What makes a good eLearning resource?

The **Best on Blackboard** competition had over 350 nominations — that covered approximately 250 courses within the Faculty of Humanities — for *the most useful resource in Blackboard* this academic year

**Organisation, up to date information, ease of navigation**

"Really good layout of lecture by lecture notes, key readings and extra readings. Made learning easier and each topic much more interesting"

Discussions and communication

"It's a fantastic way for students to discuss course issues and for everyone to help each other out — makes communication between course members really easy"

Lecture notes, course materials and tutorial presentation

"Extremely detailed lecture notes, covering much more than could be covered in a 1 hour lecture, explaining all hard topics in the course clearly"
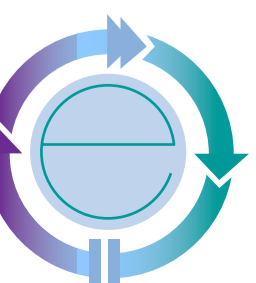

Group work and collaboration

Other
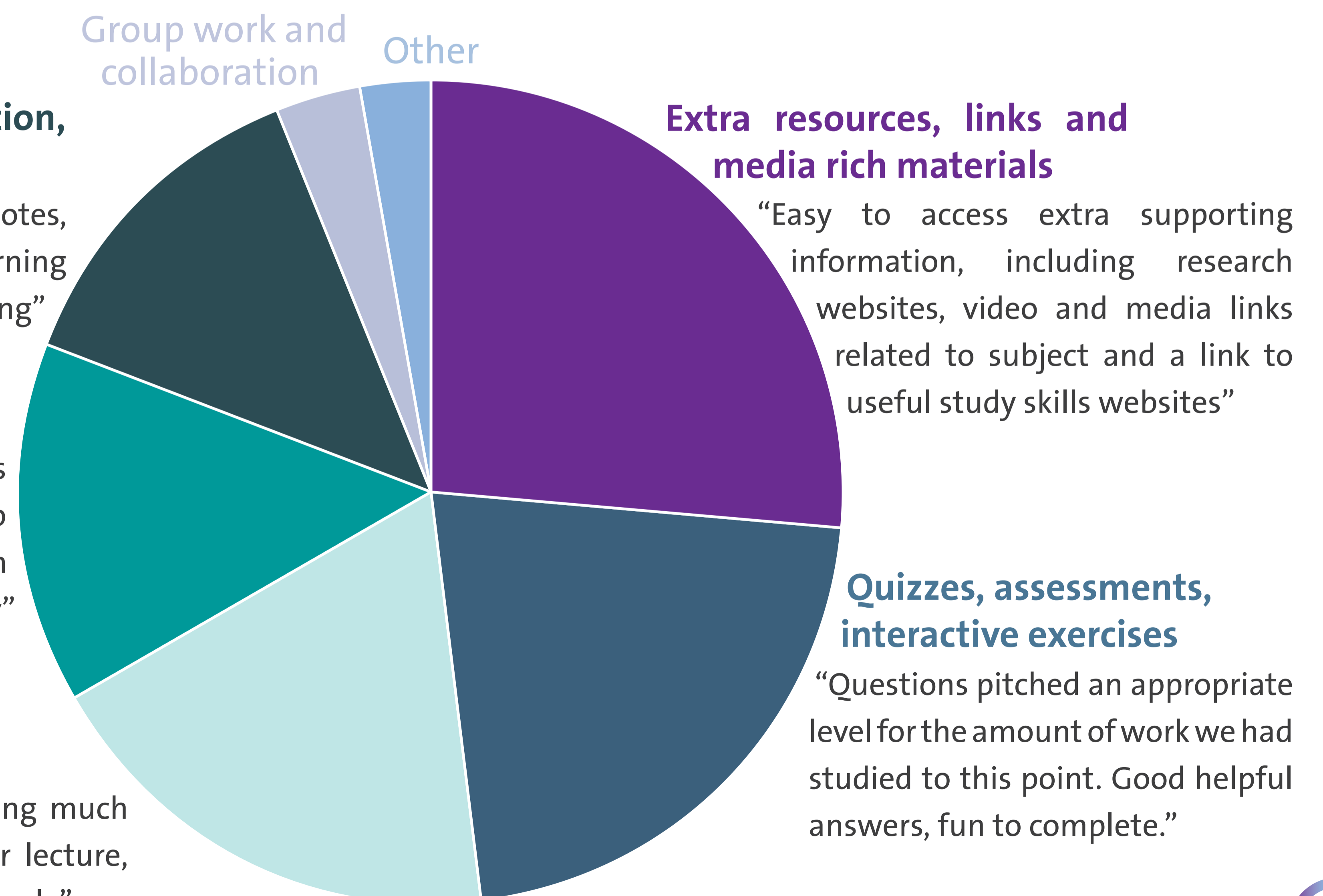
Extra resources, links and media rich materials

"Easy to access extra supporting information, including research websites, video and media links related to subject and a link to useful study skills websites"

Quizzes, assessments, interactive exercises

"Questions pitched an appropriate level for the amount of work we had studied to this point. Good helpful answers, fun to complete."

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Lecture notes/course materials

"I want the students to take notes in the lectures, using my notes to fill in the blanks. I encourage them to write in order to internalise the information; but also by giving them notes I am able to show them how to organise information — and anyway, I talk too fast for them to write it all down"

"The lecture notes are there but they have gaps so that the students have to come to lectures to fill them in. This aids concentration as they have to fill in the gaps. I use a tablet — which is the same as a laptop but you can write on it. It means that I work at the same speed as the students and the written notes can (eventually) be put on Blackboard.
It also keeps spontaneity – I can write more difficult examples up there and go off on a tangent"

"It's useful to compare how you understood the lecture at the time to the materials that were presented in it after the event"

"The webcasts of the lectures are on there because I have a live video link.
I don't use super-modern methods in the lecture theatre – I am still a chalk and talk lecturer. The students can use the lectures for revision and it's better for overseas students"

"At times, lecturers power through lectures and you're baffled at the end; webcasts allow you to control the pace of teaching and learning"
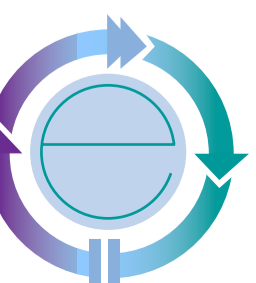
Organisation and up to date information

"Some of the people who are most resistant to the new technology are the students. It needs to be used as part of the teaching experience in order to get over the 'come in, listen and leave' approach"

"Study materials are on Blackboard – my assessment guidelines and tips about how to write – but they can be accessed in a number of different ways and through different links so that they have more chance of being timely and in the right place for the students' needs"

"It is well organised, very colourful and student friendly looking. It has a table of contents where you can easily switch between different sections, for example, the presentations and lecture notes"

"It is embarrassingly simple. You have got to be quite realistic about what students are going to engage with. This is a first year course. For each of the classes we have broken down the information into the class itself – PowerPoint slides plus a PDF.

What we want the students to get out of the class is a summary of concepts and ideas, plus support activities which are readings classified as 'must read', 'should read' and 'might read'.

Students might not read them in the first year but they are glad to have the information there; and they go back to them in the third year when they do more research"

"This is a first year course. The students get very detailed lecture notes with a variety of tasks. They choose which of the tasks they would like to complete and post up on the discussion board.

I think that this system works because it helps them to discipline themselves and to get cracking on the work. Students are great procrastinators. By making them do one of the tasks it is more likely that they do all of them and begin to take responsibility for themselves"
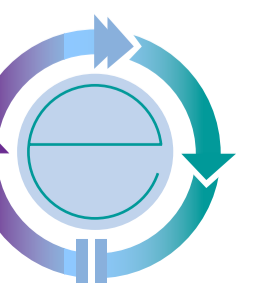
Quizzes

"The quizzes were open so that the students could do them any time. Lots of them did them in the run-up to the exam. The failure rate was much higher – 38% – for those who had not done the quizzes than it was for those who did them all – only 10%"

"The purpose of the quizzes was to make sure that the students read the set texts and applied their knowledge in exercises. I also wanted to give a structure to the reading process and provide immediate feedback"
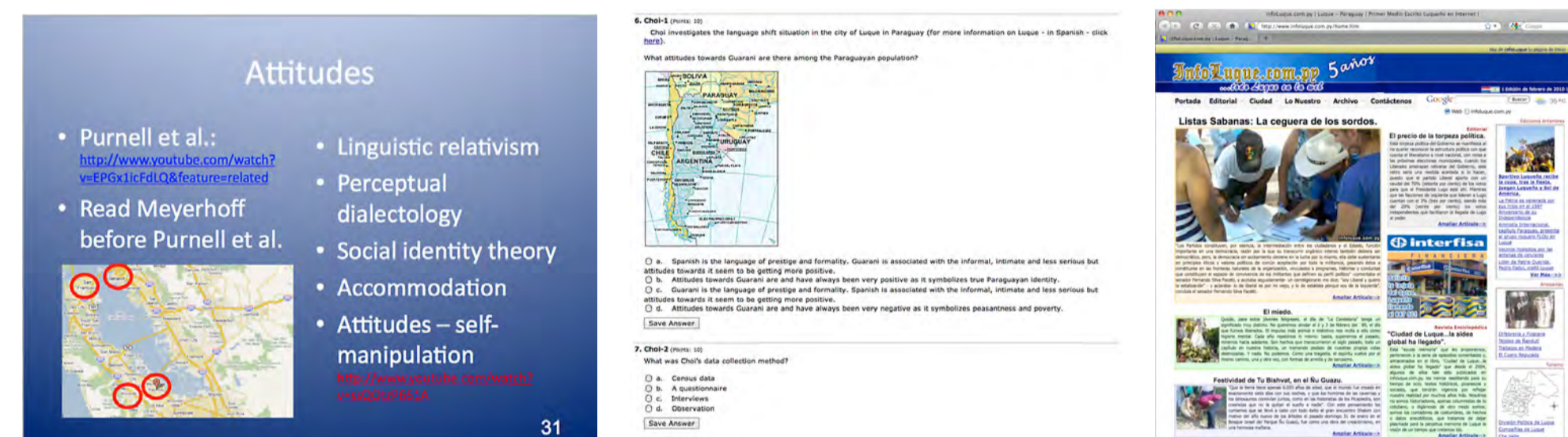
"Each week, I introduced the task in the lecture with a slide that contained points from the chapter they were about to read and talked about them briefly, so as to give the students a focus.

Then they did the reading and the quiz. The quizzes are just on content – they force the students to look things up and act as pointers to the important aspects of the course.

I have added maps and links to web pages. Next year I would like to add some interactive activities. It takes a long time to set up quizzes but I am pleased that I have done it"

"It's a good way to check if what you learnt in that weeks seminar/lecture has actually gone in properly, relatively quick too!"

"The quizzes related to the readings and helped with my revision at a later date; it improved my learning. Sometimes I read and do not take everything in; by doing the quizzes on top of the reading, it reiterated essential parts of the course book"

"The quizzes make me up to date with my reading as I would have to answer the questions correctly to unlock the full version of the lecture notes. Helped me a lot!"
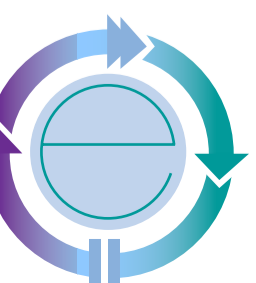
Extra resources, links and media rich materials

"I am asking students to look at new information sources and make judgements about how to use them. The advent of wikis, podcasts and videos could be compared to the information explosion in the 17th century after Gutenberg's press and the release of printed material. As literary academics, this is what we do, we criticise sources".

"There is a lot of material on the site: movies about war and torture, papers and key readings. Most important of all are the audio radio recordings which are downloadable, so that they can listen to them on their iPods on the bus. These are like extra lectures. I talk about all these things in the lectures and refer to specific aspects of them. The lectures involve a lot of discussion.
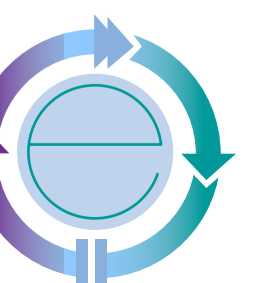
There is a recommended text by Thomas Rix. He speaks on one of the radio interviews, so I hope that students will be encouraged to read the book after hearing him speak"

"The resource is very easy to find and gives direct access to the most important original sources on writings against liberalism in the context of Jurisprudence"

"Informative, useful and interesting article. Helps to raise awareness and make judgement calls on information researched on the internet as to its usefulness for study"

"Some students would be able to find things on their own but others might become frustrated and give up. By supplying the links you show them the sorts of places that they can look at for information"

"Different key readings from diverse sources - interesting, useful and highly informative. Gives enormous amount of knowledge on different parts of the subject and makes the subject extra intriguing!"

Discussions and communication

"I discovered that the students began to use the discussion board in a more animated way about two weeks before the exam. Some students posted requests for help and others were giving answers. I was surprised by this use. I wondered what was in it for the good students. Then I realised that this is the way things work now. If my 16 year old son needs an answer, he doesn't go to Wikipedia, he simply posts it on Facebook and someone replies"

"This is quite a technical subject. It needs extra input towards the end of the course when contradictions begin to appear. The students began to ask questions on the discussion board when they were revising. I look at the discussion board when I upload the lectures — probably only once or twice a week.

If I didn't answer within a couple of days the questions were answered by other students. It meant that the better students did better: learning by teaching and being able to ask.

There wasn't anything too surprising there except the depth of the questions: that was really rewarding"

"It was used to debate a political issue whilst also an experiment into the pros and cons of online political debate — it worked pretty well"

"Having the option to speak with someone online is very helpful; this also comes in handy when taking on group tasks or last minute questions!"

"I pose a question at the beginning of each week and leave each group to post a response.

The discussion group is a way of getting them to communicate but it also gives a different kind of interaction.

It means that they have to stand back and compose on behalf of the group and consider other peoples' views — be more reasoned and reflective, in other words"
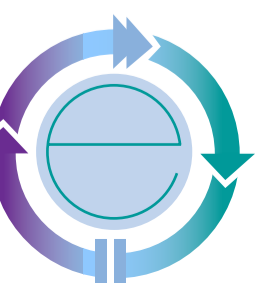
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Group work and collaboration

"Online Wikis: of all the things that I have done with students this has been the one that I have most enjoyed. It was a real fillip to me. I have been teaching this course for 11 years and this helped me rediscover my interest. It also captured the students' imagination — 82% said that they had enjoyed it and 80% that they would expect to use these skills in the future"

"The problem with most seminars is that even if they have worked well you don't necessarily know what it was all about.

Writing a summary of a discussion is a skill; one which all graduates will have to do in the workplace.

What I didn't bargain for was that the students would see this as useful for their revision because it has substance — a well written minute is quite handy and I genuinely believe it gives a bit more point to the seminar and teaches a useful skill"

"Students may be able to get the right answer but they don't know how to present it well — which is what is lost in multiple choice. I take ten random scripts, remove the name and add full corrections and comments, then put them onto Blackboard. I am careful to give a mark for each answer, e.g. as 2 I or 2 II, so students can see what makes a First and what the standard is"

"Gives an idea of what is expected and how the student work is marked. Gives an opportunity of seeing different students' work and to learn ways to improve based on other students' work"

"Every seminar had someone taking notes specific to the topic we were doing. These notes were then typed up and sent to the lecturer which he then put on Blackboard. It meant that we had access to notes and discussions of not only every seminar, but of the other seminars from the different groups on the course. Very useful study aid for the exam and coursework. A brilliant idea"

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