Regularly Re-running **Automated Cohorts (Sessions)** on Coursera's new platform

An overview for Coursera Partners

Balance of Availability & Structure

We heard consistent feedback from learners on our old platform that it was frustrating to have to wait a long time to start a course. Because of the rigid structure of sessions on our old platform, learners often fell behind and were not able to catch up.

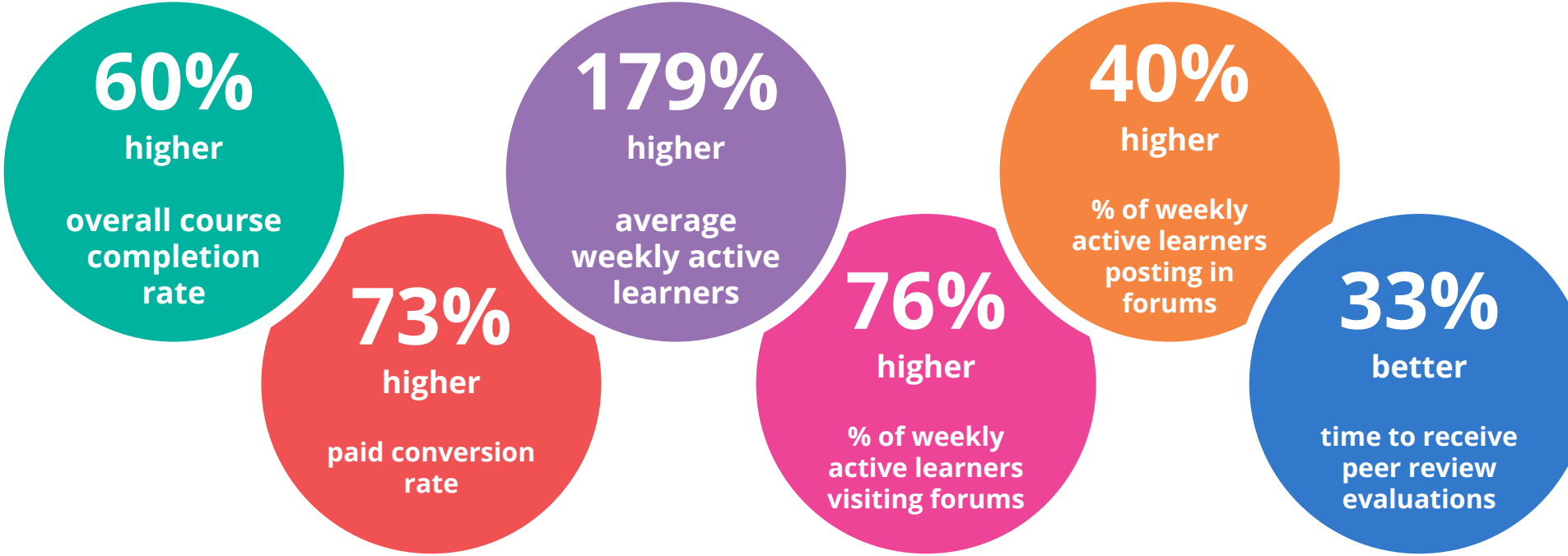
In 2014 we launched a new platform with always available content to address availability issue for learners. The first types of courses that we launched on the new platform were completely self-paced, which we hoped would provide enough flexibility for learners to complete courses amidst their busy schedules.

We quickly learned that self-paced courses -- without the structure of deadlines or a suggested schedule -- had a negative impact on completion rates and course engagement.

We then experimented with different course structures and discovered that a model with **frequently-running auto cohorts** provided the right balance of availability and structure for learners. This is now the course format that we recommend all courses use.

Sessions are better for learners

A comparison of courses in the two formats shows that session-based courses provide a much better experience for learners than self-paced courses.



Note: these metrics are not based on randomized experiments.

How do Sessions work?

THERE IS ONE COURSE

- course is **always open**
- **cohorts are layered on top** of open courses to provide a **structured experience for learners**
- there will **always be one cohort open for enrollment**, so learners always have something to join
- **cohorts run on an auto-schedule** with **no additional operational load for instructors**

LEARNERS ENROLL IN A COHORT AND CAN START LEARNING ANYTIME:

- Learners enrolling **before** cohort start date: full access to Week 1 content (including assignments)
- Learners enroll **after** cohort start date (but before enrollment closes): full access to all content

INSTRUCTOR & COURSE STAFF ACCESS

- instructors and mentors can access all discussion forums across cohorts
- partners can send email announcements to particular cohorts
- course teams can make improvements to the course for future cohorts, even if they're grade-breaking changes, using versioning (note: this feature is not available for self-paced courses)

For more details about auto-cohorts and answers to common questions, please see the slides below and refer to this article in our Partner Help Center.

Switching my course from On-Demand to Auto-Cohorts (Sessions)

Sessions are the new default. All newly-launching courses on the new platform, including in Specializations, will use the sessions format.
800+ courses are in the sessions format and currently running on the platform.

Given the better learning experience in sessions as shown by engagement, retention and completion statistics, we encourage courses that are currently in the self-paced format to switch to using the sessions model.

Contact our partner support team to request this change for your courses.

More Details

How frequently do auto-cohorts run?

In order to serve learners best, there should always be at least one cohort with an upcoming start date that learners can enroll in. By default, courses will automatically have cohorts that re-run on a monthly schedule.

For courses with consistently high enrollment numbers, we recommend a more frequent re-run schedule (every two-weeks). Most Specializations are on this bi-weekly auto-cohort schedule.

For courses with lower enrollment numbers or instructor-specific reasons to run a course less often, you can ask our partner support team to enable auto-cohort re-runs at a minimum frequency of 6x or 4x per year.

If you have other considerations to discuss about auto-cohort frequency, please contact your institution's Coursera Partnership Manager.

What do learners experience in auto-cohorts?

Learners can still start the course at any time

For each course, there will be a series of specific ‘start dates’ at which the course content will become fully available and open to all learners in the cohort. For learners enrolling prior to an official ‘start date,’ they will be able to preview the first week’s content while they wait for the cohort to begin.

If a learner arrives ***before*** the next start date:

Learners will be allowed to enroll and ‘preview’ some course content immediately - and their progress in the preview will be saved toward their overall course progress.

If a learner arrives ***after*** a start date (but while enrollment is still open):

Learners will be allowed to join the cohort that just started and start the course immediately.

If a learner arrives **more than 5 days after** a start date (when enrollment has closed for that cohort):

Learners will be invited to enroll in the next cohort instead, and will have ‘preview’ access.

Learners can still go at their own pace

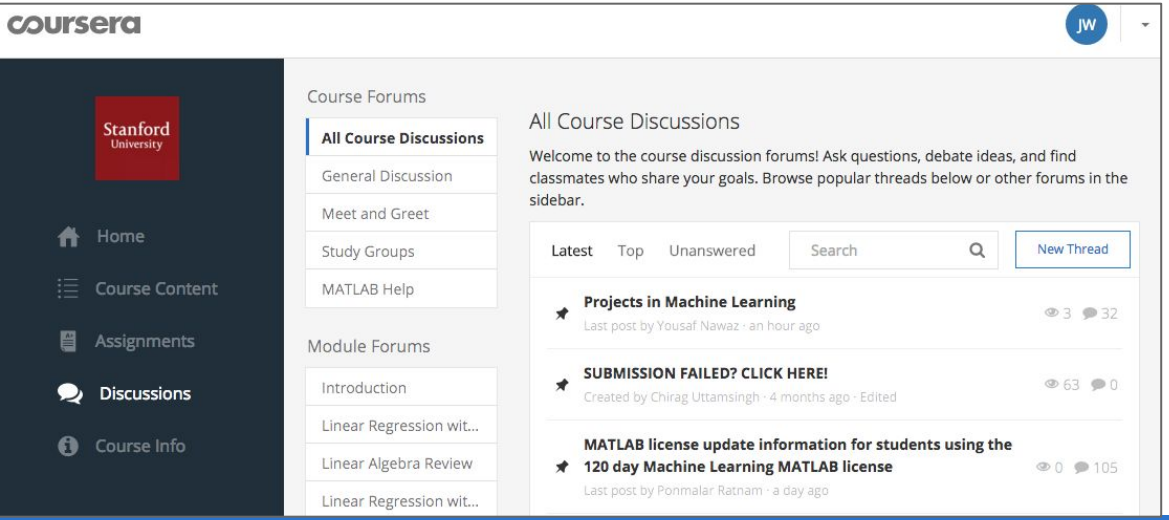
Once a learner has been placed in a cohort and the ‘start date’ for that cohort has arrived, **learners are free to move through the content as quickly as they’d like**. We have seen that the typical time to complete courses has shortened considerably in the on-demand model, and we anticipate that some learners will move at an accelerated pace. Others will move ‘on pace’ and others will move at a slower pace; the automated cohort model is designed to accommodate multiple paces.

What are discussions like in auto-cohorts?

- Learners only see discussions for their cohort.
- Instructors to have ability to pin specific threads to be visible across all cohorts of the course.

76%
higher
% of weekly active learners visiting forums

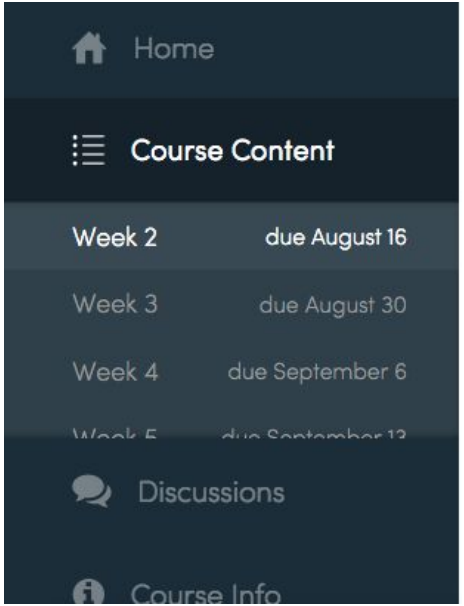
40%
higher
% of weekly active learners posting in forums



Example of discussion forums in a course with cohorts. Learners see only threads from their own cohort of the course, plus posts from cohorts that have been pinned by the instructor or mentor to persist across all cohorts.

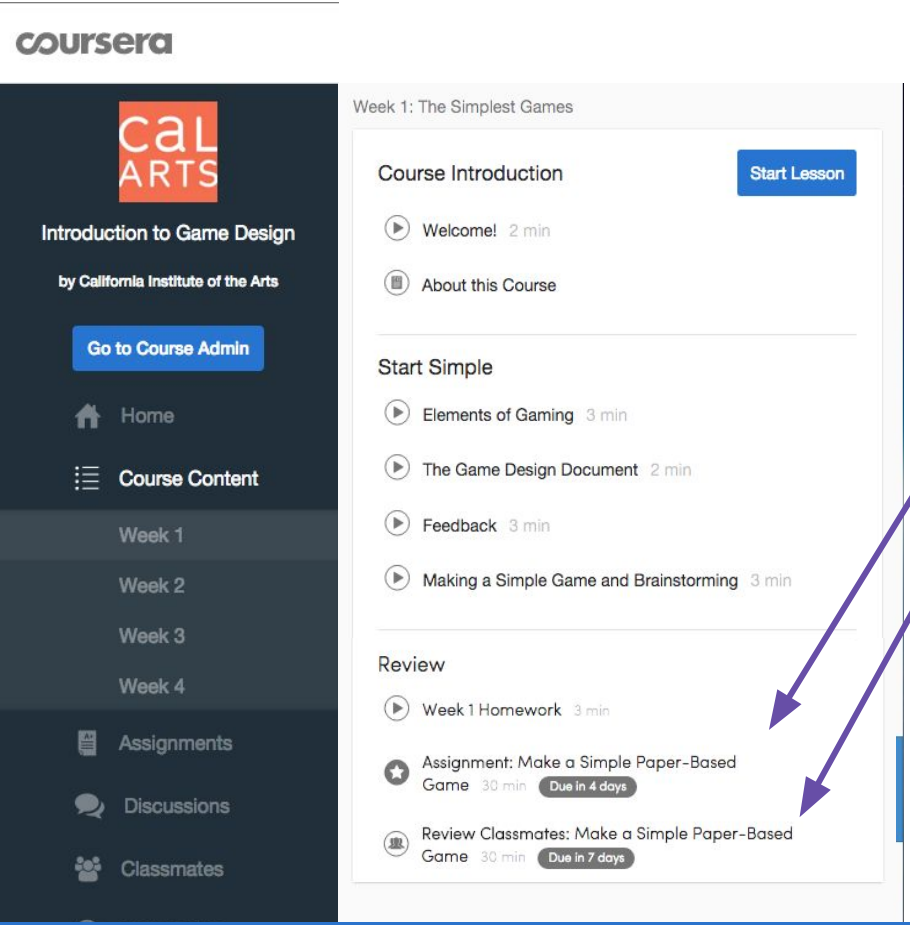
How do deadlines work in auto-cohorts?

- Instructors can determine which modules correspond to each week, and this course schedule will apply to all cohorts of the course.
- Soft deadlines are at the end of each week, with a final hard deadline at the end of the cohort.
- All content is available once the cohort starts, so learners can move faster than the recommended pace if they want.



Learners in a cohort will all see the same suggested schedule. Instructors set the suggested schedule; default is 1 module per week.

How does peer review work in auto-cohorts?



Phased Peer Review

(for graded peer assessments only)

Week view, where peer assessments are shown as two separate items:

(1) submit phase
(2) review phase

90%
of on-time submissions
receive peer review grades within 3 days

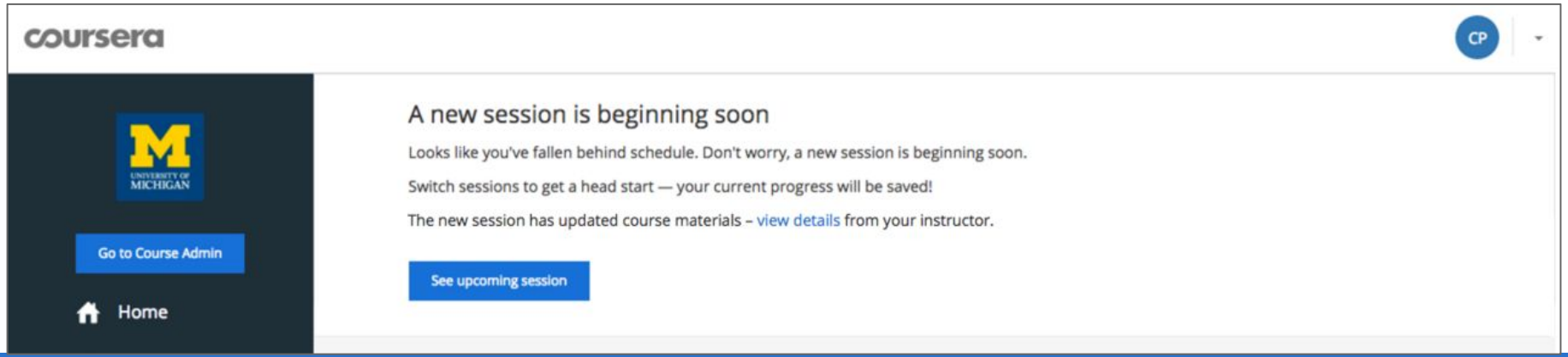
How it works:

- Must (1) submit your own assignment before you can (2) review peers
- On-time submissions get prioritized to receive evaluations (ahead of late submissions)
- Learners can submit late (any time before the final hard deadline when the cohort ends)

What about learners who fall behind?

- If learners fall behind, they will have the opportunity to enroll in the next cohort.

- Course progress is maintained between cohorts. Learners don't need to resubmit assignments they have already completed in a previous cohort.



Are courses designed differently for auto-cohorts?

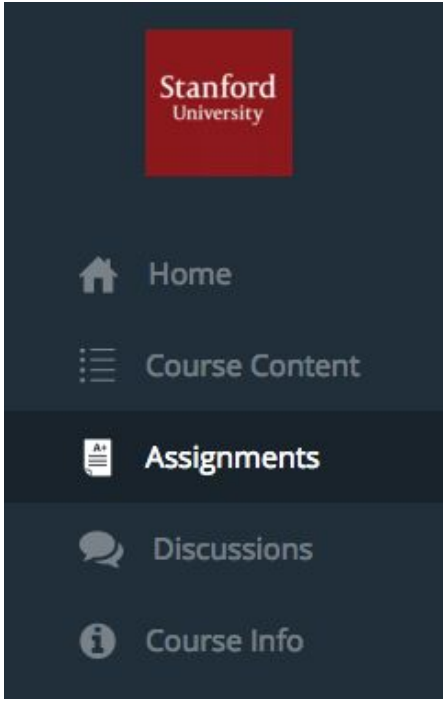
- Course design should not be affected by this change.

- As in the standard layout, you should consider the amount of work that is reasonable for a learner to complete in a week, and create your recommended course schedule accordingly.

What are the logistics of managing courses in the auto-cohort format?

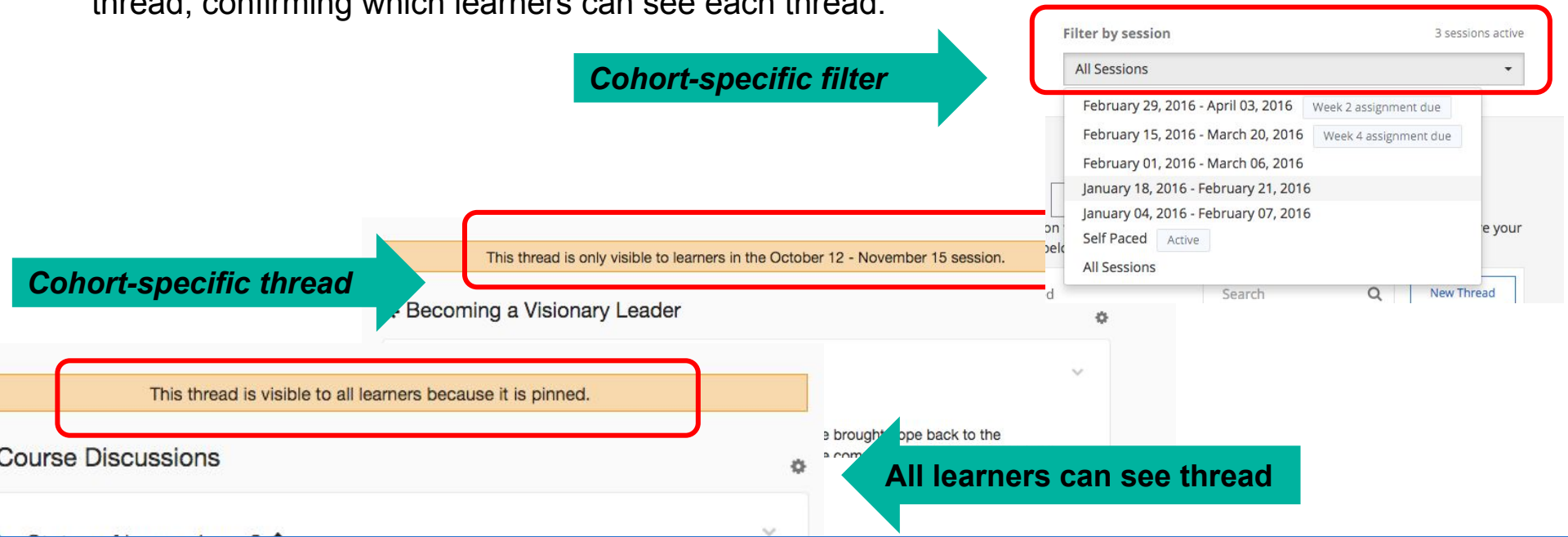
- Schedules and emails are automated. No manual grading or scheduling of cohorts is required.

- Grading occurs automatically in cohorts. As soon as learners complete all required assignments and receive all assignment-level grades, learners will receive their overall course grade.



How do course teams monitor discussion forums in cohort-based courses?

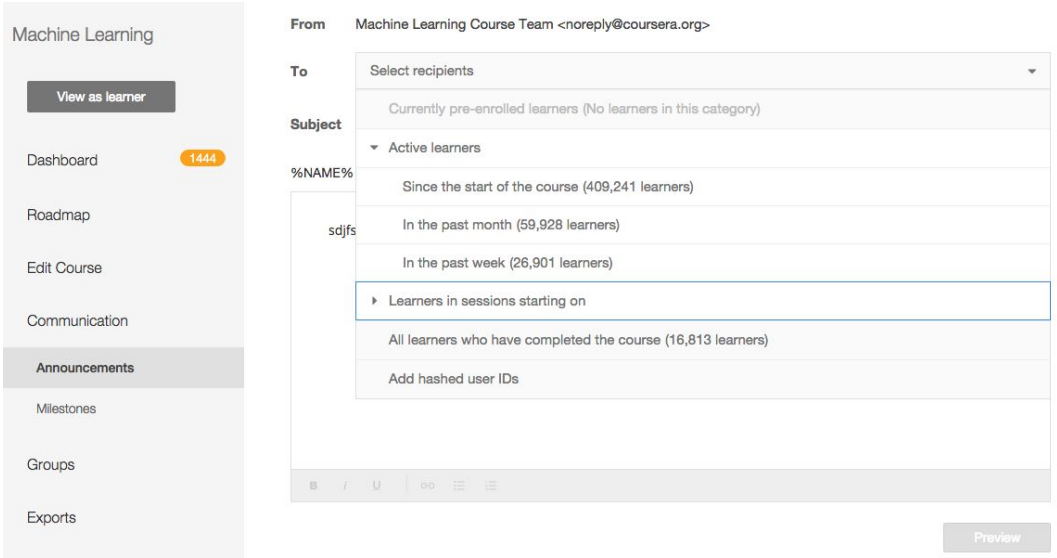
Course staff can see and manage discussion forums across all cohorts. They can filter to see only threads from specific cohorts, or from the entire course. They see special banners on each thread, confirming which learners can see each thread.



How can course staff communicate with learners in different cohorts?

- Course Announcements: Instructors can email learners in specific cohort or in the entire course

- Discussion Forums: Instructors will be able to view forum threads from all cohorts and post to specific cohort threads or across all cohorts

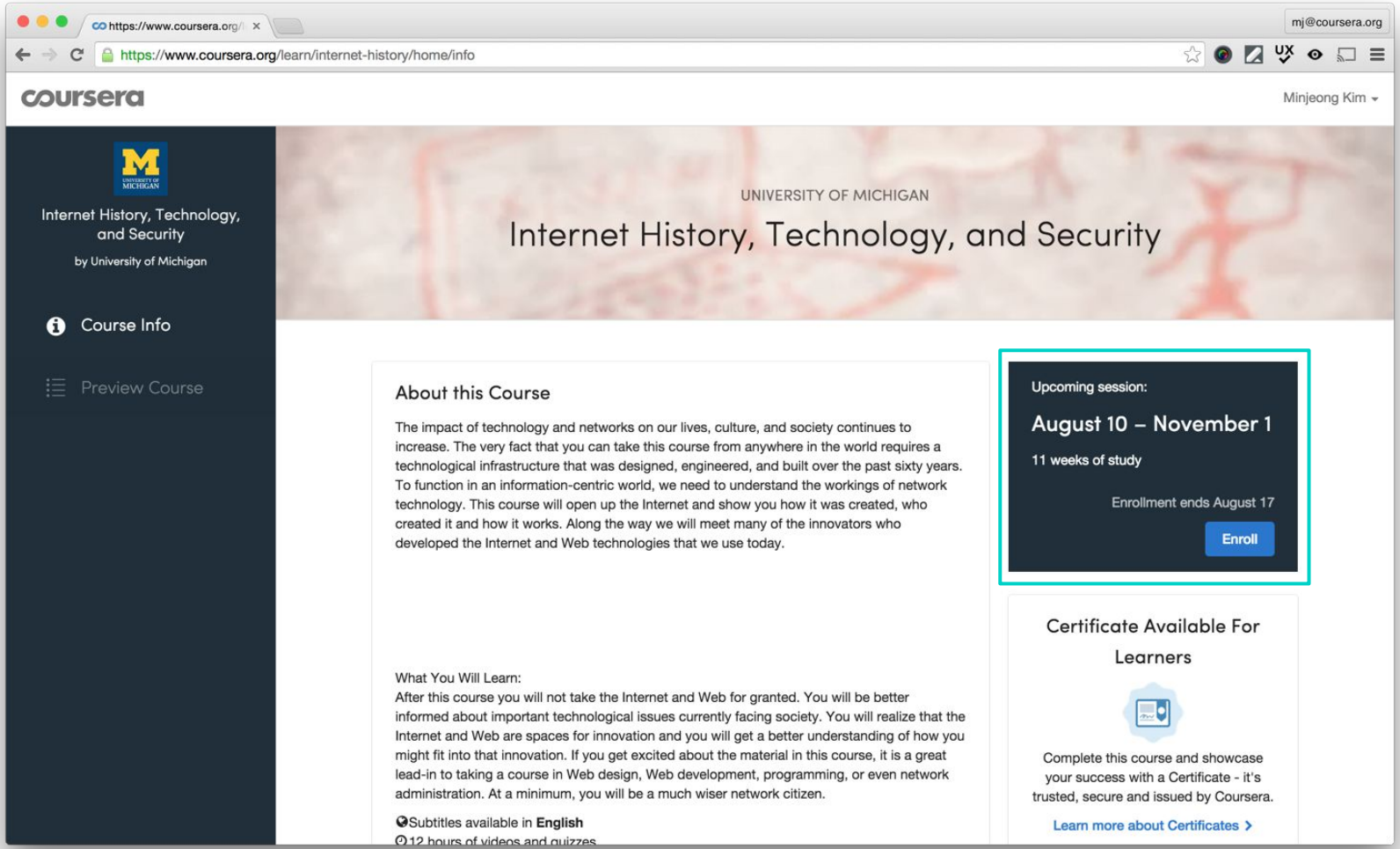


The course-level announcement interface allows course staff to email particular cohorts of learners, other sub-sets of learners, or all enrolled learners at once

Appendix

Before cohort start date

Screenshots as walkthrough of the learner experience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Minjeong Kim
Internet History, Technology, and Security
by University of Michigan
Course Info
Preview Course
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Internet History, Technology, and Security
About this Course
The impact of technology and networks on our lives, culture, and society continues to increase. The very fact that you can take this course from anywhere in the world requires a technological infrastructure that was designed, engineered, and built over the past sixty years. To function in an information-centric world, we need to understand the workings of network technology. This course will open up the Internet and show you how it was created, who created it and how it works. Along the way we will meet many of the innovators who developed the Internet and Web technologies that we use today.
What You Will Learn:
After this course you will not take the Internet and Web for granted. You will be better informed about important technological issues currently facing society. You will realize that the Internet and Web are spaces for innovation and you will get a better understanding of how you might fit into that innovation. If you get excited about the material in this course, it is a great lead-in to taking a course in Web design, Web development, programming, or even network administration. At a minimum, you will be a much wiser network citizen.
Subtitles available in English
12 hours of videos and quizzes
Upcoming session:
August 10 – November 1
11 weeks of study
Enrollment ends August 17
Enroll
Certificate Available For Learners
Complete this course and showcase your success with a Certificate - it's trusted, secure and issued by Coursera.
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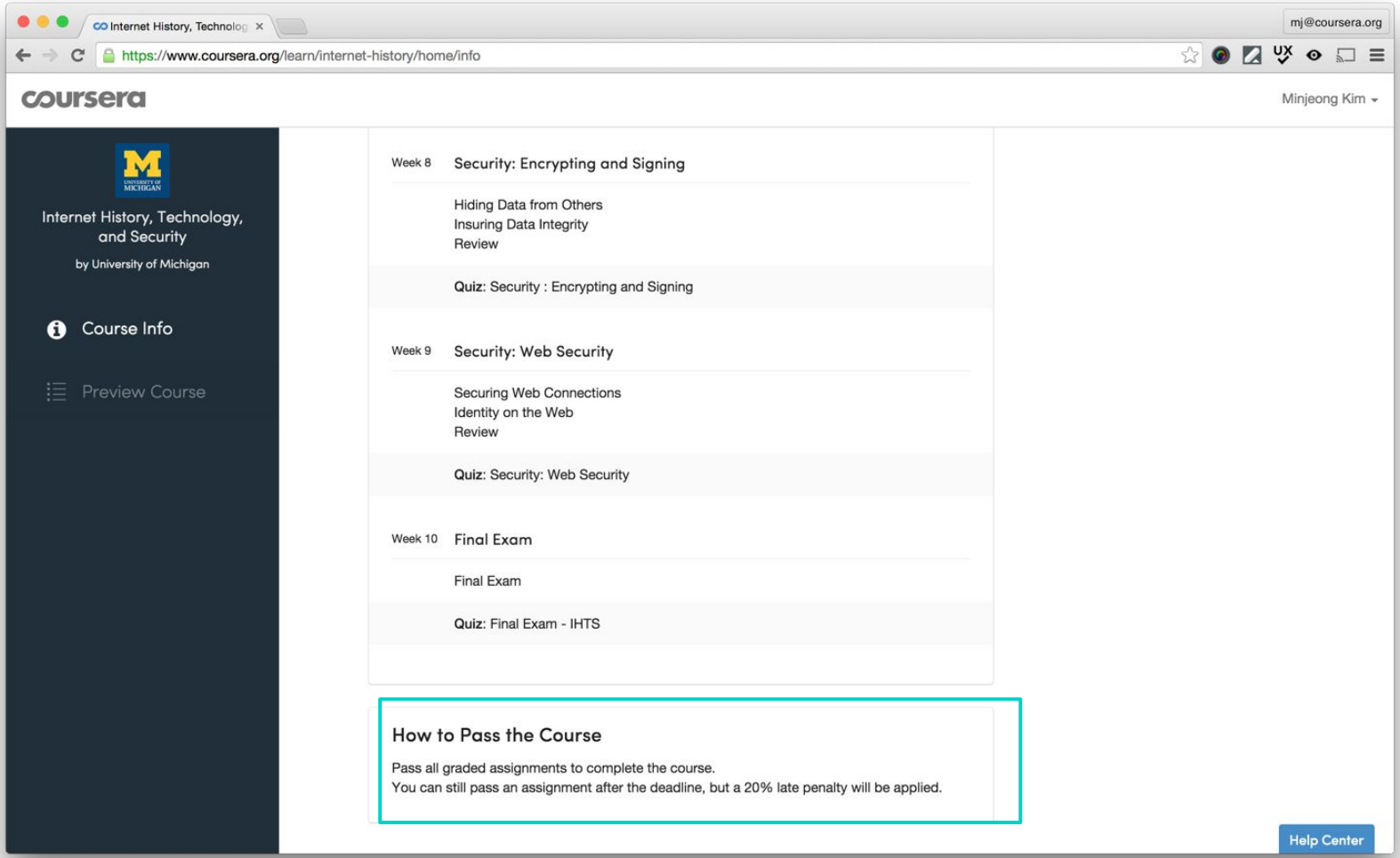
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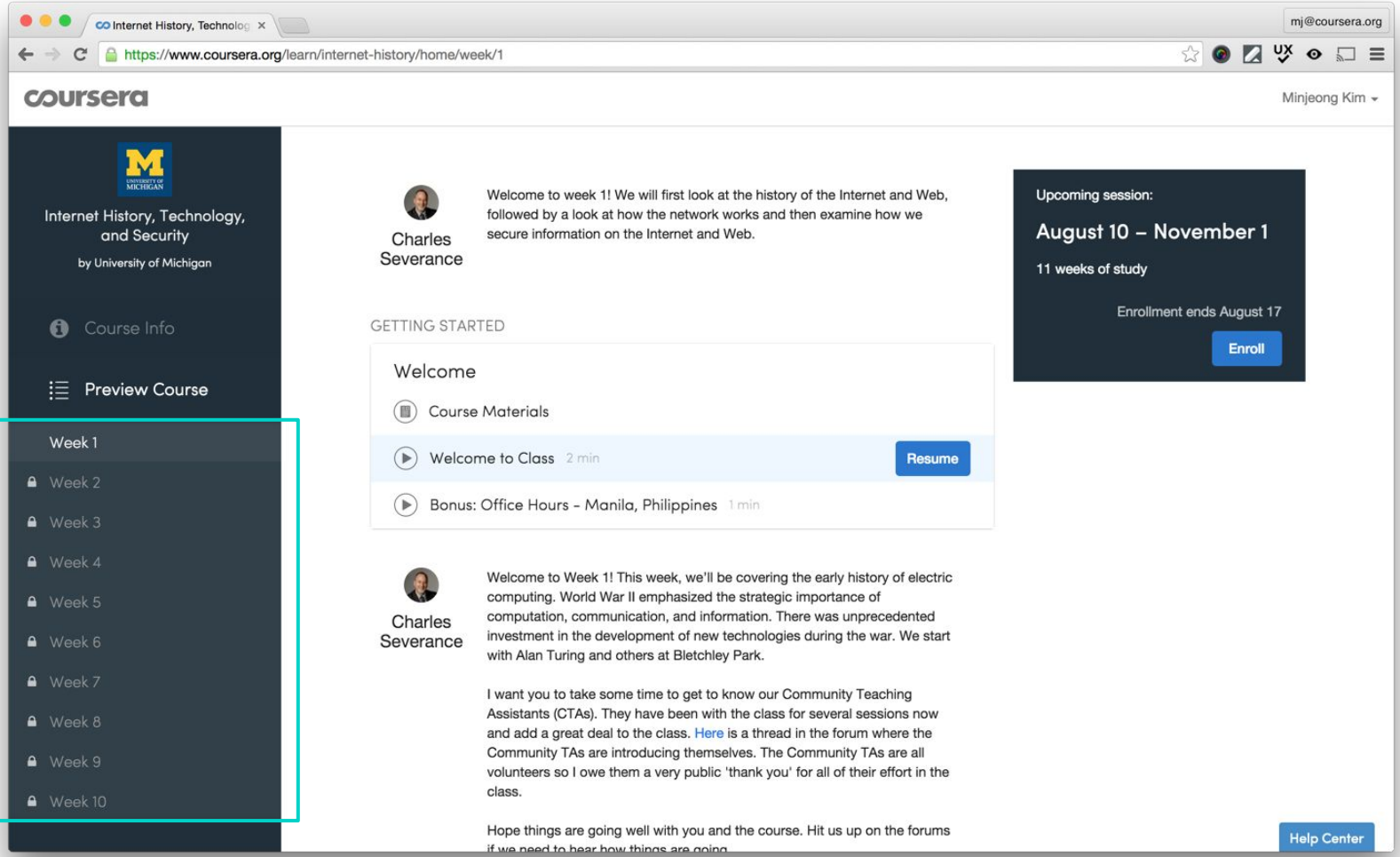
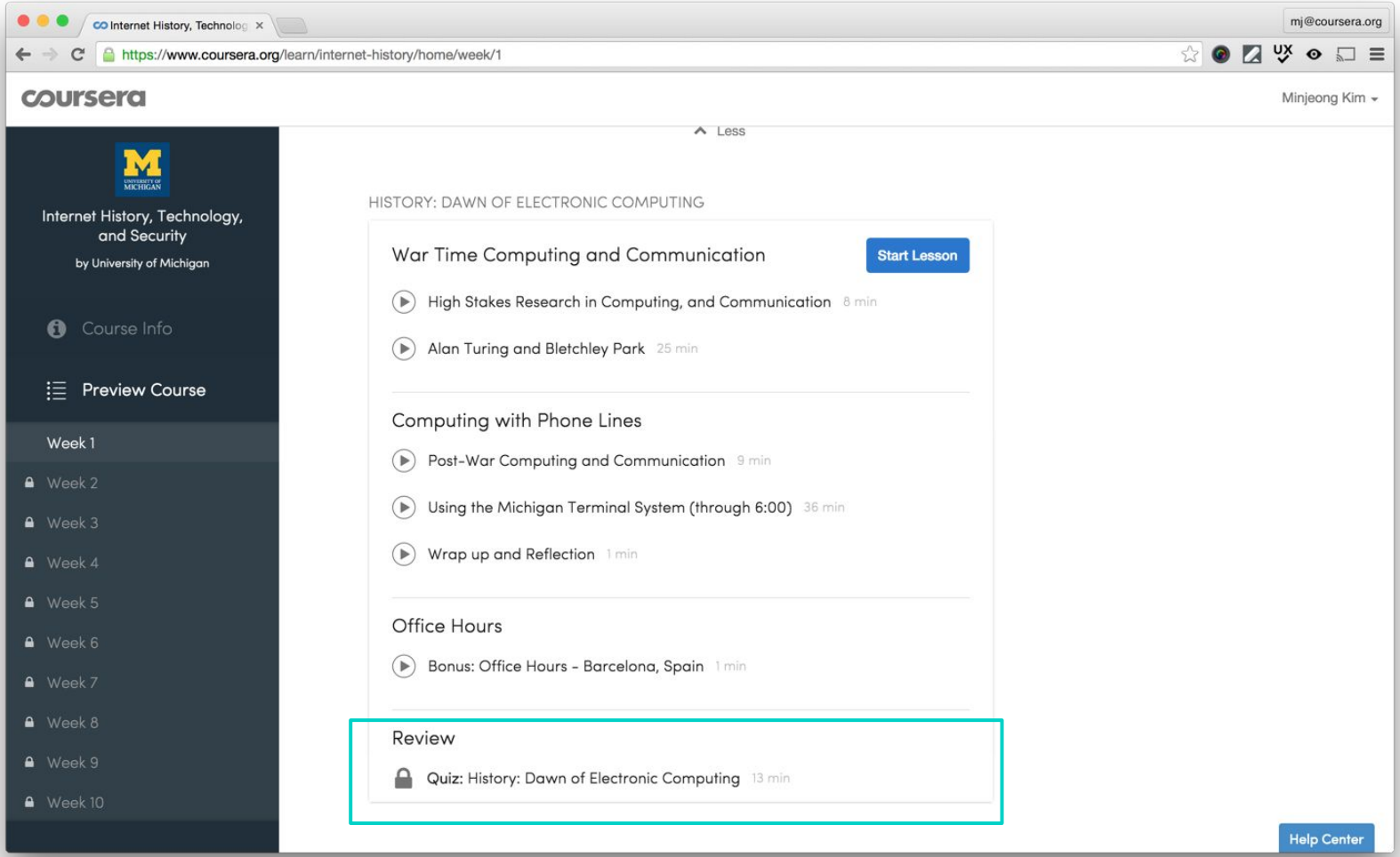
Internet History, Technology, and Security
by University of Michigan
Course Info
Preview Course
Week 8
Security: Encrypting and Signing
Hiding Data from Others
Insuring Data Integrity
Review
Quiz: Security : Encrypting and Signing
Week 9
Security: Web Security
Securing Web Connections
Identity on the Web
Review
Quiz: Security: Web Security
Week 10
Final Exam
Final Exam
Quiz: Final Exam - IHTS
How to Pass the Course
Pass all graded assignments to complete the course.
You can still pass an assignment after the deadline, but a 20% late penalty will be applied.
Help Center



Before enrolling, learners can preview the first week's material, but not the assessments



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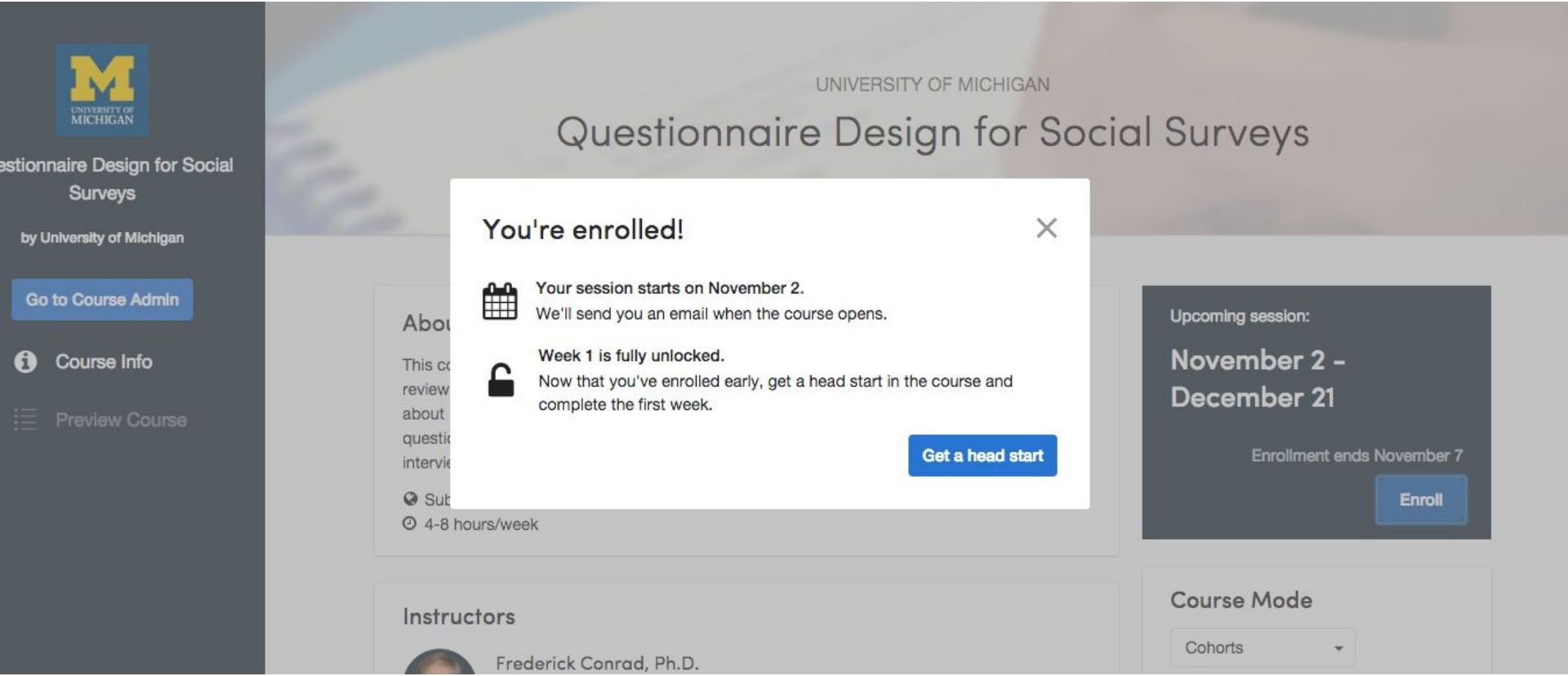
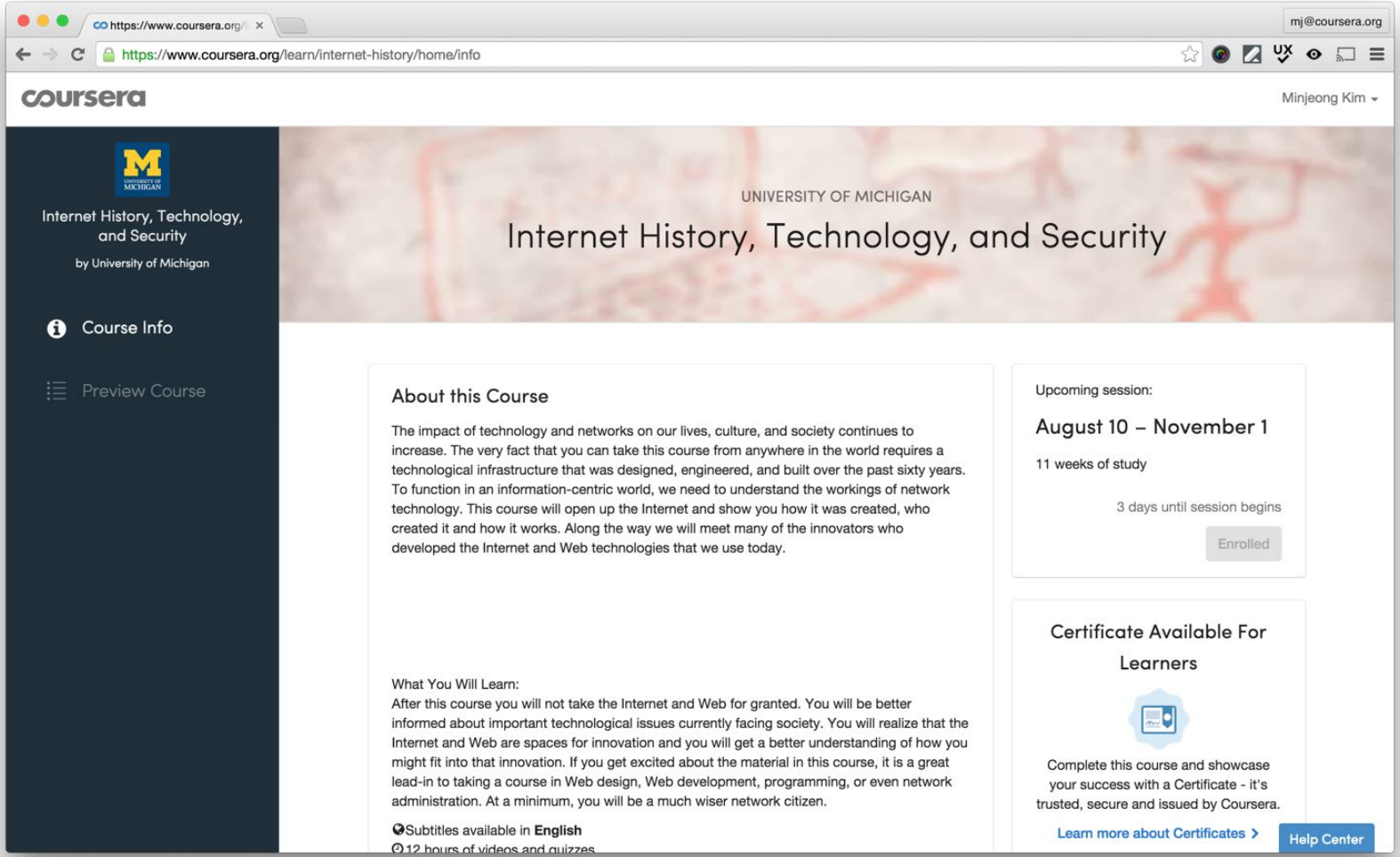
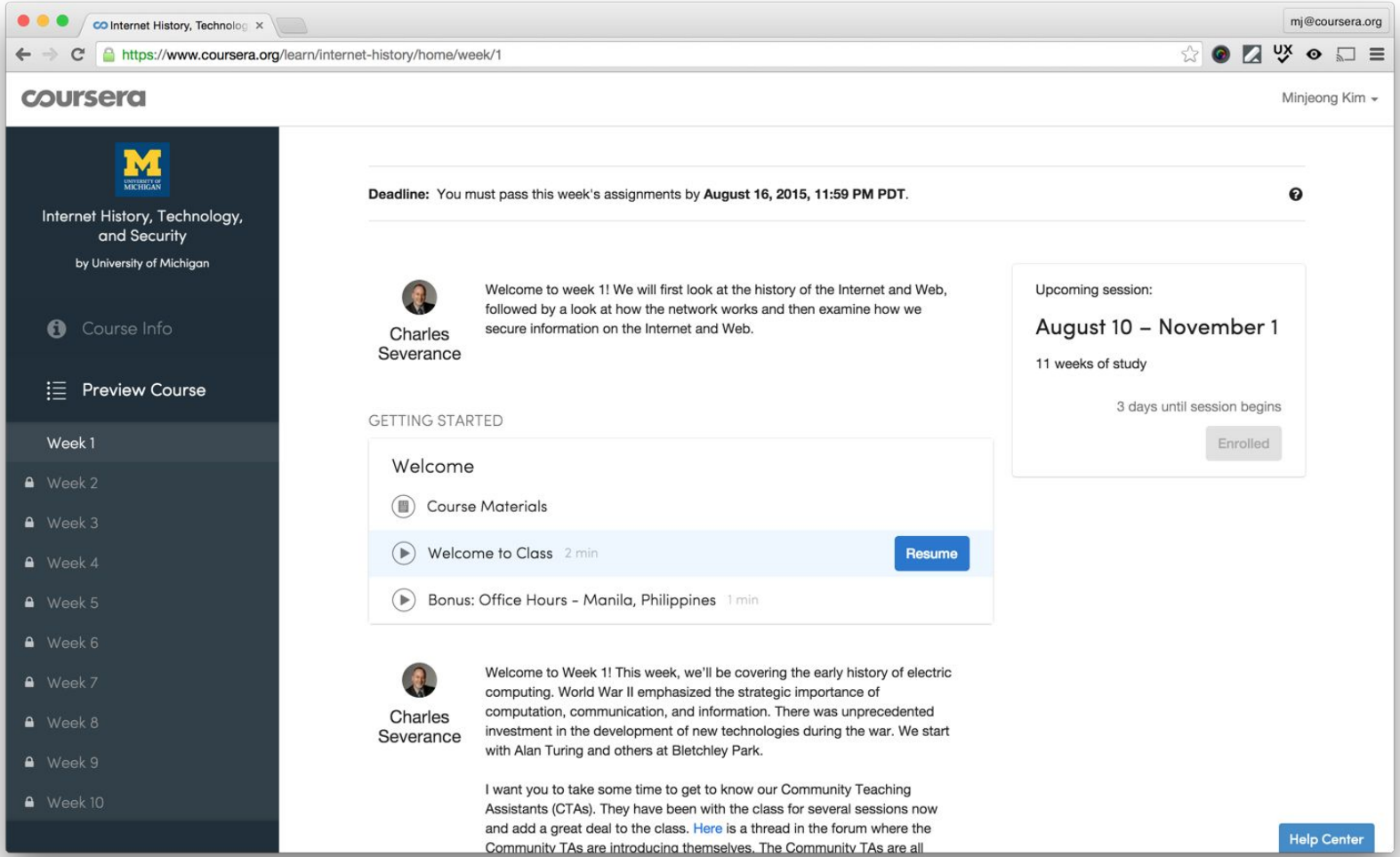


When learners decide to enroll, they will see a confirmation that it is possible to start learning right away

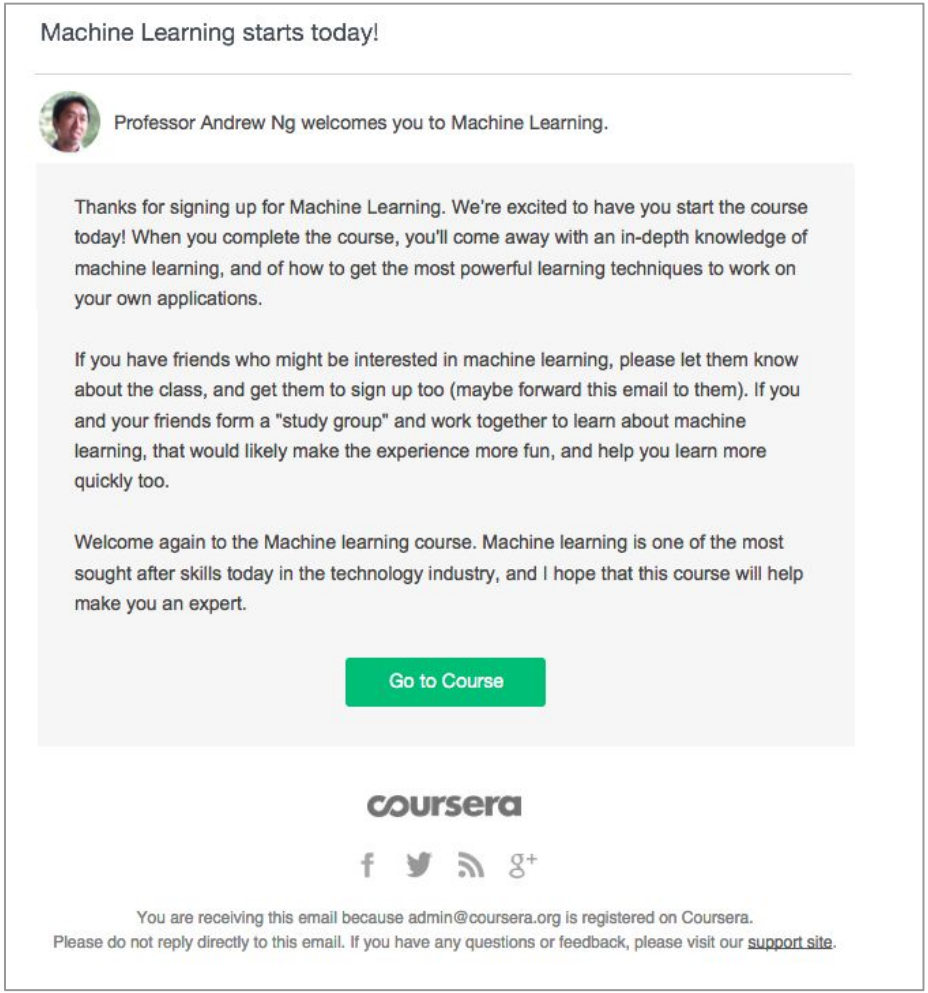


After enrolling, the Preview is available (including assessments) while waiting for Course to start



After enrolling, the Preview is available (including assessments) while waiting for Course to start

Example of a course announcement email received by a learner



Machine Learning starts today!

Professor Andrew Ng welcomes you to Machine Learning.

Thanks for signing up for Machine Learning. We're excited to have you start the course today! When you complete the course, you'll come away with an in-depth knowledge of machine learning, and of how to get the most powerful learning techniques to work on your own applications.

If you have friends who might be interested in machine learning, please let them know about the class, and get them to sign up too (maybe forward this email to them). If you and your friends form a "study group" and work together to learn about machine learning, that would likely make the experience more fun, and help you learn more quickly too.

Welcome again to the Machine learning course. Machine learning is one of the most sought after skills today in the technology industry, and I hope that this course will help make you an expert.

Go to Course

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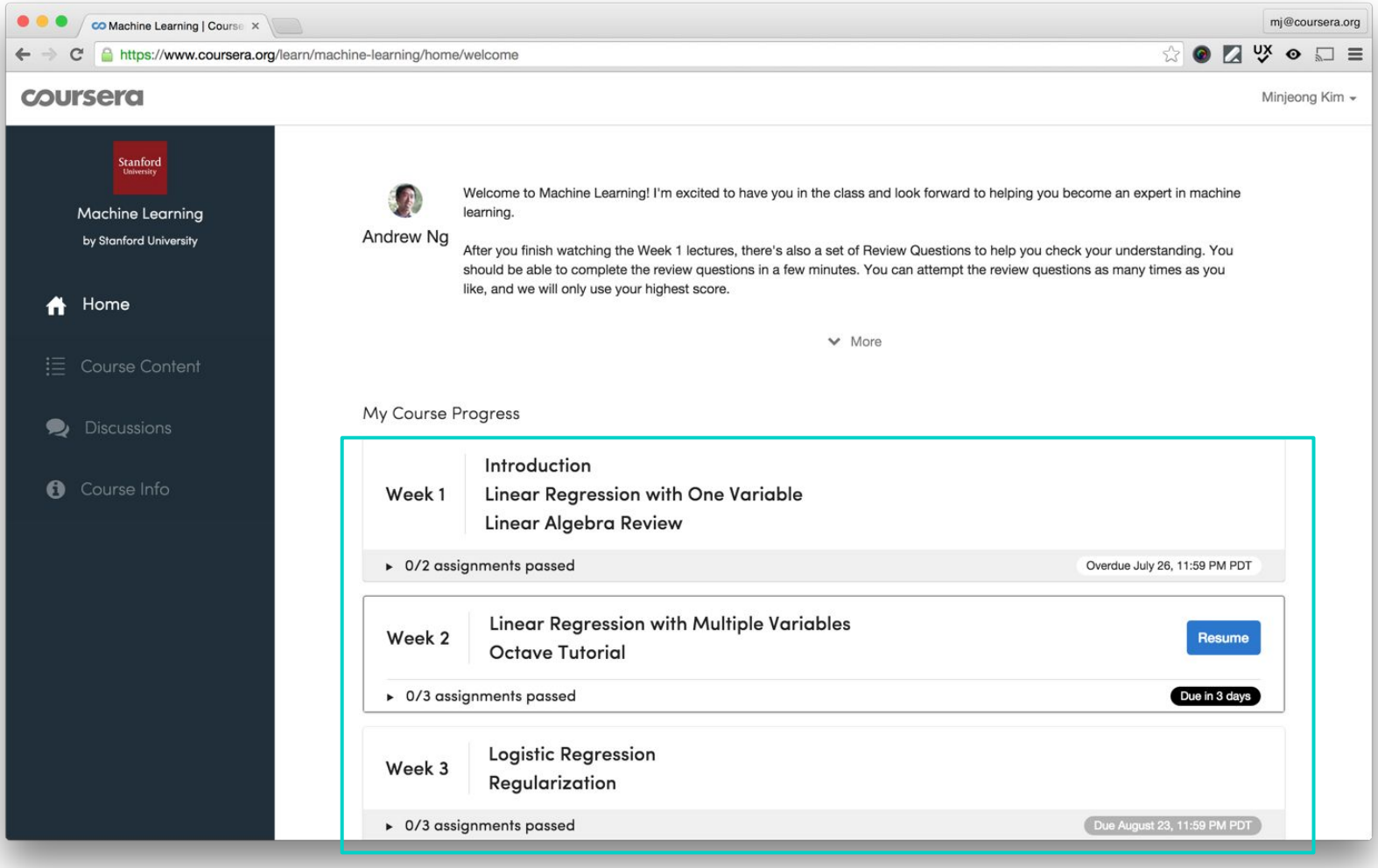
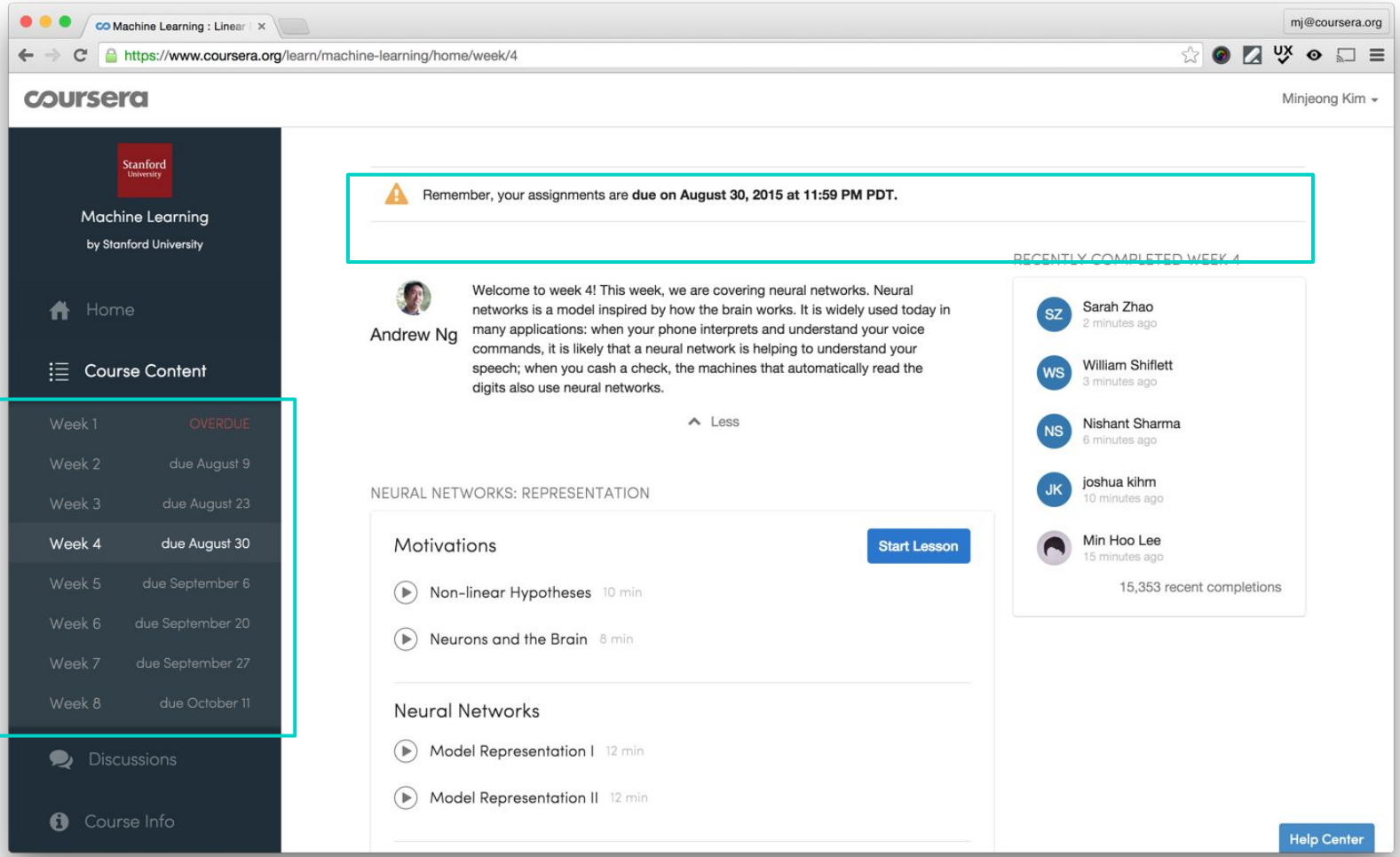
During cohort

Screenshots as walkthrough of the learner experience



Content organized by weeks; All content is visible on the start date; Assignments show due dates for the soft deadlines each week



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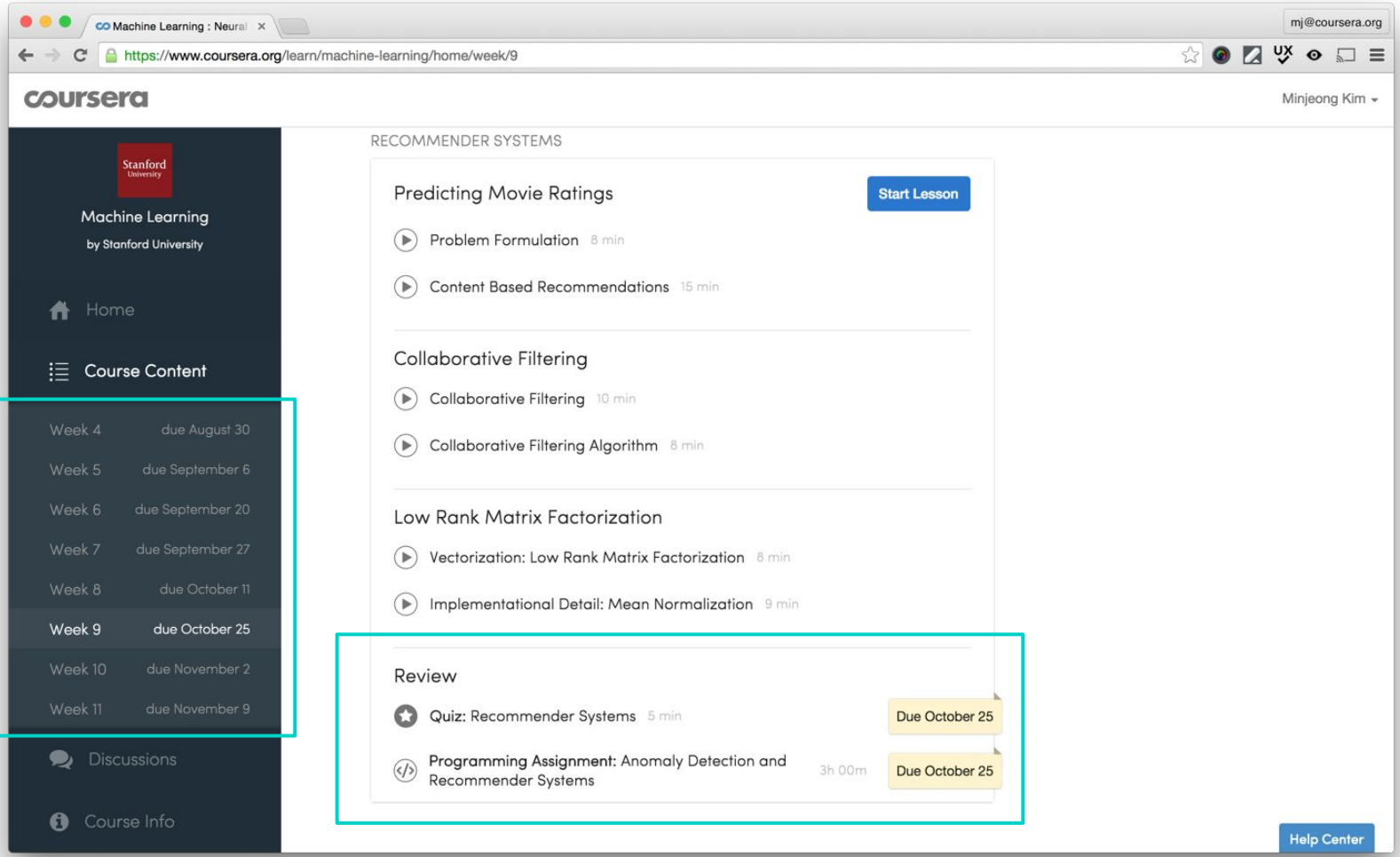

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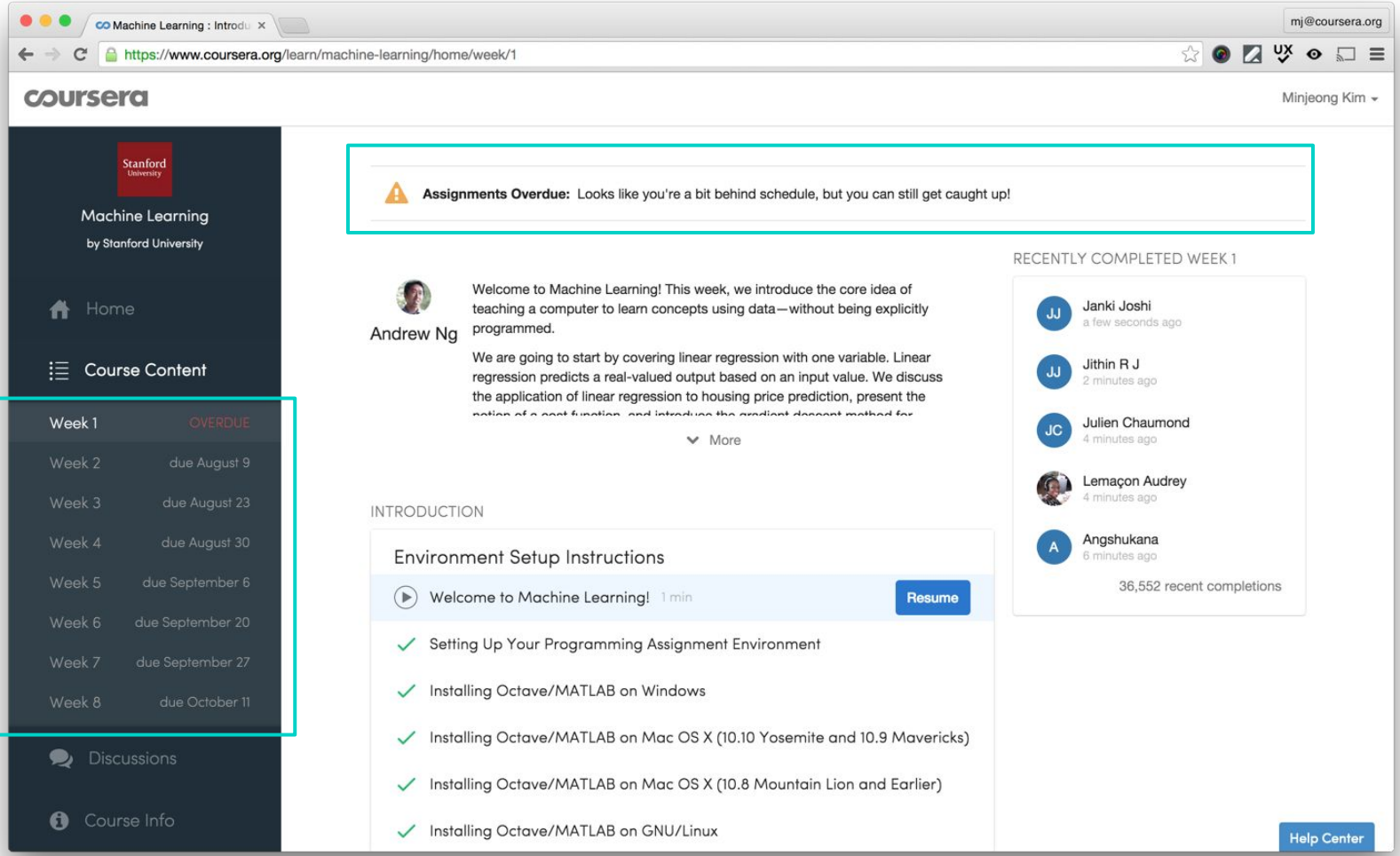
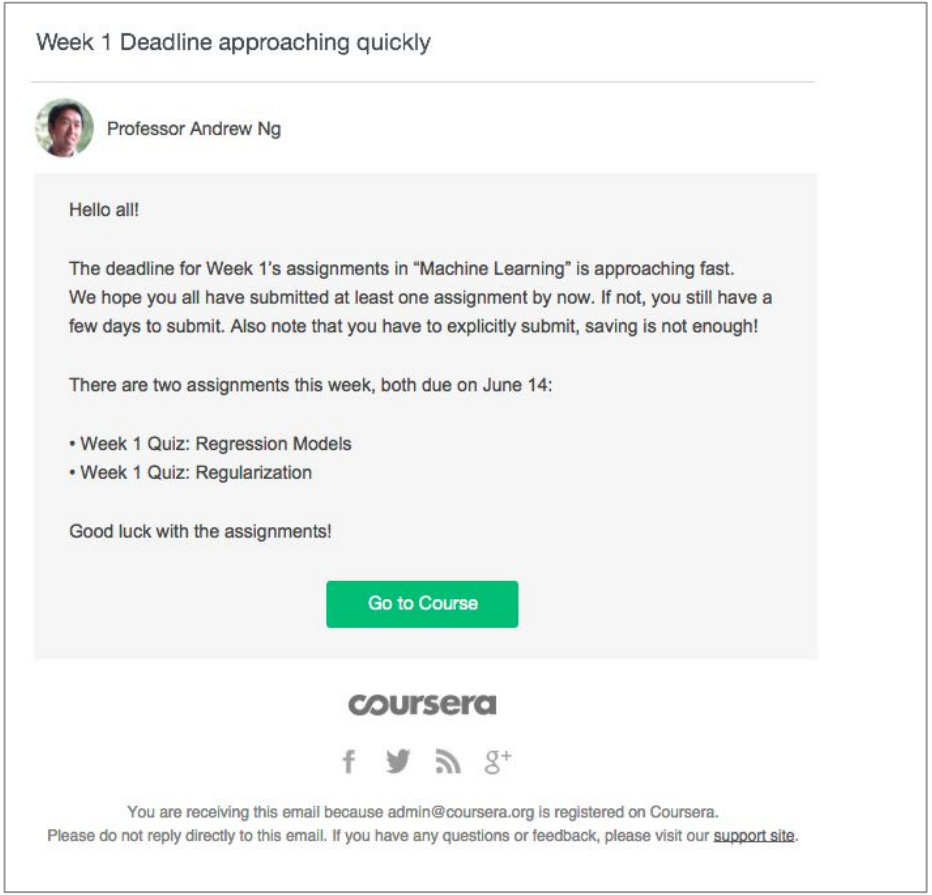


Content organized by weeks; All content is visible on the start date; Assignments show due dates for the soft deadlines each week

Example of automated reminder emails to encourage learners to stay on track



Week 1 Deadline approaching quickly

Professor Andrew Ng

Hello all!

The deadline for Week 1's assignments in "Machine Learning" is approaching fast. We hope you all have submitted at least one assignment by now. If not, you still have a few days to submit. Also note that you have to explicitly submit, saving is not enough!

There are two assignments this week, both due on June 14:

- Week 1 Quiz: Regression Models
- Week 1 Quiz: Regularization

Good luck with the assignments!

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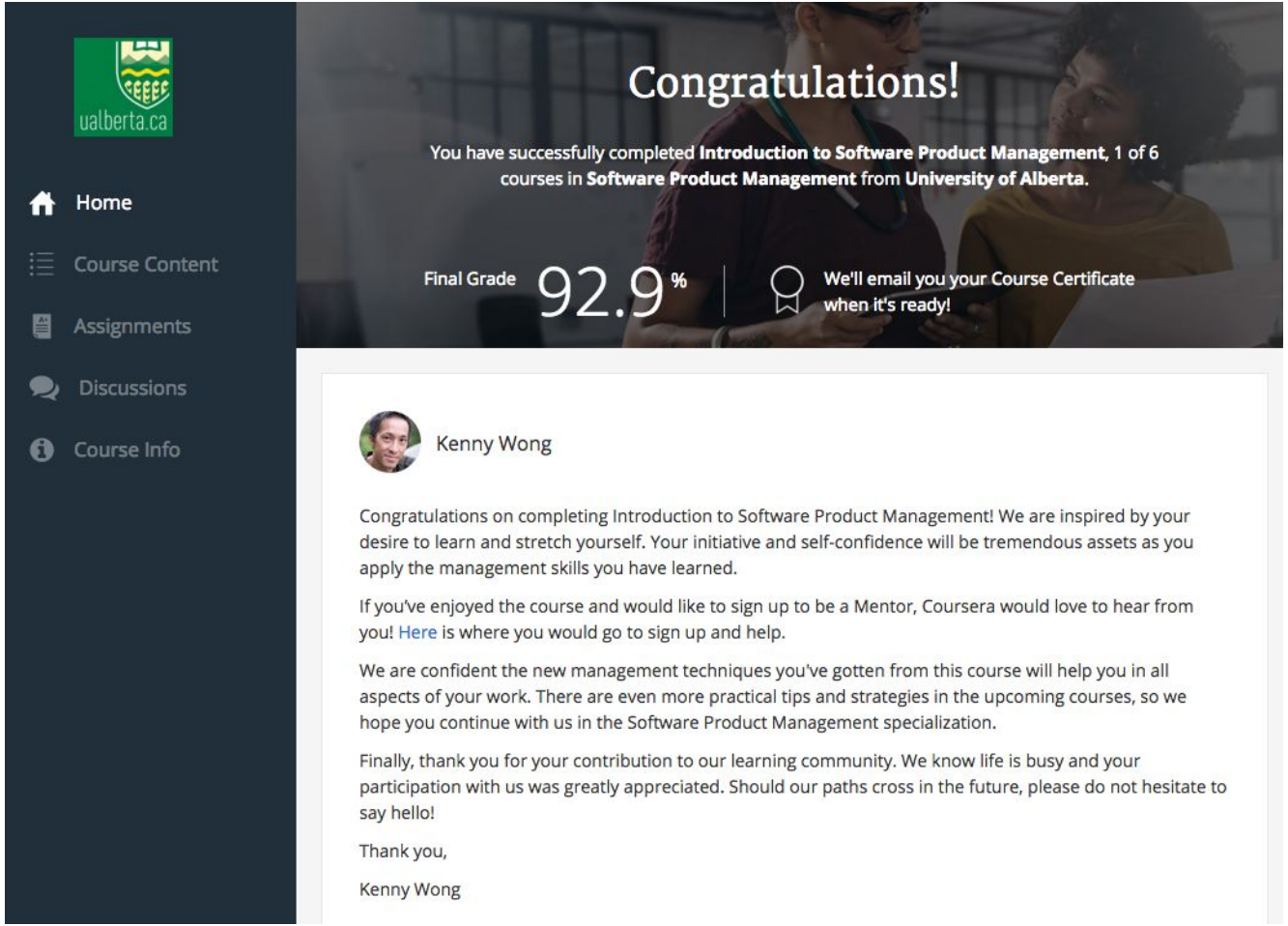
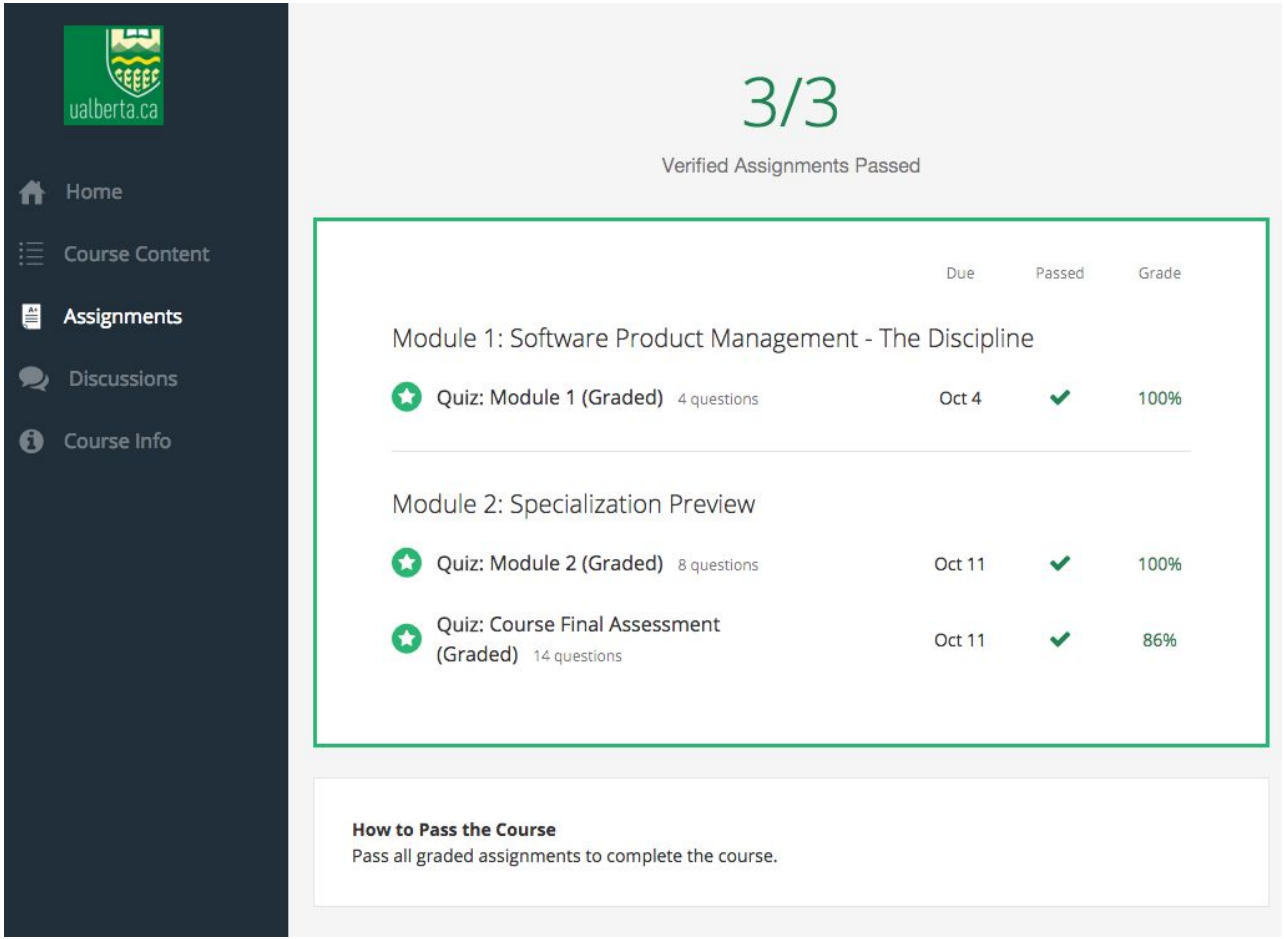


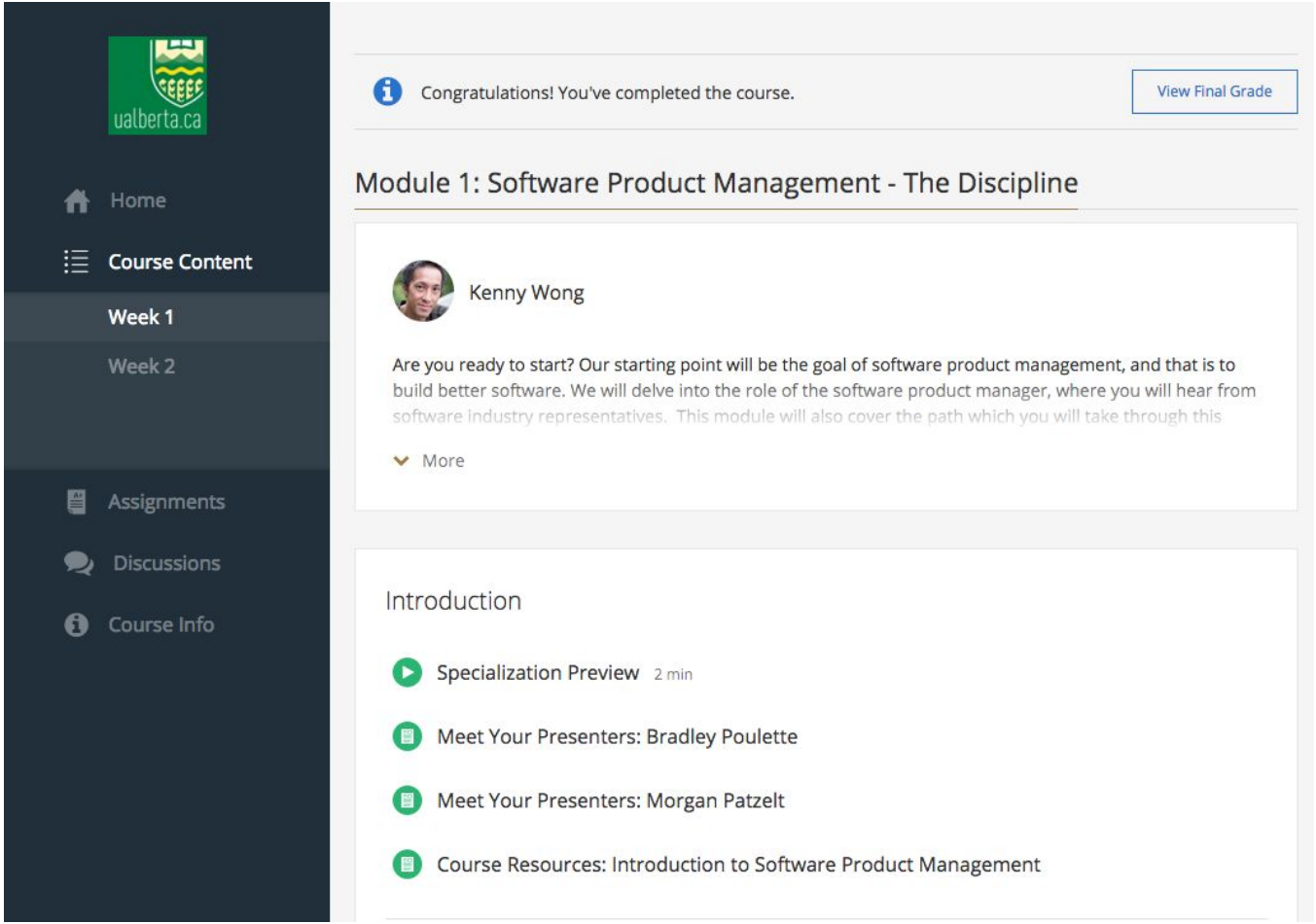
End of cohort experience for learners who have passed the course



End of cohort experience for learners who have passed the course. All assignments are marked as done on the Assignments tab.

After the cohort end date

Screenshots as walkthrough of the learner experience



After the cohort end date, learners still have archive access to the course content. The course shows their progress.

Old Platform

- Still available, but by March 2016 no sessions will be running on the old platform
- More details about the timeline and specifics of sunsetting the old platform can be found here.

New Platform

- Suggested weekly deadlines (no grade penalty for missing these “soft deadlines”) [see this help article]
- Can publish a Course Description Page and collect pre-enrollments/pre-payments before official course launch
- Must have all course materials finalized on the platform 1-2 weeks before course launch
- All content is available to learners once the course launches, so learners can move at their own pace if they want
- Can create custom Discussion Forums, including a staff-only forum (e.g. for Mentors)

On-Demand (Self-Paced)
(old format for non-Specialization courses)

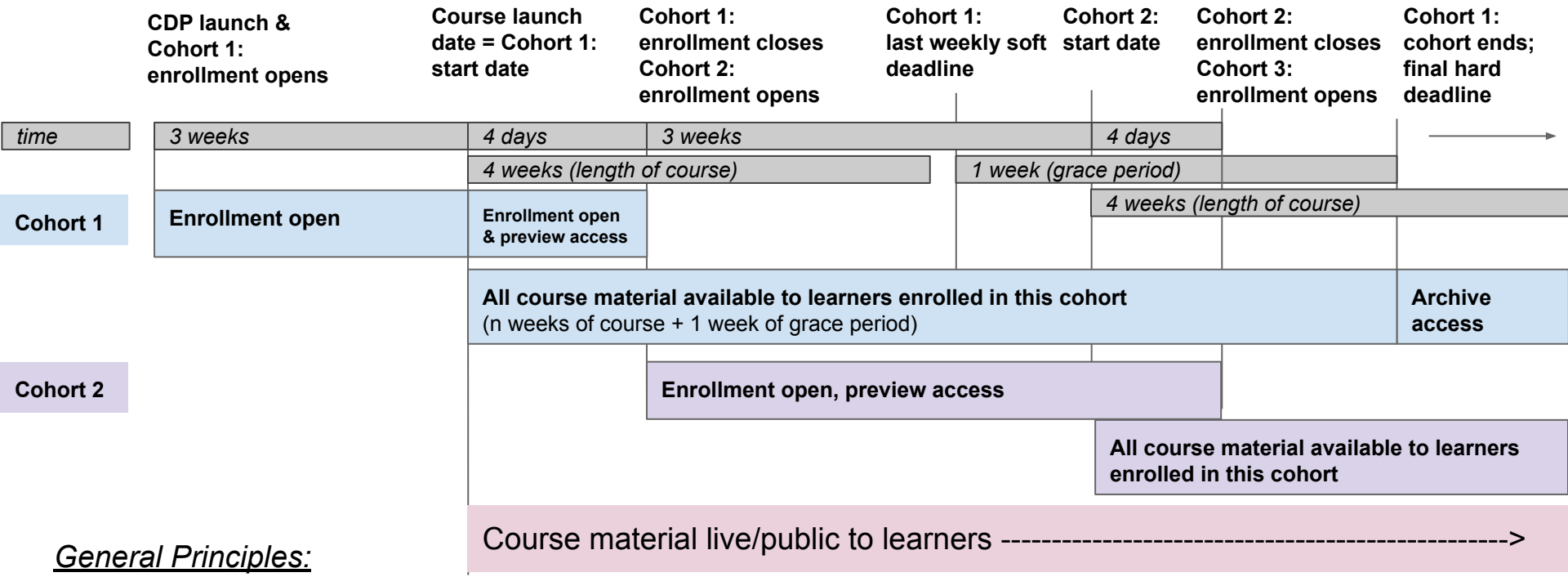
- New courses can launch any day of the week
- Learners can enroll any time
- Courses are always available (no end date)
- Learners see individualized suggested weekly deadlines, based on when they enrolled. Learners can disable these deadlines if they want.
- Discussion Forums remain visible to all on-demand learners

Auto-Cohorts (Sessions)
(recommended format for all new courses, including Specializations)

- New cohorts begin on Mondays
- Learners who enroll before the start of the cohort will be able to preview the content from Week 1 and begin coursework early if they want
- Limited enrollment window to join a cohort (so learners can’t join and be already behind)
- Always have at least 1 cohort open for enrollment
- Coursera will determine re-run frequency based on learner demand (default is monthly; no action needed from partner and no manual work involved for course to re-run)
- All learners in a cohort see the same suggested weekly deadlines
- Discussion Forums refresh for each cohort (partners can “pin” threads to be seen by all learners, regardless of their cohort)
- If learners fall behind and do not complete the course by the cohort end-date (the “hard deadline”), they will have the opportunity to enroll in the next cohort, where their course progress will be maintained.

Auto-Cohort Schedule:

example shown is a 4-week course on a monthly re-run schedule



Data from Auto-Cohorts Pilot

Summer 2015

Metric	On Demand (Default Deadlines)	Monthly Cohorts
% of visitors completing 2 modules by 2nd deadline	**5.55%**	**7.01% (+26%)**
% of visitors that enroll	60.8%	55.8% (-8%)
% of enrollees that activate (e.g. watch lecture)	69.9%	74.2% (+6%)
% of active enrollees completing 2 modules by 2nd deadline	13.1%	17.0% (+30%)
% forum questions answered within 3 days	39.8%	51.6% (+30%)

Data from five initial courses strongly supports a cohort layout.

Summer 2015

Data from Auto-Cohort Pilot

Metric	Sessions (old platform)*	Cohorts (new platform)*
% of visitors that enroll	71%	62%
% of enrollees that activate (watch a lecture)	65%	77%
% of enrollees that finish the course	7.7%	10.7%
% of visitors that finish the course	5.5%	6.6%

Comparison based on one course (January 2015 session on the old platform, and the June 2015 cohort on the new platform.) While we believe the general trend of the data, the specific percentages might vary depending on your course.