Blackboard

Digital Teaching Symposium 2026

Beyond the Calculation

Rethinking the Blackboard Gradebook as a Communication Tool for Student Success

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A Gradebook can calculate marks correctly. How well does it communicate student progress?

Rethinking the Gradebook as part of the student assessment experience.

Blackboard Ultra activity at UP

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University of Pretoria · 2024–2026

2026 snapshot

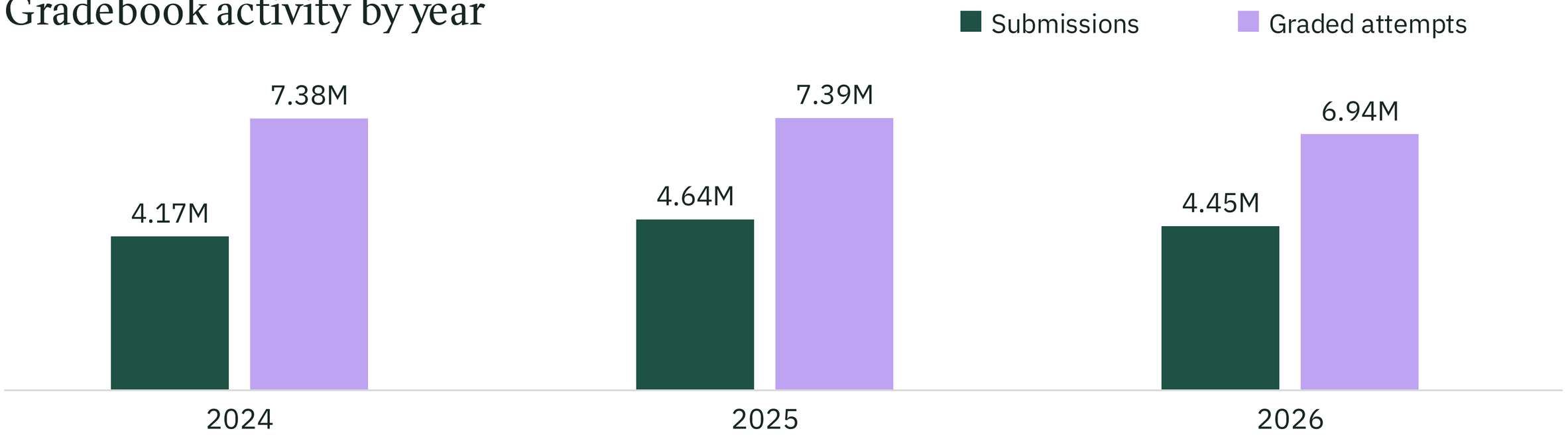
43,740
Student users

3,036
Instructor users

4.45M
Gradebook submissions

6.94M
Graded attempts

Gradebook activity by year



Source: UP course analytics workbook. Full-year coverage for 2026 is unconfirmed.

One Gradebook, two perspectives

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Lecturers

Configure assessments and calculations

Manage grades and feedback

Control when marks are visible

Maintain the Gradebook

Students

Access marks and feedback

Understand how grades are calculated

Monitor academic progress

Identify what still needs attention

How can we design the Gradebook to help students understand their progress?

Listening to lecturers and students

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60

Lecturer responses

Gradebook experiences, confidence and challenges

12,358

Student response records

Records per poll question

3

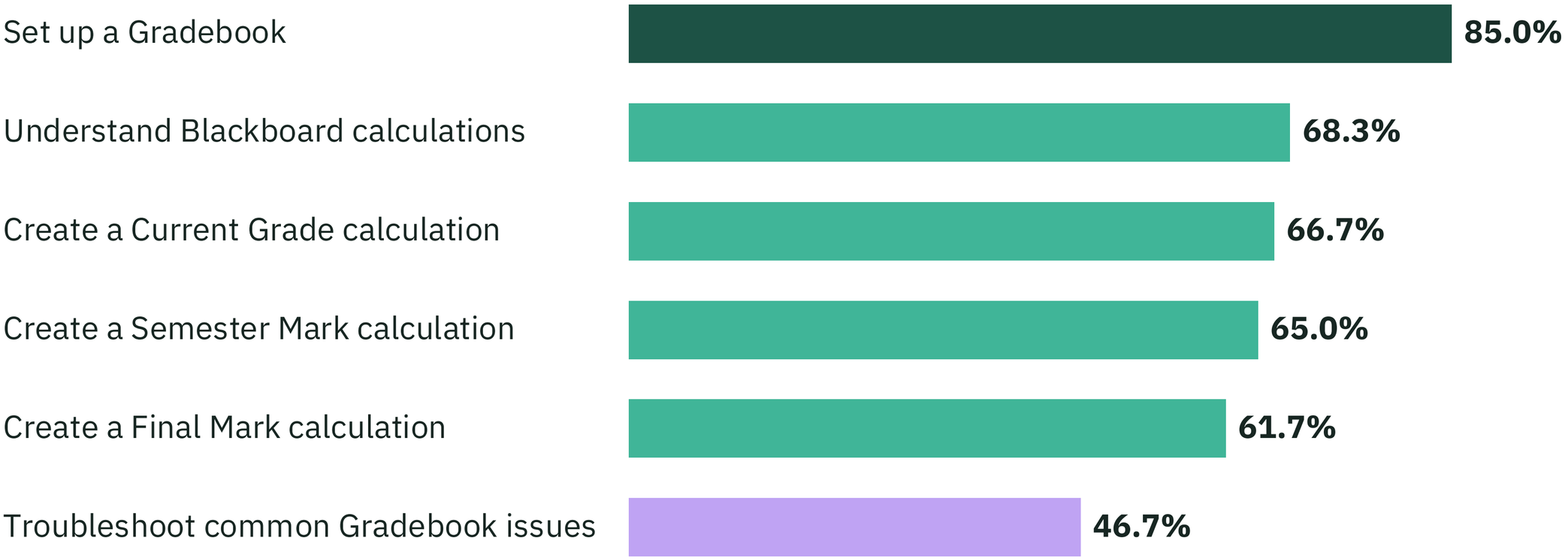
Student poll questions

Clarity, usefulness and suggested improvements

Separate lecturer and student surveys at the University of Pretoria.

Lecturer confidence varies across Gradebook tasks

Agree or Strongly Agree, n = 60



Source: Rethinking the Gradebook lecturer survey

Lecturers see a role beyond calculation

Source: Rethinking the Gradebook lecturer survey, n = 60. Single selections of Agree or Strongly Agree.

86.7%

Design requires pedagogical planning and technical knowledge

83.3%

A well-designed Gradebook reduces student confusion

80.0%

The Gradebook promotes assessment transparency

66.7%

I design with the student experience in mind

What a well-designed Gradebook makes possible

See where I stand

A clearly labelled running grade shows progress on work marked so far.

Understand the result

Visible marks and feedback show what contributed to the grade.

Decide what to do next

Timely updates and visible outstanding work help students prioritise.

How we built Gradebook capacity at UP

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2023

Grading and Gradebook workshops during the Blackboard Ultra rollout.

2024–2025

Repeated hands-on workshops as lecturers brought different assessment designs.

2026

Training continued, with a dedicated Gradebook Setup Support Day in October.

Most students reported that the Gradebook was clear

89.4%

Selected Clearly or Very clearly

4.3%

Selected Unclearly or Very unclearly



- Very clearly 70.7%
- Clearly 18.8%
- Neither clearly nor unclearly 5.8%
- Unclearly 3.0%
- Very unclearly 1.3%
- Do not use the Gradebook 0.4%

Source: UP student poll on Gradebook clarity, n = 12,358 response records.

Students value assessment information in the study guide

91.8%

Selected Helpful or Very helpful



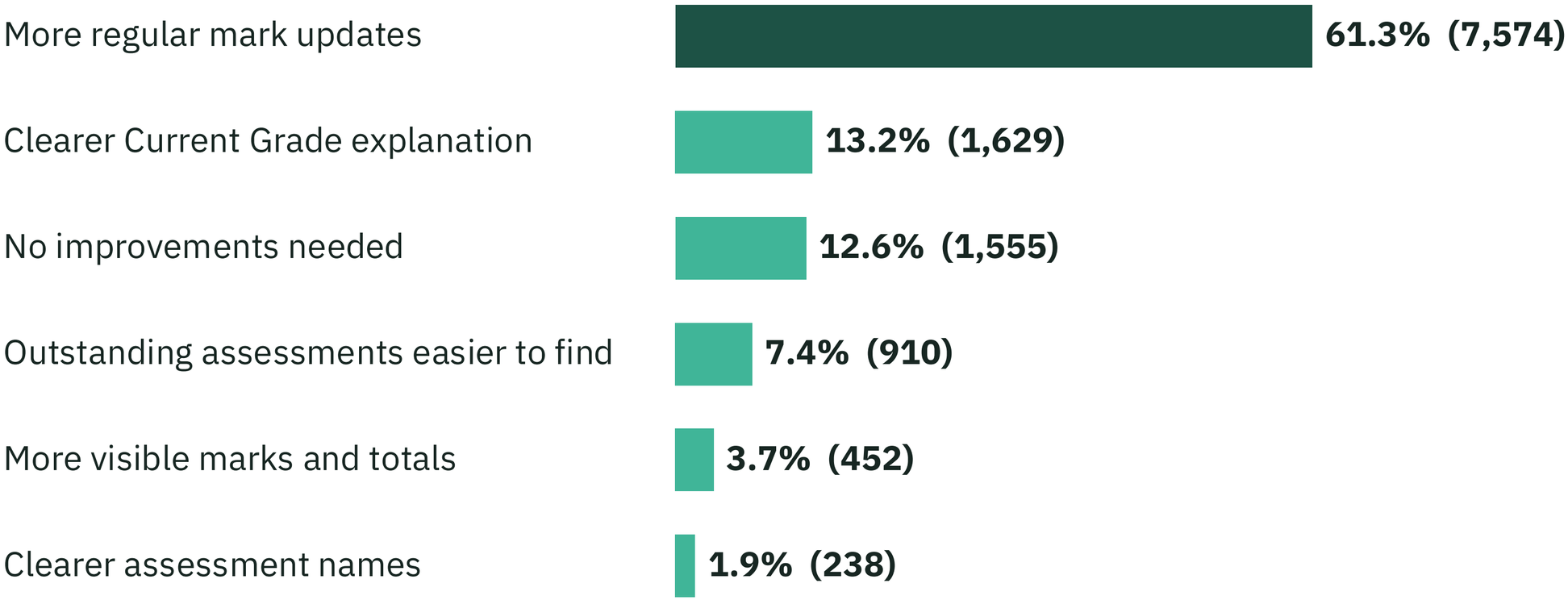
- Very helpful 74.5%
- Helpful 17.4%
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful 4.6%
- Unhelpful 1.8%
- Very unhelpful 0.8%
- Did not consult the information 0.9%

The study guide gives students a reference point for interpreting Gradebook results.

Source: UP student poll on study guide usefulness, n = 12,358 response records.

Students' top priority was more regular mark updates

Selected response, n = 12,358



Source: UP student poll on Gradebook improvements.

What lecturers and students told us

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Lecturer responses

85.0% confident setting up a Gradebook

80.0% agree the Gradebook promotes transparency

66.7% design with the student experience in mind

Student responses

89.4% selected Clearly or Very clearly

13.2% want clearer Current Grade explanations

61.3% prioritise regular mark updates

Separate surveys: 60 lecturer responses and 12,358 response records per student poll question.

What changed on Gradebook Setup Support Day

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Bring a real course

Lecturers brought their own assessment rules and calculation questions.

Work through the setup

The team reviewed course Gradebooks and worked through calculations with lecturers.

Build trust in Blackboard

Positive feedback highlighted that Blackboard could handle calculations lecturers had been doing in Excel.

Why one-to-one support takes time

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Every setup is different

Courses vary in weights, assessment rules and how progress is shown.

An hour can be too short

Complex cases can need another review after the calculation has been built and tested.

Support has to scale

Teach common patterns in workshops. Use pre-review and follow-up for complex cases.

From calculation to communication

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These four considerations can guide Gradebook design from the start.

Accurate

Calculations reflect the assessment methodology.

Clear

Students understand what their grades include.

Visible

Students can access relevant marks, totals and feedback.

Current

Marks are updated consistently throughout the semester.

FAQs on the clickUP Help site

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Gradebook Calculations

- Current Grade calculations
- Grade categories and calculated columns
- Dropping the lowest mark
- Different weigthed totals

Student & Gradebook Management

- Exemptions and individual exceptions
- Extra attempts and adjusted due dates
- Copying a Gradebook setup

Rubrics & Assessments

- Grading without a file submission
- Identifying the rubric evaluator

What can lecturers find on the clickUP Help site?

Three questions for Gradebook design

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Can students see it?

Are marks, totals and feedback visible when needed?

Can students understand it?

Are calculations and assessment weights explained clearly?

Can students use it?

Are the marks current enough to help students decide what to work on next?

Review the Gradebook from the student’s perspective.

A Gradebook should do more than tell students what they achieved.

It should help them understand where they stand, how they got there and what comes next.

Thank you. Questions and discussion.