



Inclusive Learning Series

Research Insights from the Ally Community



Blackboard



An Impact on Inclusive Education Across the Tar Heel State

Colleges and universities throughout the state of North Carolina serve a diverse population of students with a variety of learning needs and abilities. More accessible digital course content delivered in a variety of file formats helps ensure students have access to learning materials that work better with assistive technologies, mobile devices, and study tools. Blackboard Ally integrates into four major Learning Management Systems (LMS) to help institutions address accessibility barriers with course content, increase instructor awareness about accessible content authoring, and improve how students engage with their course materials.

Institutional Report

View overall accessibility trends in the LMS over time. Focus at the issue level or course level for strategic planning and benchmarking. Analyze detailed usage data of Ally tools.

Alternative Formats

Machine learning algorithms automatically generate eight unique file formats from the instructor original. Improve accessibility and usability of course files for all students. Increase learner flexibility and options for engagement.

Instructor Feedback

Accessibility indicators next to course files raise awareness and prompt engagement. Guidance helps faculty address issues and develop authoring skills. Course Accessibility Report provides actionable insights to faculty.

Ally Adoption in North Carolina



57 Colleges and Universities currently using Ally in the LMS



234,147 Students benefiting from Ally (based on full-time enrollment)



3,290,662 Files checked for accessibility in 2019-2020 academic year



3,818,623 HTML items checked for accessibility in 19-20 academic year



596,626 Alternative Formats downloaded through Ally in two years



55,744 Files improved through the Instructor Feedback in two years



Institutional Report Data

The “Overall Files Score” in the table represents the average accessibility scores of files (PDFs, Word, PowerPoint, Images) uploaded to the LMS during the 2019-2020 academic year.

For the five accessibility issues listed, the table includes the average number of files affected by the issue, and the percentage of files with the issue out of the total number of files that could be affected by the issue.

Accessibility numbers in N.C. reflect national averages. Given the volume of files with critical issues, institutions require a scalable, data-informed approach. The **Institutional Report** allows admins and campus leaders to proactively identify problem areas, allocate resources strategically, and benchmark progress on key issues and courses.



Alternative Formats Usage

25 institutions with Alternative Formats enabled in Fall 2019 courses saw an average of **1.44 downloads per FTE, exceeding the national average by over .4 downloads**. On average each week during 2020, **4,517 students** have downloaded **2.81 formats per week**. The different formats downloaded highlight several important use cases. Low-income students accessing content on devices without MS Office or who need a smaller file size can download a **Tagged PDF** format, while those who rely on mobile devices can download their files in a responsive **HTML format**. The **ePub** and **BeeLine** reader formats can help students with dyslexia and focus challenges read more effectively. The **MP3** format allows students to review content on-the-go, while pairing the MP3 with text can support English Language Learners and students with processing challenges.



Instructor Feedback Usage

In the past two years, **38% of indicator clicks resulted in an attempt to fix the file** through the Instructor Feedback and **82% of attempted fixes resulted in an improved accessibility score**. Consistent with national data, images were the most commonly improved file type (65% of all files fixed in NC). Images were followed by PDFs (17%) Word Docs (12%), and Presentations (6%). **6,529 files were altered** through the **Course Accessibility Report**.

Providing instructors with accessibility feedback and guidance within their course workflow helps institutions scale professional development and make a sustainable impact on inclusive education.

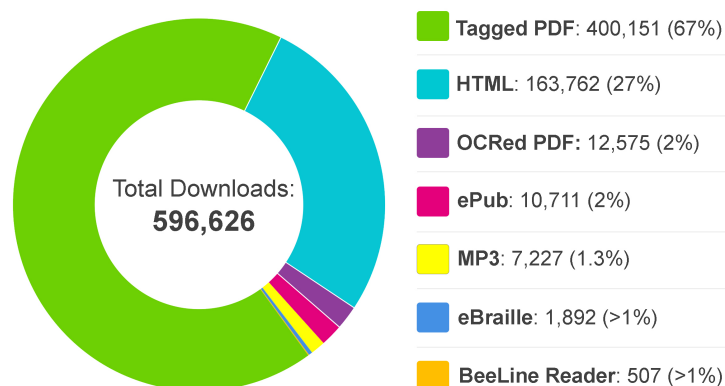
Avg. Accessibility Scores and Critical Issues: 2019-2020

File Score and Issues	Small	Medium	Large
Overall Files Score	57.6%	54.3%	47.2%
Scanned PDFs (% of Total PDFs)	710 (18%)	2,926 (14%)	15,721 (19%)
Untagged PDFs (% of Total PDFs)	1,460 (32%)	7,116 (33%)	31,676 (36%)
Docs Missing Headings (% of Total Docs)	3,758 (25%)	15,335 (25%)	54,563 (25%)
Images Missing Description (% of Total Images)	5,133 (64%)	30,411 (75%)	68,268 (84%)

Small = 620 - 4,000 FTE (43 institutions); Medium = 4,000 - 10,000 FTE (6); Large = 10,500 - 31,000 FTE (6)

Alternative Format Downloads by Format: 24 months

*BeeLine Reader was available in a limited number of courses



Engagement with Instructor Feedback over 9 months

“Files altered and improved” are limited to files uploaded through Ally. Additional fixes may be made directly through the LMS

