yet the students had a hard time grasping it, we were able to make the assignment

more accessible to students by switching to "Information has Value" frame. Embracing the

ACRL Framework in professional programs gives librarians a valuable means to help structure

their teaching so students gain the information literacy they will require to succeed in their

professional lives.

Conclusion

Currently, because of personnel shifts, the liaison duties for the FCS department have

been reassigned again, back to Filgo. Because this program of instruction will continue, it

provides a chance for the librarians to address some of the limitations of this project. One of

those limitations was the lack of robust assessment of how the students progressed in their

understanding of the information literacy concepts that we covered. The ACRL Framework

describes what novice and expert learners understand and lists knowledge practices and

dispositions for learners who are "developing their information literate abilities" (Association of

College & Research Libraries, 2015). Beyond the formal assessment of the projects turned in

and graded, including a qualitative assessment of the students' knowledge practices and

dispositions would be helpful for future instruction. Because our instruction focused on

professional practice, future research could even include assessment beyond graduation, as

students begin work in their field.

We are also aware that, as with all case studies, there is always a question of whether the

project is representative or generalizable. Our project had some unique dynamics: our

instruction took place in one introductory course and for the third (and upcoming fourth)

iterations we have the advantage of a two-hour class period. So, we are left with questions about

how the assignment might work under different conditions. What might this project look like

with less time for instruction? Could some of it shift to an asynchronous online delivery? How

might this type of project work in upper level interior design classes? We do not have ready

answers for any of these questions at this time. However, they are certainly questions we could potentially explore in the future should we expand the project to other classes or if the interior design department moves away from the two-hour class structure. Finally, in reflecting on our project we also note that it had a shifting cast of characters: two different instructors and two librarians in four classes over six years. While some may consider that a limitation, we embraced that dynamic as a strength, as the type of collaborative and iterative assignment design that we engaged in was essential to how this project progressed. Having multiple perspectives and input on the learning outcomes focused and improved our instruction plan.

Ultimately, we hope that this study illustrates a way librarians can use the Frames beyond traditional academic classroom settings. Our innovative instruction using Pinterest was the result of iterative assignment design, collaboration as faculty and librarians changed roles, and a focus on information literacy skills needed by professional designers. This paper detailed how this collaboration at Baylor attempted to produce interior design students who are more able to "acknowledge they are developing their own authoritative voices in a particular area" as well as "see themselves as contributors to the information marketplace rather than only consumers of it" (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015).

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