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:

Report Author:

Your Role:

Date Submitted:

Your Institutional Learning Management System:

The Learning Management System you tested Ally on (if different than your institutional LMS):

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.

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.

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

Describe who tested the tool?

I asked our (Department of Accessible Learning) DAL office to recommend some students for testing. I got two names. Both students took a while to respond to my email and I gave out the wrong link to start. After sending the correct link I got a response from one of the students.

Did the tool work as they expected?

I can't say they had a lot of expectations going in. I told them what it would do.

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?

I think the users mixed up BB Learn (our LMS) and ALLY. This is something I'll want to be clearer about if we go ahead with ALLY. The non-intuitive comments were more related to Learn than ALLY

What did the users like about the tools?

> " Audio Files- great to have the ability to have instructions/documents read aloud.
>
> Braille feature – wonderful to have this accommodation. I have not come across it before, thrilled its there."

What did the users dislike about the tools?

Again, some was BB Learn but one comment may be applicable to ALLY:

> "Buttons on the pages instead of a drop-down menu to find accessibility features; it may seem like a small thing, but any place a transposition could occur should be considered. I had an opportunity to use VIU's student platform (D2L) this weekend to compare against BB, and found the buttons used by D2L far more clear to navigate."

The student also mentioned Alternative voicing for the audio documents. There may be frequency issues for some students with auditory impairment and potential age-related accessibility should be considered. If this feature is there, she couldn't find it.

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

My only contact was by email. I didn't have the opportunity to sit with testers.

Any general comments you may have about this specific component?

I think I would try to set up a student site in a lab and offer food and maybe have them go through some tasks.

INSTRUCTOR TOOLS

Describe who tested the tool?

I sent an email to all faculty about the tool and asking for testers. I had five responses. I also had someone from our DAL office enrolled. She was interested but did not participate. I also tested (Distributed Learning Facilitator)

Did the tool work as they expected?

Again, other than what I told them about ALLY, I'm not sure they knew what to expect.

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?

I had feedback from 2 users. I had one comment that 'it took a while to figure out how to get the icon to show up'. I don't know if that was related to some server issues we might have had (I couldn't see the icons in my test course for a while) or, if it was a BB issue (editing turned off).

What did the users like about the tools?

In general, they (and I) found the ratings to be helpful and the instructions for fixing things very easy to follow. We liked the 'how' and 'why' explanations for fixing documents.

What did the users dislike about the tools?

No negative feedback.

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

As with students, only email (lots of prompting and reminding) and some in person conversations.

Any general comments you may have about this specific component?

The individual faculty members I've spoken to about ALLY are excited about it what it can do. I noticed that it's not obtrusive in the courses and that it's easy to use. I think the important thing – and this I learned from the Washington State pilot – is to be very clear in describing how ALLY is not the LMS but is integrated, and where to find the alternate formats so that everyone knows and can take advantage of them.

INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING TOOLS

Describe who tested the tool?

Our e-learning support technician did some minimal testing to make sure that it was working. I admit I didn't focus much on this part.

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?

Very easy to install and gives a good idea about who has a good accessibility score.

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?

Like I said above, being very clear that ALLY is not Blackboard Learn but is seamlessly integrated so that the ALLY features are not confused with general LMS operation. I would add information about where to find the drop down menu for alternate formats to the BB Learn student training course. I would use the Teaching and Learning Committee that I co-chair to host some events around ALLY and add a session to our regular 'boot camp' for faculty. Making sure the DAL office and student services are aware of ALLY and what it can do. Promote through Student union or some other student focused entity. Posters. Once people know about it, learning to use it is pretty easy.

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

I did not but this was more of an off the side of my desk type of testing than a really robust test.

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?

I did while I was looking for information to send to testers. I found some useful information on the BB help website. https://help.blackboard.com/Ally/Ally_for_LMS/Instructor

GENERAL QUESTIONS

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

The biggest one is no support for html. I know that's coming but knowing the code is clean would be great. One tester would have preferred buttons to a drop down menu for accessing alternate formats. There are some language translations that would be nice to have that are not there yet.

I tested some audio on both high and low scoring files and I wonder if students who aren't used to hearing formatting will find them useful or not. It's definitely interesting to hear the formatting comes through in the audio and to remember how important it is for assistive technologies.

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

The integration to the LMS makes it available to everyone, not just a student who identifies as needing support. ALLY creates the alternate formats removing the responsibility (and cost) of finding them. Other accessibility tools that I know of seem to be specific to an individual, making it difficult to know if whatever formats you can provide will work for them.

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

ACCESS! I'm less interested in Institutional Reports than having accessible content but reports may be more important to others here. The ease of use for instructors, the seamless integration with BB Learn, and the content options for students are the top benefits for me.

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

Cost. Possibly mitigating some fear for instructors that they are being judged for the accessibility of their content.

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

Try and have someone (or a small team) who can dedicate some time solely for the purpose of the pilot. I found it difficult to get some people to do what they'd signed up for but maybe the timing was bad.