We're on a worldwide search to see what inclusive education looks like.

So, Blackboard Ally is going on tour for 2019,

visiting campuses around the globe to learn how they're tackling

their toughest accessibility challenges and

improving the learning experience for all their students.

Hey, everybody, welcome to the first episode of the Ally Tour Podcast.

So, for the first stop on the tour,

we're going to be hearing from the team in Atlantic Cape Community College.

Wow. They have just a really inspiring story about

how in the face of challenging legal mandates to become more accessible,

they rally together as a campus to take on

those tough accessibility challenges and

really become more inclusive for all their students.

So, let's jump into it and hear from the team.

All right. We'll start with Mike since you just walked in.

Yeah.

Just a quick introduction, your name,

your role here, and your relationship to Accessibility.

Okay. My name is Mike Barnes,

Director of the Center for Accessibility here at Atlantic Cape Community College.

I've been working closely with

Michelle's Department and everyone here on making everything as accessible as possible,

in as many different ways as possible.

My name is Michelle Perkins,

I'm the Director of Instructional Technology here in Atlantic Cape,

also the Blackboard administrator.

In my role or through instructional technology,

we work very closely with

the Center for Accessibility and delivering training to faculty and

staff throughout the college and we work with faculty in

trying to help them get their content as successful as possible.

I'm Josh Carroll, I'm the Technician for the Instructional Technology Department.

I do most of the back end server work for Blackboard

and other academic related technologies.

My role with accessibility is basically to test out new solutions, try to break them.

Sometimes I'm more successful than other times,

but yeah, my point is to test all the stuff out.

I'm Gerry Fox, I'm a Technologist here at Atlantic Cape.

We work with Blackboard and with the faculty,

making their content accessible.

I'm Pat Kubaska, Coordinator in the Instructional Technology Department.

I work with Gerry and Josh and Michelle,

working with the faculty, assisting the students.

They call if they have problems with Blackboard.

Chad Bullock, Senior Manager of the Center for Accessibility.

We work on all aspects of

accessibility in terms of working with students with disabilities and

their courses and also training faculty and staff

on different strategies for accessible content.

All right. So, let's start maybe in the glory days pre-decree.

What was it like around accessibility? Who cared about it?

Prior to consent decree,

everything was funneled through the counseling office.

So, you have a few counselors that handle the students

that would visit disability services,

is what it was called at the time,

and they would basically handle anything that had to do with accommodation.

So, accessibility wasn't really in the conversation,

it was more about accommodation as opposed to

making materials of course materials accessible.

So, that was probably the way it was set up in the past.

So, if any request came through,

there's probably one or maybe two people to handle an accommodation request.

So, now, after the consent decree,

we're trying to be proactive where what we're

doing is making things accessible from the GetGo,

so we don't have to have as many accommodations in order for a student to be successful.

So, that's kind of how the tide is changed a bit.

But in regards to accessible content,

there really wasn't much of anything.

I mean, we would be the creators,

non-faculty creators whether for web content,

we would make sure we had an alt tag.

Other than that, that was the time of like

flash animations and let's make everything as spinny

and fancy and eye-catching as we can and there maybe some people who can't look at it,

but at least those who do,

will really enjoy it.

With faculty, I really don't

think accessible content was a part of their vocabulary as a whole.

Content was really designed in those days for users with perfect vision,

hearing all their senses,

nothing precluding them, whatsoever.

The rules aren't really much of a thought given to making content accessible.

Then what happened? So, then you get hit with this,

it's a consent decree,

that's the official name.

Yeah.

Yes.

It's a consent decree that we had agreed to as an institution,

we had agreed to 100 percent accessibility across the board.

So, that was something that they had negotiated prior to my arrival at

the college and prior to Chad's leaving Michelle's department.

So, then I was hired.

So, Chad, he kind of manage this consent decree.

I'll never forget the moment,

I was sitting on the beach and I'm looking at this,

I got an email from the coach saying, "Here's this document.

You might want to check it out.

It's going to be doing a lot of work on it."

So, I opened it up and I'm like, "Oh.

Okay. Here we go."

But we viewed it as a good thing.

I think like it was very daunting,

but it was something that in looking at it,

it was like a blueprint into making the college,

like the ideal to making the college completely accessible.

Realized that 100 percent accessibility is really difficult and probably not attainable,

but we had a blueprint right in front of us that sort of

spelled out exactly how we should do it.

So, it enabled us to reach out to other institutions

that had been there before that done it really well.

It enable us to reach out to some consultants in industry that

had worked with other universities on figuring all that stuff out.

So, we just sort of jumped headfirst into this world and just sort of

started just from the ground up and just started with the basics of,

"Okay. If we have a student with a visual impairment,

how do we make sure that they can get into a classroom and take this class?

What are the barriers?"

We identified the barriers.

We even went as far as, this is actually Chad's idea,

as we're going through in the very beginning,

we didn't really know how to really test a lot of this stuff.

So, we hired a blind student to test everything.

So, we brought in a student,

we paid him as a consultant, and he came in.

In the very beginning, we ran everything we did

through the student and he would tell us where he got stuck,

he would tell us what do you know,

he was able to get here,

maybe this part was a little wonky,

go back and change this,

and that was a game changer for us,

to be able to really see his perspective on trying to

register for classes or trying to read

the course catalog or trying to do all these different things.

So, we were able to create a map to then go back and say, okay,

like what's the main,

so in order to get over here and take this class we've got to get here first.

We get here, we got to get here so it was almost like a, "Choose Your Own Adventure" with

this kid trying to figure out exactly how to get where we needed to go.

Then with all these different things with help of Ally

eventually now we have a whole system in place that's

really enabling us to ensure that these students have

access to fully accessible content and that if they don't,

there's a process for making that accessible,

both on the student side and the faculty side.

So, pre-Ally had you started to look at the content in the LMS?

How were you trying to look at the content in the LMS?

I don't think we started looking at it.

We had started training.

We that was really the first thing we tried to do is to

educate the faculty and to start to teach

them how to make their content accessible and I guess at that point

we were relying 100 percent on the office accessibility checkers.

But there was really no validation or if they

weren't using office for some reason when they uploaded their content.

We really didn't have a way to manage and you know it was,

there was one point at a meeting that I missed that's the way it always happens,

where it got back to me that Michelle Perkins will go through

every single course on Blackboard and make sure that the content

is accessible. I just said-

I know what that means.

I even don't know what to say because I said even

if I said it was accessible here

two seconds later they upload something it might not be accessible.

So, we've really didn't have a solution at that time,

we were just trying to get started because we knew we had to get started we didn't

insert Ally which made that journey a little bit easier but-

Once we got familiar using the Microsoft Office Checkers,

so once we found the Blackboard had a product that was basically going to mimic in

a way that same result and usage then we jumped on right away with thought this is great,

let's get it in here even first ones or something to do it,

if we were but we're pretty early on in

the adoption process just for that reason because we couldn't keep just

using the Microsoft Office checkers so there wasn't

enough analytics behind that in order to see what was really happening at the school.

Just to point out that the day

Blackboard Ally introduced their product was in mid-March of 2017, I believe.

That same day we were a better toaster for a Blackboard Ally's so we

were in communication with Blackboard two months before they

rolled out the test products and we were testing it from day one and we rolled

out for the full semester I

believe was the limited roll out or do we actually do a whole roll out?

We started with a pilot at fall and the pilot was so successful.

Our vice president of academic said turn it on for everyone,

everything we need everybody to have this tool and have access to it. So-

The pilot like 20 classes, 30 classes or something along those lines?

It was more like 20 faculty members,

and then of those 20 we turned it on and all their courses.

But then over thanksgiving break we turned it on system wide and never looked back.

What were some of the indicators of success of that pilot?

One big indicator was that when we were invited to go back on different webinars,

we were already trained on the things that they were discussing in those webinars,

on how to build accessible content.

We were saying we're already in past,

we already know this stuff in a way like we were

already educating faculty and staff on these stuff already.

So, we felt like we were ahead of the game,

so that was a real good indicator.

Especially on a few Blackboard webinars.

As a matter of fact, I think we are on the Blackboard webinar,

we mentioned that we're from Atlantic Cape and they even mentioned then that

we were already been working with you guys on accessibility stuff, you already know this.

Isn't all that's neat. We're already making

some type of indent or something in the industry.

Right.

And I think to it speaks to the culture change of the institution.

I think from the very beginning,

we had stepped in to try and figure out how to not

just require people and faculty to make accessible content,

but to create culture of accessibility to where we're creating

accessible content irregardless of

specific disabilities may or may not be in the classroom.

So, I think that vying and in combined with access to this Ally product,

you know once it came out and we started noticing that

faculty members were really concerned about their score,

they were concerned about their content,

which I think was something that we really didn't see in the past.

I think Ally really allowed,

it was kind of like the vehicle for

our faculty members to be able to

visualize progress instead of just us saying, "Yeah, it looks good."

You can really go in and see exactly where they're at and

also figure out how to make changes if needed.

Another indicator was a faculty started coming up to

us in conversations and start talking about accessibility.

While before that, they were saying I don't know what that is.

I don't know what accessibility is.

I don't know really know what you're talking about,

and they had a lot of stress and trepidation about it,

about getting into it, and then they will stopping us in a hallway saying,

you know I edit headers on this document and I can't figure out how to modify the header,

and I'm going this a great conversation because that

means you're implementing this stuff.

So, that was a game changer.

Yeah I mean the scoring system of Blackboard Ally

for some they took it like a game, like progress.

I want to get to this new level for content I'm giving to my students.

So, I don't know if the game of fire is the right word for that

but that's kind of what the scoring system did in the beginning.

So, did you first kind of turn on

the institutional report and look at that before you opened it up to faculty?

What was that process?

I think we did turn on the institutional report.

We were looking before we turned it on.

Yes. So, we were looking just kind of out of curiosity.

There was at that time I mean we were still training faculty,

it wasn't like anything was being held against faculty.

We were kind of morbidly curious to see where we were in those very first steps.

In those days, we would go through page after page after page

of zero percent, five percent.

We were excited that, "Hey, we had 10 courses that are 100 percent accessible now."

Remember, we were looking at that stuff.

Absolutely.

And then that number grew more

and more and it was exciting watching the change. It was really exciting.

Yeah I mean it was a good indicator of what

content faculty were putting on Blackboard at the time and I think in the beginning,

there were like 80 courses at zero percent because they were all scanned PDFs.

There was just not a trace of anything

accessible beyond a person who could visually see the scan document.

And as a team looking at a course like that,

what was your strategy?

Did you pull them into your room and sit them down

like we had to do something like now about it?

What was the process there?

There was a lot of education.

I mean we had this series of accessibility courses that Chad created.

We had two faculty development days that were dedicated towards,

let's get down and get dirty and show you how to do this.

We had messages from upper management.

I was going to say, we tried to take the nice guy approach at first,

and of course, that worked for

some and then there were others that we needed administration.

We needed administrations backing.

I mean, it wasn't going because it does require work and it's not hard work,

but it's different and change is different,

and until administration said,

you have to do this.

There were some people who just weren't going to do it,

and those people then would end up in our offices and say, I'm so overwhelmed.

I've no idea how to start with this and we're going to start one document at a time.

You have to look at it one PowerPoint at a time,

one video at a time because when you're trying to look at,

well I have five different courses I teach and I have like 60 different thought.

It's very overwhelming to start one at a time and when you do that one,

then you can do the next one,

and then the next one and you're going to find that it gets a little bit

easier and we found that in the beginning,

we had faculty who just weren't willing to do anything,

and it really just please try and you know what I can do this stuff,

and like they were excited about it and then they're like you know what,

I have other students who are actually using this too and they said it's better,

and that was all very exciting feedback for us.

I think to like one of the things that we struggled a lot with.

I was sort of on the peripheral of a lot of this stuff that rise.

What I saw was a lot of the faculty members who've been here for 40,

45 years, 50 years and that's a lot of data.

That's a lot of course material, that's a lot of stuff,

and what we wanted to make sure that we did from the beginning is to not devalue all of

that work and devalue all of that content because it is still great content.

It's still very great for lack of a better word,

but in doing this it was saying like okay that's still good stuff.

We had to figure out a way to bring that to now.

So, it's to make that content accessible for kids now because right now it's not.

So, what do we have to do to work together to make sure that that

still holds value and I think once we

broke down that barrier of being like that I think there's

a lot of faculty who were just like look don't touch my stuff,

it is my stuff, I'm not playing this game.

Once really explain that it's not your stuff,

your stuff still great.

It's just how it's presented and things like that.

So, I think once that barrier was broken down, I think we saw a lot.

That's what I think we really started to see the culture change and

that shift at the college to more accessible content.

I was part of it too.

There was some defensive faculty early on that said,

you know why are you targeting me?

I've always taught it this way.

I don't understand why anything has to changed.

So, part of the message was saying it's not your fault,

we're not blaming you and pointing the finger directly to you,

it said this is really how the process should be all along.

Let's put you in the direction of

improving everything you create from this point forward,

whereas punishing you for what came before.

We had to kind of get around,

the explanation, and get to the learning part of it, I guess.

I think using examples too of students,

for instance, we had a student with a visual impairment,

who had no cognitive issues whatsoever and this student can't access her material, right?

The student is no different from any other student

other than the issues the student has a vision,

and we're saying that this student effectively that okay even though you've got nothing

else besides your visual impairment,

you can't take this class because it is in a language that you can understand, right?

So, I think by really having that student right

there in front of somebody saying like okay well you can't be here,

that I think was a little bit of a change too because it brought the idea of

accessibility home to where like now we have a kid who's in our a fully capable

student,

who is at our institution that cannot access anything unless we make changes.

I was going to ask me about that course with

all scans because like that's a heavy lift right.

Doing heading on a word document,

not too terrible but in cases like that,

what was some of the process?

Because that's something that we hear a lot from institutions which

we keep carve off all text or whatever,

but how did you pick up some of these big challenges?

Well, any other training that we did,

we kind of reiterated a lot of the same thing

and a lot of different training that we did,

and one of them were we're not the only school on the planet that are trying to make

this particular document or infographics in an alternative version.

There's resources out there already.

So, whenever you get stressed out like as

faculty member I mean about making something accessible,

we have support circles to help you with that,

and if we have a solution today,

we're to find it because we know the channels where to reach out and where to look for.

So, we'll find a solution,

but now fix the things that you're comfortable with fixing,

record the things that you're having trouble with,

and eventually your course will be fully accessible.

So, just keep chipping away at the course semester after semester.

They would email you directly when they had an issue of what was that system they use?

The words accessibility and Chad just weren't together at all aspects even like staff,

they were going to buy a piece of software Chad has to test it.

I'm like wait, hold on what!

and I have a lot of email.

So, originally that's what happened and then we looked at the process though,

and we looked at where we needed to implement different stages of the process.

So, what they brought on a part time employee just for the academic side of things.

So, just for faculty support that helped me out a lot,

as opposed to just coming directly to one person.

Now, we have a few people that

instructional technology was helping out a lot with giving direction.

We made a web page strictly for

resources where faculty can read up on things on their own,

so they didn't have to keep reaching out to us especially for things that we

felt were a little more simpler concepts to really understand and get.

So, that helped out so all these different channels

and buckets we really started to fill.

Now, once those buckets got filled a little more,

it was easier to get things done especially the time of [inaudible 00:21:05] anyway .

That's what we were saying for the academic side for [inaudible 00:21:09] ,

the part time support on the academic side,

and then we just kept educating ourselves.

So, we went through professional development for ourselves.

We have two people on staff now that are certified, right? For accessibility.

So, we took courses in professional development.

We spoke to vendors, we brought vendors in.

We went to conferences all these different things.

Anything that we could do to gain more experience as quickly as we could with experience,

and then once we gain that,

we bring it back and disseminate that information as much as possible,

and that was really the plan.

We just keep going with that.

Great.

The process doesn't end.

No. It never had and never will,

and that's a message we said it backwards to about their courses.

It's never going to end. You're not just going to be fully accessible one day.

Because anytime you bring in a new piece of equipment,

you want to have accessibility in mind whatever that concept might be so.

Yes. It's constantly evolving but it's good.

So, some of the training that you all set up,

I mean you are showing me some of the things that you have built out,

and so you provided basically asynchronous secret.

However, you can reach them you did it.

Yeah, and bombarded too.

We offered more training than we had ever had in the past.

We basically made it like Fridays where training.

Without a doubt, we always had something on Fridays and then we would

always do a Tuesday or Wednesday as well on top of that.

We brought out new workshops stuff that was

never been offered before to keep it a bit fresh.

I mean obviously there were no accessibility workshops.

We know that, but then we also parlay that into universal design.

We talked about video captioning which is certainly accessibility,

what is just the bucket of it.

We never had workshops dedicated to those topics before.

So, now we have more education than we ever had before.

So, it's easier especially for a new faculty member,

a new adjunct that comes in.

They can jump right into all these resources and get educated very quickly on this topic,

and that's probably one of the biggest things.

Right, and one of the other things that academics is doing now is,

they started putting together

some standard courses that had accessible content already filled out in it.

So, that when a new adjunct was hired instead of saying, hi you're hired.

Here's the syllabus on a text.

Good luck. Here you go.

Here's a course we already have fully accessible PowerPoint.

We already have a fully accessible syllabus.

We already have all these things that are already done and give them a head start.

What I mean when they started.

So, we're still working on that.

But we definitely have made a lot of progress.

So, those templates were something pretty new that you introduced after.

Oh, yeah. They're very new.

They just started last summer.

I think they just started developing them for last fall.

How is faculty response to templates?

Are they like, don't tell me how to organize my course or my syllabus.

There's some of that. There's others

who have embraced that a little bit more because it doesn't.

They're not restricted from changing it.

Once they get it, it's just given them a foundation to get started.

Once they have it, they can then use it,

not use it, add their own content.

Some of our academic departments have really,

again you spoke with some of our science folks earlier.

They've done amazing things with developing that type of

content both for lecture and lab blackboard core shells.

So, that way when an adjunct comes in.

Just think of it, you're a brand new adjunct they're hiring maybe in the 11th hour.

How am I going to make this happen?

Just like that and they not only have the tools they need to be successful,

but it's already accessible and it all is

just going to help make the students more successful.

In the process of training up faculty,

getting them on board,

did certain faculty champions emerge that you propped up on the campus to say,

hey this is your model look at this faculty member?

Absolutely. We're definitely did because we had

some remember where you can see right away.

Like that bell click or something clicks all of a sudden where they get it.

So, this isn't as stressful as I thought it would be

or as daunting as a test because I thought it would be.

But then we started getting feedback going.

I've cleaned up a lot of stuff in my course.

I didn't realize how much stuff I have had my course.

I don't even use anymore that's really old or something like that,

and I brought in new content new fresh stuff as well.

So, we're getting good feedback from that.

With something that we really didn't think about.

We were just trying to make it accessible. But here we are.

They're designing their courses all over again and updating their materials and they

felt like that cleaning out my closet type of feeling, more organized and I'm ready to go.

So, that was a nice response.

Well it sounds like there's been some cost savings,

there too as far as storage.

Oh, yeah. Right. Because we were always up

against the limits because of storage with Blackboard.

Because we are a managed hosting and we pay for our storage and faculty,

they'd upload a file and it would never be deleted from their course and we could

go through their files and they'd have a syllabus in there from 2004.

That's just been copied over and over and over and over again, and we had,

well over half of our faculty that just

said, "Give me a brand new course I'm starting over," and that is really.

Cleaned it up a lot.

Yes it did.

Comes down to customer service emails and all that.

So, now I mean you're pretty far along in this journey.

You got some success in there.

As you were starting to see these courses turn green.

Did that inspire the campus?

Did it start to move away from just a stick being beating over to them to a sense of pride?

How has, when you talking about a culture shift,

how does that now feel on a campus that has become more inclusive?

Well, accessibility is obviously a big word.

Everybody I think on campus knows about it and knows exactly what it means,

exactly how to implement it.

Which is three years ago there wasn't something that was happening here at all.

Right. That's just not a word that people knew and now they know

a lot of it probably more than they want to know about it.

Well, I think they're proud to know I mean we were talking a

little bit earlier and some of us in the room teaching.

I'm proud that my course is accessible.

I wanted it to be accessible as accessible as it can to everybody and I think that

there are a lot of faculty on campus that are proud that they can say that now,

and many of them did the work themselves and they are like I did that,

and I think there are a lot of people who are proud of themselves.

I think when the teachers hear any feedback from a student though.

Right.

That's where it really makes

an impact because that's what they're here for at the end of the today.

So, we always pitched the idea of saying,

would you like less emails from your students about they can't get access to this thing.

Where they can't find this document, those types of things.

Now, that the courses are more organized and accessible,

they're not getting those emails or just getting emails

about content which is where they want to be.

They don't want to have emails about software where things are.

So, you know when they get that feedback from the students I think that

really makes them feel so good about it that they

have a good product that they're putting out there.

I think also how much it's support students without disabilities.

I think that's a point that does get lost a little bit.

Accessibility is a whole doesn't just serve students with disabilities,

it helps students without disabilities incredibly well as well.

So, I think by seeing sort of the student investiture

in their Blackboard courses

I think they're starting to see an uptick of students using them.

Students be able to access them and also

by taking out a lot of that stuff that has been there forever,

it's very much easier to navigate.

So, I think students are using the Blackboard

courses a little bit more now because they're a little bit cleaner.

So, I think that's been a pretty positive thing as well for staff and faculty.

So, and faculty get the service, right?

I mean they get feedback on their courses.

So, they can literally read all this feedback and get feedback directly from the students.

So, that's a big one too.

Are you getting a sense that it has improved in some of those areas that

students are reporting a better experience in the course?

Yeah. Well, and part of that was

as a part of this process in the very beginning of the process probably one of

the first things we did is we

instituted a standard course menu in all of our Blackboard course shells.

So, we could make navigation a little more consistent.

That probably hit more resistance than you could probably imagine from faculty.

Because we were telling them,

you can only have these eight things on your course menu now instead of

the 30 things that you had before and they didn't

want to be told that and they sure didn't want somebody telling them what to name them.

But we did survey students after we did that and there was so much positive feedback.

The students were like it was nice that no matter what course I was going in,

I knew where to find my syllabus,

I knew where to find this,

I knew where to find that,

and that definitely was validation that we were moving in the right direction there.

Has it changed the way your office is doing things?

What's been the impact on your office?

It's been a great impact as we're able to now

ensure accessibility for students and we can now say,

so if a student comes in and we know what they need to take,

like for instance got one of our student visual impairment.

We know he has to take a biology class at some point in the next few semesters.

So, now we're able to go in and try do

a deep dive now into that course to make sure that it's perfect.

So, I think we're seeing that.

Being able to look into the future and sort of

scaffolding the students experience as they move through.

But also being able to point our students towards classes that are more accessible.

To say, so we know we have a student who requires a high level of accessibility.

We're able to now go in and we

know that the faculty members that are really doing it well.

So, this enabled us to go in and see who are those professors that are just killing it.

So, that we can now take our students and put

them in that direction instead of what we're doing before.

Just like this is open go here,

just because it's open and we don't know what experience that students is going to get.

Being a community college we're full of adjuncts.

Most of them are wonderful.

But sometimes you have some that are a little bit funny.

Now, we can go in and really see what the course looks like and make sure that

students experience is almost 100 percent going to be a good one.

Is it over now? Is the-

In consent decree? No.

No, it is not.

No. We still have, what do we got left?

We got some time left on it.

I think it's just the progress,

this is going to continue.

That's the way too much new technologies are way

too much variation in dissemination of information,

where accessibility is always going to have to be

thought of when you're creating content and when you're bringing content in.

It's never going to go away.

So, we have to stay up to date now for all the new stuff that's coming in.

So, there's a lot of work to be done.

But as far as the legal hammer,

that's still over your head in a way?

Yes, like the deadline that loomed for so

long of all content has to be 100 percent accessible by a certain date,

that passed last summer.

So, we are past that now but we still

have facets of it that is still ongoing for a little easier.

Because you are right. I mean it's always going to be there, right?

It's always a journey, right?

That inclusive learning they say it's not a destination, it is a journey,

and it's something you'll always work on.

Well, I think the most important part over the consent decree, right?

When everybody thinks about consent decree they think about lawsuit,

they think about things that have to get done right away.

But what the consent decree really did was it highlighted

ways that we can support our students that we were not doing prior.

We were offering a lot of services.

That's not why the consent decree came about,

it was because there were certain little areas that we weren't offering support in.

So, we were able to really analyze

those areas and strengthen them, and that's what we've done.

So, we're taking proactive approaches because of that and we'll continue to do that.

I think, and I'm not sure if this was mentioned,

but I think one of the great things about the consent decree is

it's allocation of resources, right?

So, you have something like this that we're now legally bound to do, which I stand by.

I think the consent decree is a great thing.

I think it's enabled us do a lot of really good work,

but with that comes an allocation of resources,

with that comes the ability to go to conferences,

to be able to write grants, to do these things,

to be able to bolster the program and get the technology we need.

Not just with Blackboard Ally but being able to get the right magnifiers,

being able to get the right equipment,

the right everything and be able to have an ability to pay for it,

which I think that's been huge for us.

It's being able to use that added resources and really figure out a way out.

It's very rare that you get the ability to build a program from scratch and say like,

"Here's this document, build a program around this document."

So, it's a unique position to be in and we really took

full advantage of it across the board.

The other two amazing resources we did get out of the consent decree is Mike and Chad.

Whereas Mike actually was in

Atlantic Cape before and Chad was part of instructional technology,

but the roles they have here now have changed the Atlantic Cape

forever in a positive way and have just really opened up everybody's eyes.

They have been the vehicles by which

they had directed the change of the culture here at Atlanta Cape.

I think by breaking down the silos that had existed across campus for so

long and really being able to work so closely with them, instructional technology,

that's just been a perfect partnership in that we're able to work seamlessly

together on projects where it's not just we're off

doing our thing and then we're on Step 10 and we go,

"Hey, what do you think about this?"

And like, "I've been doing this too.

Why don't we." So, our efforts have been combined from the jump.

Then not only just with instructional technology but

working with the academic side of the college, with purchasing,

with every area and every facet

of the college being able to make sure that it's accessible.

So, for instance the college isn't

purchasing any kind of electronic technology without our approval,

without it being completely vetted through the center for accessibility.

So, we're not even buying anything that we know is inaccessible now,

whereas before we just like, "Go ahead and buy it."

Now we're able to go in and look at it and feel like if this is

an accessible product we're not buying it, right?

We have the ability to approve or deny all those things which I think is huge.

We've been able to include a lot in policy changes.

We've changed a lot of different policies now to

include accessibility within those policies now.

So,-

Absolutely.

When I see that we've rebuilt the whole thing and we got rid of

every policy and procedure and we rewrote everything.

We just went and we found different institutions that were doing it

right and we just adopted things that other people had done that worked.

We took things that we were doing that worked and we built this

around best practices from all over the place,

and then realized that we could create our own philosophy, right?

We looked at our population of students.

It's a unique community college.

We service students in the community and a lot of our students are on the fringe,

even if you take the disability completely out of it.

Even to walk in the front door is a huge success.

So, what could we do from an accessibility standpoint to be able to

scaffold these students and to be able to make them feel like they can be successful?

We've built a program around that.

Also, we want to get what we do without the team that's here,

without the culture of the institution stepping in and allowing us to build this thing.

I think by large it's been pretty successful thus far.

You were talking about student success and the benefits for all students and

I shared with you all your alternative format downloads recently.

It sounds like people are pretty excited to hear that number.

They're very excited because you know what?

That's a part of Ally that our faculty don't really think about a whole lot.

Because they think about the indicators and do I have green or red whatever,

but they don't really think about the fact that now

their content isn't just like that one accessible file they put up there,

but now there's several other ways that students can

also get this content in a way that they never could before.

That just makes their life,

their learning experience a better one.

You were speaking to that point earlier Chad,

about broadening the conversation to that UDL,

thinking about the usability of the course and opening up a lot of those principles.

Do you want to talk about maybe what you see as you all move further down the road here?

Well, we're definitely focused more on universal design.

There's a lot of different aspects to universal design

but just the organization structure to the course.

It's extremely beneficial for student success,

but I think what we're finding too is how faculty member can actually have

a dialogue with students about certain things that they never knew before.

So, we have a student in your class that relies on a screen reader.

We have a faculty member now saying,

"I know what screen reader is" I'm aware of

that tool and I can build contents so that that will work that way.

So that's a huge benefit.

That's one of the big changes that we're seeing that

actual conversations that are happening.

Prior to this, you probably said I don't know what a screen reader is.

So go see disability support services and

get a combination of something while now it's like, "No, we can work with that.

As a matter of fact, there's an alternative versions right here in blackboard.

Let me show you. Click this button" type of deal.

So, faculty are definitely more

open to discussing these type of things with their students.

There is a lot of dialogue, which is good.

Yeah. I'll just point out prior to this whole thing,

the word accessibility was not required in syllabus.

So, it wasn't really a thing that a student

even had the opportunity to bring up with their instructor.

One of the first policy changes you guys can correct me and all

that is that there had to be a little blurb in every syllabus thing.

"Hey, we have these resources available,

here's the contact information to reach out for that."

Part of that is now with the very first class.

You hand out the syllabus. Hey, it's right there in writing.

If the student was curious about something,

they can bring it up with their instructor or they can just

go straight to CFA to take care of it.

That's part of the reasons when we rebuilt the program, we rebranded it.

It was for years,

it was disability support services.

So, the first thing that we did was we took that out and

threw it away and changed it to the Center for Accessibility.

That's at the bare bones.

That's what we do, is we make

things accessible for students not distractions with disabilities.

So statements like that on the syllabus,

we were able to do that and link that directly back to

an office instead of just being just random statement.

Any other policy things that you wanted to mention,

any other things that you instituted you thought were

pretty effective and in creating that culture shift?

I'm sure a lot of other institutions would love to hear about.

Well, we did the 90 percent green.

I don't know if you want to mention that, but yeah.

Yeah, we did have a goal or challenge.

You emphasize 90 percent and you say that we're had a standard that we were looking for.

Right, that the Office of Academic Affairs put out,

where they told faculty,

they wanted everybody to strive towards

a 100 percent accessibility but they really wouldn't accept anything below 90 percent.

So as a result of that,

we had Josh here develop a way to extract the data that the Deans actually

look at the accessibility of all of our active courses on a weekly basis.

Anybody that dips below that number gets an email from the Dean,

"Hey, there's something going on in your course.

Did you upload some new content that you need help with?

We have these resources.

Do you have it in an alternative format we're not aware of?

If so, let us know so we're aware."

So, that definitely was huge in our success.

Again, that's administration support.

You need the backbone.

You need the muscle from the top and you need the workers

from the bottom to have that perfect success I think.

Absolutely.

I mean, not this isn't specific to Ally,

but one of the things that we implemented that I think we've seen a big success on is,

being a community college we see a lot of older students.

Like a lot of institutions that we are one of them in order to receive accommodations,

we have to provide documentation of your disability.

We were only accepting documentation that was,

less than five years old.

So, and making students go if it was older than five years,

they can go out and get re-evaluated,

at their own cost.

I've seen most institutions are

doing this but when I was going or going through regarding this,

we realized we don't, we really have to do that.

We don't really have to have this barrier so,

it's kind of the idea for five of the students has documentation that they have

autism but the documentation is from 2010.

There's a really good chance they still have autism,

and what kind of a barrier am I putting in place now for the student saying, oh great,

I have this IEP from high school,

that says you have autism,

but it's not, we can't take it anymore.

So, I'm going to need you to go out and spend

a thousand bucks to get re-evaluated to tell me something that I already know.

We threw out the window, we got rid of it.

So, as always we get something from a licensed professional,

we're going to take it and we're going to work with

every student also comes in and meets with us.

So, we don't really

go on the days where a student just sends off a piece of documentation,

we give them accommodation.

They come in and we come up with

an individualized plan and if their plan involves accessibility and technology,

they're going to go and meet with Chad and develop

an individual technology plan

to be able to suit them and this is, we're in high schools now.

So we're talking to kids or juniors in high school now,

that identified Atlantic Cape is the place that they're going to come.

We're working with them now,

on technology plans, still in high school.

So, trying to get this technology in their hands now,

so that when they come to Atlantic Cape,

they're proficient in the use of that technology already.

So, we're really dialing it back.

So, we know for instance like how many visually impaired students,

how many deaf students are in our catchment area that may

possibly come to Atlantic Cape at some point over the next five years.

So we're ready, and they know that we have a resource here.

They also come on campus.

You don't have to be a student here to come in

and talk with us and learn about the resource,

learn what we can do, how to support you irregardless of where you go to college.

So, I think it's been a good success for us, policy wise.

It's our policy wise but one of the new Blackboard Ally tools that we are

actually or abilities that we are using is,

we had to develop or Mike developed a form that students could click on and

fill out if they do happen to go through

their Blackboard course and find a piece of content that wasn't accessible.

They could click on that link and it takes them to a form,

then goes to Chad and Mike so they can help the professor

identify what the content is and make it more accessible.

We were able to use that new feature,

where you could include

that automatic help feedback to the student to put in a direct link to that form.

So as the student clicks on the piece of content and that's not

working for them and they go through

the alternative formats and they're not working for them,

then right there, they're taken to the form that goes straight to those guys

to help them to get their content in a format that's actually going to work for them.

Very cool. Any closing thoughts?

You want me to expand just a minute longer,

I know because you wanted some stuff on universal design.

Where we're at though in terms of training,

we did a lot of training for accessibility,

meaning you can use an automated tool to see if something is accessible,

just like Blackboard Ally.

So, our faculty really understand

what accessibility is and how to make something compliant.

But now, we're trying to educate them a little bit more on usability and

why we're doing the things that we're doing for student success.

The student experience side of it.

So that's what we're catering towards our workshops now,

in the future, adjusting to that.

So, in other words you can run a document through an accessibility checker and get the green light because

the accessibility checker might say that you have alternative text on an image,

but is the alternative text good for the context of the lesson?

Is it really a quality alternative text.

So that's where the conversation is heading now at our school,

quality in universal front.

Let me as one challenge question,

while I read this one back in at another part.

But as far as you mentioned some faculty,

because I've heard this one before,

some faculty saying I'm going to yank

my content out of there so that it doesn't get checked.

What's been the strategies in trying to address that?

Do you see that starting to change a little as they see

other faculty get green and feel more comfortable with it?

No, yeah. Number one,

our message from our departments and we do

workshops is never ever pull content down like that.

That's not the way this institution operates,

and that's not the way we're trying to operate.

That's really not an option.

The option is to identify where the barriers are,

the struggles for accessibility and reach out to

the support circles in order come up with a resolution.

So, if we keep doing that rhetoric,

then that's what's going to happen.

If we have a rhetoric of take it down,

it can to make excessive of work.

It's too hard, don't worry about it,

then that's the result you're going to get.

So, we're not really looking at that result.

We don't say that rhetoric.

We don't, we try to do,

push them in the positive direction of trying to,

we absorb the challenges,

we look forward to a challenge and try to come up with a solution for it, so.

I think a lot of it too is just having real talk with

faculty members and just when we're noticing that content's removed,

the content's not reflective of the course,

having blatant purposeful conversations

with that faculty member and just trying to figure out why,

figuring out what's the rationale behind it.

Then, just taking things from there,

just realizing what like Chad had said it's not the culture of the institution.

We've been collectively working really hard for a long time

to build this culture and that's counter to what that culture is and

what the mission of the college and the Center for Accessibility and all of

the other offices and it's not acceptable and it's kind won't be tolerated.

We do have the support of,

all the way up to make sure that this stuff happens.

But I think communication and real talk and just making sure

that once people I think realize how non-difficult it is,

that's when we start to see that shift.

So I think, having those conversations and not sort

of beating around the bush so to speakers, is really important.

And you said the examples.

I mean we have examples in classes about how this was made accessible.

Well, I don't know how to make that. Is it possible to do that?

I say, "No hold on, let me show you."

Exactly.

We have different ways of doing it.

We've done it over here this way,

maybe you can implement that.

When they see that their peers are able to do

it and maybe they think outside the box a little bit,

to get it done, that's the direction that we push people in.

It's a bit of a strange statement because when

you're saying I'm going to pull my content down,

you're basically saying I don't want to give my students the ability to learn this.

So, it's an odd starting point for something like that to say that.

I'm going to remove resources from my students, then okay.

I mean, if that's going to be your starting point as a teacher,

you probably have other things you got to look at.

Yeah.

All right. That's a wrap.

Wow. Hearing from the team in Atlantic Cape,

I mean what an amazing, amazing story.

They deserve major kudos for leading their campus and really

turning a tough situation into a triumph for inclusive learning.

So next stop, we'll be continuing on the northeast leg of the tour

with visits to William Paterson University from the University of Connecticut.

Until then, good luck on your road to IncluCity.

Join the tour along with the rest of the Ally community at tour.ally.ac.

You can catch the latest updates on Instagram and Twitter at #AllyTour2019 and

listen to stories of inclusion from our community champions

on the Ally Tour 2019 podcast series,

available on SoundCloud or in your favorite podcast app.

We'll look forward to seeing you at the next stop on the road to IncluCity.