online.shsu.edu/publications/news/2024/spring/faculty-contributing-to-ally-and-digital-accessibility.html

Blackboard Ultra Base Navigation is here! Learn more at the **Blackboard Learn Ultra Transition** webpage.

Prospective Students: Check out our viewbook!

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NEW TRENDS IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Faculty - Contributing to Ally and Digital Accessibility

WRITTEN BY:

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Director, Research and Strategic Support, SHSU Online

PUBLISHED:

Jan 19, 2024

RECENT NEWS @ SHSU ONLINE SPRING

The Accessible Campus, a report published in June 2023 by the Chronicle of Higher Education, "...examines how colleges are working to make physical and digital spaces accessible to all and the challenges that students and employees face in obtaining accommodations" (Field, 2023). The report illustrates a renewed focus on accessibility for Higher Education that is wholly consistent with Sam Houston State University's focus on student success. SHSU Online is committed to addressing accessibility challenges in digital course delivery that affect all students, particularly students with disabilities. The interest in principles of universal design, in campus construction as well as pedagogy, has increased dramatically from the past. Like campus architects that design facilities that eliminate barriers up front, professors are offering students more options for how they can access, and demonstrate mastery of, course content (Field, 2023).

Several years ago, SHSU Online purchased and implemented **Ally**, a three-component "plug-in" accessibility tool that seamlessly integrates into Blackboard (Bb), our Learning Management System (LMS). With guidance and feedback from SHSU Online and the Ally program, many faculty made great strides in improving accessibility, and we want to continue that trajectory of improvement. The

purpose of this article is to support student success by providing information about Anthology Ally for new faculty that will also serve as a review for faculty already familiar with Ally. You can expect more information in future SHSU Online newsletters to support instructor efforts toward providing accessible digital experiences for students.

Ally functions within Bb to 1) identify, 2) measure, and 3) help address accessibility challenges in digital course content. In our case at SHSU, that content is the digital course materials in Blackboard which faculty upload not only into online courses but also use for instruction in face-to-face courses. Ally identifies digital course materials in Bb, evaluates the accessibility of that material, provides feedback to the instructor, and guides faculty with options to make a one-time improvement that addresses the identified accessibility issue.

From the standpoint of student success, Ally provides the opportunity for students- all students- to choose and access course materials in Bb in **different formats** – formats that students believe will work better, in accordance with their individual preferences and learning styles. Among the alternative formats are Tagged PDF, HTML, ePub, Electronic Braille, Audio, BeeLine Reader, Immersive Reader, Optical Character Recognition (OCR), and Translations.

For you – SHSU faculty- **Ally can provide you** with a review of your digital course content in Bb, feedback on that review, and straightforward guidance on how you can improve the accessibility of your course materials (see Jacob Spradlin's **"Bb Tip - How to Run a Course Accessibility Report for your Blackboard Course"** in this newsletter). After you address and apply adjustments to your content in Bb, you immediately **receive new feedback**.

Finally, from the SHSU perspective, continuing the institution's trajectory of improvement in accessibility of digital course materials will reflect well on the faculty, the institution, and most

importantly, the students at SHSU who will have improved accessibility that will contribute to their success.
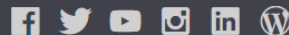
References

Field, K. (2023). The Accessible Campus. The Chronicle of Higher Education.
https://store.chronicle.com/collections/reports-guides/products/the-accessible-campus

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Ally Update

WRITTEN BY:
Jacob Spradlin
Associate Director for Instructional Technology Support Services

PUBLISHED:
August 27, 2019

THIS MONTH @ SHSU ONLINE AUGUST 2019

Registration is Open for the 8th Annual Digital Education Summit: September 19 & 20

Membership Has Its Privileges

VoiceThread Makes the Most of Dynamic Class Discussions

ID Corner: Chris Hayden

Ally Update

Staff News

Strategic How-To Sessions Coming in September

Blackboard Tips: Ten Tips to Improve Accessibility in Blackboard Courses

Current News

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Current News

News Archive

In previous months, the SHSU Online Newsletter has covered Blackboard Ally's rollout across all Fall 2019 courses. If you'd like a refresher, please see the **July** or **April** newsletter articles. This month we would like to provide you with some updates on Blackboard Ally's features and functionality. This article will cover:

1. **The Blackboard Ally Adoption Toolkit**
2. **The Download Alternative Format's New Look**
3. **Course Accessibility Report – New For Instructors**

Blackboard Ally Adoption Toolkit

If you'd like to see what Blackboard Ally is all about, we recommend taking a look at the **Blackboard Ally Adoption toolkit**. The toolkit will help all Blackboard instructors become familiar with Ally's mission, key features and getting started. It covers:

- Ally Basics
- Ally Instructor Feedback
- Accessibility Checklist
- Downloading an Alternative Format

It also provides "micro-learning" opportunities that allow you to learn about Ally one "fix" at a time. **Take a look at the Blackboard Ally Adoption toolkit** to learn more.

Alternative File Format Download – A New Look

Blackboard has made it easier for students to locate and download the alternative formats to files you have put in your course content. Students will now see the **Download Alternative Formats** or Ⓐↆ icon next to files you have uploaded. They just click this icon to open the **Download alternative formats** dialog.
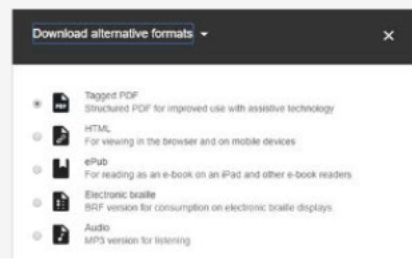
○ Schedule Template
Ⓐↆ Word document for **student viewing** - an effective format product can be copied and pasted into the last pages of a syllabu be helpful to chunk material in this manner IF you plan to teach easier to expand and contract a course when needed). Bottom li expand and contract the course, OR if your "weeks" cover a *differ*

○ Content Outline Template
Ⓐↆ Word document for **instructor and Instructional Designe**

Download alternative formats ▾   ✕

📄 Tagged PDF
Structured PDF for improved use with assistive technology

📄 HTML
For viewing in the browser and on mobile devices

📄 ePub
For reading as a e-book on an iPad and other e-book readers

📄 Electronic braille
BRF version for consumption on electronic braille displays

📄 Audio
MP3 version for listening

prompts, assignment instructions, notes regarding content for it
instructors teaching online for the first time, and allows your ID t
(whether that be modules, units, weeks, sessions, etc.).

Course Accessibility Report for Instructors – New Feature

Blackboard Ally has added a course **Accessibility Report** under *Course Tools* in your course's control panel. The course accessibility report acts as a complement to the existing accessibility indicators. It provides an accessibility summary and overview at the course level.

Ally's course accessibility report includes *Overview* and *Content* tabs so that you can get the big picture as well as specific details about the accessibility of your digital course content.

- The Overview tab shows the accessibility score for the course, course content grouped by content type, and a list of all issues identified in the course
- The Content tab shows you the content with accessibility issues

👤 Alex Williams **15** ▾   ⏻

Course accessibility score