

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.

Welcome back to another episode of the Blackboard Ally Tour Podcast series.

It's been a while since our last recording, we have been on the road.

We made it as far as Singapore and Australia on our inclusive learning mission,

and today we are in Chicago land

gearing up for the Edgy Callers conference next week in downtown Chicago.

But today, we're on the campus at the College of DuPage,

the second largest community college in the country.

We'll be sitting down to talk with the Learning Technologies team.

They are a passionate,

fun loving group who are doing amazing work supporting their diverse learners.

This campus is supporting all students from high school students who are

transitioning into college to students with various disabilities and learning needs.

So really excited to hear about how they are

supporting their faculty and designing more accessible courses,

as well as how they're taking advantage of the alternative formats to

provide those diverse learners with different types of learning opportunities,

different types of formats,

different types of media that can work with different types

of study tools and different types of assistive technology.

So very excited to hear what the team has to say

about their journey so far with Blackboard Ally.

Welcome to another episode of our Allied Tour podcast series.

I'm at the College of DuPage,  
just outside of Chicago with the team here,  
who is going to talk a little bit about how they're supporting their diverse students,  
be more successful on their pathway to higher education.

Talk a little bit about how they're using Ally to support those students.

We're going to start off with a round of introductions.

I'm joined by five members of the team.

I'll start on my left.

Lara Tomkins. I'm an instructional technologist.

Becky Benkert. I'm an instructional designer.

Michael Maxse, I'm also an instructional designer.

Kelli Kerns, accommodation specialist.

Susan Landers, manager of the Learning Technologies Department.

All right. So thanks everybody for joining us today on the podcast series.

I wanted to start off.

Just thinking about, what kinds of students are you supporting here at College  
DuPage?

Give me a little bit of the context of the college,

the kinds of students that are here.

What kinds of needs that they have and what is their general goals?

Where are they going from DuPage?

I'm in center for access and accommodations and we see a variety of students  
really,

whether they're coming in to talk about a short term disability, they may have.

I need accommodations on campus.

Maybe they had a surgery and they need a handicapped parking pass.

We go over what their needs are and then also in the classroom as well,

and that goes along with long term as well.

A lot of disabilities at least.

So lots of, we see a variety,  
all types of different students.

It doesn't have to just be physical.

It can be invisible disabilities as so cognitive.

But yeah, we see all around I'd say and we  
provide what we can to help them be successful.

What's generally been the process for  
supporting students with disabilities here on campus?

As soon as they are accepted into the college or they enroll for courses,  
they disclose, they come to you.

What does that process look like?

We like to have them enroll in classes first.

But obviously, it can work both ways.

Maybe there are parents even that will reach out to us  
from students that are just graduating high school  
because high school is very different from college.

So we see both sides of it.

But we don't like to conduct our intakes  
until after we have students enrolled in courses.

So we know that they know their plan,  
at least in some way or another they have something set up for them.

But we also hold information nights or sessions throughout  
the year as well to provide some guidance for those that are thinking about college.

But we do intakes and that's when we sit down with them and figure out okay,  
so they bring in their documentation. We review it.

All of our specialists here in the college have a background and

some disabilities or maybe special education, teaching.

So we go through that documentation prior and then sit down with the student, maybe the parents as well,

and we go through what do they need,

what do they previously receive and what were they successful at?

Because a lot of times I've seen I'm very new in the office, actually,

but I've seen that just because a student was provided

something in the past doesn't mean that they necessarily want it moving forward,

and that's a big part of them leaving

high school where they had someone else advocating for them,

and now they're learning to advocate for themselves.

So we help them along that process as well to

communicate what they need to be successful in the classroom to their instructors.

We're not going to initially reach

out to the instructors and say this is what the student needs

and we're going to help guide that student in being successful that way and

maybe setting up an email to the instructor,

but working with the student to help

them self-advocate because that's what they're going to

need along their college path whether it be here or when they move out as well.

Do you have a sense of how many students have

disclosed disabilities here at the college and has that number been increasing over time?

Yeah, it has. I know.

Last I heard. Because again, I'm new.

I just started this semester and in this department at

least I know it was over 2,000 the last I heard,

and I know prior to this,  
I was in the Learning Commons,  
which is a tutoring center more or less I'd say,  
and I was providing accommodations during those sessions when they came  
in for tutoring or maybe needed math assistance or writing, reading, speech  
assistance,  
and even when enrollment will be down,  
our amount of students with disabilities disclosing to  
us went up dramatically by hundreds every semester.  
I would think it went up by at least a few hundred every single semester.  
So there's an increasing availability  
for supports here at the college is what I'm thinking is  
maybe that's why maybe they're  
feeling more comfortable learning how to voice what they need,  
and that's exactly what we want.  
I say to in our county and this is a community college,  
so it's district run because people are  
driven here based on being within the taxpayer base.  
They get a cut on their tuition by being an in-district resident.  
The K-through-12 schools in to DuPage County are very special education strong.  
We a lot of really great support for special education in K-12,  
and we've got a lot of anecdotal evidence that people  
move to the area when they have children with special needs.  
So I think our population has a higher base of students  
with various disabilities that we're drawing from to begin with too.  
Interesting, and you do have even a transitioning program to help  
with those high school students that are coming here taking courses, things like  
that.

Do you want to talk a little bit about that program?

Yeah. So many of the high schools in the district support their students beyond graduation.

In Illinois, we have a law that provides education for them up until the age of 22.

So the high schools are already set to provide supports of some kind for students who'd like to take their diploma and come on to college.

Some of the local schools actually pay for transition coordinators to be here on campus all the time.

That's where they work, and their job is to provide, I don't want to say a whole.

They hold the hands of the students who are here and ease them into the different needing to advocate for themselves environment of college, and it provides them a little bit of a safety net that maybe regular students without any disabilities are learning needs would not need as much as these students do.

So the districts are even supporting having that staff here and working with the retention to keep the students in school and give them just a little bit of extra support and teaching them some of those navigation and advocacy skills that they may not have just yet.

I think it's really helpful or it's been helpful.

I mean, the program's only growing.

They just received their own space.

So it's like safe space more or less where they check in.

I know they do weekly check ins with their case managers as well, and then it helps again,

teaching them with self-advocacy.

I'm coming up with what you need and okay,

let's figure this out together.

At least one of the schools,

Hinsdale is running a couple of I would

call like first year experience courses that the students enroll in

that first semester that teach them some of those study skills

and other advocacy skills while they're taking some of their other credit classes.

Yeah, it seems like such an important part of it in

that transition is that self-advocacy piece I hear that a lot,

and being able to figure out what you need as a student,

what's going to help you be successful so that you as a college can put

the procedures and support in place for those students.

Now, on the flip side,

for the instructional designers that are working with faculty,

is thinking of us used with disabilities part of that design process?

Are you taking more of a universal design perspective?

How are you thinking about that and working with faculty?

I would say definitely the universal design perspective and

just encouraging faculty to bring in content for a variety of modalities.

So visual content, audio, text based images,

just you bring in a variety of different modes so that students

with different abilities and not just even disabilities,

but students who have interest in learning different ways,

will be better able to understand and perceive the content.

I think that's one of the things that we really

emphasize in our accessibility training is

really that you're not just doing this for

those certain students who might have a disability.

That you are actually doing this for the entire college population,  
and that's really the accessible content impacts all students.

It really helps with their success in the class,  
the way they acquire knowledge of  
the concept that you are delivering in the class and really trying to  
emphasize that point home that this  
is for the benefit of all the students and not a select few.

You mentioned there is accessibility training that our faculty mandated to do that.  
Is that something you're starting to put in place?

What is that training look like?

Yeah, that's something that we're trained more to put in place,  
offer it to all staff and faculty through in-service presentations.  
Also just general trainings throughout the year. We'll do that as well.

When I was done in the Learning Commons,

I know we reached out because we were confused on maybe  
how to successfully upload a PDF to make it accessible because we were  
promoting to the students that would come in  
for extra tutoring assistance or whatever it may be.

We found out that many, I think almost all of our flyers were not accessible.

So students who had a vision impairment,

they couldn't open the documents,

but no one ever really voiced that,

and it wasn't until Learning Technologies came up with or

brought in Blackboard Ally and we started playing around with them a little more,

and then it's just figuring out how to use it, and you guys were great.

We reached out and don't really know what to do with this,

and you guys came down on it just a separate day and provided that training



to the coordinators and people who would be uploading that type of information. So I feel like you guys are very accessible to all departments to their needs, and I know Lara, when we took our class together too over the summer, I think universal design and choose great teaching a class, anything we didn't know about it. So yeah, I think you guys provide a lot. All we have to do is ask or anyone on campus just needs to ask for that assistance. Ally has really been the beginning of our accessibility conversation here on campus. In the past, we've been really reactive when we have a student who comes to the Access and Accommodations Department and says, "I can't read the PDFs because they're scanned, and my screen reader says they're blank and I'm blind." So I can't read this. They would contact us and we would work with a faculty member to remediate things. But we weren't really doing anything here and there. Some faculty members are very strong with accessibility, but overall, as a campus, we weren't really strong in that universal design or accessible content, and so when we had the opportunity to purchase Ally, we jumped on it and used that as our springboard for starting the conversations. We developed the accessibility training over the summer, presented it where we can. It's been grassroots in some ways because the library invited us to come and speak with them last January, and so that was the beginning of our accessibility presentation. Learning Commons had reached out, so people are becoming more aware and

talking about it.

But there's not been a mandate yet.

Next week in our in service,

I got a talk with you and we will be doing

some information about access and accommodations,

what an accommodation is versus accessibility.

I'm just beginning those conversations and we're hoping that that

will increase interest in the training.

We also felt it was important to have discussions about accessibility.

We don't want to just roll this too out and say, here you go.

When you look at all your red markers,

you have at it and you wanted to have some framework

for people as they were beginning to discover what it means,

and that's where it all started.

How has the response from faculty been as this has

become more of a focus and more a part of that conversation?

I don't have much, I'm going back again,

Laura and I take this disability and universal design class over the summer

with Michael Dugin and ICE witness because none of us here are faculty.

But we saw with some of the nursing faculty,

it was overwhelming at first because it was

like my whole curriculum because I had to change it all.

So a little bit of panic, any change causes panic.

But it sounds like they sat down with you for

a short amount of time and then they were able to figure it out.

They were really heavy table with like all

of their activities and like there was just no way to even make it accessible as it was.

So I like prototyped a few modules.

I was like asterisks it's okay,

but if you have fifty asterisks,

how is someone going to connect the asterisks

to know what was referring to and like all these other things.

So they are super excited.

Then they were just like buckling down their offices together,

like going through everything,

trying to get to a hundred percent.

Like they're definitely just like, yeah.

So into it, it was adorable.

Their enthusiasm, I think infected the whole class.

So that was a positive outcome I think, but otherwise,

I don't really have much interaction with the faculty as much yet in regards to ILA.

It was a good outcome, I'd say.

I think that one of the things in our accessibility trainings that we kind of

lead off with is that, they're not going to learn any new tools.

This isn't really earth shattering, groundbreaking things.

These are settings that they're going to use in programs that are familiar to them.

That's either they've ignored or they don't know the impact it has on accessibility.

I know that during the in-service training,

I sat down with an instructor to make her syllabus more accessible.

Really, a lot of it was the headings and styles that weren't there and really,

once she got on the roll with that,

she was like that's it.

That's really one of the main things that was wrong in

my documents and basically resolved it.

The score went up from there and I think just made her feel a little bit better too of how familiar the tools are and what can be used already with making content more accessible.

What about other tools, technologies in the ecosystem to support diverse learners from the tool side? I know access and accommodations, site licenses for read, speak, not Read Speaker.

That's on my wish list. Read and write via text telephone and creation by text telephone .

I haven't had an opportunity to learn those yet, but I have actually used a group meeting.

One of the attendees just raved about a quiz show and how amazing it is for faculty. That's what I've heard as well.

So when I first got brought in on the onboarding of when you guys were presenting Blackboard Ally and that was my first thought because that was when I was in the learning comments and was like our biggest or largest amount of students that come in for assistance is for math. A lot of times, math is the biggest struggle for what I would see at least behind the scenes in that number is wise of students coming in.

So I was a little nervous about with Ally.

I'm like, oh my goodness, that's where we need it.

Now that EquatIO is being involved,

I think that will be fantastic.

I know I was doing some research with one of the math faculty members, Jim Bradley.

We came in and I don't know if it was some other specialist in our department

and the access and accommodations department that found it and said Learning Commons needs this.

I used to work as a bridge between them and say, whatever you guys get, let us know.

We're going to get downstairs to make it accessible for everyone and then EquatIO came across and it just, I think that's awesome.

That's the last piece that it would need us to read through those damn programs to be helpful, because that's where students need a lot of help and it's math.

Well, especially when I do my intakes with new students coming in, any who is have you taken the math placement test yet?

No, I'm holding off.

I don't want to take math. So if we can provide that little extra assistance, it would be great.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's nice that you mentioned that the user group call and we talked all about some of the unique challenges with STEM content and complex equations.

I actually spoke with Zack about it yesterday, who's an accounting major.

A simple formula, simple equation is not too bad.

But when you get into that advanced multi layered equations and things like that, that's when that accessibility stuff becomes such a challenge.

Math can be such an anxiety point for a lot of people too.

Those even with more emotional disabilities or challenges in that area and how they react to it and really interesting to think about.

So on the campus here, are you kind of offering all kinds of programs?

I mean, are there particulars?

You mentioned a nursing program.

Are there kind of other unique types of programs here on the campus that students are participating in and what do those look like?

Well, since we're a community college and essentially feeder college for four-year degree, we do have some associate degree, actually several associate degree programs that will lead directly to employment. But a lot of the students are coming here to get their feet wet in college, to save some money and plan to move on.

So we have a really wide range of things and a lot of gen-ed type so that they're getting that stuff done before they head off to another institution.

But we do have very specific programs like nursing and automotive, a lot of career in technology.

Got some CAT and CIS, culinary.

Pretty much everything.

So about eight percent of our students come from outside districts and usually that's because their community colleges don't offer the programs that we have.

So they get, I think, in-district tuition.

They do, we have a program in Illinois that was designed to keep community colleges from

duplicating programs and then having

small enrollments just to make more efficiencies of scale,

where if their home district doesn't offer the program,

they can go to another district and then what we do is call the charge back.

Then the home district of the student ends up paying

the difference between in-district and out-district tuition, something like that.

But basically, it doesn't penalize the student and it doesn't keep a student who really wants a particular program from missing out because their home college doesn't offer it.

So we do get some students from outside districts for that.

As you've been rolling out Ally to the campus, have you been targeting particular programs or areas or has it been more based on faculty?

What's that process look like?

I think in the beginning,

Blackboard recommended that we do a pilot to roll things out and get our feet wet with it.

We had really hoped to get a nice broad spectrum of faculty involved.

We knew the people that would probably be game and willing to jump on board.

We wanted some of that easy, low hanging fruit for the first term.

So we did get a pretty good across the board representation of about, I think, 38 faculty members.

So we had theater people.

We had Chemistry.

We had English.

We had Philosophy.

We had Nursing. So we really did have a nice wide spectrum.

We didn't necessarily target any programs,

I think we targeted individuals more than anything because we know in our office who is going to be willing and would step up and try it out.

We wanted to get a good sense of how we knew STEM, in particular, was going to present a challenge.

Honestly, the first semester,

we didn't hear a whole lot,

probably because the faculty that we recruited are people who are already doing that.

I don't know that there wasn't much student outreach that particular term.

That was back when the icon was just the little gray carrot and

I think there were probably a lot of students who didn't notice or didn't pay attention.

We did ask the faculty to point it out to the students,

but we had a really,

a hard-hitting campaign starting in the summer when we

rolled it out to all the courses so that the students would know it was there,

and they would take advantage of it.

We really tried to frame the conversation around

universal design and the benefits that all students can get from the tool,

not just students with disabilities,

and learning preferences are very well covered by their alternative formats.

So we wanted all the students to know this is here.

We've paid for it. We want you to use it.

We're also in a Guided Pathways Program,

which is a community college initiative to improve

student success by making the pathway easier to navigate.

A lot of community colleges have first time college students in the family

and so their parents can't help them navigate because they've never done it before.

So there's this whole design process to make the college pathway easier, is out there.

So we tied it to that whole student success piece.

That was good and bad because some people think pathway is a dirty word,



because they think they're already doing student success and they didn't want to be told how to do it differently. But we really felt like making this tool an obvious piece of that project just made a lot of sense because it speaks to learning styles and every student can benefit from it, not just the students with particular disabilities. Especially for getting buy in from the administration. Right. For faculty, UDL like Ally, it's thing you do incrementally and initially it scares them. You can't just make your course UDL in a day. So we've had success re-framing it as a social justice issue or a mobile first issue. I think that's probably one of my favorite aspects about Ally. We know as a community college, 20 percent of our students are only accessing their course from their phones. When I meet with students and when I initially meet with them and do their intakes and figure out, "Okay. Well." When the student says that they've previously used books on tape in the past and that's been successful then. Maybe they have a reading disability of some sort. So at the college, we have and we provide a link for students to go to. So they have access to books on tape and they work with our assistive technology specialist from our department. But I talk about Blackboard Ally, because of that, how students, the technology, they're using their phone all the time. So I use that exact example. Where do you live at?

No matter what, where you live at around here,  
you could live five miles down the road and it still can take a half hour to get here.  
So they'll use in their car.

I said, "So if you haven't read  
an article you're supposed to read for class, you're on the way to class.  
You can then connect your car to Bluetooth or  
whatever it may be and you can listen to it that way."

So I encourage them to try it out and let them know.

If it doesn't work, talk to your instructor.

Let them know, "Hey, I tried to do this in the car and it wasn't working."

So that could be or at least I'm trying to get them to advocate to their instructor.

So if it's not working maybe the instructor wasn't aware of it.

Maybe they thought that it was working and it's actually not.

So I try and encourage it that way at least.

We can definitely help you develop  
some messaging templates to you for students to save that like.

That's a good idea.

Your document is inaccessible so the MP3 is unusable and kind of...

Right. Right. We have some options for you.

Okay, good call.

We did a really big push at the beginning of the term,  
in talking to new student,  
orientation and just handing out flyers and letting new students know that Ally  
is here and the alternative formats are available  
for them and it's something they can do and download them.

It's not something they have to wait for the instructor to do.

I think a lot of students are really excited about that,

especially those reading content on their phones or listening to content on their phones.

We saw a lot of student excitement and we really hope they'll approach their instructors in order to make their content more accessible.

That presents a challenge too since we've always tried to have as much content as possible in the content editor, so would look nice for a mobile.

So now students are like, "But I can't listen to that."

So I have to rethink how we deal

with putting content into courses and as we continue to work with faculty on development.

Yeah, we had also hoped that students would advocate for Ally because we only have about a 75 percent adoption of our mass four classes across the board.

Obviously, they are online. They're all using them, but we have lot of professors who are still.

If they're supplying content to their students.

They're emailing or they're handing them pieces of paper.

So we would hope that the students would say, "Hey, in my English class, you get this really great tool and I can download an MP3 of this.

How come you're not using it?"

Whether or not they would, we don't really know.

But that was one of the things that we talked about was, this is available to you, should be available in all your classes.

If you don't see it, talk to your professors, and we were hoping that that would increase adoption of

Blackboard overall because that helps the students if they have one place to go, everything is centralized and the expectations are a little more and the standard across the board. The tools that they have to use that has to help with their success on some level. So we're also using it in an ulterior way to get faculty adoption higher and just giving the students an opportunity to get to things the same way in every course. Well, it's definitely a great strategy trying to get the students to be the ones to prompt that culture shift for instructors. I think that can be a huge motivator because faculty want their students to be successful, right? So getting them to move towards it in for the content stuff. Alternative formats coming soon for that HTML content so that will have you covered there, so you don't to have to go rearranging things right away. Hopefully, that will be out soon. But now, and so you've got the ground up push from the students. Now, you're also talking about putting some policy in place or putting some more top down measure. Do you want to talk about what's motivating that and how you're thinking about that. I know that thinking about accessibility policy is something that a lot of institutions are thinking about. What is a good accessibility policy look like? Are there thresholds that we need to put in place for faculty to have to meet? So how are you approaching that? So I mentioned earlier with

the accessibility conversation is really just getting started.

We are within this first year here of a big push.

We've had some staff changes.

Even at the administration level,

we have a new provost structure.

We have a new Assistant Provost for

students and we have an opening in the Dean of students.

We have a new manager in the Office of Access and Accommodations.

I think all of those pieces have fed into just people

looking at how we were doing things and wanting to make some changes.

We are starting an accessibility committee that will include people across

campus because we do know that what works well

at this campus is getting buy in from the faculty.

They don't like those top down mandates.

So we'll be getting a group together and I think

from there start talking about some policies like what are we going do with with Ally?

What are our benchmarks?

How do we want to move forward with it?

Do we want to just make the goal for everyone to have their syllabus

accessible by a certain percentage, by a certain date?

Or do we want to have people try to

achieve their particular average across their courses?

We'll have the committee come up with some of those pieces.

Obviously, we'll have some input and make some suggestions.

But definitely if we just throw it out there,

we're probably going to hit some resistance.

So we want them to help to frame the direction that this goes as well.

Yeah.

So related to kind of thinking about that.

Now, you've had a chance to see some of your data.

Did that help you in thinking about that? Were you encouraged?

Maybe let's start with the alternative format download and what you saw there.

Were you encouraged to see a nice jump in the beginning of the term there.

Definitely. Especially considering how much time

we spent tabling during our busiest time.

So faculty are trying to build or

adjust courses really quickly and classes we're about to start or just had started.

So it was gratifying to see that.

Those efforts paid off.

We're not a student facing office.

We're faculty facing. We like students.

We enjoy our interactions with students

but we're not something that they're used to seeing.

Even aside from seeing the name of our department as they walk by here,

I don't know that that's something that's within their vocabulary.

It's a big school too so some students probably figured,

"Oh, that's a department I've never seen before."

But it was really stepping outside of our,

I don't want to say comfort zone but regular activity.

Yes, it was very gratifying to see that it was paying off.

Especially, the third or fourth day,

we saw the tag team too would go to

the various activities during that student orientation week.

It was very gratifying to have students go, "Oh, I already know about that.

I already have one of those flyers.

Great. Tell your friends.

Tell your professors."

So you put together a flyer that listed

the alternative formats and were passing that out?

Yeah. Then on the back, we had that super cool table that has one column,

what's kind of your learning need and then tells you which formats work,

which I pointed out to students and they absolutely love that.

I was surprised how low the MP3 downloads were.

I was definitely really amping that up when I was

talking to students and their eyes got all bright.

Yeah.

But again, maybe the files they were downloading,

you download one that's not accessible and you don't bother

trying the MP3 format again in the course.

We started with the communication and adoption tool kit

and what would you say we mixed our own.

We remixed it.

Nice.

To meet our needs. Yeah.

So is HTML the second most downloaded alternative version?

Yeah.

Yeah, I think so.

Then I think that's the one I promote the most because I hate reading something on

my phone and having to scroll over to the right and

back to the left and all that stuff. So this for me, I'm the one that's, yeah.

I describe that to students.

Yeah. You have the PDF and you're like, going around every corner of your phone.

But I think, yeah, the next step is really I'd like to develop, like a tool to help students identify which format would work best depending on their need, like a program, choose your own adventure, working off that table and be like.

Because a lot of them they don't know what they want because they don't know. Yeah, like the HTML sounds scary maybe to a student who isn't tech savvy, could be their favorite one.

Yeah. Just speaking of a choose your own adventure game and that being I was at, I think it's called the Inclusive Learning Center in Toronto.

Maybe it's based out of Toronto.

They've been working with the cast organization to develop this, choose your own adventure, to develop your learner preference.

So it is that similar, right?

We've talked about it a little bit.

There's definitely an education piece, I think, in helping students understand when to use certain formats, why they would use them.

You all have such a focus around creating good study practices.

I mean, not your particular group, but the others that are on campus.

It seems to be a big focus helping them become better learners.

You mentioned 20 percent access or content on mobile exclusively.



Wow. So definitely the HTML, I mean, hugely important for students.

Yeah. That's huge. For faculty too,

because I don't think they realize that.

You have some people who be like, "I

can't believe they're writing a whole paper on their phone."

But it's like, that literally might be the only way they can.

So just because that wasn't how you learned.

So that's a challenge you with faculty.

I didn't learn this way.

So this is how I do things.

For anyone, really, updating how we approach things in our processes.

Well, I think what we found is even with the students that have

socioeconomic challenges, they all have phones.

So that's their access to the Internet.

Also, being a commuter campus,

they don't want to grab even a light laptop and haul it around all the time.

They don't want to have to babysit it and make sure it doesn't get stolen or broken.

They know there are machines here on campus in

the library that they can get to pretty easily.

Whereas maybe in a residential campus,

that's one of the things you purchase is

a computer and you've got it. It's always in your room.

Here, where the students are driving back and forth,

they don't want to have the big machine.

So they're definitely using their phones a lot more

to access the content and maybe other places.

Now, instead of going back to the faculty,

you've mentioned putting some training in place, putting some policy.

I mean, is there other promotions that you're doing,  
other ways that you're going to try to reach faculty?

Are you thinking about helping them with some of  
the remediation of content or what else are you thinking about for faculty?

I think one thing that we're doing,  
there's a big initiative on campus for the use of OER.

Then I think as more and more faculty maybe develop or adapt or  
adapt OER and move it into the learning management system,  
then there's going to be more more content that students  
can access and download in different formats.

If right now, the only thing in there is a syllabus,  
maybe you don't want to listen to that mp3.

But if it's more of the course content,  
that's maybe even more beneficial for students in that way.

Also, another opportunity to get in there and train  
because a lot of OER content is going to give you some very red gauges.

True.

So this is a good opportunity for more training.

Get more faculty who are interested in the open access and the equity to  
participate.

Well, in some ways, I think it'll be easier because a lot of that OER content is remix.

If we can remix it, then we can make it accessible.

Whereas, if we're dealing with one of the big publishers,  
with the allied pilot group,

I had told some of them that had said,

"I don't know what to do with it."

So, for example, one of the first day classes had some checklists that the way they were designed visually was okay, but for a screenwriter, it made no sense whatsoever. They had heading two in front of heading one. There wasn't good semantic structure. What I had done was I made it better and I handed it back to her and said, "Now, go to your publisher because this is copyrighted material and I really can't." I mean, I can change it for a particular student, but this isn't something that you can now post. So back to your publisher rep and say, "This was not accessible. What are you going to do about it?" So we're also using it for that piece too to put some pressure on the publishers because they're the ones who are going to make the changes on their own. But with the OER, we'll be able to have an impact, I think, a lot faster. We're in the OpenStacks program through I think it's Rice University, Not positive on that, this year. So partnership program. So there's definitely a very big push for OER on campus. I think this will be a great opportunity to train people as they're developing. We've got some grants the faculty can apply for, some release time. So we will have some faculty over the next year or two developing their own. I think this will be a great time to really say, this is the time to really think about how you're designing this and how you're going to use it with your students, just promote that one more way. You're going to pull more rain into the conversation. Could you slide over so that the mic

picks you up. Because this is an area that you really work in, right?

Yes.

Which is remediating content for those students with disclosed disabilities.

What's some of the most challenging content that you have to work with?

Well, our vision impaired students have

probably the biggest of challenges because of the navigation piece.

Once they get to the content, they're usually okay.

It's the getting to the content that can take an excessive amount of time.

I hate open book tests,

trying to read an open book test to someone who's blind and has to go through

the book and try and find answers when they are,

especially something that if they can't search the information easily,

just navigating takes forever.

I'm just trying to remember that as

instructors pick their books and what publishers are using,

some are better than others.

Yeah, the navigation piece.

Yeah.

Our blind students especially have that because they're

using JAWS or other products that are similar to JAWS,

but that and the need to have multiple formats,

and I say this all the time,

it's not just that a lot of students with disabilities

need both the being read to and the print sitting in front of them.

That piece of it is difficult when the content is not available in multiple formats.

So from your perspective,

as faculty start to take on some of this work,

as they start to make the content more accessible to start with,

how's that going to benefit your office?

What's that going to allow you to do?

Well, definitely it will benefit all students,

those with and without disabilities because people do learn differently.

It's going to be, it already is in demand

and the students use Ally without even realizing they're using Ally.

They keep coming back to me saying,

well, I want more of this.

They want it all over,

not just in the course materials.

They love it, but they don't even realize they're using it,

but they just go to that button.

I just go to the button, I hit alternative formats and I'm there.

So they're not real good at identifying why or what product they're using per se.

So when they talk about it they don't refer to it as Ally,

they actually refer to it more as Blackboard just because that's what they're in,

but they love it and they want it for all of it.

So it is a definite need, definite demand.

Yeah.

They love it.

Definitely working on making it more available across all of the content.

So on our way there,

one to be aware of too,

with the generating the MP3,

there's currently 100,000 character limit.

I think we actually talked about on the user group previously.

So if the faculty's uploading a really long PDF,

a really long book PDF or something,

I also think it's a best practice to chunk it out a little bit, right?

I do a lot of that.

Do you chunk things out?

I have to take books and do it chapter by chapter

because of the fact that the navigation piece.

Yeah, becomes so poor, right?

So it definitely if you ever hear students saying, oh,

the audio is failing,

and you notice that it's a really long file that's probably why.

So it maybe another that advocacy piece for the student to say, hey,

if you chunk this out for us then I can get the audio and it's going to help me,

and obviously it makes the files more manageable,

so lots of benefits there.

It's definitely opportunity to link that with any first year initiative we do,

because one thing that students are often not taught is how to learn.

I think that's something that would be great for a first year experience in integrating

Ally and that advocacy piece would be really powerful.

When you touched on that point about just having accessibility at

the forefront in general is a good opportunity to have

conversations with faculty about some best practices.

I won't name the department, but we did a presentation to

a department this summer where one of the questions was;

so you guys can caption audio?

What about my 45 minute videos are not captioned.

You can caption videos for me?

What about my 45-minute videos?

That's a chance for us to say,

not fairly confident that most of your students are watching those to the end.

So it gives us an opportunity to identify where

the teachers are not using the best necessarily practices and we say,

hey, if you were to chunk that out or take the most important pieces and narrow it down,

you're much more likely to get your students to go all the way to the end of the video.

So it's good to have that there to force some of those conversations.

Absolutely. I also just wanted to ask you how things have

been going working with the Blackboards deployment team.

So I know Sam and Tim Wright have been

involved with the Campus in helping with the roll-out.

What's that process been like?

How have they been helping you?

What's been some of the conversation there?

So I've had most of the follow up after what would you call it,

the on-site meeting that we had back last fall.

They were fantastic for that.

They came and they have lots of great ideas.

We did a really good job within our office of

getting a lot of good stakeholders on board for those meetings.

That was how Kelly was brought in because we knew we needed people from learning commons.

We had a couple of students there and that just helped to lay

the groundwork for people understanding even

what Ally was and what it would be able to do,

because we didn't really have a lot of issues,

I didn't have faculty screaming,

what are these dials?

We don't know what to do with this, turn it off.

Yes, we didn't experience that either with the pilot or even when we rolled it out.

We haven't needed a lot of direct support,

but Sam has been really good in sending us

and going through the data like you did a couple of times and she's been good.

We've been really busy and it's fallen off

my radar a couple times and she'll just check in and say,

how's it going? What do you need?

I asked for some of the data numbers for our in-service for next week and she said,

yes, absolutely, I can get those together so that it's the most up to date data.

So they've been really great.

Nice.

Yeah.

Well, we'll start to wrap it up here.

So it's been a really great conversation.

I think that the approach and the strategies that you're talking about really

I think drive home just how important it is for all students,

accessible content, having access to these alternative formats.

I think there's so much validation and it's such a good story to push to your instructor.

So we're next, you have a big day Tuesday coming up.

What's happening on Tuesday?

What's happening moving forward in

the journey as Laura likes to hear me talk about the journey.



Yeah, Sherpa.

The hippie journey.

Well, it's what we say too because sometimes when you present and you start talking about

the gauges and inaccessibility and

the impact especially for people who really don't know anything about it,

you guys get really big and so the first thing

I say is we're not expecting you to go home and spend

the next four days trying to remediate all of your content and get to 100 percent.

It's a journey, not a destination,

and sometimes you can't make it perfect,

especially with that STEM content.

So next Tuesday is our faculty in-service and we don't have any class for students,

but faculty are here on campus and we'll be doing some activities and some presentations

and sending the message that

accessibility is important to the administration and the college in general,

because even though they don't like the top down initiatives,

if they don't think that the administration is supporting it people will buy in.

So we're going to start with that.

I mentioned earlier that we are forming an accessibility committee,

and I think we'll go from there to begin to develop some policies and look

at a timeline for bringing all pieces in to the project.

Especially procurement for the web technologies and software and all that good stuff.

Yeah, is that another area that you're thinking about too now is

making sure that the software that's being implemented on campus is accessible?

Absolutely. So anything that goes in a Blackboard,

we have some control over.

I'm testing for accessibility issues and communicating with the vendors that such issues exist because I had experience with the vendor the other day who had accessibility as the second word in their tagline on their web site and they only just got a V pad and it was partially meets for 2.0 AA, and it wasn't even on the website.

The link was broken and I'm like.

So there's a lot of lip service to accessibility in a tech, but once you get down and test it, you find out differently.

So my hope is to create a usability testing group of students using various assistive technologies to test these things as well.

All right. Well, that's a wrap from College of DuPage and the team.

Thanks so much for all of your great work and for participating on the podcast today, and I wish you your best on your journey to more inclusive education.

Thank you.

Thanks to the learning technologies team, Susan and Laura and everyone else at College of DuPage for joining us on the podcast series today.

Really interesting to hear about the work they're doing connecting with students about the learning benefits of the alternative formats, working with instructors to design more accessible course experiences and improve accessibility issues with their content and they're just getting started on their journey.

It's going to be really interesting to see the impact that they can make on accessibility and inclusive education on their campus.

After today, we'll have the opportunity to speak with some students and faculty directly

about their experiences using Ally and some

of the challenges that they face in terms of accessibility,

and after that we'll be journeying about four hours south towards St. Louis,

where we'll be meeting with the team at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Be great to hear about their journey with Blackboard Ally and some of the amazing work happening at one of Illinois's premier state university.

So with that, wishing everybody a great rest of your day.

Thanks again for joining us on that tour podcast

series and we'll see you on the road to InCluCity.

Join the tour along with the rest of the Ally community at [tour.ally.ac](http://tour.ally.ac).

You can catch the latest updates on Instagram and Twitter at

hashtag Ally tour 2019 and listen to stories of inclusion from

our community champions on the Allied tour

2019 podcast series available on SoundCloud or on your favorite podcast app.

We'll look forward to seeing you at the next stop on the Road to InCluCity.