Introduction to Nota Bene (NB)

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ON
MODERN METHODS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction to NB

- NB is a web-based tool where users can read and annotate PDF documents using standard web browsers;
- Annotations in NB are either anchored to a particular location in the document or are general comments on the document;
- NB stand for “nota bene”;
- MIT’s Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory developed NB for collaborative reading and learning.

Introduction to NB (Cont'd)

- NB is currently used in several MIT courses and over 100 courses in 10 other institutions.
- Teachers who wish to engage students more deeply in reading and wish to collect a class-wide perspective around the readings will appreciate NB.
- NB target students reading lecture notes and draft textbooks with the aim of helping each student to gain a deeper understanding about the contents of the text.

Introduction to NB (Cont'd)

- NB helps student see whether the questions they have, are shared by others, or in some cases, whether they have misunderstood or glossed over an important concept.
- NB's developers have conducted research that indicates when students read and annotate consistently throughout the entire document, they interact more frequently with peers' comments than in a traditional discussion board and are more motivated to complete reading the lecture note/textbook.
- NB presents a strong motivation for the online reader who wants to see up-to-the-minute peer interactions.

Introduction to NB (Cont'd)

- Students appreciated that high-quality peer responses happen much more quickly than when they depend on a single instructor.
- Students and instructors agree that the collaborative reading inside NB offers a clear alternative to paper and online discussion boards when it comes to collaborative reading.
- The user dashboard provides a summary list of student contributions, highlighting items that have been flagged with a reply request (e.g. problems or questions that need immediate attention).

Introduction to NB (Cont'd)

- When used correctly NB increases participation and reading rates, highlights trouble spots, and allows students to see what their peers think prior to the class session so that they use class time most efficiently.

- The instructor can get a quick overview of each student's work and download a printable version of the annotated document to use in the classroom.

- Collaborative work will take place heterarchically, which means a perfect equality of all participants.

NB's Attributes

Functionally, NB has many of the same attributes as other text annotation tools such as:

- A file repository for PDFs (and other text-based files) that is restricted to students;
- Class-viewable comments;
- A discussion threads;
- A dashboard that presents an overview of recent activity to the instructor,

Advantages of NB

NB has the following advantages:

- When reading the text, questions from students can be answered by their colleagues;
- The lecturer on one hand will be relieved and the “questioner” does not have to wait too long for a response;
- Furthermore, when students pass on their knowledge, they tend to gain more insights;
- NB allows us to read the text in many different and differentiated ways creatively. For example, sample videos, soundtracks or other specialized texts can be linked to specific text;

Advantages of NB (Cont'd)

- When used correctly NB increases participation and reading rates;
- Students can highlights troubled spots in the text;
- NB allows students to see what their peers think about different areas of the text prior to the class session;
- It serves as a class rehearsal for the lecturer and students.

Some NB FAQ's

Q: Is NB free to use on http://nb.mit.edu for educational purposes?

- A: Absolutely.
  You are welcome to use NB server at http://nb.mit.edu to create an account for your class, upload PDFs, and invite students and colleagues.

However, please be aware that NB is a research project, so it is offered "AS-IS":

Some NB FAQ's (Cont'd)

Q: I've never used NB before. How do I get started?

- A: It is very simple: Just fill in the form at: http://nb.mit.edu/newsite

Setting up a class, adding folders, uploading PDFs and inviting students is straightforward.

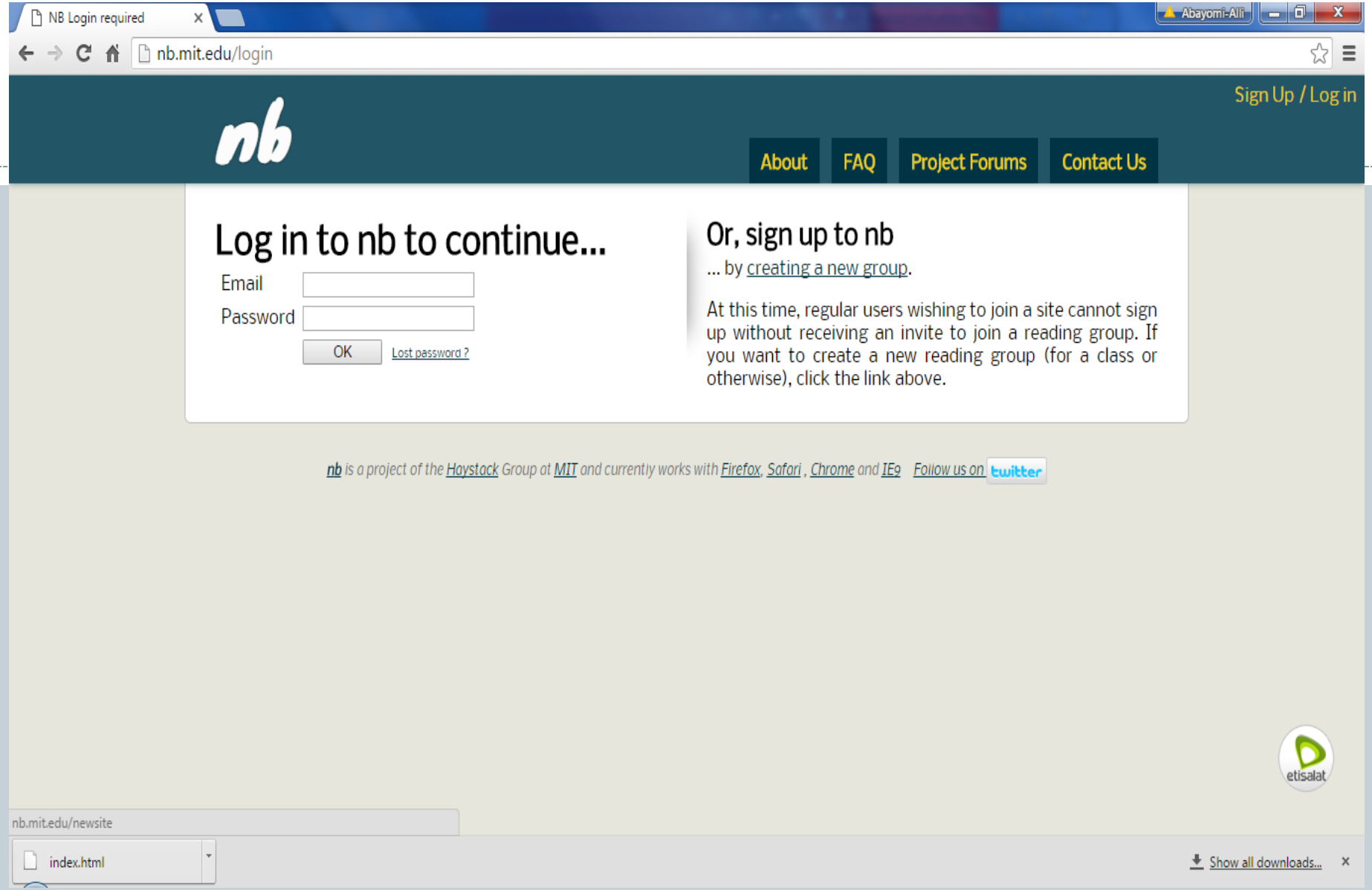


Figure 1: An NB's sign up and home page

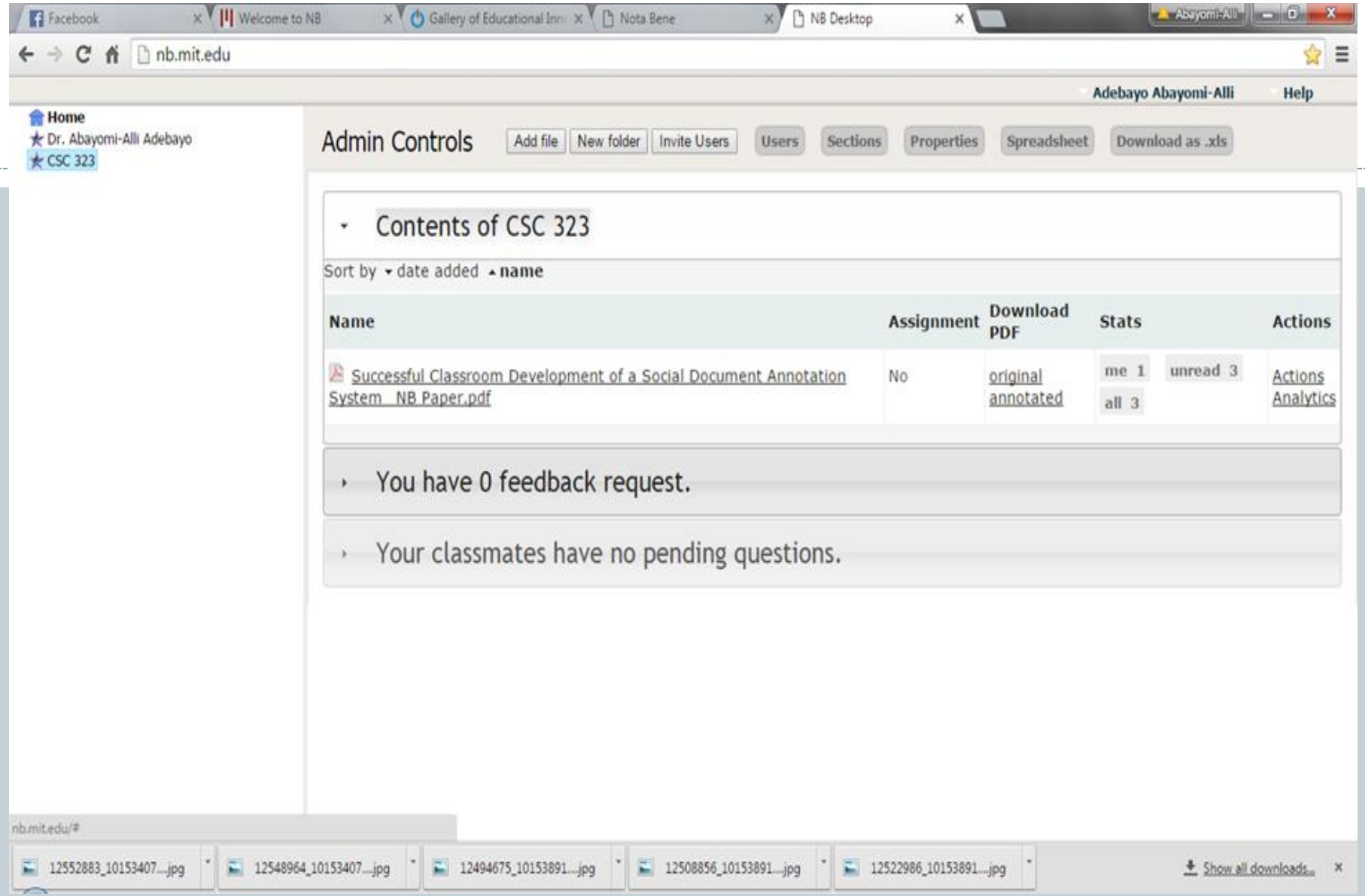


Figure 2: An instructor's home page on NB

Some NB FAQ's (Cont'd)

- A student will typically accept an NB invite and log in to NB;
- He/she then selects a document and starts reading;
- As the student peruse the document:
  - they can highlight segments of text and immediately a small text area swoops to the margin and awaits annotation;
  - Small, subtle indicators encircle selections;
  - As the reader skim the document, nearby annotations light up, and invite further exploration or response.

SETTING UP NB

Q: How do I create a new class?

- A: Once you're logged in;

  click on you name on the top-right of the screen;

  and select the menu "Create a new class".

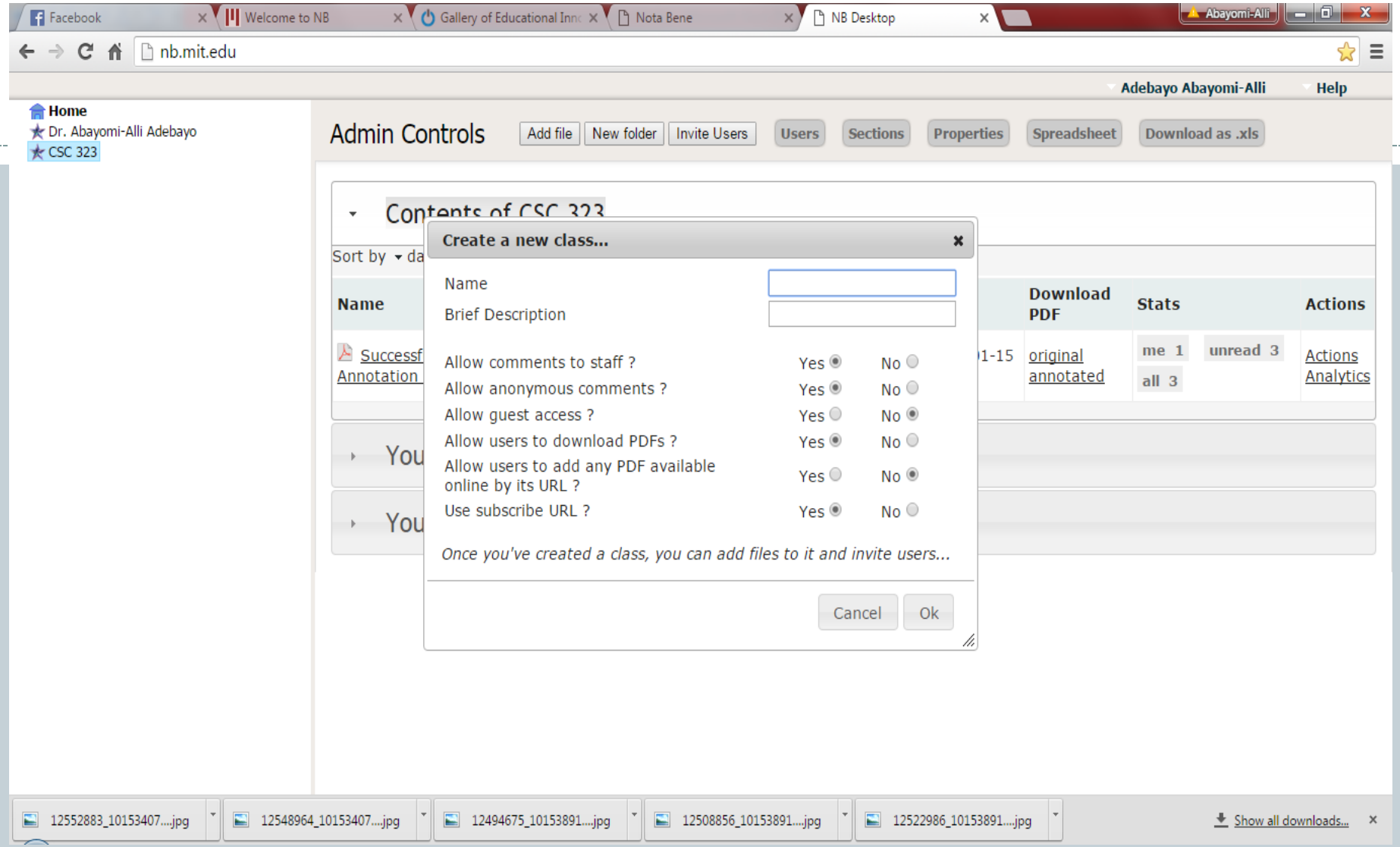


Figure 3: Creating a new NB class

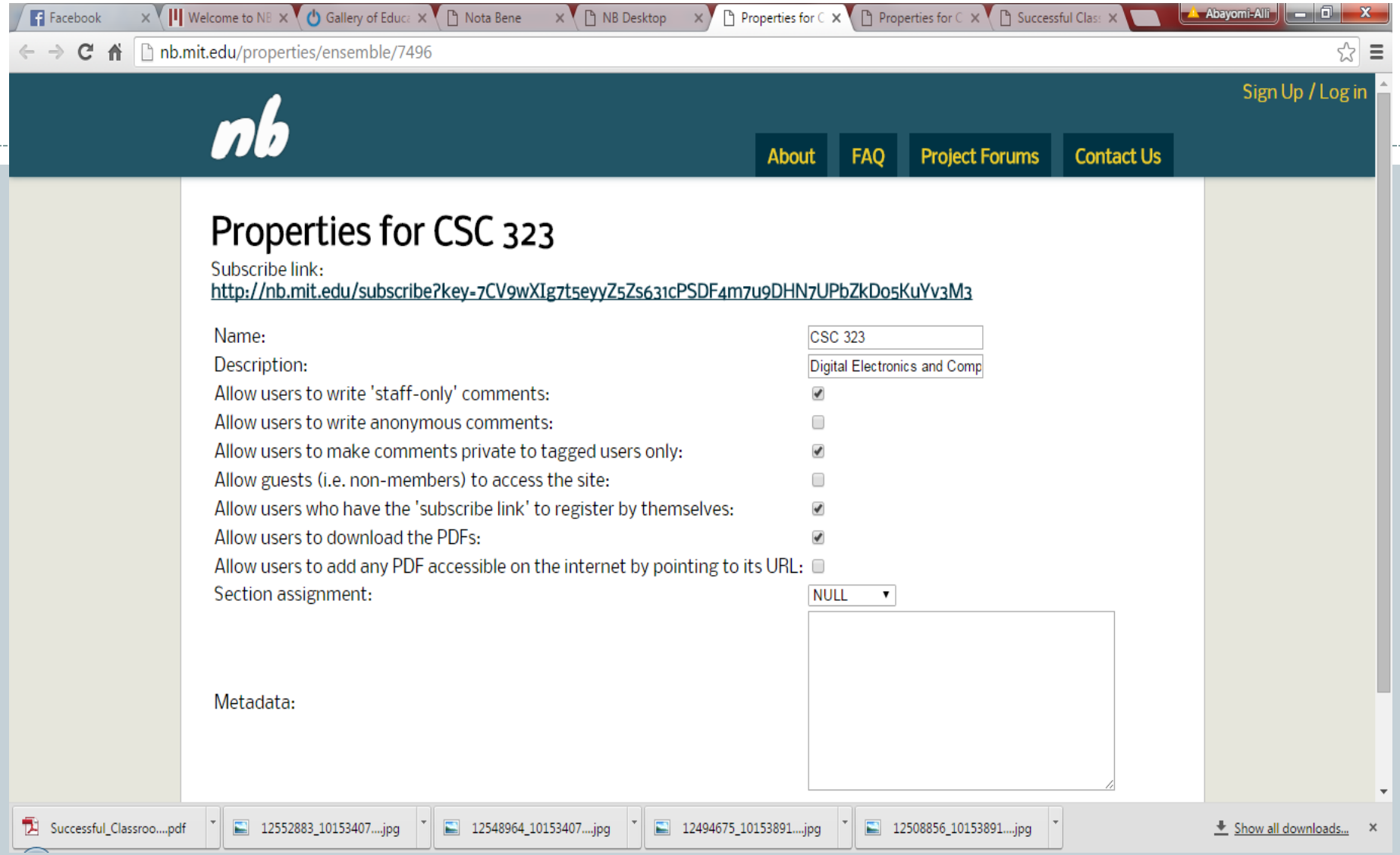


Figure 4: Viewing the class properties

Situated Annotations

- To add an annotation somewhere in the document;
- Users click and drag to select a region they want to comment on;
- This region is highlighted and an in-place annotation editor pops up (bottom of Figure 4).

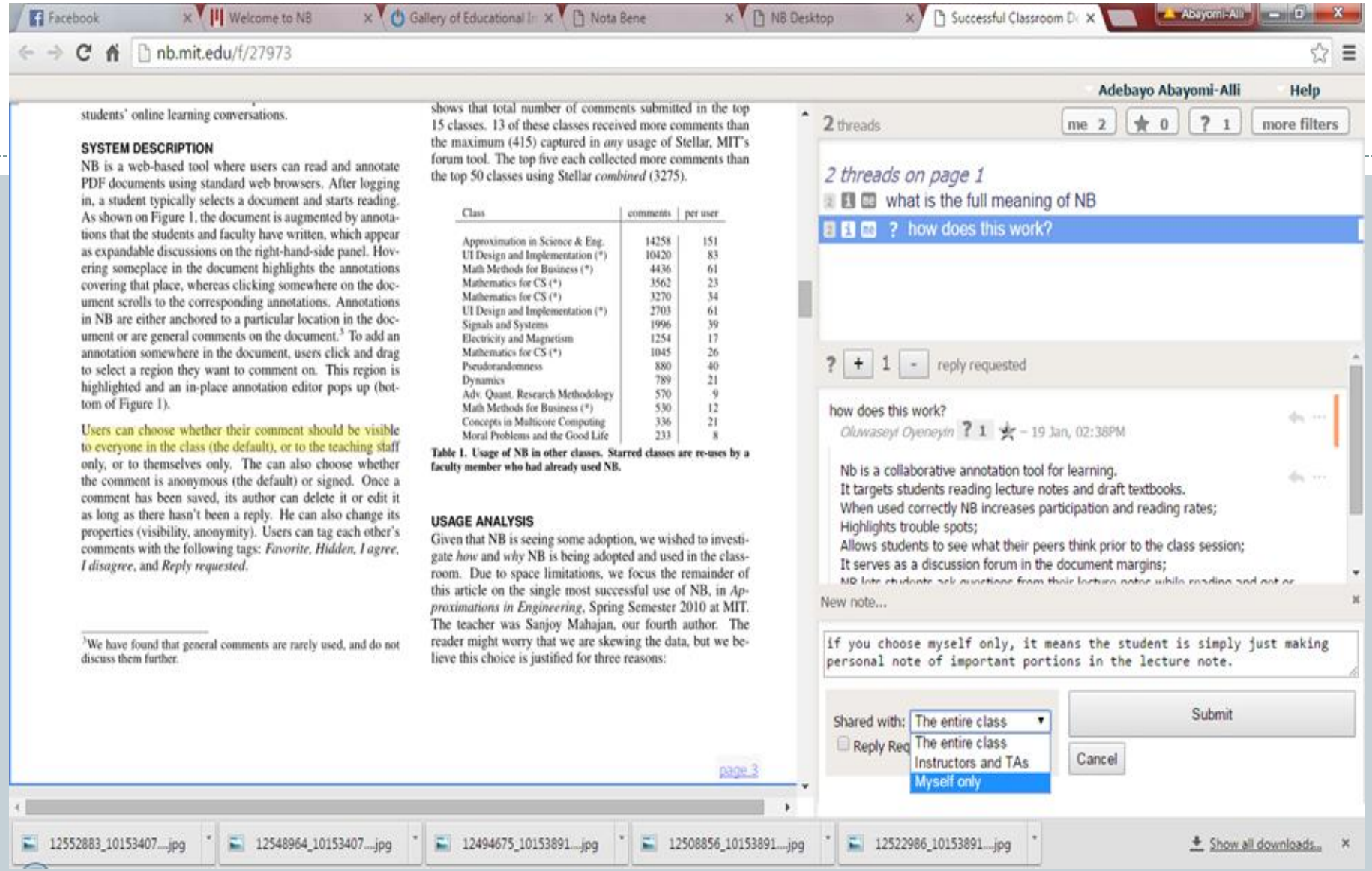


Figure 5: Annotating text in a PDF document

Situated Annotations (Cont'd)

If the student decides to make a note or ask a question:

- the result can be made public to the class;
- visible only to student and instructor;
- or private to the student alone.

- Annotations can even be set to appear anonymously to other registered students.

Situated Annotations (Cont'd)

- Once a comment has been saved, its author can delete it or edit it as long as there hasn't been a reply.
- You can also change the comment's properties (visibility, anonymity) (See Figure 5).
- Users can tag each other's comments with the following tags:

  Favorite, Hidden and Reply requested.

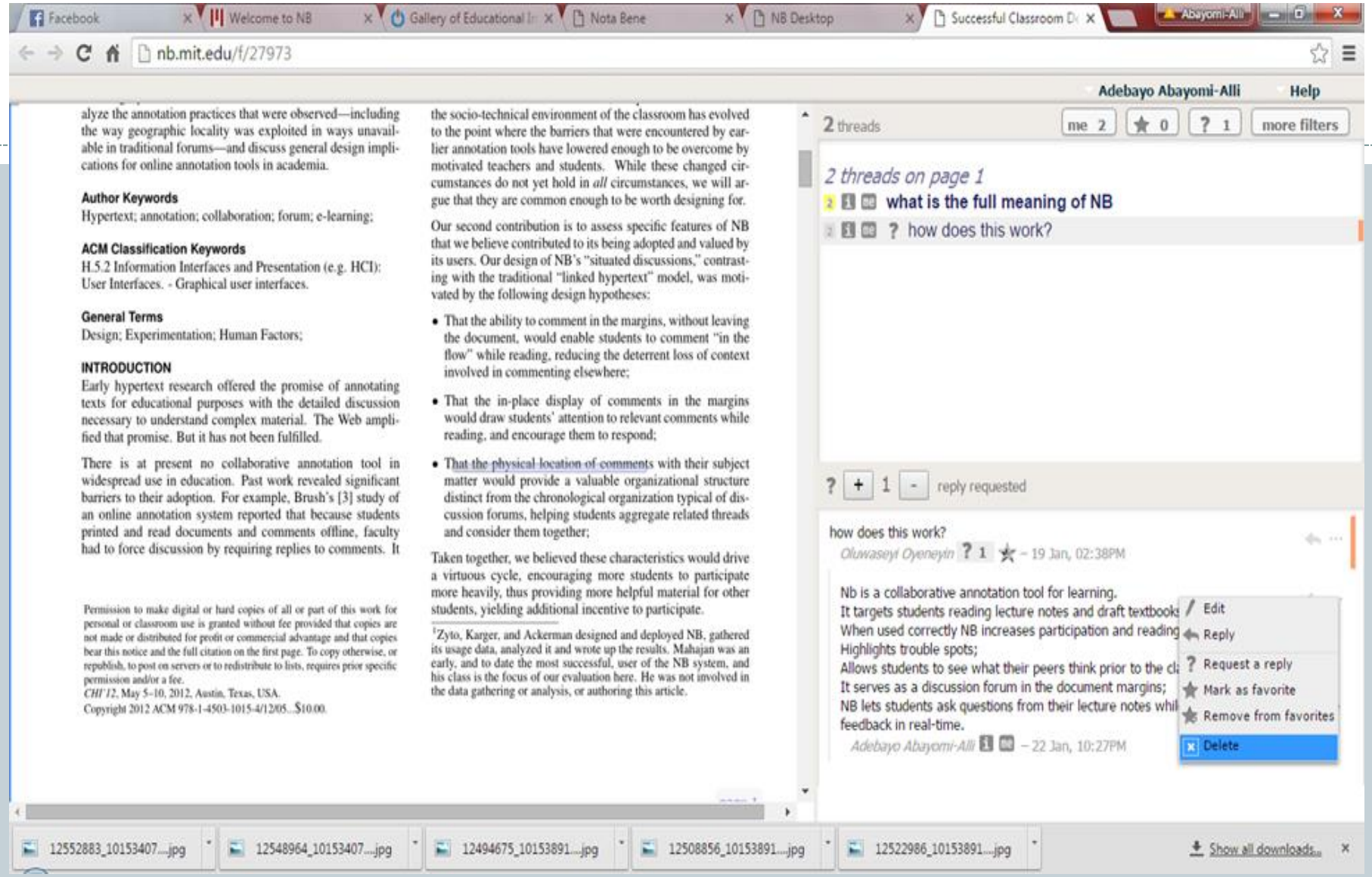


Figure 6: Changing the comment's properties

NB LOGIN

Q: How do I change my password?

- A: Once you are logged in;

  click on your name on the top-right of the screen;

  and select the menu "Settings".

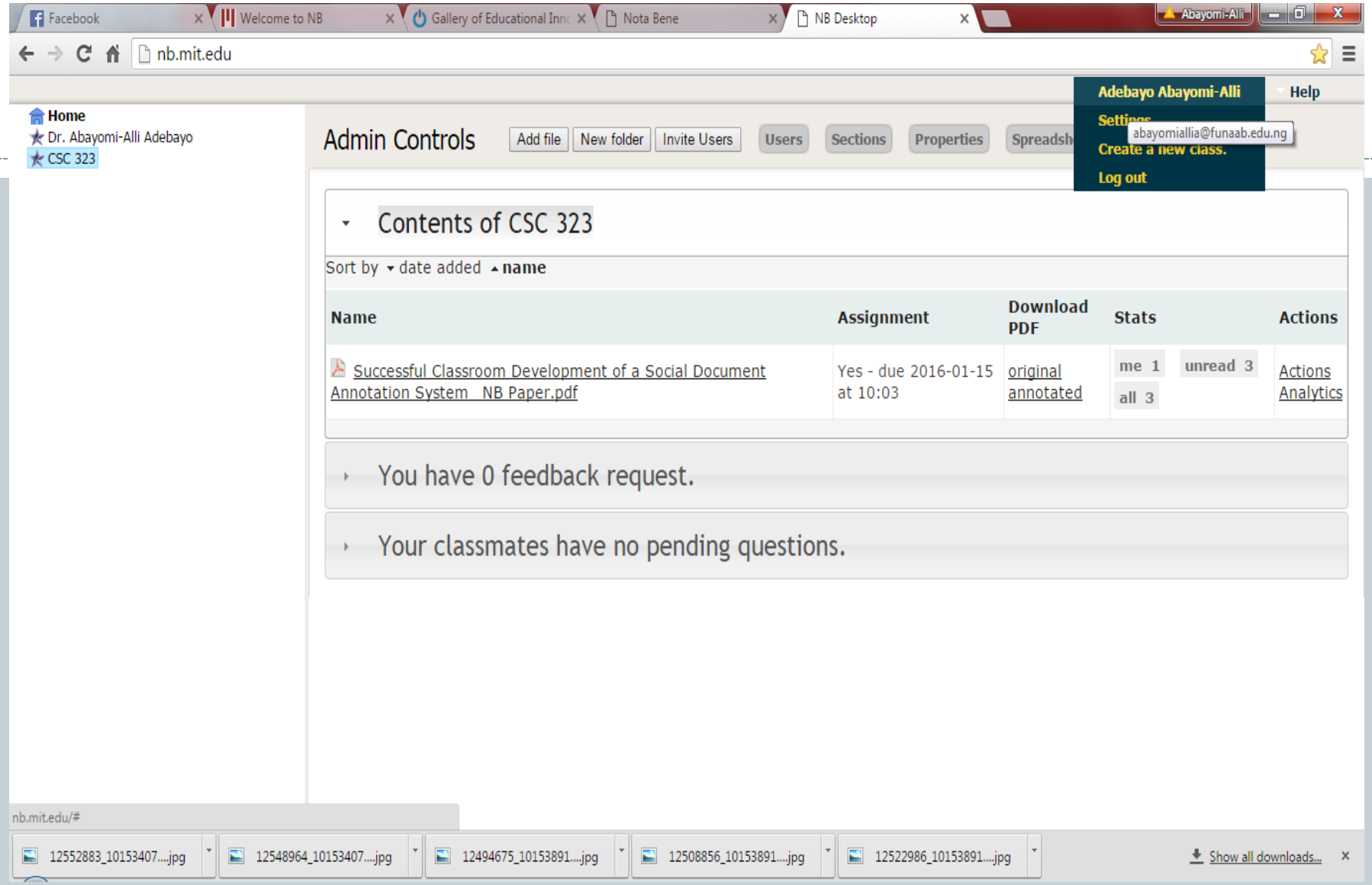


Figure 7: Settings and other menus

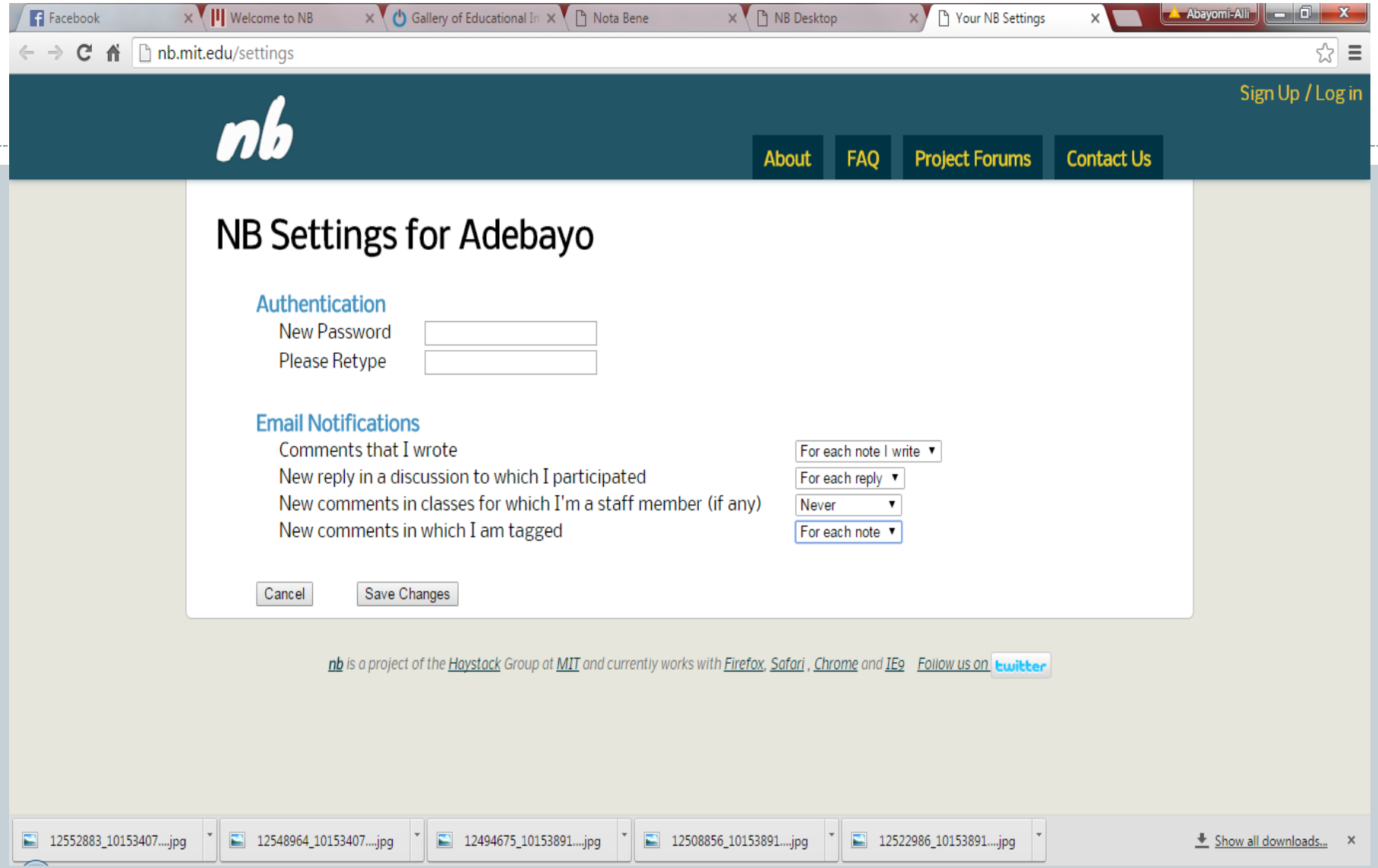


Figure 8: Authentication and Email notifications

NB Login (Cont'd)

Q: Is there a way to reset my password if I forgot it?

- A: You can ask for password reset instructions near the login box.

MEMBERSHIPS

Q: How do I give students access to contents from a class on NB?

- A: It depends on the class settings:
  - If the class is "by invitation only", then you need to send an invitation students using their email addresses.
  - If the class provides a "subscribe link", the student just need to enter that "subscribe link" on their browser and confirm that they want to be part of that class on NB.
  - If the class material is viewable by the whole world, then anyone can access your class contents by visiting the URL of the class (it looks like http://[SERVER_NAME]/f/[SOME_NUMBER],
- for example http://ocw.csail.mit.edu/f/1

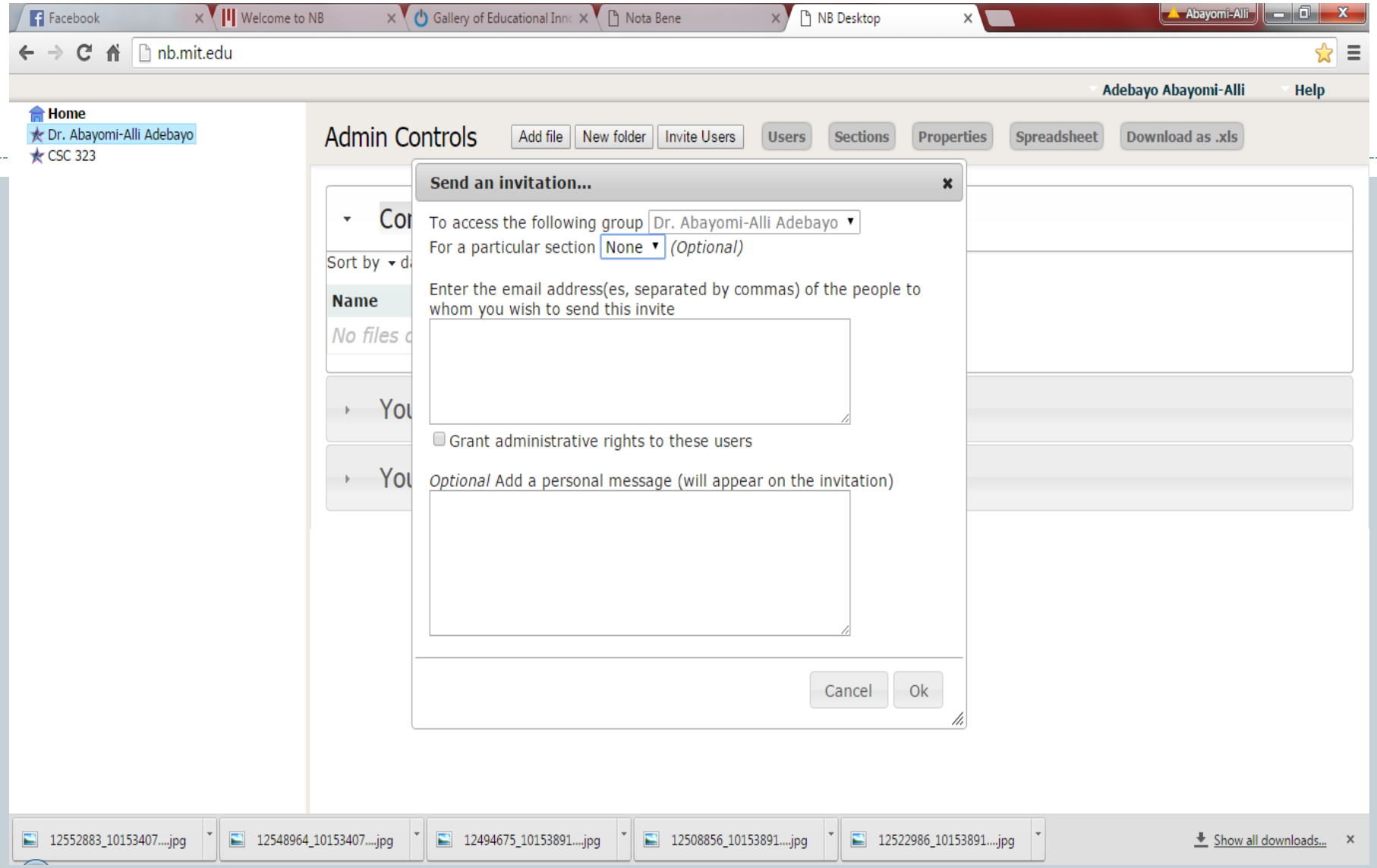


Figure 9: Send class invitations using student's emails

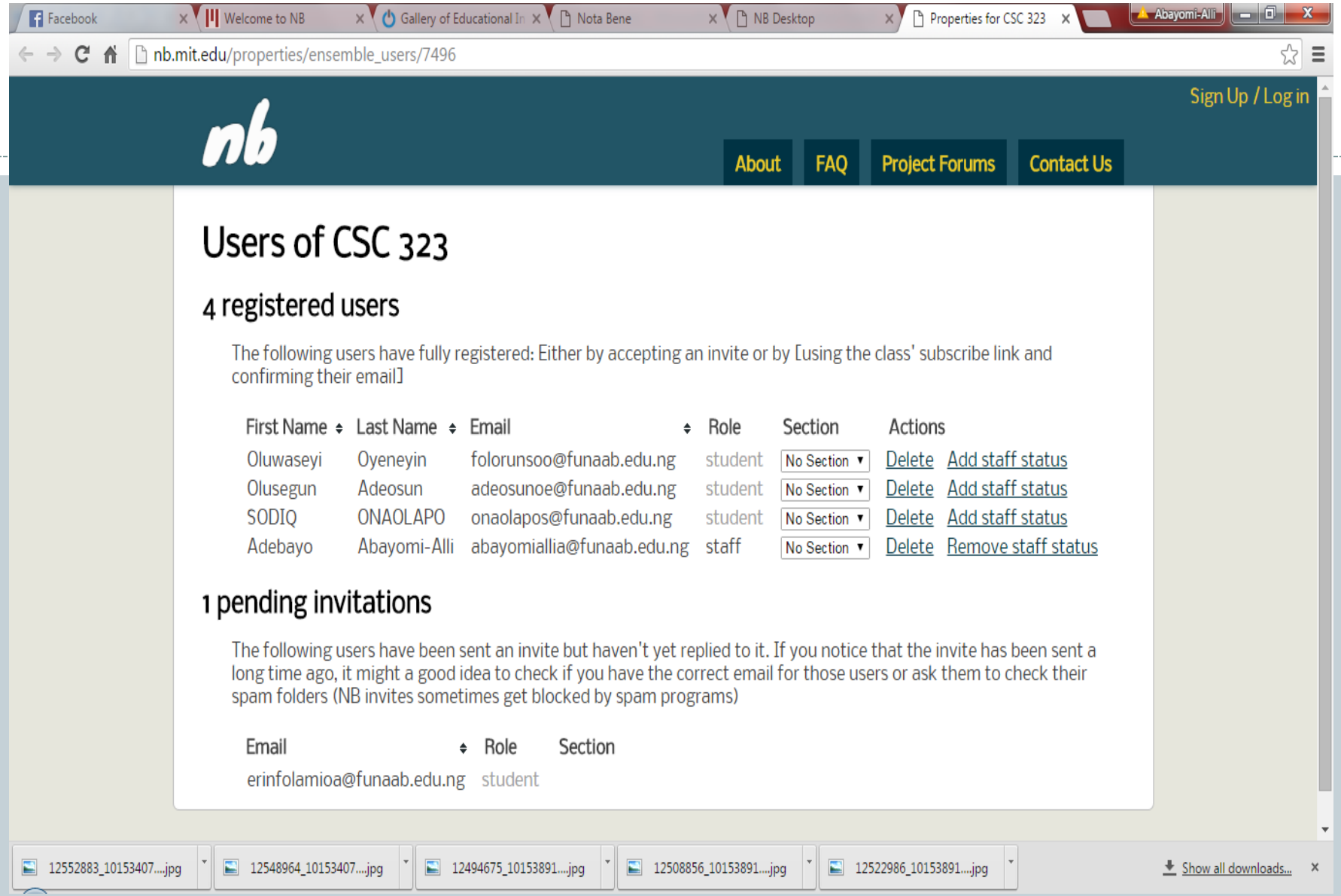


Figure 10: View the class registered users

MEMBERSHIPS (Cont'd)

Q: Can a student be removed from a class?

- A: Yes. Click on users, then delete the user.

Q: Can a student be given the staff access?

- A: Yes.

  Just change the student's status to staff.

MANAGING CLASSES AND FILES

Q: Can NB annotate anything besides PDFs?

- A: Yes, NB can also be used for annotating HTML documents and YouTube videos.
- Other file types may be printed to PDF using commands like Export to PDF or simply Print.

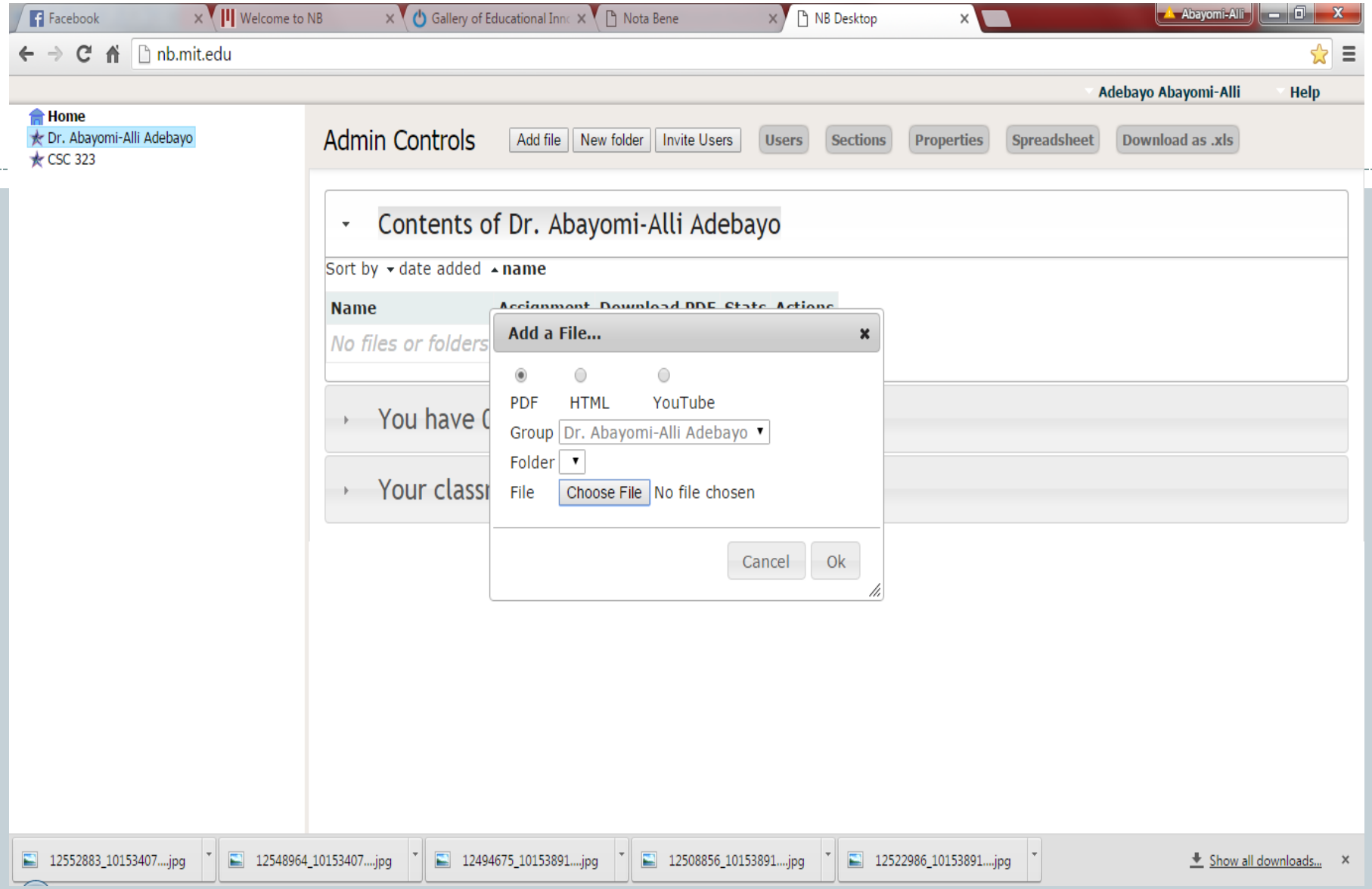


Figure 11: Adding PDF, HTML or Video file

MANAGING CLASSES AND FILES (Cont'd)

Q: How do I delete a file from the class list?

- A: Once you're logged in, right-click on that file's name and select "Delete".

Q: Can I remove comments from a file if they're not mine?

- A: Not currently.

Q: Can I give reading assignments to my students?

- A: Yes.

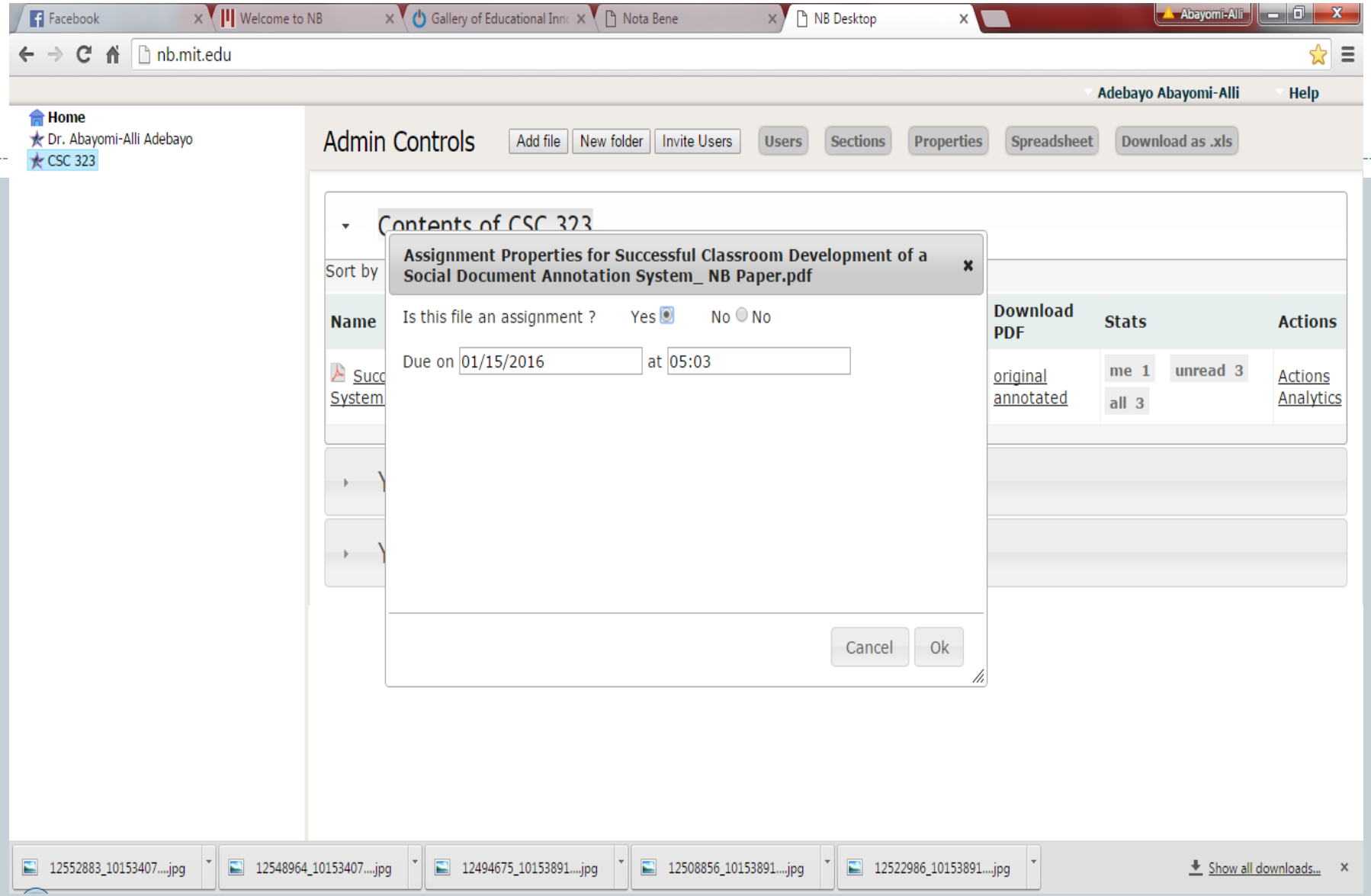


Figure 12: Setting up a reading assignment for students

MANAGING CLASSES AND FILES (Cont'd)

Q: Is it possible to download the annotated PDFs?

- A: It's possible to download the annotated PDF if you have admin rights to the NB class that contains that PDF.

Q: Is it possible to filter the threads and get statistics or information about threads and discussions?

- A: Yes it is possible. Click on more filters.

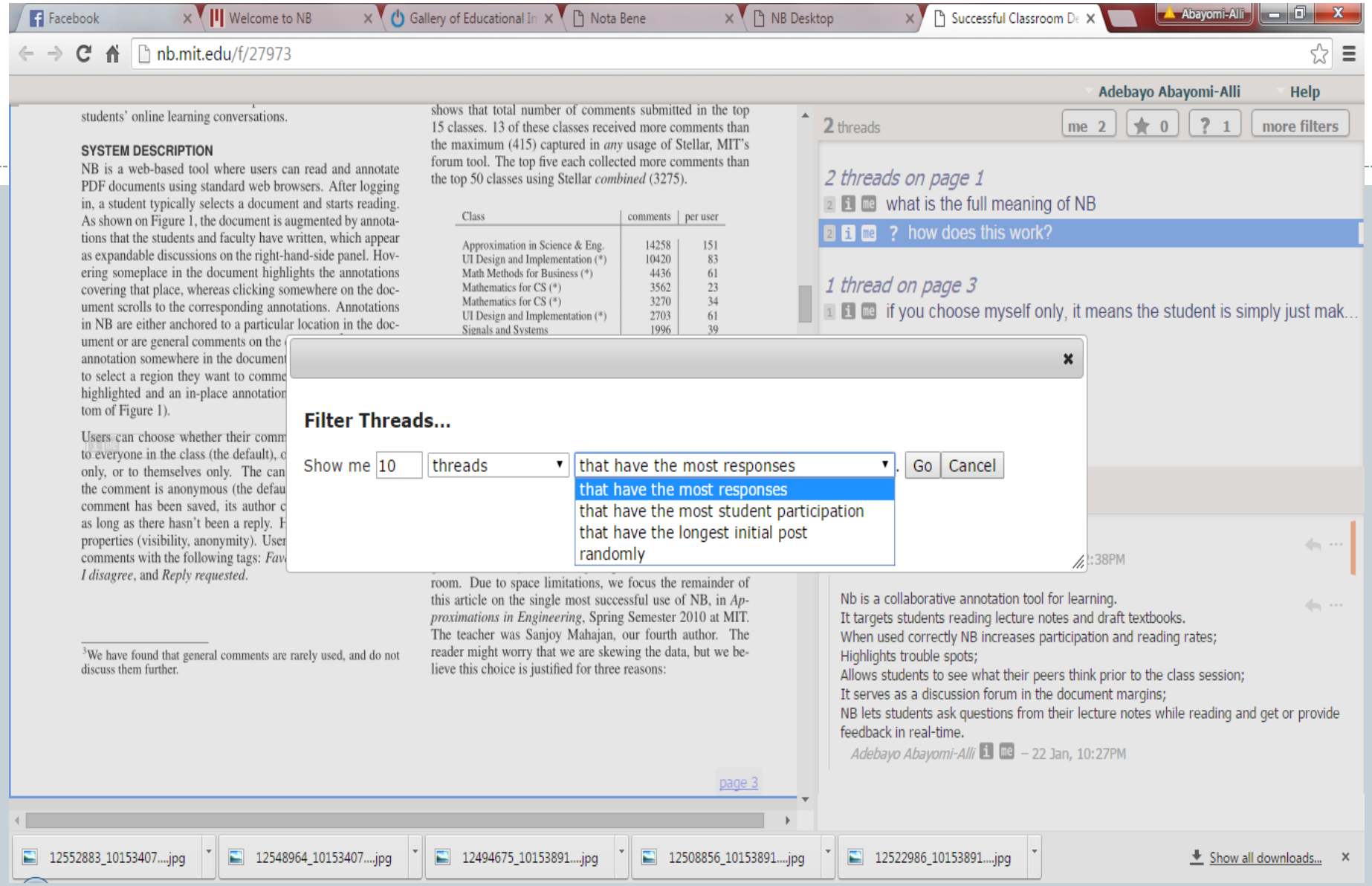


Figure 13: Filter threads for more information

TROUBLESHOOTING

Q: How can I get help with an NB-related question?

- A:
  - First, check if your question on FAQ section on NB site.
  - Not there? Visit NB forum at http://nbproject.vanillaforums.com/categories/users
  - As a last resort, you can contact NB: team@csail.mit.edu (note: you will likely get a much faster response if you use the NB forum).

TROUBLESHOOTING (Cont'd)

Q: Nothing shows up on the main screen and none of the links work?

- A: Are you a compatible browser? Currently NB works with the following browsers:
  - Firefox
  - Safari
  - Chrome
  - Internet Explorer 9 or more recent. If you're using NB on any of these browser and NB still doesn't work, please visit the NB forum.

TROUBLESHOOTING (Cont'd)

Q: Is my information secure? What gets stored where? What about privacy?

- A:
  - NB stores your annotations on an SQL database located on campus.
  - There are 3 visibility settings for your notes:
    - The Entire Class, meaning that both students and staff can see the notes.
    - Staff only, meaning those notes can be seen by the staff. Note that some NB sites might not allow Staff only notes.
    - Myself only notes are private: Staff and other students can't see them

TROUBLESHOOTING (Cont'd)

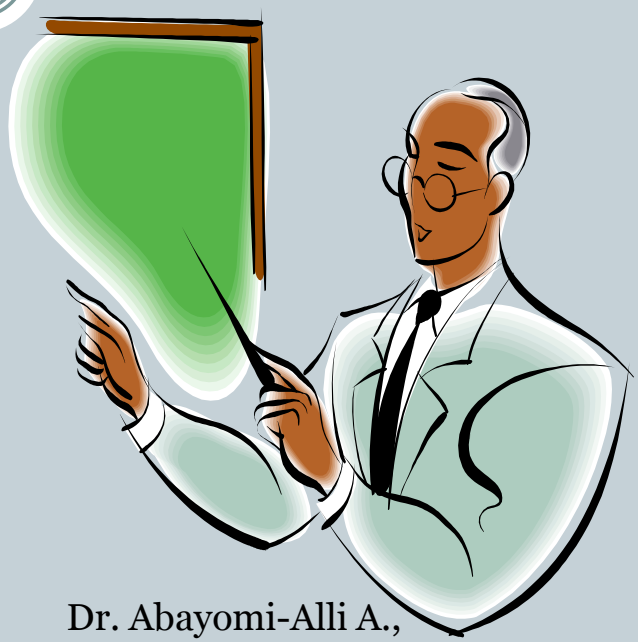
Q: Can I use NB for my research in online educational tools?

- A: Yes. NB was initially developed for research purposes, and was made open-source under a MIT license so that it can be used and modified in order not to have to reinvent the wheel if you need to deploy an annotation tool.

A paper about how students and faculty used NB was been published at CHI 2012:

http://groups.csail.mit.edu/haystack/documents/papers/2012/nb_chi2012.pdf

Thanks for Listening



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