Picture Your Students

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Abstract

Do you want help to learn your students' names and faces? Whether you have 10 students or 210, you can take a digital photograph of each one and make one or a series of photo pages to keep on your computer or print and post in the lab. The options are nearly limitless on how to take the photos and then organize, print, and display them. This mini workshop will show you easy ways to use a simple digital camera, free or cheap software and Microsoft Windows to create pages of smiling student faces. At the end of the semester, the pages can be filed with the grades for later reference.

Introduction

I have been taking photos of students in the lecture and laboratory sections for many years. For a long time I used a regular film camera by taking photos, cutting and stapling them on the bulletin board. With the new use of digital photography and photo handling software it has gotten much easier. You can use Microsoft Word to make a galley of photos on one page or several pages

depending on the number of students. In Word you can make this galley quickly and easily. The pages are in one larger file and can be kept as long as you want. I have 4-8 lab sections each semester, and have had up to 200 people in the lecture section where up to 2/3 are the same students as in lab. It is very helpful to have a way to learn their names and faces. The photos, names and majors posted in the lab let the students see the others in the course and who else has the same major.

Getting the photos

I have used various methods to take the photos. I take photos of the lab students on the first day of lab. I send a paper along the lab benches asking for name and major area. Then I follow the same path taking a candid photo, watching for windows behind the student and any other distractions. The lecture students who are not in lab are asked to come to my office for a photo to be taken. These I pose in front of a wooden door as a background. To get the ones who don't come to me, I finally go to the lecture room and take a photo in the hallway while they are waiting for class to start or after class. Then I transfer the photos to my computer and rename the file to the student's last name. Naming the file with the student's last name (and first initial if needed) will put them in alphabetical order.

Another large class lecturer wants photos of up to 100 students. In that case, I go to the large classroom and take photos of the students as they come in the door, or go where they are seated. They write their names on a list in the order I take the photos. This really takes very little time, but you need to pay close attention to get the correct name in the same order as the photos.

Another way is to take a group of several students. As long as you keep the names with the faces, this works fine. Most photos can include several students and allow you to crop out similar sized faces as long as they are in a row or at a similar distance.

Adjusting the photos

After the photos are taken, and the files renamed and sorted into sections or classes, you can use any software for simple adjustments of your photos. ADSee is one that came with my scanner. MGI PhotoSuite came with my Sony camera. Ulead has a site on the web with software you can download and use a certain number of days or times for free. There are several other sites you can find by searching the web. Or you can just use the software program that comes with Microsoft Word. The photos usually need to be cropped then adjusted to a size that will fit an appropriate number on a document page. You may also need to adjust the color balance, lightness or darkness and contrast.

Now that we have the photos, what is the best way to get them on a page?

Word 95 and 97 will let you insert the photo you can see directly on the document page you are working on. Then you can open "edit picture" and use the tools to crop and adjust the photo. You can move the photo wherever you want it on the page. Text can be added above and below the photo. Word 98 and 2000 won't show the photo on the page when it is inserted. I like to see the actual photo on the page so I insert the photo on a new document page, "edit picture," copy, then paste on the document page you are working on. Again, you can move the photo around the page. You can also open the photo in any program to adjust for color and size, and then copy and paste on the Word document page.

One way to organize your page is to just put the photos on the page and add the name and major below it. Another way is to make a grid template with the table command and put the photos in the cells. This gives you an easier way to line up the photos and names. You can add frames or borders if you wish.

What do we do with the galley?

For the lecture course I just put everyone in alphabetical order. The ones who are also in lab will have a different background. The lab sections each have a separate page. By varying the size of the photos, you can put 12, 16 or more students on one sheet of paper. Twenty is a good number for a personal index. The pages are printed as one long document (or several short ones) for the lecturer. Once the photo is on a page, it can be copied and pasted to another page, and resized if necessary. Each lab section is printed on one page. I print at least one color copy on photo paper to post on the bulletin board in the lab. Color copies on plain paper, or black and white laser copies can be made for TAs or the department. At the end of the semester, the color copies can be kept with student grades for future reference.

I also make galleries for the graduate student course instructors for the core courses. This helps them learn names and faces of the first year grad students.