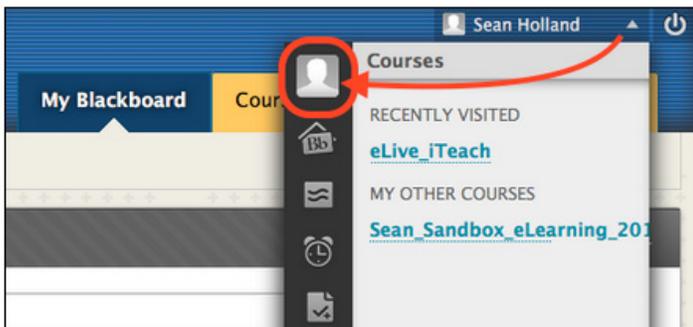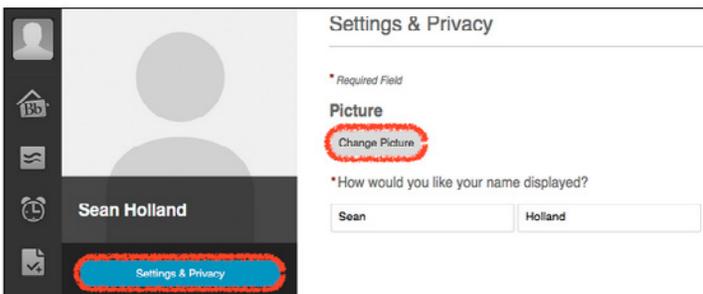# Use Profile Pictures to Increase Engagement

A picture gives us a visual anchor that helps us navigate an online conversation, particularly one with many participants. Social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter are obvious examples, but did you know that Blackboard also supports profile pictures? Encouraging their use in your course could help increase student engagement in discussions and allow a learning community to develop more naturally.

Research has found that students regard posts with accompanying profile pictures as more meaningful than those without[1]. Students also tend to prefer Facebook-like discussions to those in Blackboard[2]; utilizing profile pictures in Blackboard affords you one benefit of Facebook without its obvious privacy concerns.
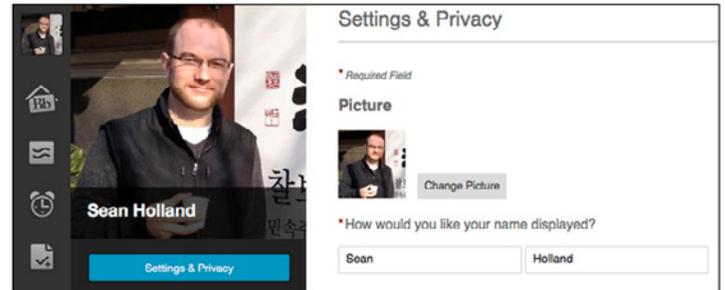
To set up your profile picture, log into Blackboard and click on the dropdown menu to the right of your name in the top right. Select the blank user icon.

In the following page, click on the "Settings & Privacy" and select the "Change Picture" button. Upload your photo from your computer. Blackboard will ask you to crop the photo to a square. This will ensure that your photo (a.k.a. avatar) is displayed neatly across Blackboard. Click "Save" and you're done.

This is what your profile page should look like once you've added a picture:

Profile pictures are retained across UAF Blackboard shells. Students who are in several classes together or meet again in a later semester will be able to recognize and re-engage with each other more quickly.

Student and instructor profile pictures can make your course more visually engaging, and make online discussions more familiar and productive. Creating a profile picture for yourself is a great first step to set the example. Students can be asked to do this as part of a first-contact assignment, or as an opportunity to earn extra credit.

REFERENCE

[1]Tu, C. H., Blocher, M., & Gallagher, L. (2010). Asynchronous network discussions as organizational scaffold learning: threaded vs. flat-structured discussion boards. Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange, 3(1), 43-56.

[2]Hurt, N. E., Moss, G. S., Bradley, C. L., Larson, L. R., Lovelace, M., Prevost, L. B., ... & Camus, M. S. (2012). The 'Facebook' effect: college students' perceptions of online discussions in the age of social networking. International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6(2), 10.

See Also: Blackboard Profile Photo Instructions

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