

First Steps: Gamifying Your Blackboard Learn Course

Innovative Educator Webinar Series

Friday, 13 March 2026

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What? Agenda

Introductions

① What is Gamification?

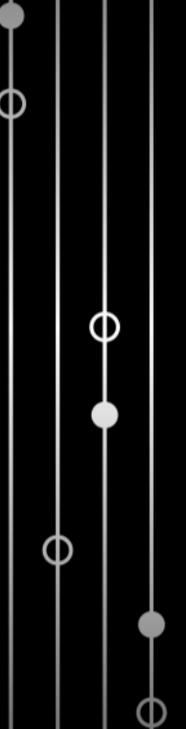
- Not a silver bullet

② My Three First Steps

- Journey / Milestones
- Rewards / Competition
- Second Chance

③ What is Next?

- After the first step
- What do you think?



Who? Presenter



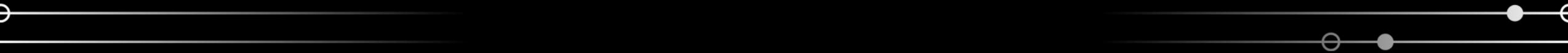
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Cautionary Statement

This session does **not** present a scientific research.

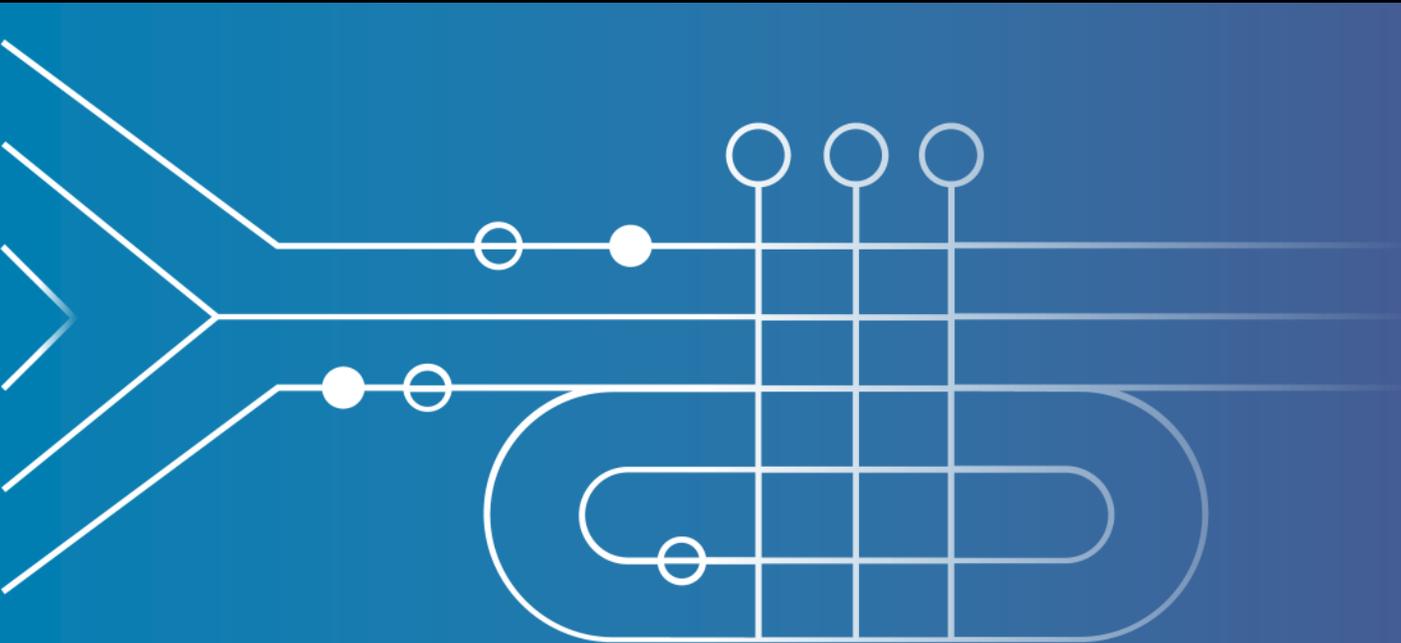
It presents the author's personal experience, with a humble hope that it may somehow be helpful to fellow educators.

The author is equally interested in learning from the session participants.



①

What is Gamification?





Οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἀγγεῖον, ὁ νοῦς
ἀποπληρώσεως, ἀλλ'
ὑπεκκαύματος μόνον,
ὥσπερ ὕλη, δεῖται

The mind is not a vessel
that needs filling, but
wood that needs igniting.



**Gamified
educational
approaches have
a noticeable
motivational
power since they
inspire students
by providing fun
experience.**

Educational games: Game-based learning

- In 2022-23, a supervised senior design project titled *Gamification 2.0: Integrating Unity 3D Game Engine and Anthology Blackboard Learning Management System*.
- Students presented a case study, which explored practicalities of developing an importable Unity package that enables developers to **connect their games with Blackboard** Learn seamlessly.



- The work also revealed **limitations and drawbacks** of the Blackboard Learn APIs.

Gamification: definition

- **Gamification** is
 - the use of game design elements
 - in non-game contexts...
 - to motivate desired behaviors (Sebastian Deterding)
 - **Game** is a series of interesting and meaningful choices made by the player in pursuit of a clear and compelling goal (Sid Meier).
 - a **play artifact**
-
- Play is (five criteria by Gordon Burghardt)
 - **repeated** behavior that is
 - **incompletely** functional in the **context** or at the age in which it is performed and
 - is initiated **voluntarily**
 - when the animal or person is in a relaxed or **low-stress** setting

Game: design models

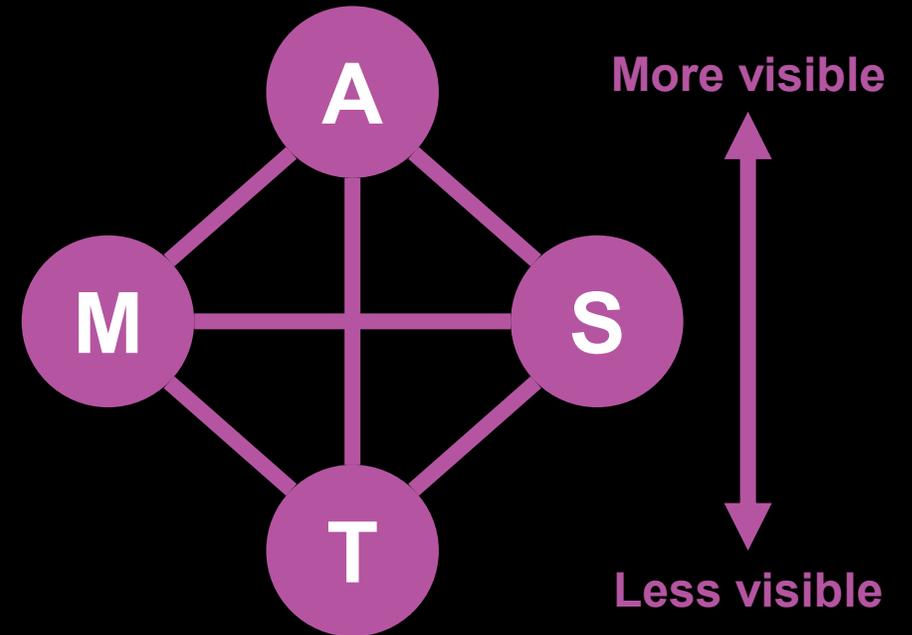
- **MDA model** (Mark LeBlanc)

- Mechanics
- Dynamics
- Aesthetics



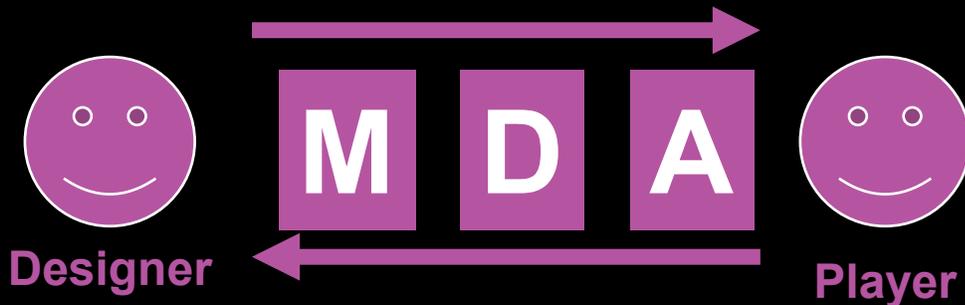
- **Elemental Tetrad** (Jesse Schell)

- Aesthetics – Mechanics
- Story – Technology



Gamification: definition

- Gamification is
 - **not** a silver bullet
 - works best with introductory courses



- Game design **elements** (different levels)
 - interface design patterns e.g. badge, leaderboard, level
 - design patterns and mechanics e.g. time constraint, limited resources, turns
 - design principles and heuristics e.g. enduring play, clear goals, variety of game styles

Gamification: research

- **Sebastian Deterding**
 - Professor, Chair of Design Engineering at Imperial College London
- **Szymon Machajewski**
 - Professor, Director of Digital Learning at University of Illinois Chicago, Anthology Education and Research Center Research Fellow



How do Students Behave in a Gamified Course? - A Ten-Year Study (University of Lisbon)

- Game elements used
 - leaderboard, achievements, experience points (XP), levels
- Four different **student clusters**
 - Achievers – Regular (Late Awakeners) – Disheartened – Underachievers

②

My Three First Steps





千里之行，始於足下

A journey of a
thousand miles
begins with a single
step.



**Gamifying your
course, turning
it into an
engaging
learning
experience for
your students is
a long creative
process.**

My three First Steps of gamification

Journey / Milestones

- Weekly learning outcomes
- Weekly folders
 - learning materials
 - participation activities
 - self-check test
- Adaptive release of the next week folder

Rewards / Competition

- Students progress through the course
 - by earning badges and ‘unlocking’ weekly materials
- Badges for course activities
- Earning also ‘real’ vs. virtual rewards

Second Chance

- Course assignments include bonuses
 - help Late Awakeners
- Number of participation activities
 - graded discussions forum posts
 - check-and-go tests

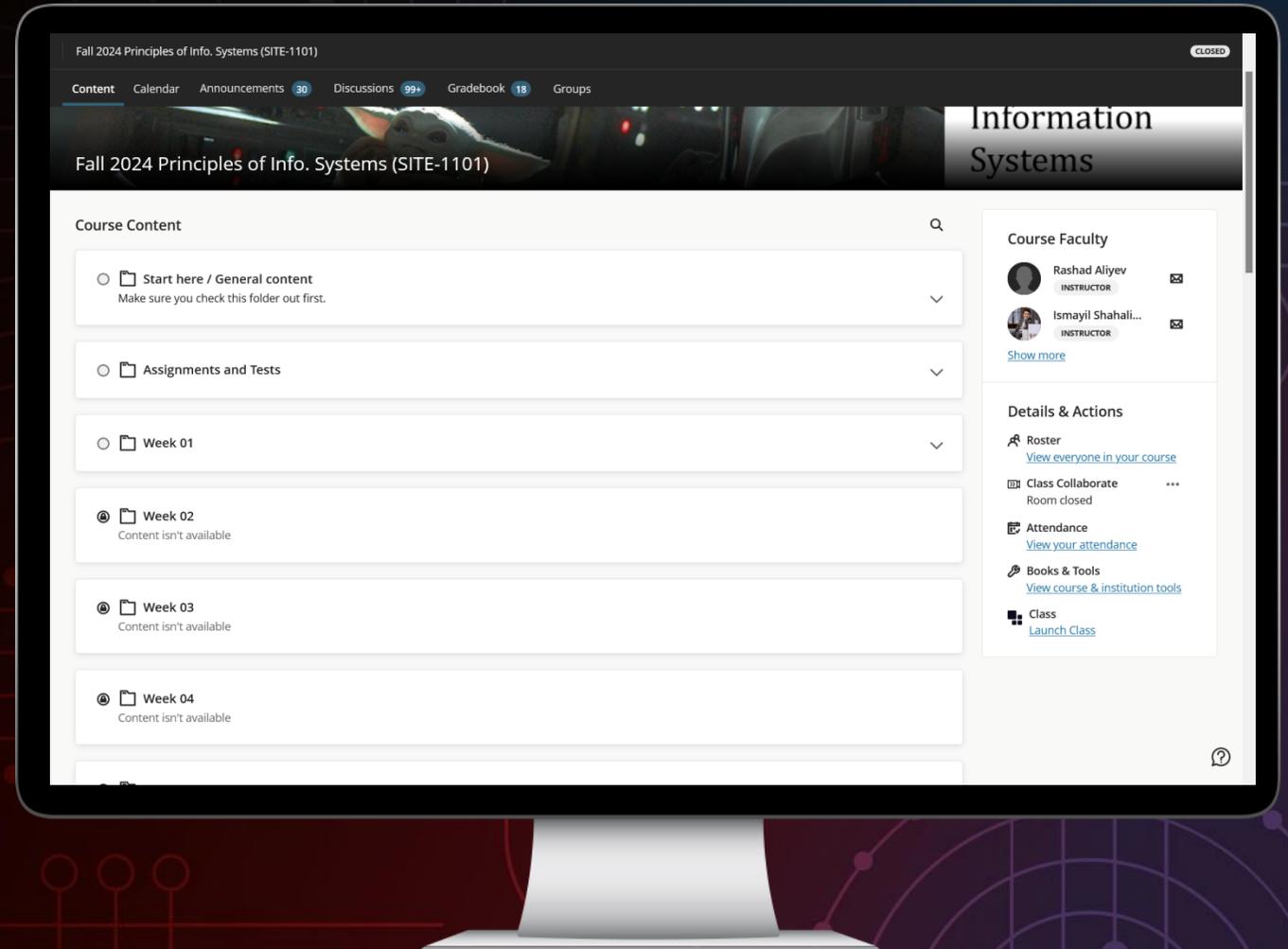
Journey / Milestones

–The journey of the hero is about... the eternal cycle of change within us...

- Hero's Journey

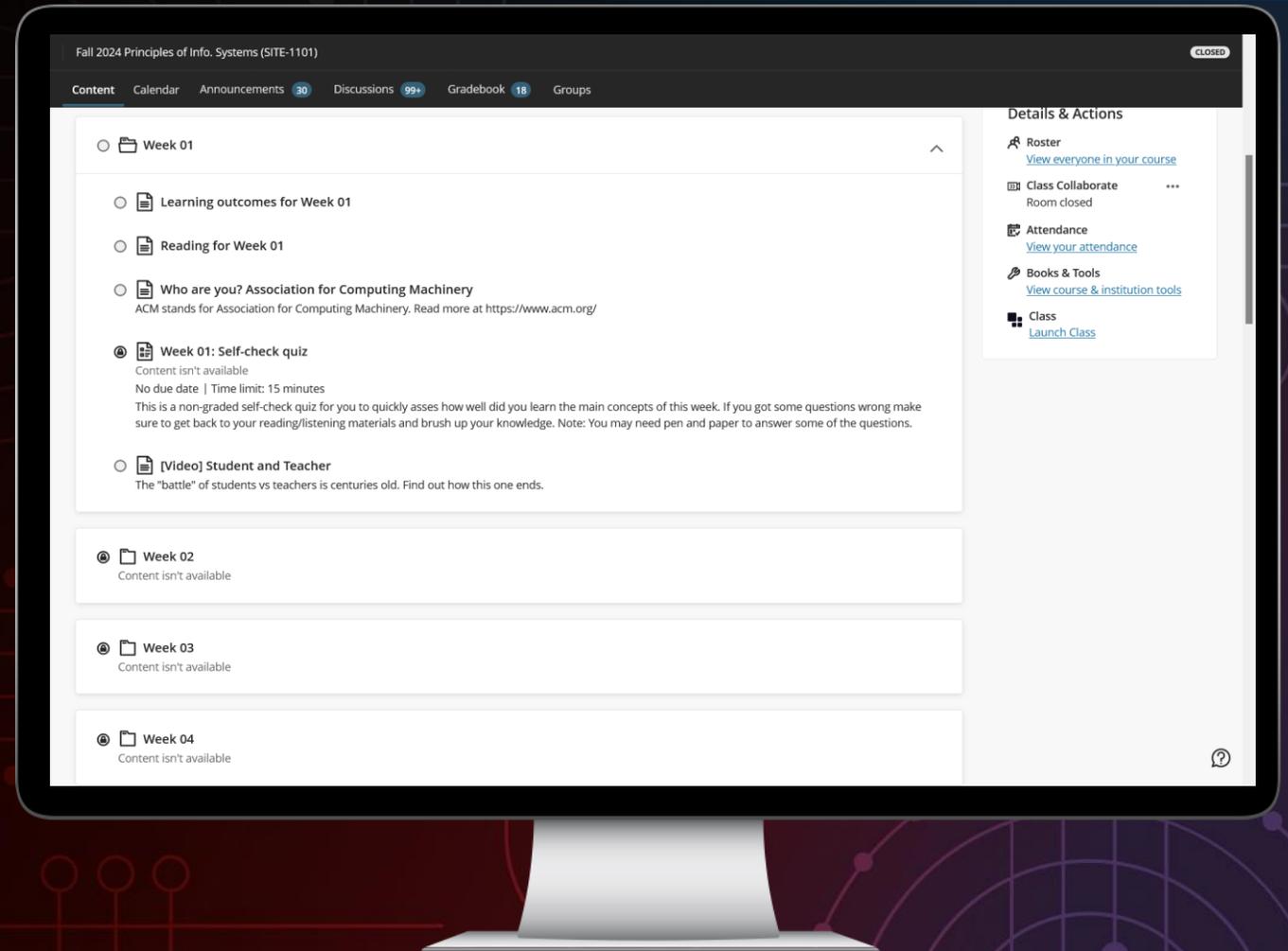
- a path with milestones e.g. weekly learning outcomes, weekly **content folders/modules**

- in line with the Blackboard Exemplary Course Rubric (ECR) 1.4. *Content is made available or "chunked" in manageable segments*



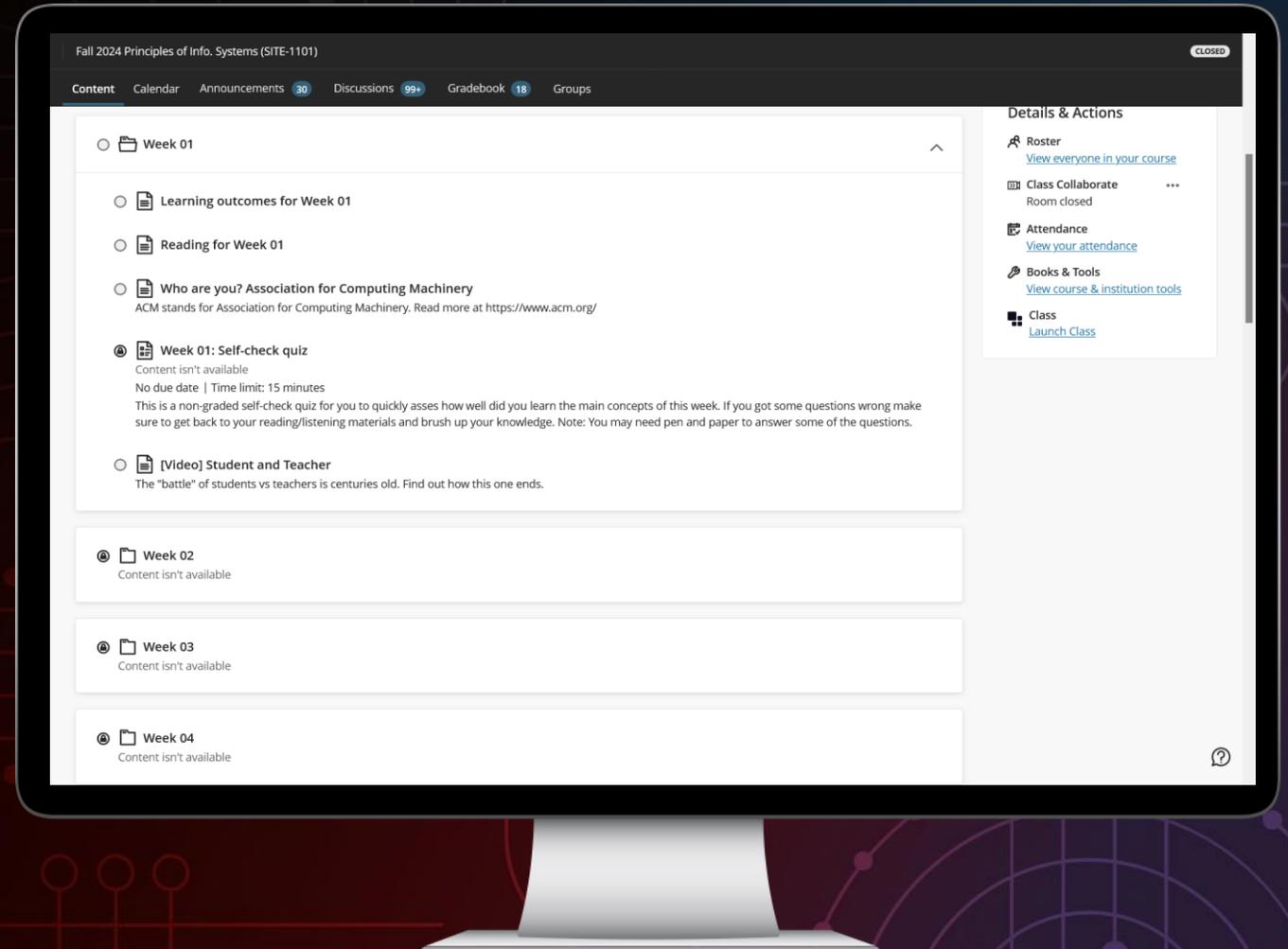
Journey

- Weekly folders/modules
 - list of learning outcomes (specific, verifiable)
 - linked short (not longer than 15 minutes) explanatory videos
 - reading materials
 - non-graded **self-check test** (after the class sessions) with limited number of attempts



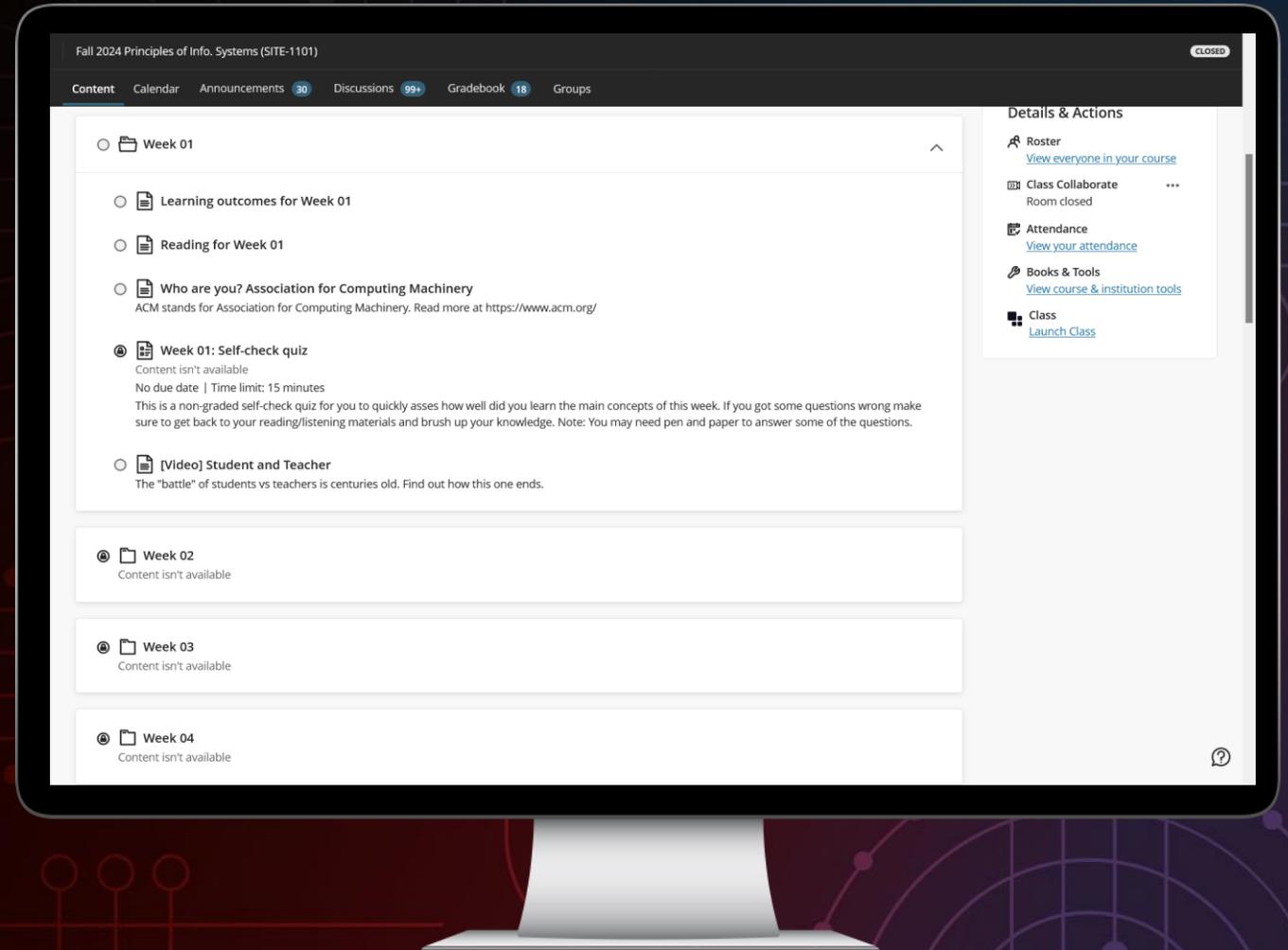
Journey

- Non-graded weekly self-check tests
 - in line with the ECR rubric 3.5 *Assessment activities occur frequently throughout the duration of the course*
- **Adaptive release** of the next week folder
 - if a student scores more than 50% in the self-check quiz of the previous week



Journey

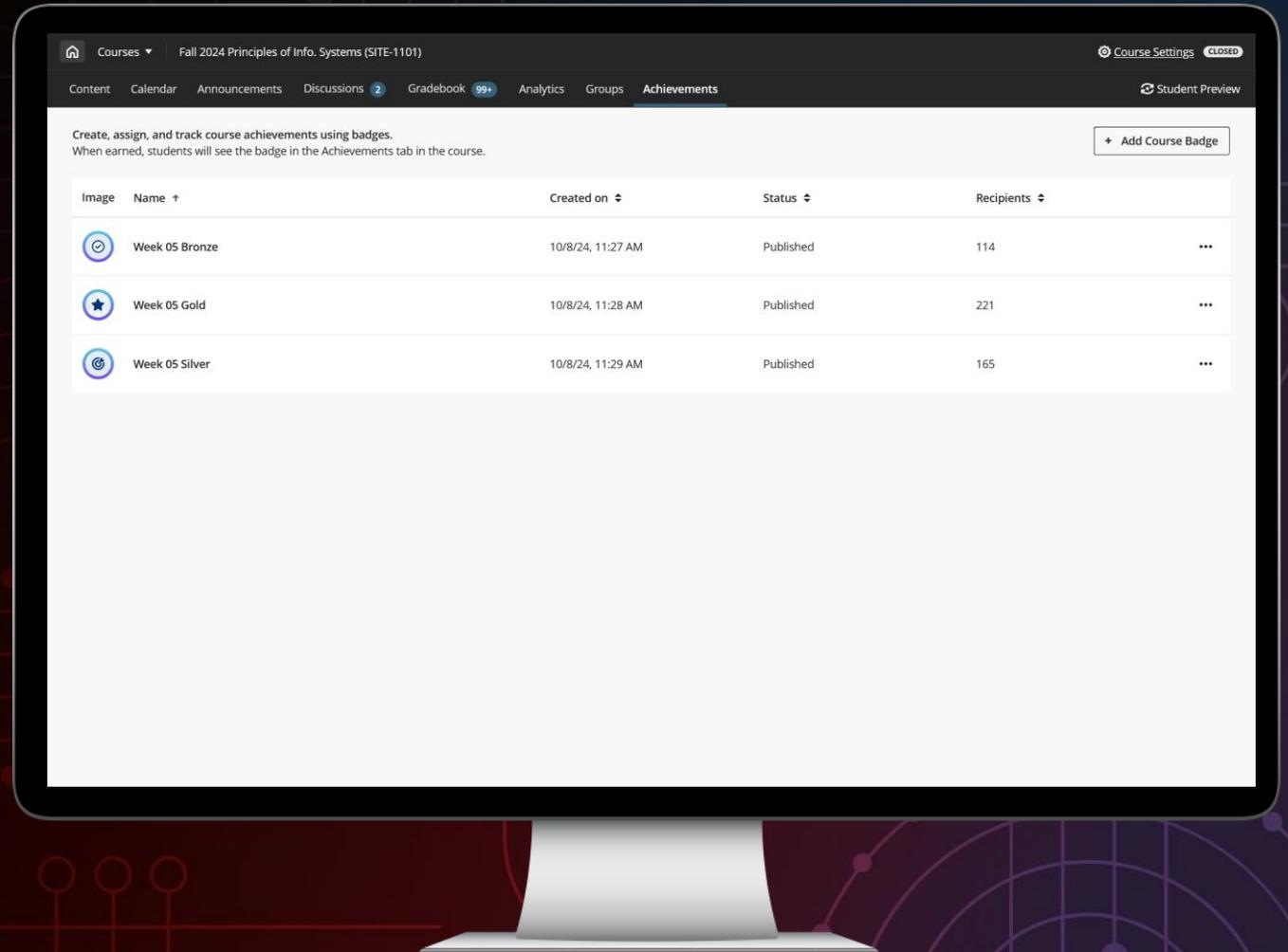
- Students progress through the course...
 - by earning **achievement badges** (medals) for self-check test results and ‘unlocking’ weekly learning materials



Rewards / Competition

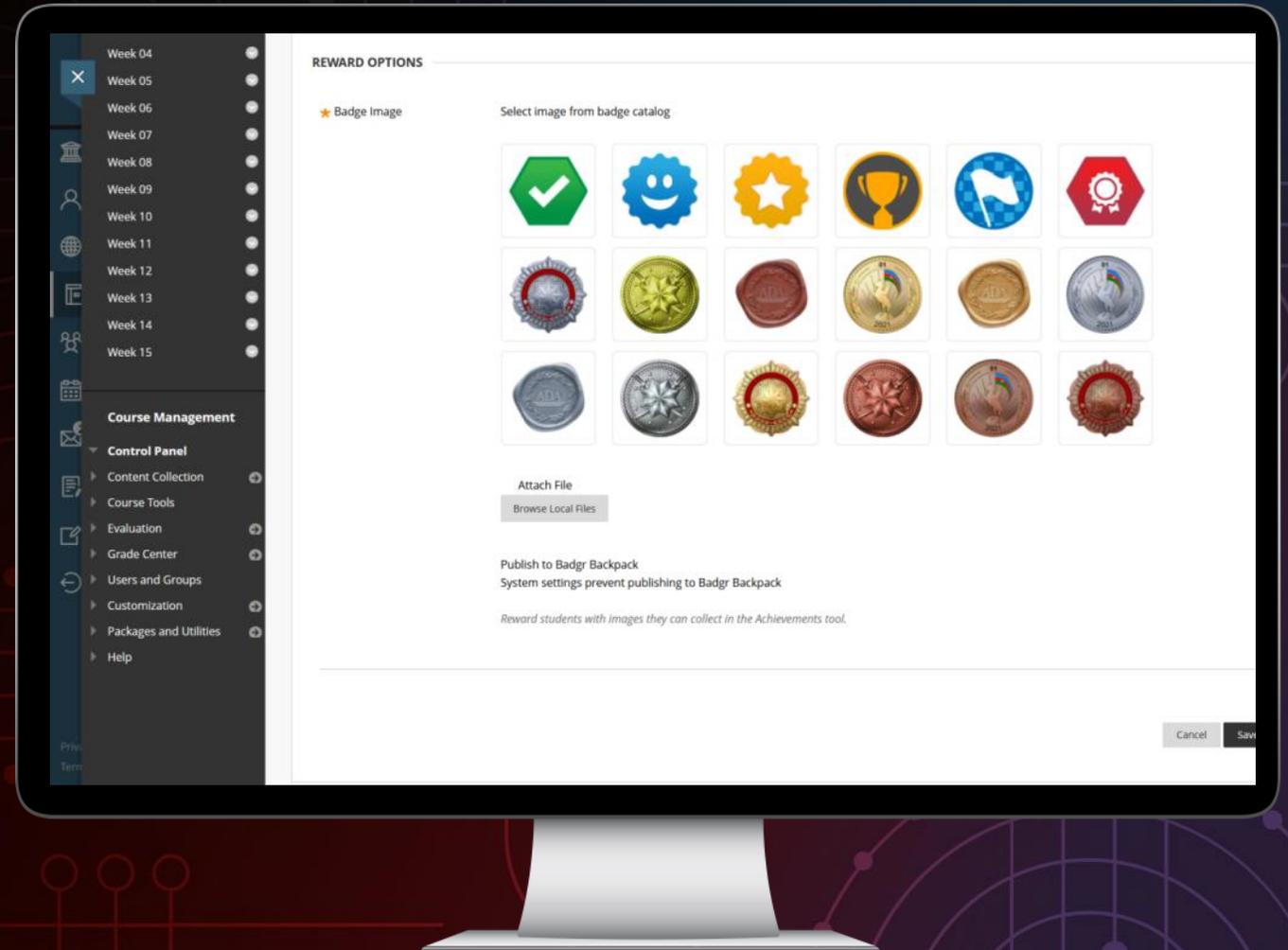
– *It's amazing how a competitive nature can turn a negative into something positive.*

- Earning **achievement badges** (medals) for course activities
 - bronze, silver or gold medal badge for the weekly self-check test
 - novice, contributor or expert badge for discussion forum posts



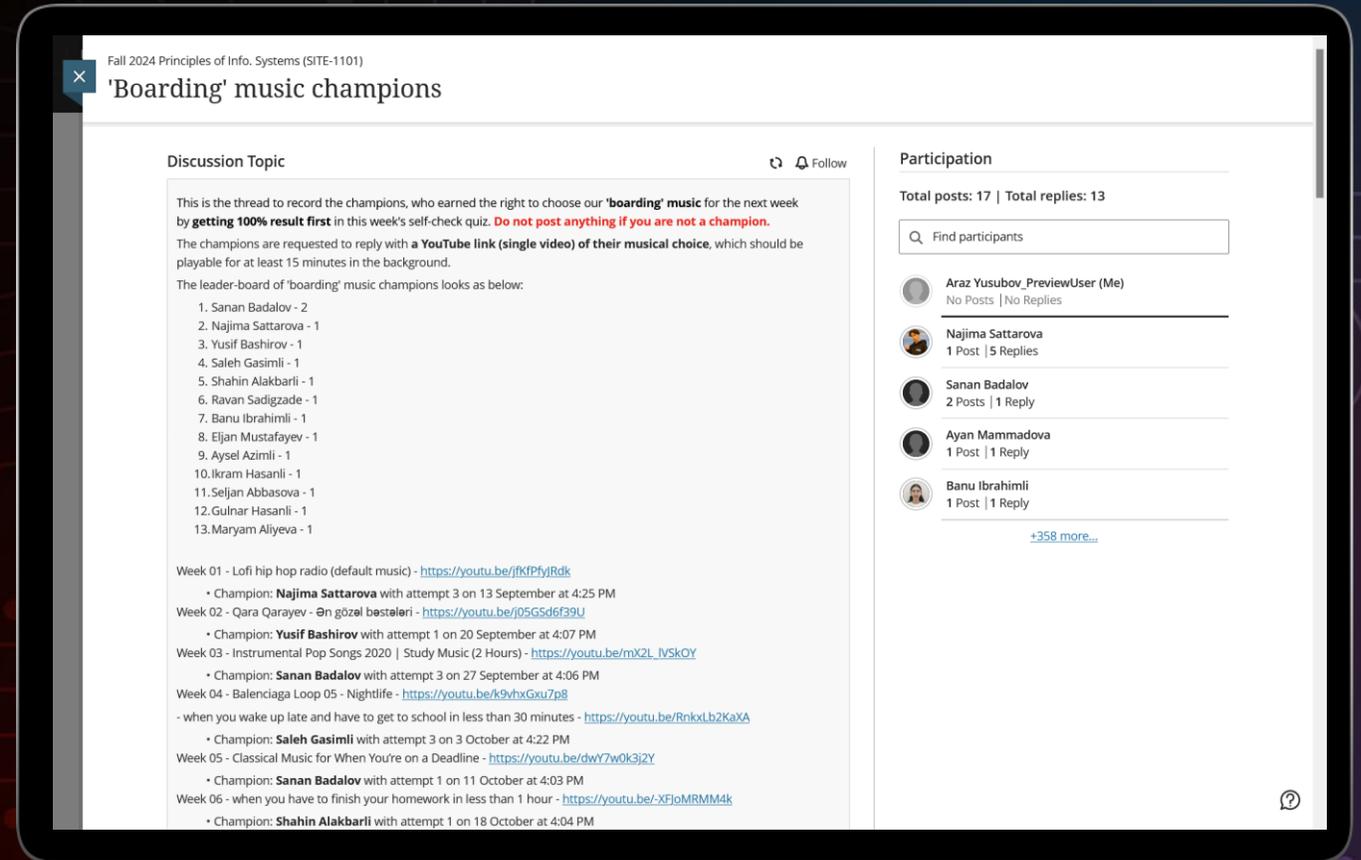
Rewards

- Achievement tool does **not** have a leaderboard feature
 - standard Roster tool is not a leaderboard
 - an alternative tool i.e. Gamegogy Leaderboard was explored
 - these are built on now retired Building Blocks



Rewards

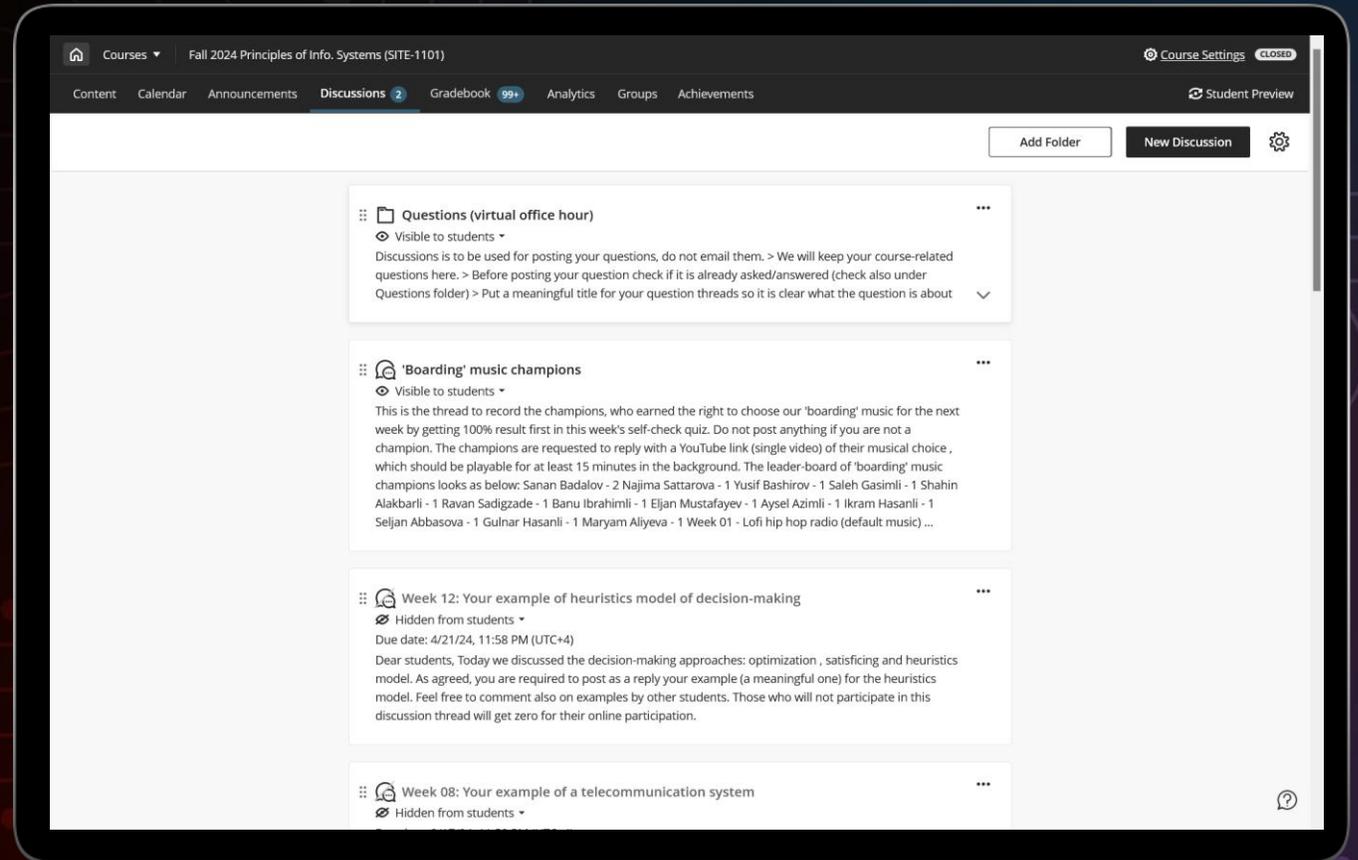
- Earning also ‘real’ vs. virtual rewards
 - the student who gets 100% for a self-check test first is to select the ‘boarding music’ for the next week class sessions
 - absolute champion(s) get some gifts at the end of the semester



Second Chance

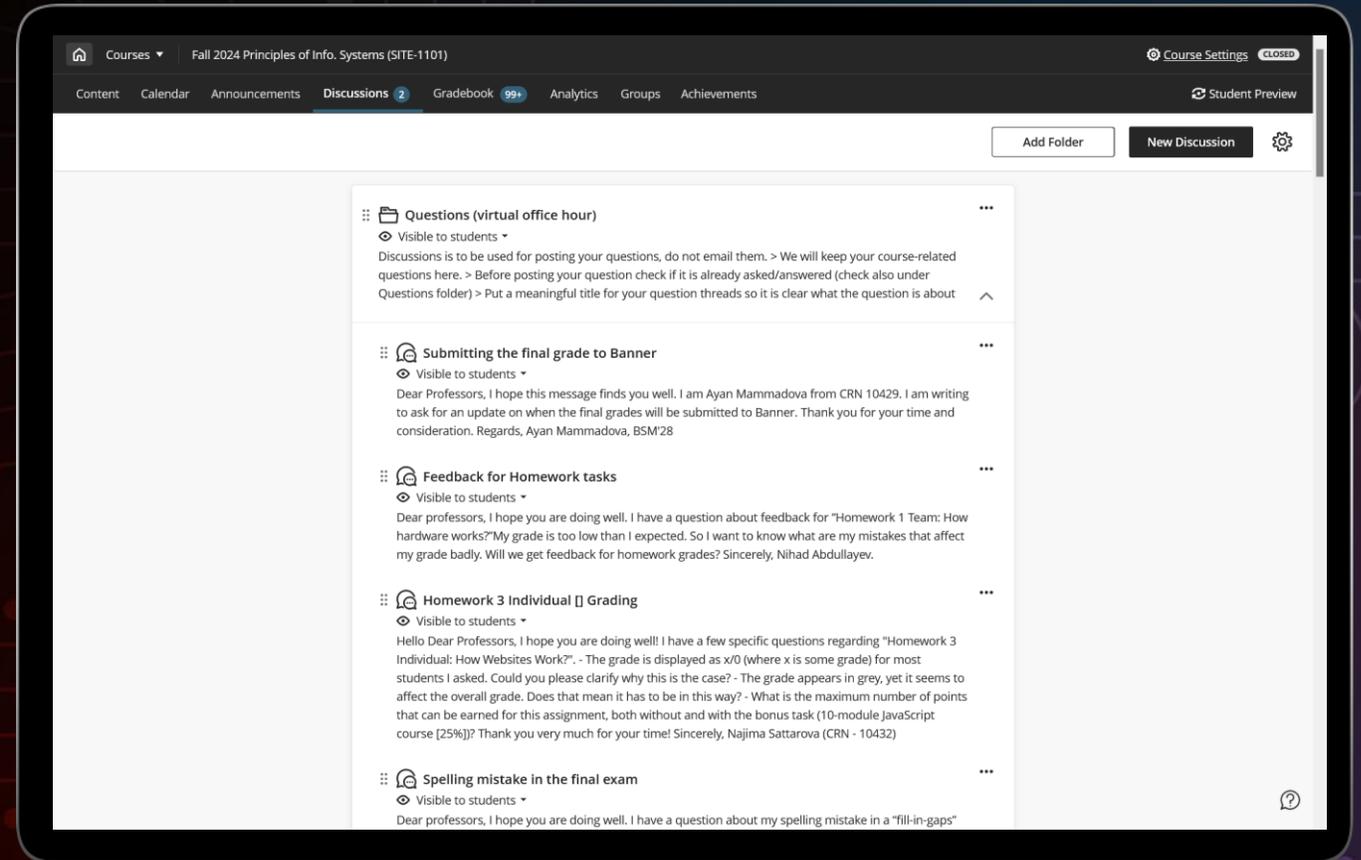
– *The freedom to fail is vital if you're going to succeed*

- Course assignments include **bonuses**
 - help Late Awakeners to make up the points lost in ‘waking-up’ period
 - e.g. a total of 14% grade in four assignments



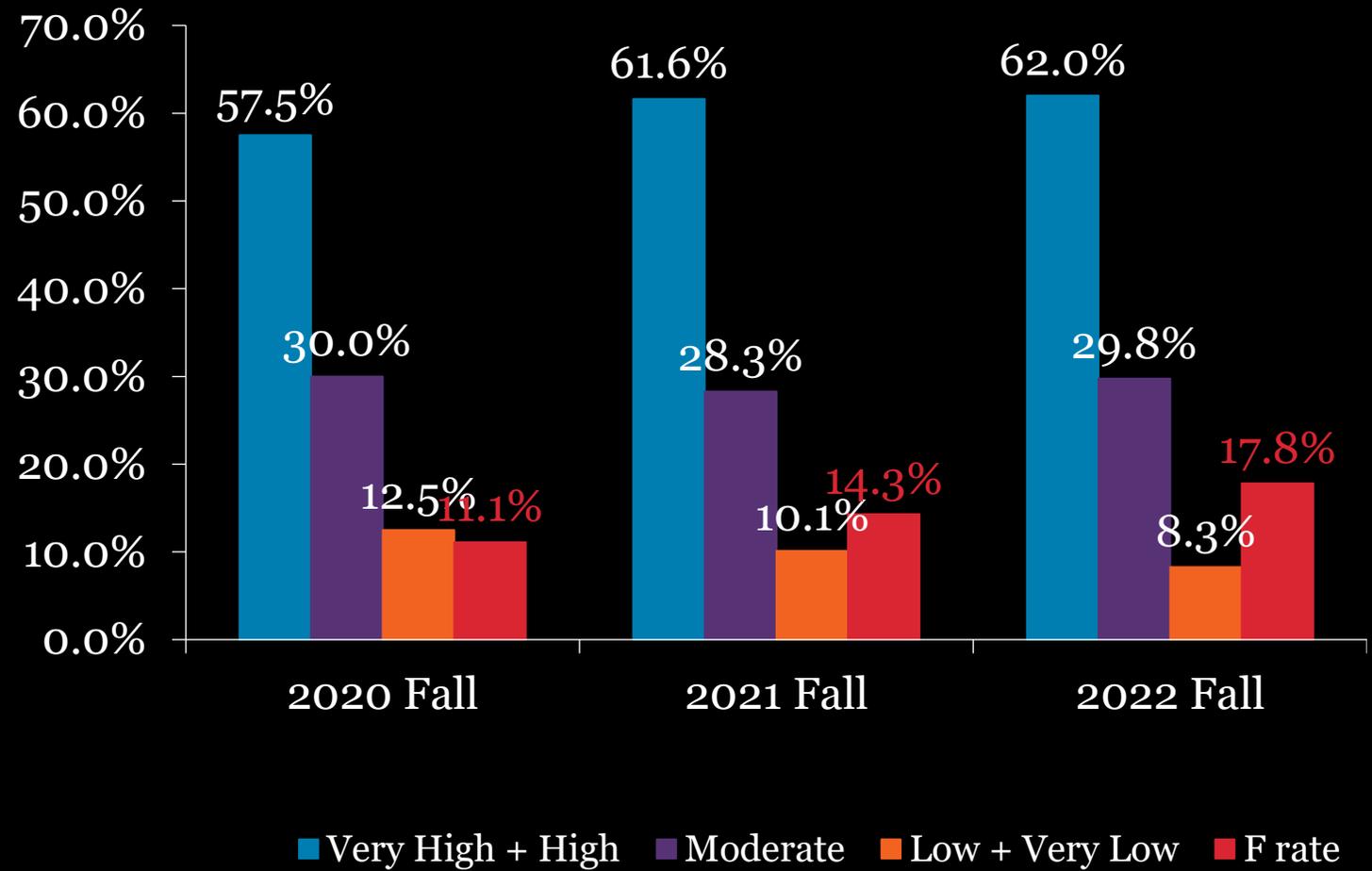
Second Chance

- Number of participation activities
 - graded posts in Questions and Course Discussions forums
 - “Who are you?” and “Picture of the Day” tests



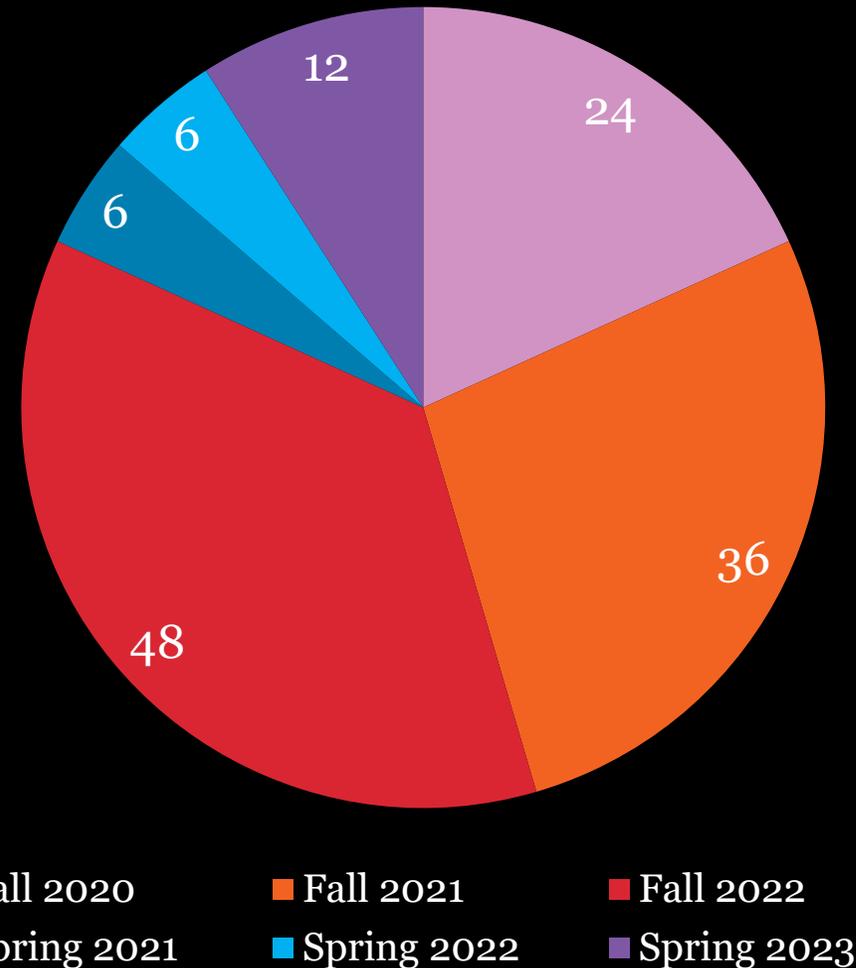
Does it work?

- We do **not** know
 - It does not, if we look at F rate
 - No comparative data
 - Many varying factors e.g. total number of students, number of sections
 - What do answers to “Overall, my level of satisfaction with this course is...” tell us?



Does it work?

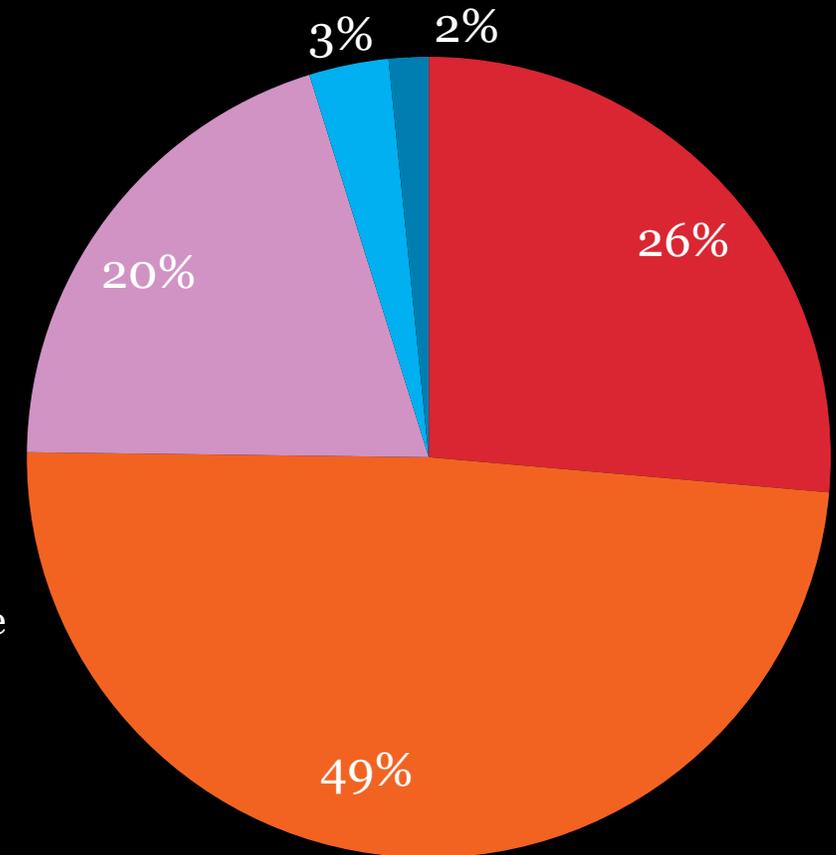
- What do we **know** then?
 - Posted a survey on 18 July
 - Up to **125** responses by 1 October
 - Six students took the course more than once



Does it work?

- “These changes made the course more **interesting** i.e. you **liked** the course more.”
- Which elements made the **biggest** difference?
 - Bonus tasks – 75.6%
 - Weekly self-check tests – 64.1%
 - Selecting “boarding music” – 48.1%
 - Achievement “medal” badges – 46.6%

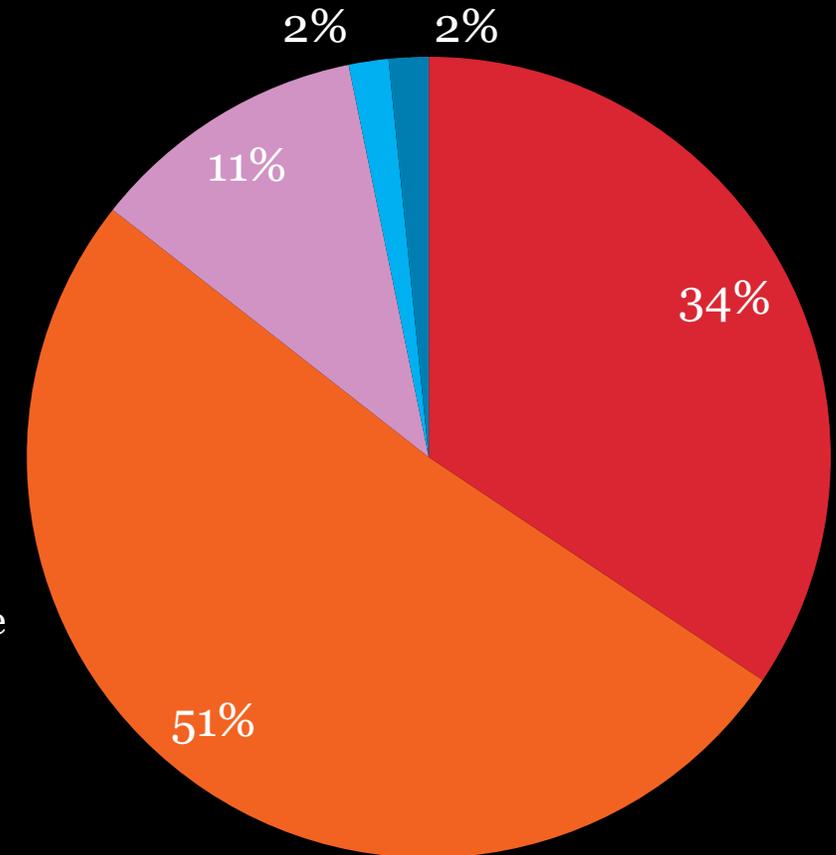
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



Does it work?

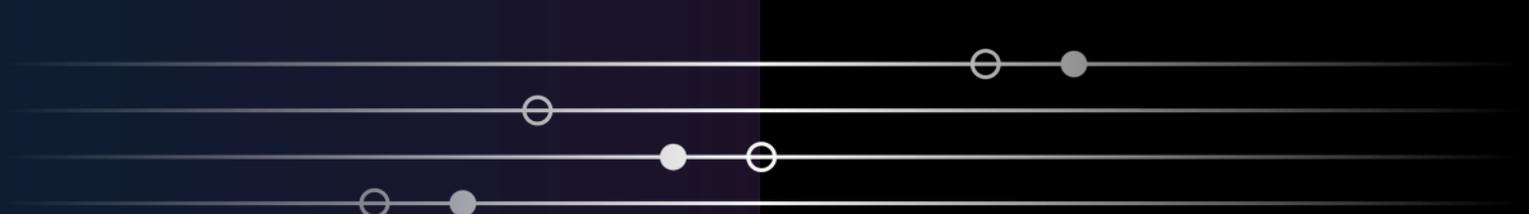
- “These changes made the course more **engaging** i.e. you **interacted** more with the course.”
- Which elements made the **biggest** difference?
 - Bonus tasks – 63.4%
 - Weekly self-check tests – 59.5%
 - Selecting “boarding music” – 42%
 - Picture of the Day tests – 41.2%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



Does it work?

- “The course would be better off **without** these changes.”
 - Strongly agree – 3%
 - Agree – 15.9%
 - Strongly disagree – 18.2%
 - “These changes increased the course **workload**.”
 - Strongly agree – 11.4%
 - Agree – 37.1%
 - Disagree – 11.4%
- How did these changes affect your **overall performance** in the course?
 - Very negatively – 0.8%
 - Negatively – 3.8%
 - Positively – 54.5%
 - Very positively – 20.5%



“**Picture of the day**” helped think more creatively and out of the box. **Weekly self checks** played a great role in learning the material and using those questions for exam preparation as well.

Homework **bonus tasks** were a good opportunity for students who are falling behind the program, and generally a good motive for extra points and higher grade.

Weekly **medal and boarding music** were very nice and encouraging to stay on top of our studies. It’s always curious to see who is the week’s winner and what music they like. Also helps to find new acquaintances with shared taste in music.

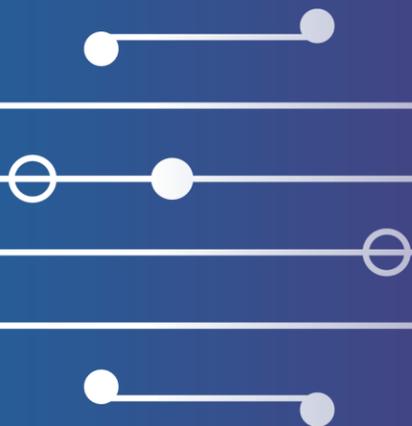
Most importantly I believe these activities taught us **consistency**.

Without staying consistent with weekly tasks, we couldn’t unlock the next weeks material and stay productive. This ensured not to cram all the material 2 days before the exam, but gradually learn every week’s material.



③

What is Next?



After the first step

- The journey just **started**
 - more creative use of achievements
 - using XP for course activities
 - more personalized experience
 - different streams of assignments for students to choose
- What do **you** think?