Blackboard

CONTACT

Massimo Morigi, Blackboard
+44 (0)20 7025 4808 or massimo.morigi@blackboard.com

Blackboard's Accessibility Solution Continues Strong Momentum, Impacting 3 Million Learners Worldwide

464 institutions around the globe have licensed Blackboard Ally to provide students with more accessible, higher quality and more usable digital content

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31, 2018 - Blackboard today announced that the Blackboard Ally accessibility solution continues to experience strong growth, having expanded into 16 countries over the last 12 months and added support for 20 languages. Currently, a total of approximately 3 million students at 464 institutions worldwide have access to more inclusive learning environments and more accessible digital course content through the tool in a way that can benefit all learners.

Blackboard Ally integrates with an institution's existing learning management system (Blackboard Learn with the Original or Ultra experience, Blackboard Open LMS, Canvas, and Moodle) and automatically runs course materials through an accessibility checklist that looks for common accessibility issues. The solution generates a range of alternative formats for the instructor's original content including Semantic HTML, audio, ePub, electronic Braille, and a translated version. It provides educators with guidance for improving the accessibility of their course materials, while also supplying comprehensive reporting on the current state of content accessibility at both the course and institutional level. Since its launch in April 2017, Blackboard Ally has processed 12 million courses, checked 285 million content items, generated over 1 million alternative formats, and helped instructors improve hundreds of thousands of content items.

Over the last year, numerous institutions around the globe have implemented the solution with positive results, including:

- **Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG)**: The Technical College System of Georgia consists of 22 colleges offering technical education, custom business and industry training, and adult education programs. In October 2017, TCSG began rolling out Blackboard Ally to all of its 22 colleges. TCSG has made significant improvements in the accessibility of digital course content over the last year. In partnership with Blackboard, TCSG has led a system-wide movement toward more inclusive learning environments, ultimately resulting in positive increases in accessibility scores across all 22 colleges within the system.

- **University of Derby, UK**: The University of Derby is a TEF Gold University in central England with over 17,000 students enrolled in 300+ programs of study. Derby implemented Ally in early 2018 as part of its inclusive learning initiative, which aims to provide more accessible, supportive environments for students to learn independently both inside and outside the classroom. The university saw a 3% gain in its overall accessibility in just two months, and the Ally launch has also catalyzed more conversation about inclusive learning design.

- **Grand Valley State University, Michigan (GVSU):** Named a "Top University in the Midwest" in 2018 by *U.S. News & World Report*, Grand Valley State University is one of the 100 largest universities in the nation and attracts nearly 25,000 students with its high-quality programs. Blackboard Ally was put into production and made available to all GVSU students, faculty, and staff members in June 2018 to support the university's accessibility efforts around equity and inclusion. Ally was adopted at GVSU to increase awareness of the importance of accessibility and ADA compliance, to build the capacity of faculty in creating accessible content, and to offer greater insight at the institutional level. Since deploying Blackboard Ally, the overall accessibility score reported by the institutional dashboard shows an increase of 16 percentage points.

- **Gaston College, North Carolina**: Gaston College is one of the largest community colleges in North Carolina, offering over 170 programs of study and enrolling more than 16,000 students each year. In 2014, this student-centered institution created a five-year accessibility plan with the goal of creating more inclusive digital learning environments across each of its three campuses. The implementation of Blackboard Ally at the institution began with a pilot in January 2018. Gaston College has already seen great success in using the solution to provide accessible formats in a timely fashion for all students, with limited resources.

- **The University of West Florida:** Founded in 1963, the University of West Florida is a vibrant, distinctive institution of higher learning with undergraduate, graduate and targeted research programs. With multiple locations in Northwest Florida, the University serves a student population of more than 12,000. Dedicated to helping students realize their full potential, UWF favors small class sizes with quality teacher-scholars who deliver personalized, innovative, hands-on learning and leadership opportunities. The University of West Floridais currently piloting Blackboard Ally during the 2018-2019 academic year to better assist its faculty in efforts to ensure digital learning course content aligns with accessibility standards.

As part of Blackboard's commitment to making a significant impact on accessibility, in December 2017, the company made Ally available for Blackboard's Web Community Manager, a product that enables K-12 schools and districts to create websites that engage parents and community members. Additionally, in May 2018, Blackboard launched Ally for Websites to help institutions ensure that their website content is more accessible to a wider audience.

"We're proud to be a part of institutions' journeys to become more inclusive, allow learners choice in how they access and interact with course materials, and help faculty and staff develop courses according to universal design best practices," said Nicolaas

Matthijs, Product Manager at Blackboard. "We are committed to continuing to help our partners worldwide provide online learning experiences that are accessible."

To learn more about Blackboard Ally, visit www.blackboard.com/ally.

About Blackboard
Our mission is to partner with the global education community to enable learner and institutional success, leveraging innovative technologies and services. With an unmatched understanding of the world of the learner, the most comprehensive student-success solutions, and the greatest capacity for innovation, Blackboard is education's partner in change.