

Promoting Engagement and Accountability with Profiles and Notifications

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A low-stakes assignment requiring students to update their Canvas user profiles and notifications settings has great utility in *all* class sizes and for *all* instructional modalities in which Canvas is used. Learning outcomes for this assignment include: 1) enhancing users' familiarity with customization elements of the Canvas learning management system; 2) improving course communication by incorporating personalized contact preferences; 3) improving student accountability through customization; and 4) promoting engagement among course participants by discouraging anonymity.

This assignment allows students to select how and how often they receive information through Canvas, and in the process they become familiar with the layout of the LMS. Adding a preferred personal or *non*-university email address or cellphone number (for text messages) increases the likelihood that students will actually receive and engage with course communications. Updated user profiles allow course participants to “see” and “meet” classmates and instructors by viewing profile photos and personalized bios. Instructors and students alike can learn participants' names and faces *outside* of class time and *beyond* traditional in-class or face-to-face interactions.

Ideally, students should update their user profiles and notification settings within the first two weeks of the semester. Once user profiles and notification settings are updated, students enjoy the benefit across *any and all* classes utilizing Canvas. User profile and notification settings are “universally” applied as a feature of one's account: settings in Canvas are not *course* specific, but are *user* specific and remain in place until changes are made.

In my face-to-face courses, students complete a two-part assignment in which they: 1) upload a profile picture and/or write a short bio for view under the PEOPLE tab in our course site and 2) change notification frequencies and add an alternate email address or cellphone number. I demonstrate each part of this assignment in class;

students receive a step-by-step assignment sheet and are directed to additional Canvas resources relevant to the assignment.¹

Students are graded on *completion* of each part of the assignment-- Part. 1: Update User Profile and Part 2: Update Notification Settings.² To “grade” Part 1, instructors click on the PEOPLE tab in their Canvas course sites to see if a picture has been uploaded and a bio written. To “grade” Part 2, instructors can request screen shots or print-outs showing changed notification frequencies or alternate communication (email/cell number) information. (To protect students’ privacy, appropriately discard this information after completion scores have been noted in your gradebook.)

This low-stakes assignment has enhanced my students’ experience with Canvas-- they report that it is harder to miss important information when it finds you wherever you are. They have been able to connect to classmates by using PEOPLE to locate co-majors or others with interests *beyond* a shared class enrollment. As an instructor, I’ve enjoyed greater confidence that my announcements are reaching students. Users’ profiles and bios provide insights into who they are beyond Canvas: as people and not just students.

¹ These resources include:Canvas Student Quick Start Guide: <http://guides.instructure.com/m/8470>; Canvas overview video: <http://guides.instructure.com/m/4210/l/141852-canvas-overview-video>; Canvas Guides-- How Do I Edit My Profile?: <http://guides.instructure.com/m/4212/l/75098-how-do-i-edit-my-profile>; Canvas Guides-- How Do I Set My Notification Preferences?: <http://guides.instructure.com/m/8470/l/73162-how-do-i-set-my-notification-preferences>

² In my courses, Parts 1 and 2 are worth a combined total of 15 points (7.5 points each). I award half-credit (3.75 points) for Part 1 if students uploaded only a profile photo or write a bio, but do not do both actions.