



# BLACKBOARD ALLY SANDBOX INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

## Institutional Report

### Abstract

The following document outlines the results of Blackboard Ally testing as part of a 9-month sandbox pilot project facilitated by BCcampus. The project ran from April-December 2018 and involved 5 BC post-secondary institution; UBC, VCC, Langara College, Camosun College, and North Island College. Each institution was asked to submit a report outlining the results of their user testing following the project.

# BLACKBOARD ALLY SANDBOX

## INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

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### INSTITUTIONAL DETAILS

INSTITUTION: Langara College

REPORT AUTHOR: Briana Fraser and Heidi Mede

YOUR ROLE: Instructional Materials Designer, Department Supervisor

DATE SUBMITTED: Feb 26, 2019

YOUR INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: Brightspace

THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM YOU TESTED ALLY ON (IF DIFFERENT THAN YOUR INSTITUTIONAL LMS): Moodle

### TECHNICAL INFORMATION

DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY SIGNIFICANT OR UNEXPECTED TECHNICAL ISSUES DURING INSTALLATION OF THE APPLICATION? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ISSUE AND HOW THE ISSUE WAS RESOLVED.

No, we were tested Ally in a LMS different from our institutional system; Blackboard Ally provided us with a Moodle testing environment.

DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY SIGNIFICANT TECHNICAL ISSUES WITH ALLY OPERATION DURING THE SANDBOX/PILOT PERIOD? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ISSUE AND HOW THE ISSUE WAS RESOLVED.

No, we did not experience any technical issues during the pilot period.

### USER TESTING

Ally comes with 3 sets of components aimed at different use cases within an institution; Student Tools, Instructor Tools, and Institutional Reporting Tools. For each of the components you tested, briefly outline;

- Describe who tested the tool?
- Did the tool work as they expected?
- If not, what was unexpected?
- Did the test users find the tools easy and intuitive to use? If not, what parts of the application did your users find was not intuitive to use?

- What did the users like about the tools?
- What did the users dislike about the tools?
- What kind of support did you provide, or was required, to support the tester during the testing session.
- Any general comments you may have about this specific component?

## STUDENT TOOLS

### WHO TESTED THE TOOL?

A group of Educational Technology department staff, including Instructional Assistants and an Instructional Materials designer, tested the tool. We had planned to include students and staff in our Accessibility Services department in the testing process, but because we tested Ally on a learning management system different from our institutional product, we felt that the unfamiliar LMS could distract users and skew the information provided.

### DID THE TOOL WORK AS THEY EXPECTED?

Yes

### IF NOT, WHAT WAS UNEXPECTED?

DID THE TEST USERS FIND THE TOOLS EASY AND INTUITIVE TO USE? IF NOT, WHAT PARTS OF THE APPLICATION DID YOUR USERS FIND WAS NOT INTUITIVE TO USE?

Yes, although testers were unable to test the e-braille format.

### WHAT DID THE USERS LIKE ABOUT THE TOOLS?

Testers liked the alternative formats, particularly the OCR, PDF and the audio version.

### WHAT DID THE USERS DISLIKE ABOUT THE TOOLS?

The majority of the issues from the student perspective stemmed from the alternative language option.

- Testers found it difficult to select an alternative language.
- Testers noted that they would likely use Google to translate their course materials. For example, one tester found that although the Portuguese translation was adequate, Google translation was significantly better.
- One tester noted that the Malay language label is incorrect – the language label is in Malayalam, but the translation language is Malay.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DID YOU PROVIDE, OR WAS REQUIRED, TO SUPPORT THE TESTER DURING THE TESTING SESSION.

Support was not provided since it was our Educational Technology department that tested Ally. We did receive training from Blackboard Ally in the summer 2018.

#### ANY GENERAL COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT THIS SPECIFIC COMPONENT?

None

#### INSTRUCTOR TOOLS

##### WHO TESTED THE TOOL?

We established a two-stage approach to test the Instructor Tools. First, a group of Educational Technology department staff, including two Instructional Assistants and an Instructional Materials Designer, gathered as a group to test the tool. Then, the testers reviewed the tool independently to identify additional issues.

##### DID THE TOOL WORK AS THEY EXPECTED?

For the most part, yes.

##### IF NOT, WHAT WAS UNEXPECTED?

The first issue that struck the testing group was the way the tool presents accessibility issues. When testing files with known issues, testers were confused by the issue flagged by the tool. It was not immediately clear that only one of several issues was being presented and that it was necessary to click *All issues* to see the complete list. Individual testers were surprised that the initial issue presented is not necessarily the issue that would have the most significant impact on the accessibility score. Testers felt it would be more useful to either present the full list of issues or display the issue that when fixed would have the biggest impact on improving the accessibility of content.

The most unexpected issue was inconsistency. In particular, our testers identified three areas where they encountered inconsistency when using the tool:

1. The accessibility results provided by Ally differed from those provided by other accessibility checking tools;
2. In some cases, the issues flagged by Ally were inconsistent across files of the same type; and
3. Ally did not flag some of the issues testers felt impeded accessibility.

While not initially apparent, during in-depth individual testing testers discovered that the results flagged by Ally are inconsistent with other accessibility checking tools. For instance, when checked with the Office 365 accessibility checker, a Word document had no issues, but Ally flagged it for a headings issue. In another case, Ally flagged a document for contrast issues, but neither the Office 365 checker nor a color-contrast analysis tool checker identified contrast issues with the document.

Testers found the tool inconsistently flagged accessibility issues for files of the same type. For instance, despite incorrect headings, one Word document had an accessibility score of 100%. In another instance, Ally flagged a Word document for headings issues even though all headings were correct.

Testers also expressed concern that Ally did not flag some important accessibility issues. For example, Ally identified one Word document as having issues with headings, but it did not flag the small font size and spacing.

Another unexpected issue was the perceived accuracy of the score. For instance, one Word document received a score of 66%. Ally noted two issues with the document - insufficient contrast and missing table heading. The contrast was acceptable for the size of font when checked by a color contrast-checking tool. While the table was missing a header, the table contained only a small amount of information and was easily fixed, so testers felt that the score provided by Ally was not reflective of the accessibility of the document. In another instance, Ally indicated that a Word document was missing headings. However, the document had a properly styled title and headings were not an intended feature, and the Office 365 accessibility checker did not identify a headings issue.

#### DID THE TEST USERS FIND THE TOOLS EASY AND INTUITIVE TO USE?

Testers found the tool easy to use, but felt frustrated by some the results.

#### IF NOT, WHAT PARTS OF THE APPLICATION DID YOUR USERS FIND WAS NOT INTUITIVE TO USE?

Testers were frustrated by the initial presentation of only a single issue and the requirement to click *All issues* to see the full list of accessibility issue. Testers went so far as to note that this could become a roadblock to use of the tool. For example, testers believed that if a faculty member took the time to fix the issue that was initially presented and uploaded a new file only to be presented with another issue, the user could become overwhelmed and frustrated by the tool.

Testers also thought it would be useful to highlight the fixes that would make the biggest impact for improving the accessibility of content.

#### WHAT DID THE USERS LIKE ABOUT THE TOOLS?

Testers liked the following:

- The tool is discrete
- *The What this means* section provides a lot of useful information; however, testers thought it would be more useful if it wasn't buried under *Fix*, but rather presented as an option at the issue level.
- Detailed information, such as *How to write a good description* as well as good and bad examples.
- The comprehensive explanation of how to include an image description as well as how to write a good description.
- Information on how to *Fix* issues (however, it was also noted that the terminology is deceptive because it gives the impression that by clicking on the button the issue will be fixed).

- The ability to print out the directions about how to fix issues, although testers noted that it would be more helpful if all instructions were printable. For instance, the tool offers a print option for *How to add descriptions to images in a document*, but does not offer a print button for *How to write a good description*.

#### WHAT DID THE USERS DISLIKE ABOUT THE TOOLS?

Testers disliked the following:

- *Guidance coming soon*. Testers felt that where guidance is unavailable, the indicator should not be visible.
- Displaying only one issue when the indicator is clicked.
- When displaying the issues, not ranking them by order of importance. For instance, "This presentation contains images that are missing a description" was the first issue displayed with one PPT file. Adding a description would have changed the score from 36% to 52%; however, adding headings would have increased the score to 61%.
- In the case of a PPT presentation without headings, testers disliked the *How to add headings* message that informs users that it is not possible to fix the issue retrospectively.

#### WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DID YOU PROVIDE, OR WAS REQUIRED, TO SUPPORT THE TESTER DURING THE TESTING SESSION.

Tester were given a ratings survey and the Blackboard Ally [Instructor Package: Resources and Support](#), in addition to the Ally and Accessibility training provided by Blackboard Ally.

#### ANY GENERAL COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT THIS SPECIFIC COMPONENT?

An accessibility checker is a great idea; however, our testers felt Ally needs more work before adoption. In addition, the test group did not like the idea of Ally as a standalone approach to address accessibility issues with course content. A comprehensive accessibility education program needs to be up and running before introducing a tool, such as Ally. Without adequate education, the implementation of a tool that alerts faculty to accessibility issues as content is being upload to the CMS could be viewed as a roadblock to teaching.

#### INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING TOOLS

Describe who tested the tool?

We did not test the institutional reporting tools.

Did the tool work as they expected?

If not, what was unexpected?

Did the test users find the tools easy and intuitive to use? If not, what parts of the application did your users find was not intuitive to use?

What did the users like about the tools?

What did the users dislike about the tools?

What kind of support did you provide, or was required, to support the tester during the testing session.

Any general comments you may have about this specific component?

## ALLY SUPPORT

AFTER TESTING ALLY, WHAT KIND OF SUPPORTS AND/OR TRAINING DO YOU FEEL WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS WITH USING ALLY?

At Langara, our department and the Accessibility Services department would jointly offer workshops to instructors and instructional employees. We could also create a videos for instructions on how to use Ally and why to use Ally.

DURING THE TESTING, DID YOU VISIT THE ALLY COMMUNITY FORUMS? DID YOU FIND THE COMMUNITY FORUMS WERE A USEFUL RESOURCE FOR YOU?

No

OUTSIDE OF THE ALLY FORUMS, DID YOU LOOK FOR OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR ALLY FUNCTIONALITY AND/OR SUPPORT? IF SO, WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Yes, we looked at the Blackboard Ally [Instructor Package: Resources and Support](#)

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

ARE THERE ANY FEATURES THAT YOU OR YOUR TESTERS FELT WERE MISSING FROM ALLY?

No

HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE ALLY TO THE OTHER TYPES OF ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH?

As noted throughout the report, testers found that Ally identified issues that were inconsistent with the results provided by other tools.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE TOP BENEFIT FOR AN INSTITUTION TO ADOPT ALLY?

Ally seamlessly provides students with a range of alternative formats.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR AN INSTITUTION LOOKING TO ADOPT ALLY?

The inconsistent results provided between Ally and other accessibility checkers has the potential to cause frustration and turn users off the tool.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE CONSIDERING PILOTING THIS APPLICATION?

Ensure a robust accessibility education program for teaching faculty and staff is in place before testing the tool with students and staff.



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