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

INSTITUTIONAL DETAILS

Institution: Camosun College

Report Author: Sue Doner & Emily Schudel

Your Role: Instructional Designer

Date Submitted: March 1, 2019

Your Institutional Learning Management System: D2L

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.

- Not applicable in our case as the D2L integration with BB Ally is not yet complete. Our pilot was limited to Student and Faculty roles on a hosted Moodle system we were given access to for testing purposes.
- Ours was less of a full pilot of Ally and more of a focused testing by 2 instructional designers of the Student and Faculty tools + experience from those roles.

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.

- None; all of our testing in faculty and student roles went smoothly.

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?
  Because we did not have a D2L-based Ally to test and put in front of a pilot group of students & faculty here, our tester group was limited to **2 instructional designers** in our eLearning unit.

- Did the tool work as they expected?
  Very happy with the intuitive, user-friendly experience from both faculty-course-creator side and student side. The plain-language feedback Ally gives to an instructor to help them improve technical accessibility of content is easy to follow and also in line with the type of feedback and guidance we would also provide in one-on-one or workshop-type settings. Having the partnership of an automated-tool to provide faculty guidance on what & why & how they can do differently is SO appreciated from the building awareness & skills/capacity – better than just "your file isn't accessible"(!!).
- 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?
  We both found the tool completely intuitive to use from both faculty & student-roles. Really appreciated the plain-language within the feedback to faculty especially – great guidance around "what could/should you do next", etc.
- 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 [SEE SUMMARY UNDER "USER TESTING"]

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?

INSTRUCTOR TOOLS [SEE SUMMARY UNDER "USER TESTING"]

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?

INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING TOOLS [NOT APPLICABLE FOR CAMOSUN/D2L]

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?

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?

- Guidance at implementation time and "on-boarding"-type training from BBAlly team – including "train the trainer" support.
- Will need to post news reminders each term (or more) to advise faculty about presence and function of this tool – specifically things like what the "fuel gauge" feedback means when their file fails to meet standards ☺
- Screen-grab based tutorials for the self-serve & just-in-time type of training.

During the testing, did you visit the Ally community forums? Did you find the community forums were a useful resource for you?

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?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Are there any features that you or your testers felt were missing from Ally?

- From the limitations of the two roles – can't think of any; need to have hands-on with the administrative role & institutional reporting side before can say conclusively.

How would you compare Ally to the other types of accessibility tools you may be familiar with?

- What we are most excited about with BB Ally is the potential it offers for immediately and significantly increasing our capacity to delivery accessible content to students. Specifically: the fact that the tool gently and contextually educates instructors about what they can do better as they create & add content to an online course is an enormous benefit to creating awareness and fundamental literacy around "how do I make my course accessible?", and we predict it will be a welcome partner in helping to supplement the one-on-one or workshop training we can provide but that require faculty to actually attend and choose to be interested! My hope & expectation is that incorporating BB Ally into our D2L environment will have immediate impact on the "I didn't know"-type of errors that are predominant but preventable.
- LOVE the multi-modal outputs that Ally creates for students. We have an integrated text-to-speech tool in our D2L already, but don't have the built in capacity otherwise to provide EPUB, etc. types of formats. We'd have to connect with (e.g.) CAPER-BC to have those formats created and even then, they would be limited to a one-off version for a single student; this way we can readily and sustainably provide multiple file format options within our LMS and without requiring students to ask for them.

What do you see as the top benefit for an institution to adopt Ally?

- As stated earlier: I think one of the top benefits Ally provides is that it can reach so many more faculty, every day and in every course, than we can as individual instructional designers. Even when we do connect with faculty to help them with accessibility, it is almost always because those faculty have opted to ask or inquire. Even if faculty take or leave the feedback that Ally gives them, those little gauges will provide a constant visual reminder about existing barriers vs "I didn't know my files weren't accessible to everyone".
- As faculty & course developer capacity/skills increase with use and students really begin to reap the benefits of having accessible content files in their online courses, the multi-modal options that BB Ally generates will move up the list to being top benefit (from my perspective).

What do you think is the biggest challenge for an institution looking to adopt Ally?

- As with any change movement or new ed-tech, training & awareness building will be a big part of this.
- $$ aren't insignificant, especially for the colleges and smaller institutions.
- Will also need to position Ally as an actual "ally" to faculty efforts, vs. seeing it as a critical voice telling them everything they're doing wrong…

What advice do you have for others who might be considering piloting this application?

- Try to involve some of your senior leadership or administrators in the pilot. I regret that we didn't have some sort of show & tell session with our Director and assorted VPs during the pilot, if for no other reason than to give them a clearer sense of how common accessibility barriers do occur throughout our online courses, and the type of how-to guidance the full college community needs in order to improve our collective "accessibility literacy".
- Would also recommend actively involving members of your institution's Centre for Accessible Learning (aka Disability Services, etc.) – or anyone who is involved in print accommodations, and bring them into the testing group and/or show & tell for both awareness and feedback. Also worth consider connecting with your institution's Print Services and those who play a role in procurement of print materials at your institution (e.g. Librarians) so there is more proactive awareness of accessibility considerations when purchasing print materials for your institution's collections.