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TIPS FROM THE PROS

Tweeting as an Alternative to Discussion Forums

By John Orlando

There has recently been quite a bit of discussion on ways to use Twitter in education. But commentators have said little about whether Twitter offers advantages over traditional LMS discussion forums. Should the online instructor use Twitter instead of the tried and true LMS?

Linda Rohr and Jane Costello of Memorial University of Newfoundland compared tweeting to LMS discussion in their large enrollment online Human Kinetics and Recreation course, and discovered that Twitter does indeed produce benefits over LSM discussion forums. Students were asked to tweet twice during the course in response to pre-assigned question prompts, as well as post to discussion forums. They were also required to post a response to another student's tweet, and were graded on the tweets, just as they were for the LMS discussion. Students then filled out surveys about their experiences and the researchers compared the tweets to discussion postings.

The surveys indicated that 71 percent of the students preferred tweeting over traditional discussion. One reason was that Twitter

led students to think more deeply about course content because they were forced to express themselves succinctly in order to fit the message into the 140 character limit. The unlimited length of LMS discus-

When your cursor keeps stopping during your message, you are forced to reflect on what you want to say.

sion postings allowed students to simply unwind their thoughts from start to finish without going back and considering what they said. But when your cursor keeps stopping during your message, you are forced to reflect on what you want to say, picking out what is most important, and thinking about different ways to say it. This self-reflection improved student understanding of the course content.

Students also felt more connected to one another due to the real-time interaction of tweeting. Tweeting is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 >>

Interactive Self-Checks

By Hannah Digges Elliott, Audrey Anton, and Andrew Swanson

Many online courses still use static content such as readings, PowerPoint presentations, and the like. Students are not "doing" anything other than consuming the information.

We wanted to buck this trend by providing more interactive and engaging content. We did so by creating the Conversations with...Aristotle learning module (<http://bit.ly/1QQjVNx>), an interaction that allows students to have a "conversation" with a philosopher and answer a question about it afterward. Students work in an animated environment where they can compare their answers against the philosopher's and express themselves in a fun and interactive way that resembles the video game and role-playing scenarios they so often use recreationally.

When students enter the interaction, Aristotle greets them and asks whether they are familiar with his Nicomachean Ethics. If they indicate that they are, he then asks them to explain his Doctrine of the Mean (feigning to have forgotten it himself, since

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 >>

IN THIS ISSUE

2
90+ Percent of Our Students Use Pinterest; Shouldn't We?

3
Generating Lively Online Discussion

8
Digital Content Curation

5
The Whys and Hows of ePortfolios

President: William Haight
 (whaight@magnapubs.com)

Publisher: David Burns
 (dburns@magnapubs.com)

Managing Editor: John Orlando, PhD
 (jorlando2001@gmail.com)

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 jorlando2001@gmail.com

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90+ Percent of Our Students Use Pinterest; Shouldn't We?

By Merryellen Towey Schulz,
 Jennifer Kolker, Kristin Haas, and
 Aline Paris

Instructors today seek creative ways to use technologies with which students are familiar as a means of improving student engagement. One good technology is Pinterest. Pinterest is a social media tool that has been described as a “virtual bulletin board.” It allows students to group links from the Internet to individual or shared pages with pictures and content. By designing effective Pinterest classroom assignments, instructors can integrate visual representations of their course content while providing students with useful resources that they can continue to access after they have graduated.

At our university, four instructors from a variety of backgrounds designed different classroom assignments using Pinterest.

Nursing (<http://bit.ly/1OZjf5S>) Teaching the course Cultural & Spiritual Care in Nursing requires time devoted to discussing diverse cultural and spiritual practices, beliefs, symbols, and foods. This class started by placing students into groups of four. Each group was assigned to a unique cultural group. Most of these cultural groups have a large presence in our community, and nurses frequently interact with them. Students were asked to pin links to relevant health practices, dietary practices, and information regarding spiritual beliefs. Attention was given to beliefs on medications, herbal remedies, family values, and death and dying that would be pertinent to professional nurses. Students were required to caption their pins with why they were chosen, descriptions of the

links, and why they thought the links would be relevant to nursing. Students presented their boards and what was learned about each culture. All students continue to have access to these links, and have a way to reference cultural links when preparing for clinical experiences or as they enter professional practice.

One of the other principles of this course is learning about visual affirmation and how marketing media tries to be inclusive of such things as gender, race, and ethnicity

Students were assigned to create personal Children's Literature boards on Pinterest that included books from each of the seven literature genres studied in class.

as a means of recruitment and of appealing to a large variety of demographics. Students were asked to post to a single classroom board with examples of how companies use visual affirmation. Not all students pinned correct images, which led to great discussions of what constitutes visual affirmation and what does not. Instructors can also comment on the individual pins or discuss them in the classroom.

First-Year Seminar Pinterest was used in a first-year seminar course on emotional intelligence. A class of 15 students was divided into two groups. One group pinned examples of how social media was a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 >>

Generating Lively Online Discussion

By John Orlando

Discussion is a critical component of any online course, but faculty are often puzzled about what makes some discussions lively and others dead. To fill this gap, He and Gunter examined the factors that lead to participation in virtual teams and came up with principles that can help guide instructors in cultivating a robust online discussion.

Reputation. People will share knowledge with others when it enhances their reputation. It is easy to forget that students who speak in class are speaking not only to the instructor but to their classmates as well. They are cognizant of how they appear to their classmates. Thus, they are less likely to take risks when there is an opportunity to be wrong in front of others.

So instead of asking questions with objective answers that can be wrong, it is better to ask questions that allow students to express and defend their own views. Questions that allow students to bring in their own experiences to illustrate a point provide an easy way to contribute without fear of being wrong.

Replies. Students are more likely to get involved in a discussion when they think that someone is reading comments, and replies are a measure of others' attention. Most online faculty require students to make one or more replies to other students in each forum, but they often forbid students to make simple "I agree" affirmations. While these signs of approval should not count toward a grade, students are encouraged by seeing other students approve of their posts, and so they should not be discouraged.

Activity. Students are more likely to get involved in a discussion that is already active. Prior activity gives students more ideas for their own

posts and demonstrates that others consider the topic interesting, which influences the students' own perception of how interesting the discussion is. A good way to preserve activity is to space out postings: Require an initial posting on Monday or Tuesday and then a reply on Wednesday or Thursday. The instructor can also set a regular schedule for adding comments, giving the student a reason to periodically check in to get the latest updates.

Emotional bonds. Students are more comfortable participating when they feel an emotional bond of trust and comfort with others. This is what distinguishes discussions in

**People will share
knowledge with others
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an online course from the flaming posts on YouTube videos. The instructor can facilitate this bonding by requiring students to post a bio at the beginning of the course, and the instructor should take the lead by providing a bio for himself or herself. Students, and instructors, should be encouraged to make video bios—either using a webcam shot or "digital storytelling" format of narration over imagery—that better humanize them to others.

Task conflict. A discussion where everyone is just repeating what others say in different words is not interesting. Faculty should facilitate "task conflict," meaning disagreement about the task, not a personal disagreement, in order to generate interest. A discussion question might ask for positions on a controversial issue, one that allows

for reasonable positions on either side. Of course, the faculty member needs to monitor the discussion to make sure that it does not slip into personal attacks, but fortunately this is rarely a problem in online courses.

Leadership. While faculty often set a minimum for participation, some people will naturally go beyond that and become leaders in the discussion. This is not a bad thing. These leaders can help seed new ideas, and a group without leadership will have trouble getting going.

The trick is to avoid having these leaders monopolize debate and thus quash activity by others. Because there is no time limit to discussion, as there is in a face-to-face course, one person's posting does not prevent others from making postings. But too many postings by one person can create the impression of an unbalanced discussion. This can happen when one person seems compelled to reply to all others. Talk to anyone who seems to be monopolizing discussions, but understand that any group needs leaders, and so allow people to take leadership roles that help provide the nudge that gets discussion going. You can even reach out to individual students to ask them to take leadership on certain discussions, as a coach does with particular players. Students will generally feel complimented and respond positively when this happens.

Following a few simple principles will lead to exciting discussion in any online class.

Resource

He, J. & Gunter, G. (2015). Examining Factors That Affect Students' Knowledge Sharing within Virtual Teams, *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, v. 26, n. 2, 169-87. @

<< FROM PAGE 2

positive influence on securing a job post-graduation, and the other was a board on how social media could negatively impact someone seeking a job post-graduation. Students were required to caption their pins and comment on other pins. This sparked debate related to responsible use of social media in college and beyond.

Occupational Therapy Students were placed into teams and invited to a collaborative Pinterest board based on the diagnosis of an assigned case study the teams developed. Each team member was required to pin a minimum number of links that met the criteria. Pins needed to include a research article that made use of evidence-based practice, a treatment technique, a theory or model of practice, evidence of collaboration with other professions or specialists, an international resource, an evaluation or assessment, and discharge planning or documentation. These areas meet specific objectives of the course, which in turn meet accreditation standards for the occupational therapy program. Pins were required to have captions that related back to the diagnosis and the case study so that students could easily find meaning in the exercise. Students were asked to evaluate the websites that they pinned using five criteria: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. After the teams presented the case studies to the class, we discussed the Pinterest boards and how these resources could be helpful. Students retain access to these boards so they can refer to them in the future when they treat patients with similar diagnoses during fieldwork or in practice. These can be great study tools for those preparing to take the national board exam to become an occupational therapist.

Theology (<http://bit.ly/1KPHOhC>)

Students in two sections of the course Jesus Yesterday and Today were assigned to search the Internet for images of Jesus, and to select one that they found most meaningful or appealing and post it to a private Pinterest board. Each student wrote a comment under the image that explained the reason for the selection and how it related to the content of the course. In class, the students presented their images and led class discussions about them. The discussion on interpretation of Jesus through art moved along smoothly because all the images were located on the single board, and there was no need to wait while files were found and opened or for the instructor to insert them into a PowerPoint presentation, as had been the case in the past.

In two sections of another course, Introduction to the New Testament, an activity with Pinterest was used as a summary of the class. Every student was asked to select two meaningful images from the Gospels; some of these were events in the Gospels, while others were artistic descriptions of parables. The students then explained their images to the class, and discussions occurred on either the content of the images or the artistic interpretations of the events. A benefit of this activity is that the class session was student-led, enhancing their active participation.

Teacher Education (<http://bit.ly/23BTwbe>) Pinterest was used in an assignment that gave preservice teachers experience with children's literature. Traditionally, preservice teacher education has included learning about genres and themes in children's literature and how to integrate these into lessons. With the emergence of online resources, students can almost instantly access information about books on every subject. Students were assigned to create personal Children's Literature

boards on Pinterest that included books from each of the seven literature genres studied in class. For each pin, students were required to provide a short summary, descriptions of notable features, grade level in which they would use it, and an explanation of how they would use the book in teaching.

Technology in the Classroom

This assignment was intended to be the beginning of a lifelong resource for preservice teachers. Students in the course Technology in the Classroom were assigned to evaluate technology resources for teaching and learning. Students were instructed to create pinboards titled Classroom Technology, and to make thoughtful selections of images from 25 educational technology sites and pin them to their boards. They were to describe how they would use each pin in teaching, including appropriate grade level, why they believed the item was worth pinning, and the subject or subjects with which they would use each item.

Pinterest offers a unique way to integrate digital resources into classroom activities. The examples provided are just a few of the myriad possibilities for using social media as a learning experience. We have found that using a platform familiar to our students increases their engagement while allowing them to express and share their work with instructors, fellow students, and the Pinterest community. Take a look at this tutorial on how to use Pinterest (<http://bit.ly/1nGjLNd>), as well as this page with helpful tools for using Pinterest for teaching (<http://bit.ly/1WV4fJu>), and think about ways to use it in your classroom.

Merryellen Towey Schulz is an associate professor, Jennifer Kolker is a nursing instructor, Kristin Haas is an associate professor, and Aline Paris is a professor of theology at the College of Saint Mary. @

The Whys and Hows of ePortfolios

By John Orlando

Uses of ePortfolios

Student portfolios have become popular in higher education. They can document a student process, such as how an engineering class built a robot (Gallagher and Poklop, 2014). They can document a student's work across a program, such as an architecture student demonstrating the development of his or her design skills (Richards-Schuster et al., 2014), which can help with program-level assessments. They can also be used to cultivate students' reflections on their learning. Portfolios force students to survey what they have done, identify themes related to underlying learning outcomes, and gather those into a coherent whole. This "meta reflection" has been found to vastly improve retention and understanding of deep concepts.

The digital revolution carries the benefits of portfolios further by allowing students to draw together text, video, images, podcasts, and so forth. Plus, they can integrate their own work with outside content through mashups. A history student studying ancient Rome can create a Google Maps overlay of Rome that describes the area and events of the time through text, images, and videos added by the student.

ePortfolios also allow for a much wider audience for a student's work. Students get out of the mind-set of developing work only for their teachers and instead consider other students, friends, employers, or the general public. This requires them to think about how their messages will appear to different audiences. The ability to speak to a wide variety of audiences with digital tools is a critical 21st-century skill. Many students are learning it on their own through homemade YouTube videos

and the like. But faculty can facilitate students' development of the skill by providing students a way to formally organize their work to get feedback from others.

Finally, ePortfolios can be used to facilitate two-way communication between the student and his or her audience. The ePortfolio can include a moderated comment feature to allow anyone to comment on the content. A portfolio used across a program can be incorporated into individual courses, with students required to comment on each other's portfolios as a class assignment. This gives students a reason to continually return to the work to revise it as they add to, and modify, their understanding (Coffey and Ashford-Rowe, 2014). This helps students engage in the material in an informal, nongraded way that expresses their own understanding.

We generally think of portfolios as more appropriate to fields of study that require students to produce something to display, but they can be used for any subject. The basic principle is to capture and reflect on learning, and any subject allows students to express conceptual points through digital media. A student in a literature course can use images to convey Tom Sawyer's struggle over laws about slavery, while a student in an ethics course can use videos to illustrate different views of animal rights.

Creating ePortfolios

There are a variety of good systems for creating ePortfolios. Many faculty assume that they must use university-licensed systems, such as those built into the learning management system (LMS). While those can be simple to set up and connect to a course, their functionality can be foreign to students used to working with applications such as

Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram. One study of ePortfolios used Taskstream to host student work and found that students did not know how to publish the product, or even whether it was published. Plus, the work will likely have a limited audience, as institutional systems are generally designed to prevent outside access to student work.

EduClipper (educlipper.net) is a nice alternative to institutional systems, and allows students to easily create attractive Web content. A faculty member can set up a site as a companion to a course, with each topic given a board to which students post content that they find related to it. It also has an ePortfolio feature that allows individual students to set up their own customized portfolios.

Google Sites is another good option because it integrates with all Google products. ePortfolios can use the nearly unlimited storage capacity of Google Drive to host data, documents, or videos, and can connect to Gmail for communication. Plus, students will have access to the content after they leave school and can continue to develop their portfolios for different purposes, such as job applications.

With a Google account, students gain access to all of Google's features, including a Google Sites page. Students should share their Sites pages with the instructor so that the instructor can monitor progress and make suggestions, and then publish it when it is done. Publicizing the work just requires sending out links to the public, which can be done to all students at once. Take a look at this tutorial on how to set up an ePortfolio in Google Sites: <https://youtube/eU8xmw3eKVA>.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 >>

<< FROM PAGE 1

something that a student can do anytime, anywhere they have their cell phones—and they always have their cell phones. A traditional LMS discussion requires logging into the course once a day or every other day. Twitter allowed students to post messages as they occurred to them, and to respond to other's postings in real time. The result was a better sense of community in the course. The online discussion became closer to a synchronous face-to-face discussion.

Students also tweeted more often than they posted to discussion, with most students tweeting more than the minimum required. This could be because of the greater ease of tweeting. But it could also be because students felt that the tweets expressed more of themselves. Students tend to enter an "academic" frame of mind in discussion forums. But tweeting felt more a part of their everyday activities, and thus might have led to greater comfort in expressing their real thoughts.

The researchers provide some suggestions for faculty interested in integrating Twitter into their online teaching. One is that Twitter is ideal for field observations. Students in the course were asked to reflect on their own health habits, and could tweet about their activities as they were doing them, such as exercising or eating. The field observations can be incorporated into a variety of online course subjects. Students in an art course could tweet their thoughts at a museum, and students in a marketing course can tweet about a striking ad they see on the street or in a store. Twitter thus connects the course better with student lived experience.

Two, researchers asked students to set up separate Twitter accounts for their coursework. This made some of the students more comfortable because they were not posting course related content to their non-classmate Twitter followers.

Three, it is a good idea to use a Twitter aggregator to read and grade tweets. While Twitter has a website, few people use it to send

or read tweets because it is not organized well. Twitter aggregators allow users to sort tweets by sender, topic, hashtag, etc., and so are much better for viewing large groups of tweets. TweetDeck is a well-known aggregator that organizes tweets in a visually appealing format. The instructor can search for a single student using the student's handle (their "@" name), or set up a single hashtag for the course and ask the students to preface their tweets with that hashtag (a "#" tag). Then the instructor can search on the hashtag to get all of the course tweets at once.

Take a look at this good tutorial on how to use TweetDeck, and consider ways to incorporate tweeting into your online courses: <https://youtu.be/6YysKcsDjt0>.

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Rohr, L. & Costello, J. (2015). Student Perceptions of Twitter's Effectiveness for Assessment in a Large Enrollment Online Course, *Online Learning*, v. 19, i. 4, September, 2015. @

<< FROM PAGE 5

Another possibility is to use Google Blogger, which also comes with a Google account. Blogger is Google's blogging app, and while it does not have the variety of presentation options of Sites, it does allow for easy upload of content and attractive display options. Because a blog is organized chronologically, Blogger could be a good choice if the instructor is looking only for students to post their thoughts and content related to class topics in order, as they are covered.

Consider how ePortfolios can add to students' learning in your courses or program.

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Richards-Schuster, K. et al. (2014). Using ePortfolios to Assess Program Goals, Integrative Learning, and Civic Engagement: A Case Example, *International Journal of ePortfolio*, v. 4, n. 2. @

NEXT MONTH'S TOPICS

Using Online Protocols for Discussions

Virtual Reality in the Classroom

Use Dotstorming to Add Interactivity to Live Sessions

Differentiating Instruction in an Online Classroom

What Documentary Film-Making Can Teach Us About Course Design

Digital Storytelling in the Online Classroom

<< FROM PAGE 1

it's been so long since he wrote it!). The students then type in an essay response explaining the doctrine of the mean. Once this is answered, Aristotle declares that he's found his manuscript! He asks the students to compare their answer to his (the answer is actually Dr. Anton's summary of the topic). Finally, Aristotle asks how similar the two responses were, and makes suggestions of what to review in the event that the responses weren't terribly similar.

Creating the module

We wanted to do a number of things in this module:

1. Give students the opportunity to practice answering essay questions.
2. Present students with a model of a good essay question.
3. Allow students the opportunity to evaluate their answers against the sample response.
4. Take the students outside our learning management system to make the module feel less like a practice test.
5. Give students a low-stakes way to be wrong.
6. Give students a practice opportunity without creating more grading work for the faculty member.

Before designing the activity, the faculty member first identified areas in her lessons in which students struggled. For example, students in her face-to-face courses have had difficulty grasping aspects of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean. Typically, she spent an entire day discussing examples of this principle, with students working in small groups tasked with discerning the

appropriate virtue called for, its corresponding vices, and how to determine the "relativity" of the mean to the situation. Indeed, if the concept is usually part of in-class group work, or if the discussion in class is crucial to a student's ability to write an upcoming paper, that might be a good topic to select for an assessment.

Since Dr. Anton's online students were not going to have the luxury of in-class discussion

The assessments allowed students to "interact" with philosophers through a simulated conversation, thereby creating the impression that the student is participating in a sort of online game.

to work through such exercises, we decided to create a formative assessment that gave students the opportunity to answer potential essay exam questions, "get their wrong in," and see what a model answer to the question might look like. These interactions were ungraded, and students had unlimited attempts to practice. What's more, the assessments were designed to be fun. The assessments allowed students to "interact" with philosophers through a simulated conversation, thereby creating the impression that the student is participating in a sort of online game. Basically, students enter the interaction and Aristotle begins speaking to them. As they move through the activity,

they respond to his prompts either through written text or button clicking.

We created the interaction by combining Adobe After Effects with Articulate Storyline. After Effects is a program that allows users to create moving animations with audio, and provides the flexibility to create a wide variety of animations. We used it to create features such as a talking philosopher head and an arrow shooting at a tree. Take a look at the After Effects Animation Demonstration (<http://bit.ly/1NjvpuK>) to see how instructional designer Andrew Swanson created the interactions.

Once we had the animations, we turned to Articulate Storyline to create the interaction. Articulate Storyline is an interactive e-learning content development system. The developer creates slides that utilize interactions and can branch to other slides depending on what the user does. The developer can also create complicated motion paths, embed animation and video, overlay audio, embed quizzes, and do many other things with Articulate Storyline. Plus, it can retain student answers to be used in other slides, and can record information such as attempts in our learning management system (Blackboard).

Combining After Effects and Articulate Storyline allowed us to create an engaging interaction that met all of our learning goals.

Hannah Digges Elliott is an instructional designer, Audrey Anton is an assistant professor, and Andrew Swanson is an instructional support specialist at Western Kentucky University. @

Digital Content Curation

By Lisa Crawford-Craft

We run across excellent online content all the time. Instructional designers are always finding new tools and applications that would be of interest to faculty and course designers. Librarians also frequently have a wealth of information on systems that would benefit those involved in developing and teaching online courses. Plus, every member of a department encounters tools that others would find helpful in teaching their courses and material in their subject that would interest their colleagues and help students research topics for class.

But most people keep this content to themselves. Digital content repositories are a great way to share your finds with others. Below are two good tools for curating digital content online. These tools were chosen because they are available on multiple platforms, including Apple iOS and Android. They also allow collaboration. You can invite contributors, allow departments to work together, or perhaps utilize them for group projects for students. Both of these tools have browser buttons for utilization when on the Web as well. If a contributor finds content of interest, he or she simply clicks the browser button and the content will be shared automatically, allowing quicker and easier content curation. These tools do more than just provide a list of links; they also make the content more graphical, allowing users to decide what they want to read based on visuals rather than just words.

Flipboard (<https://flipboard.com>) is touted as a digital personalized news magazine that allows you to create a magazine not only for your own personal use but also for curating content for others. Flipboard only allows the curation

of online content such as articles, blog posts, and tweets, making it a great choice for curating content on current issues. As you add new content, Flipboard reorganizes the information with the most recent content first, but it does allow editing that lets you organize or even delete articles as needed. Flipboard's visually appealing style of presentation and organization gives users a new look and feel that might be different from a generic list of links or a wiki. When used on a computer,

**Digital content
repositories are a great
way to share your finds
with others.**

Flipboard is displayed like a blog, but on a mobile device the user is able to swipe pages as if reading a digital magazine. This trendier and techie look may make the users more likely to scroll through and read more content and even have them coming back for more as you add more pertinent content. Follow this link to see an example of a Flipboard magazine on educational technology: <http://flip.it/Vd4bv>.

Flipboard is also great for personal use. Users can add their own social media accounts to their Flipboard magazine, turning their Facebook and Twitter accounts into a visually appealing digital magazine. This tool also allows you to search by topic and find other content feeds to follow, allowing you to completely customize your experience. This type of customization can also lead to easier content curation, as you can choose to share any information you

find in your own Flipboard magazine or on other social media platforms.

Pearltrees (www.pearltrees.com) is different from Flipboard in that you can share many different types of information. This tool allows you to share Web pages, photos, PDFs, PowerPoints, and much more. One great perk of this tool is that when you share content like file attachments, the user can view the content in Pearltrees. There is no need to open another program or window. Since Pearltrees allows the attaching of files, it is not only useful for content curation but can also be utilized for group projects. Pearltrees also allows notes, which allows users to type notes or information within their Pearltrees bundles to help explain something or to give direction to group members for next steps in the project.

Pearltrees organizes information in bundles, or trees, that can branch out into other areas. For example, a Pearltree about iPad apps can have multiple bundles under it, like productivity and weather apps; see the example found at <http://tinyurl.com/oglkuzo>. This tool allows you to search other users' trees by topic and then subscribe to them or add the content to your own collection. As you continue to follow others and curate your own content, the bundles become interconnected, allowing a community of content curators to share content on similar interests. In effect, other Pearltrees users are helping you curate content as they add to their own collections to which you subscribe.

Anyone can be a curator by helping students, colleagues, and even one's self find the right information on just the right topic.

Lisa Crawford-Craft is the library director at the K-State Salina Library. @