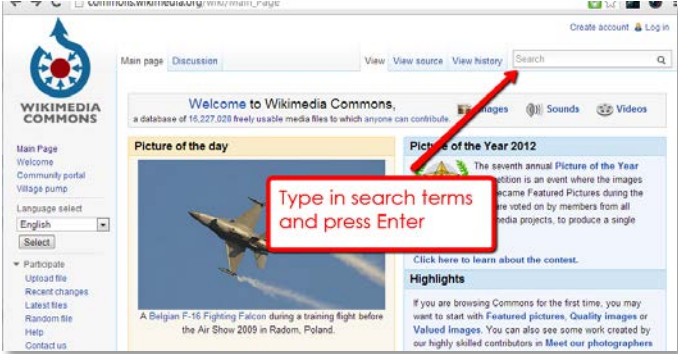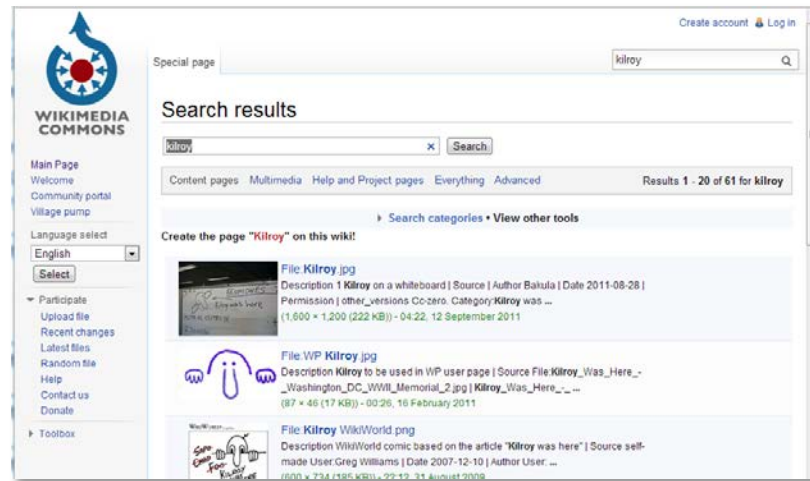# Creating a Course Banner

Because the course banner is the first thing students will see when they enter your course, it's worth spending a bit of time making it attractive and distinctive, while at the same time providing the necessary information so students can easily tell they're in the right place. Course banners also should conform to certain requirements so that SPS students can have a consistent educational experience. We ask that banners be roughly 200 x 800 pixels, and that the course number and title appear on a plain background for easy legibility (i.e. don't place text directly on top of an image).

This guide will show you how to use various internet resources to create a banner. It will demonstrate how to use Wikimedia Commons (Steps 2-6) and Pixabay (Steps 7-9) not only to find images that you already have in mind, but to get ideas of what images you can put in a banner. Using those images, you can then create a banner using Pixlr Express, an online image editor that's easy to use. You do not need any special software, e.g. PhotoShop, just an up-to-date browser with a recent version of Flash installed. You can of course use your preferred software to create a banner, but do make sure that you are not breaking any copyright restrictions: you can't just use any image you find on the internet!

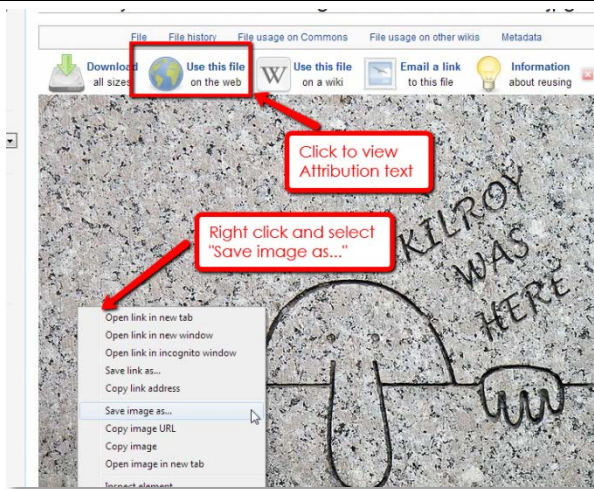| Step 1	
Here is a finished example of a course banner created using the process described here. There are three main parts involved: first, select and download images; second, place images in banner; third, add title text and finishing effects.	
Step 2 **Wikimedia Commons** (http://commons.wikimedia. org) contains a very large range of images that can be used in course banners. **Enter your search term(s)** in the box in the upper right and press Enter to find images.	

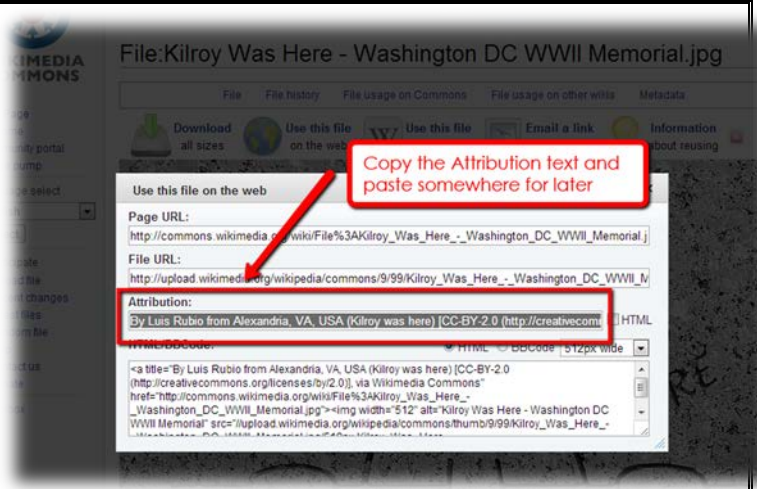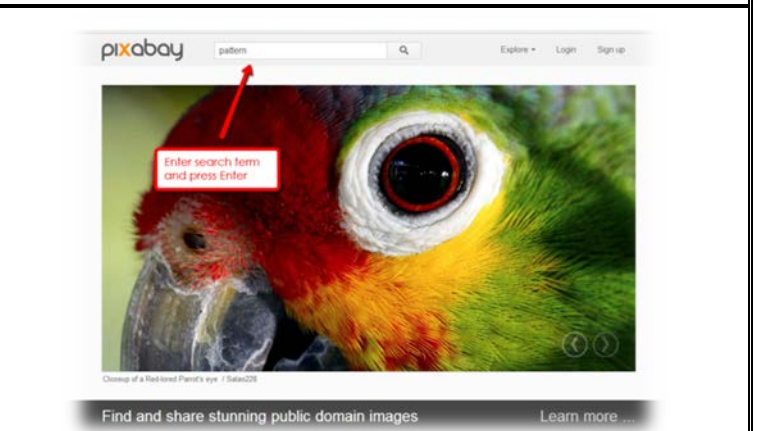|	
Step 3 Scroll down the results to **locate the image** you wish to use, and then click the hyperlink.	
Step 4 To **download the image**, right click on it and select "Save image as…" However, before you leave the page, you should **check the licensing information**. You can do so by clicking the "Use this file" button above the image, or by scrolling beneath the image.	
Step 5 Wikimedia images are either **public domain,** in which case you are free to use them without attribution, or **under a license** such as Creative Commons which specifies conditions which must be met when using the image. You can see in the image to the right, that you can distribute and adapt the image as long as attribution is given.	

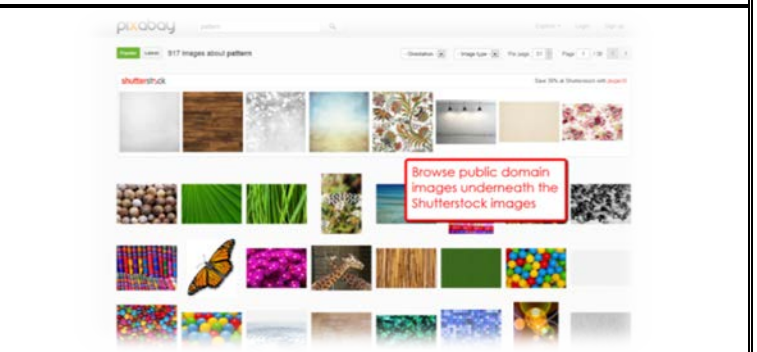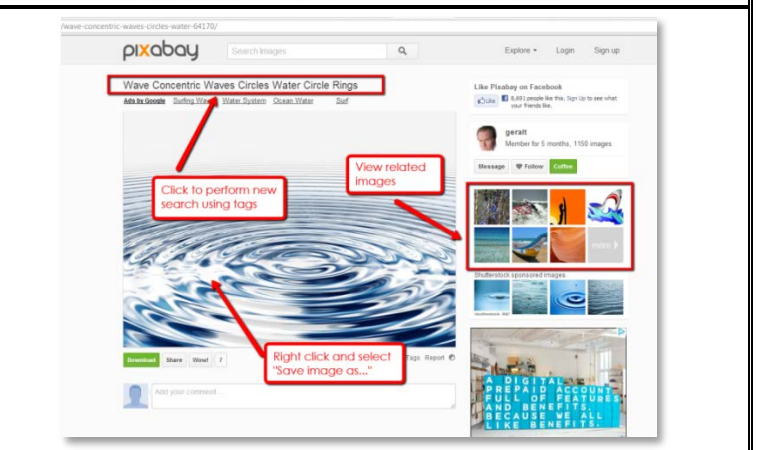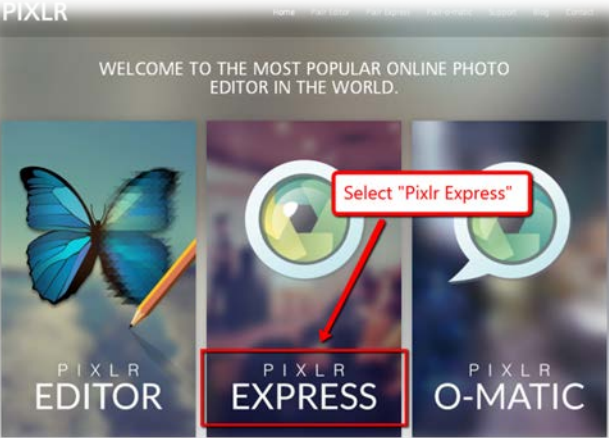|	
Step 6 To **view the text** you are recommended to use for attribution, click the "Use this file" button pictured in Step 4. Then, copy the text under "Attribution" and paste in another document. If you were to use this image, you would have to paste *"By Luis Rubio from Alexandria, VA, USA (Kilroy was here) [CC-BY-2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons"* somewhere, such as in your first Announcement.	
Step 7 **Pixabay** (http://pixabay.com) is a large repository of public domain images. Although you will find a wider range of objects using Wikimedia Commons, it is easy to find aesthetically pleasing images using this site. Type your search term(s) in the box at the top and press Enter. If you do not have a specific image in mind, you can enter "background" or "abstract" or "pattern."	
Step 8 Pixabay has a simple, clean interface, but be aware that there are prominent ads for Shutterstock, a third-party copyright stock image service. **Click on a thumbnail** in the main area to view a larger version.	
Step 9 One of the advantages to using Pixabay is that it's easy to **find related images**. You can either click the thumbnails to the right, or click on one of the words at the top to perform a new search using that tag. When you've found the image you'd like to use, right click on it and select "Save image as…"	
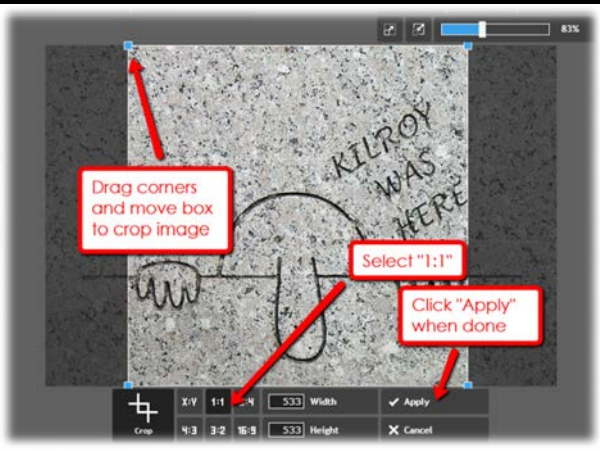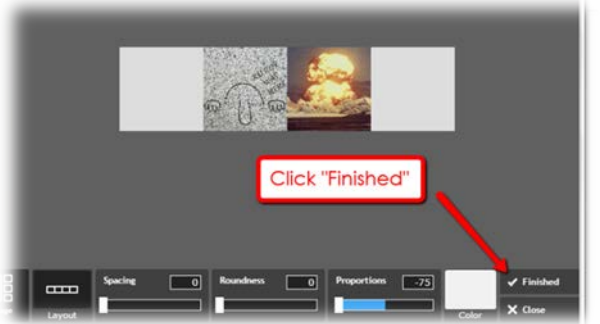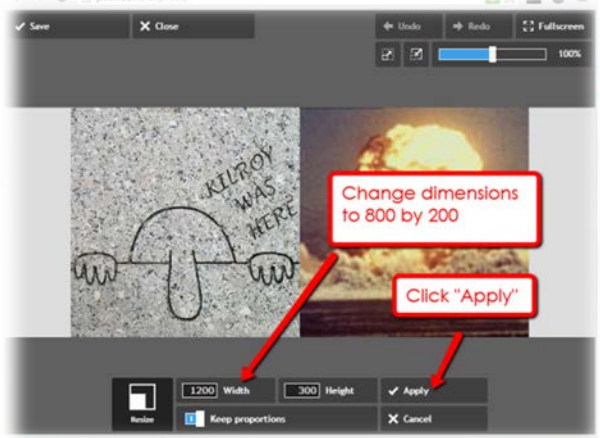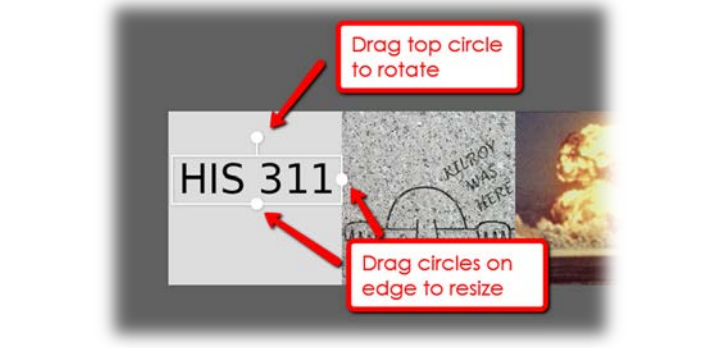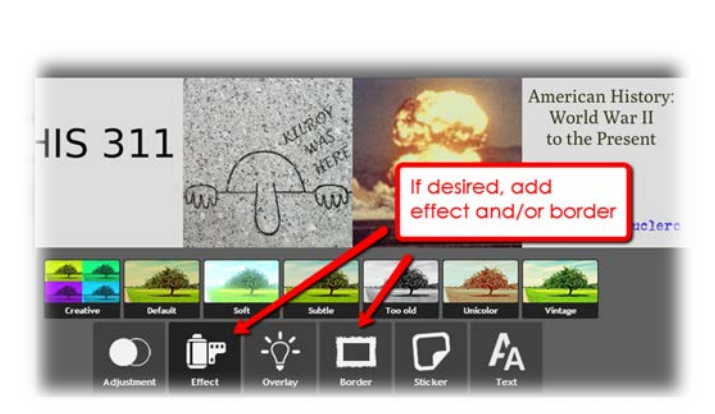
Step 10	
Now that you have the image(s) you'd like to incorporate into your banner, go to http://pixlr.com and **select "Open Pixlr express."**	

Step 11	
You will be presented with some options for choosing a source image. For our purposes, **click on the "Collage"** option.	

Step 12	
By default, you will see four boxes arranged in a square. **Click on the "Layout"** button, and choose the option with four horizontally aligned boxes. Reduce the spacing to zero so that there's no white space in the image.	

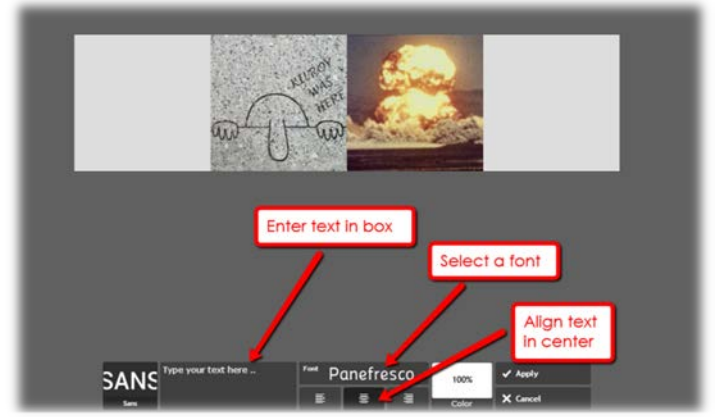| Step 13	
Now you will see the template for your banner. **Add one, two, or three images** by hovering over a box and clicking the plus (+) icon inside. Leave at least one box blank so that you can insert your course name and number.	

Step 14	
When you **click the plus icon**, you will be prompted to **upload an image** from your computer. Once it appears, you may need to **re-crop** it. Do so by hovering over the image and clicking the paintbrush icon.	
Step 15	
A new screen will appear with the enlarged image, and a row of buttons on the bottom. **Click the "Adjustment"** button and select the "Crop" option.	
Step 16	
Once you **select** "**Crop,**" you will be able to select the area you wish displayed. First **click the "1:1"** option to make the area square. You can move the box around or resize it by using the blue squares at the corners. When you have highlighted the desired portion, click "Apply."	
Step 17	
The cropped image will now appear. **Click "Save"** to return to the banner with the newly cropped image. **Note that if you click "Close" you will return to the collage screen without your changes applied.**	

<u>Step 18</u> Repeat Steps 13-17 for any other images you want to include. Remember to leave at least one square blank. **Click "Finished"** when you are ready to add the finishing touches.	
<u>Step 19</u> Now you will see the banner along with the same row of buttons you used to edit the individual images. First, you need to **shrink it** to the required size of a course banner. Click the Adjustment button and select the **"Resize"** option.	
<u>Step 20</u> Make sure **"Keep Proportions"** is enabled. Change the dimensions to 800 by 200, the size SPS recommends for course banners. Click "Apply" when done.	
<u>Step 21</u> To add the course name and number, **click on the "Type"** menu button, and choose a font style. Because you want the text to be professional and clean in appearance, it's probably best to choose either "Sans" or "Serif."	

Step 22

First, **type the title** text into the box at the bottom, align the text in the center, and select a font. If you are overwhelmed by the options, for the Sans Serif fonts, Vera Sans, Cabin, Legendum, and Roboto, are safe, neutral options. For Serif fonts, try Crimson, Garogier, Imperator, or Prociono.

Step 23

By default, the text will be white, which will be difficult to read on the light grey background. To switch it to black or another dark color, **click "Color"** and drag the small circle in the left square towards the bottom. To change to a different color, use the middle slider with the vertical rainbow to select the color you would like (and the small circle to choose the shade). The right slider changes the opacity; leave this as is.

Step 24

Drag the text box to one of the blank squares in the banner. To shrink the text, drag either of the circles on the edge of the box towards the middle of the box. The top circle rotates the text, so you should leave it as is to maintain legibility.

Step 25

Repeat Steps 21-24 for any other text elements you wish to include. It's probably best to stick with a single font, but for illustrative purposes in the banner to the right, you can see a sans serif font to the left, a serif font in the upper right, and a novelty font in the lower right (more visible in next step). If you want, you can add an effect and/or a border (not pictured). It can give the banner a more unified look, but it's not necessary.

Step 26	
Here is the finished banner. If you compare it to the banner shown in the first step, you can see that you can use the resources discussed here to create very distinctive banners without too much complication. Click "Save" to download the finished banner to your computer. Remember that if you are using images that require attribution when used, you must insert the attribution text on the announcement page or on the banner itself.	
Step 27	
Now, when you go to your Blackboard course site, you can **upload** the banner by choosing "Teaching Style" in the "Customization" area of the Control Panel. The banner option is towards the bottom of the page. Click "Browse My Computer", select your banner image, and click Ok. Don't forget to click "Submit" after uploading the banner. It will now appear on the Announcement page of your course.	