

# Examining Course Material Accessibility Using Blackboard Ally

Martha Mock, PhD

Lisa Brown, EdD



# What is Blackboard Ally?










- Alternative accessible formats:  
Automatically check for accessibility issues and generate alternative accessible formats using advanced Machine Learning algorithms.
- Instructor feedback: Guide instructors on how to improve the accessibility of their course content and alter future behavior.
- Institutional Report: Provides institution-wide reporting on course content accessibility and drives further improvements at the institution



# Accessibility Indicators



## Major Course Assignments and Projects ▼

Attached Files:   Individual\_Project.docx ▼  (26.989 KB)  
  Group\_Project.doc ▼  (44.5 KB)  
  Final\_reflection\_outline\_v2.docx ▼  (20.375 KB)

There are three major assignments or projects in this course. Please note that you will work on these throughout the course as noted in the provided information.

- Group project - due Module 7
- Individual Project - due Module 9 and Module 10
- Final Reflection Paper - due Module 10

General Information about these assignments are located in the attached documents.



# Accessibility Guidance

Page 2 of 3

3 Text fragments with insufficient contrast

Accessibility score for: Group\_Project.doc

97%

This document contains text with insufficient contrast

What this means

How to fix contrast

1 / 3

Module implementation: Each student in the class will participate in other modules, and provide feedback to the instructors. For logistical reasons, students will be assigned to these modules, and participate in them as learners the week before or after when they facilitate their module as instructors.

Revision: We believe that good teaching requires continuous reflection and improvement – so we want you to start the habit here! After you have implemented your lesson with your classmates, you will receive feedback and suggestions for improvement from both the instructors and the participants in your lesson. We expect you to review this feedback and make revisions in your original lesson plan that you think will improve it. While you will not be expected to teach again the revised lesson, your revised lesson plan will be evaluated by the instructors and receive a grade.

Group members' experience: Managing the logistics of developing and delivering a lesson as a group is a challenge, yet also a valuable part of your learning experience in this course. We will discuss in class about group work dynamics and share some tips. We urge each group to plan carefully upfront how tasks will be distributed and communicated across group members, when and how to meet, how to communicate decisions and track with each other, etc. We also encourage you to explore and take advantage as appropriate of online technologies that may help support this process – including discussion boards, Google docs, Zoom, just to mention a few.

Instructors' support: To make the task of designing and delivering a first online lesson more manageable, the instructors will provide help in the following ways:






- (a) by reviewing the key goals of the lesson (so as to make sure it is a worthwhile learning experience for the rest of the class, and that the scope is not beyond the equivalent of about half a week of independent work);
- (b) by reviewing and/or providing suggestions about readings that could be relevant to the topic;



# Alternative Formats

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 an 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

 [Help](#)



# Pilot Process



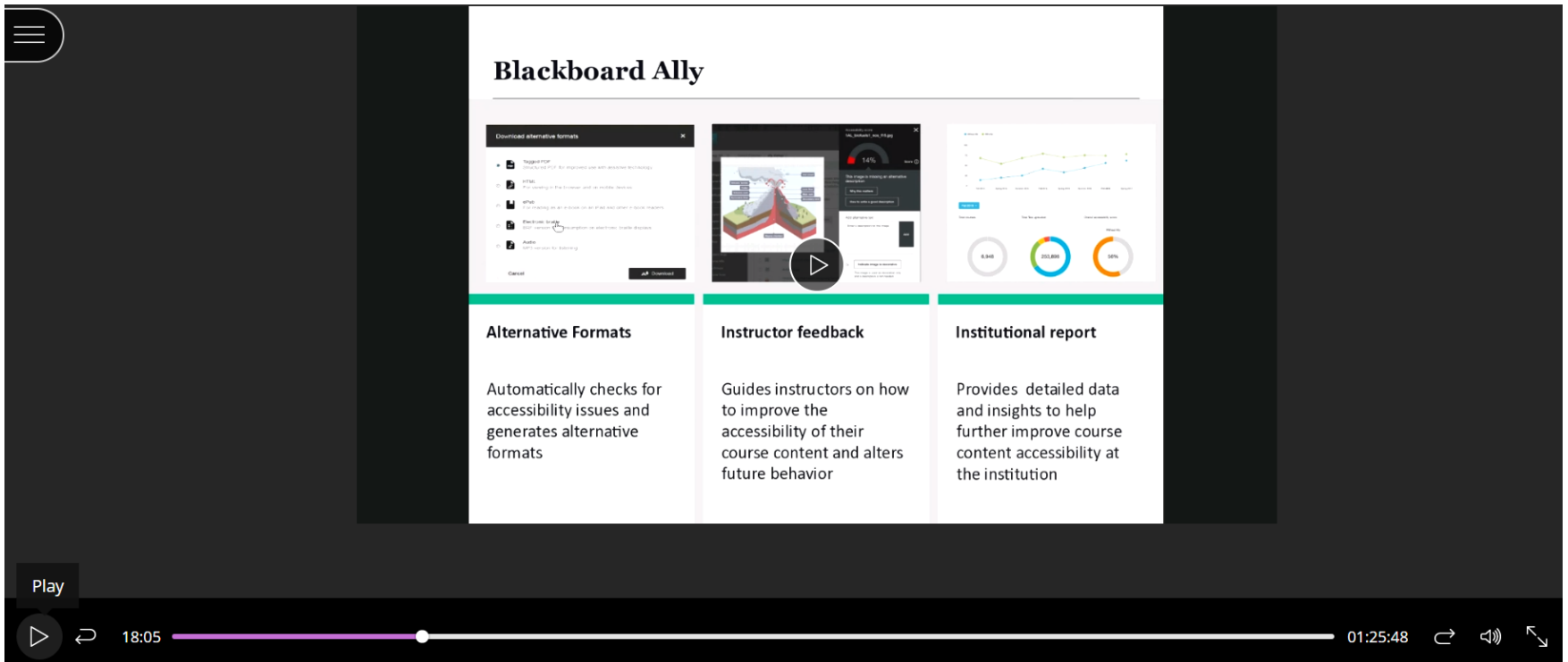
# Courses

Faculty using Ally came from the following schools


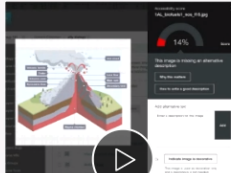

- Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (11 course)
- Eastman School of Music (3 courses)
- School of Nursing (1 course)
- Warner School of Education (9 courses)



# Training Offered



**Blackboard Ally**

| Alternative Formats   | Instructor feedback   | Institutional report  |
|---|---|---|
|  |                         |                          |
| Automatically checks for accessibility issues and generates alternative formats   | Guides instructors on how to improve the accessibility of their course content and alters future behavior | Provides detailed data and insights to help further improve course content accessibility at the institution |

Play

18:05 01:25:48





# Resources Area

## Accessibility Links



### **University of Rochester - Accessibility Information for Faculty**

This is the University's site on providing accessible materials in your courses.



### **Making Accessible Office documents**

Use this site to learn how to make your Office documents more accessible.

Click on the Office product icon for information about that product.



# Zoom Meetings

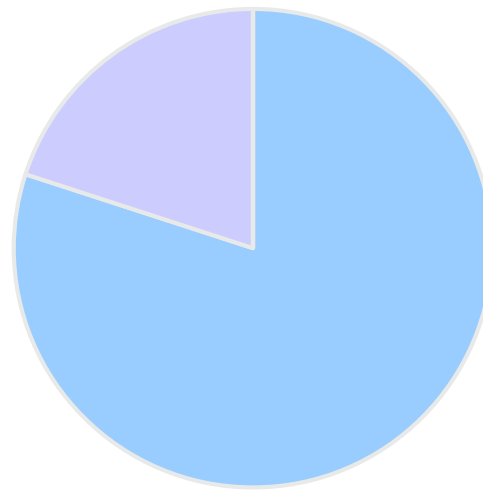


# Faculty Survey



# I have a better appreciation for accessible materials because of Ally

Percentage

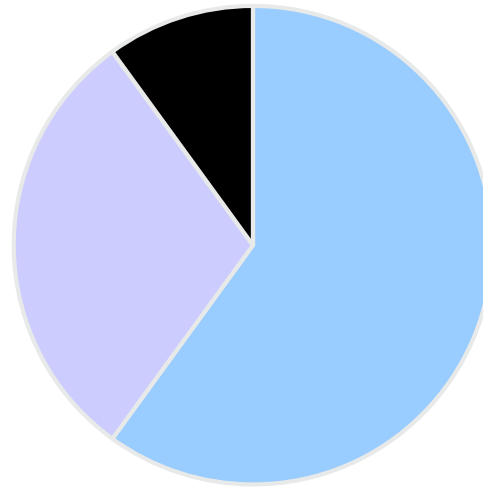


Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree



# I improved the accessibility of my course materials because of Ally

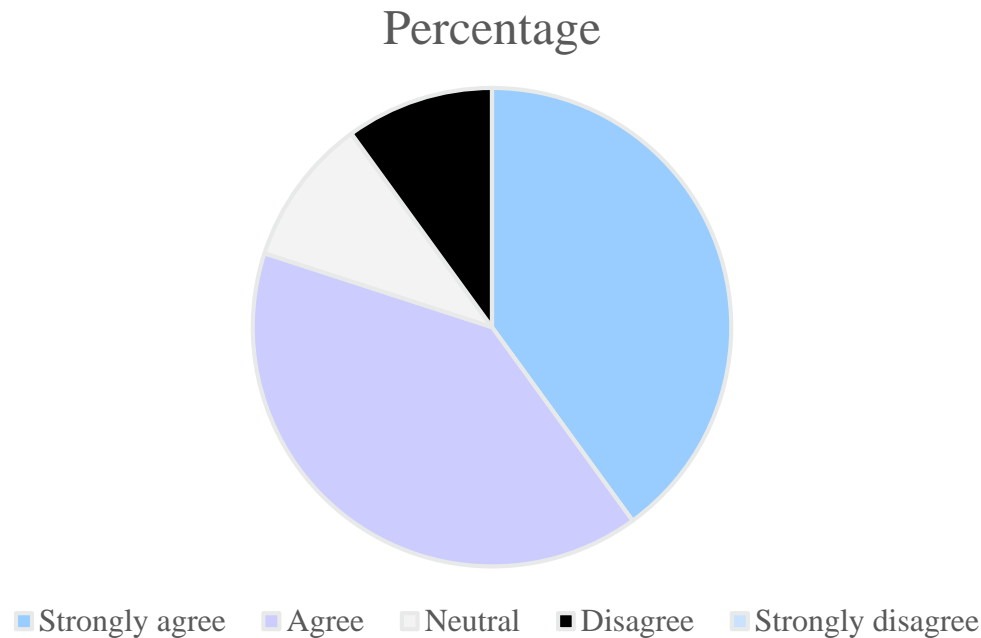
Percentage



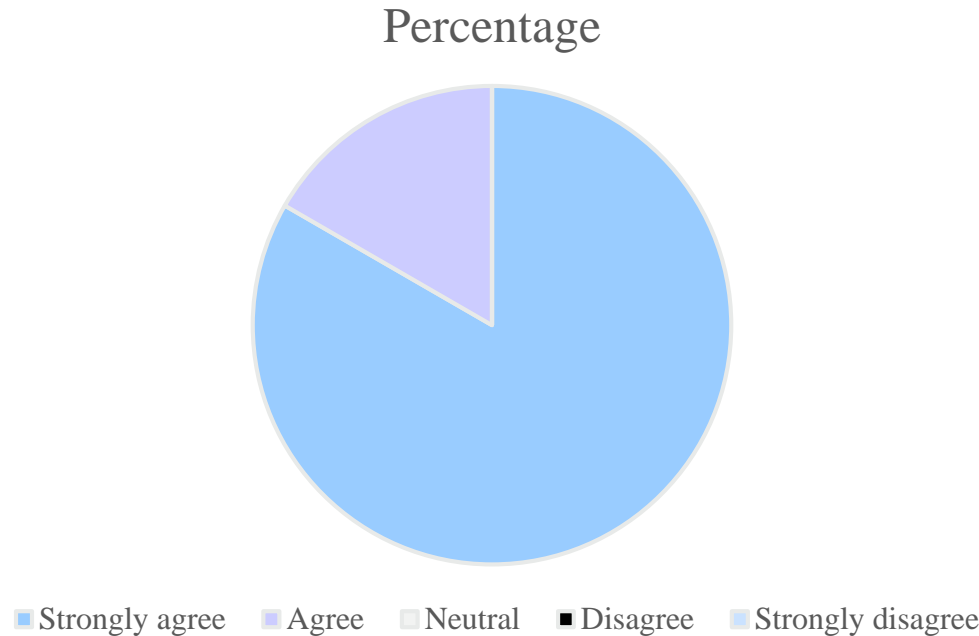
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree



# Ally provided the guidance I needed to improve the accessibility of my course materials



# An important aspect of Ally was the variety of formats available for my course materials for the students



# Ease of Use

- I really appreciated the Ally websites that listed all of the different ways you could change formats and update things to improve them, and I felt the tools inside Blackboard were really great in terms of easily knowing the problem areas in my courses on the documents it tested.
- It took some overhead--the two hour training and some playing around--but once I "got" it I could see how to make better materials





# Education about Accessibility

- I learned more about what makes materials accessible. I thought I was doing a good job, but learned how to make improvements to my personally created materials that supported more accessibility.
- I appreciated that I could make all students aware of the multiple formats available through Ally rather than using this strictly as an accommodation for identified students. Multiple students let me know that they appreciated this feature.



# Opportunities for Improvement

- It would be great if all formats could be included in the tool. In particular, integration with one of the various website rating tools would be great (that is, I created a link to a website, but Ally did not rate it). There were also some other formats that I think did not get included in the tool (maybe Google docs or something like that?), so just making sure that every part of the Blackboard site can be assessed would be great!
- I believe that Ally could have more information about how to specifically make documents and other course materials accessible
- The guidance around how to improve certain formats, especially PDFs, could be improved



# Future Suggestions

- I simply became overwhelmed by the amount of recommendations and needed maybe more ongoing direct assistance to really transform my class.
- ...the real issue is that it is going to take me a LONG time to remediate all of my documents. Going forward, I am doing a reasonable job, but the backlog of work is going to take a while



# Future Plans



- Blackboard Ally was recommended for implementation at University of Rochester as a result of the pilot.
- Purchase of Blackboard Ally was negotiated into the existing LMS contract.
- A team is working on support mechanisms within each school.
- Expectation is to provide access in Spring 2020.

