

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.