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Computer Software Release: Open Photo Roster

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Running head: OPEN PHOTO ROSTER

Computer Software Release: Open Photo Roster

by

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Author Note

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Abstract

“Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language. The average person is more interested in their own name than in all the other names in the world put together. People love their names so much that they will often donate large amounts of money just to have a building named after themselves. We can make people feel extremely valued and important by remembering their name.”

Dale Carnegie, “How to Win Friends and Influence People”

Learning student names in a classroom course is important to creating an inclusive learning environment. Some Learning Management Systems, like Blackboard Learn, provide tools for student images, but such tools are insufficient. This software project creates a consistent and reliable way of identifying students for the needs of proctored exams as well as for learning student names.

Keywords: Java Software, Blackboard Learn, Inclusive Teaching

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 4

Technical Implementation..... 5

Functionality in Beta 6

Release information..... 6

Introduction

This software is released through the OSCELOT community to benefit K12 and Higher Education institutions that adopted Blackboard Learn as their Learning Management System. The software addresses the need in Blackboard Learn to provide identification photos. While Blackboard Learn provides avatars, which can be uploaded by users or created by the organization, such avatars are available to other students in discussion forums and other areas of Blackboard Learn. This means that the photos cannot be relied on for identification, as users choose what to upload, and it means that some students may have religious or FERPA protected reasons for not displaying such pictures to other Blackboard Learn users. Instead, pictures provided by the organizational campus id system are FERPA protected data and available only to instructors, which fulfills the requirements of FERPA data stewardship. The pictures can then be used for identification in proctored exams or in recalling student names while considering email requests from students in classroom courses. Such pictures are also useful in learning the names of students for purposes of facilitating classroom discussions.

Inclusive teaching means consideration of race, ethnicity, and gender of students. Barbara Gross Davis' in her book *Tools for Teaching* (1993) mentions that “there are no universal solutions or specific rules for responding to ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity in the classroom.... Perhaps the overriding principle is to be thoughtful and sensitive....” Using student names in personal conversations is an expression of such sensitivity and intention to create an inclusive learning environment. The book mentions specifically “Addressing students by name (and with the correct pronunciation)”.

While learning names can be challenging, especially in larger classes, it is possible even for large audiences (Chambliss, 2014). Teaching international students is even more challenging due to cultural differences and pronunciation obstacles (Huelsbeck, 2016). However, using student names is linked to academic performance in some studies (Kenney, 1994). Faculty have been using various techniques of acquiring student photos (Middendorf & Osborn, 2012). When such photos are submitted by students they may not be useful for identifying students due to quality and content within the picture.

Technical Implementation

The software is implemented as a Blackboard Building Block. The pictures are delivered to a specific directory in the Blackboard Learn system, defaulted to `/usr/local/blackboard/content/PHOTOS/`. This location can be modified in `config.jsp` file. However, the file location must be shared across all application servers in a clustered Blackboard Learn deployment, therefore the base directory should be at least `/usr/local/blackboard/content/`.

The picture size will vary based on options available in the ID system. If the default picture size is too large to be rendered quickly for a large course, it is possible to deploy thumbnails. The thumbnails directory should be a child directory of the picture base directory called `thumbs`. The `thumbs` directory will be used for rendering group listings, while the base directory will be used for the pictures as they are selected by the course instructor.

Functionality in Beta

The upcoming releases of the software will include additional functionality. One feature in beta testing is the user name pronunciation and preferred pronoun. While campus information systems often include a preferred name, which can be set by the end user, the Open Photo Roster will include the pronunciation and preferred pronoun. These options will be set by the end user and displayed to the course instructor. This means that a preferred name will have a phonetic description and a preferred pronoun will be communicated in the printout or electronic version of the course roster.

Release information

Software can be downloaded from:

<http://projects.oscelot.org/gf/project/openphotoroster/frs/>

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