



FACULTY SENATE

Educational & Research Technologies Committee

Minutes

427a Waterman

October 10, 2018

- Present: Nick Bouffard (SGA), Hung Do (BSAD), Kayla Johnson (GSS), Lutz Kaelber (CAS), Cathy Paris (Faculty Senate President), Jane Petrillo (CALS), Lyman Ross (LIB), Regina Toolin (CESS), Tim Tourville (CNHS)
- Absent: Elise Hotaling (LCOM), Tim Lee (LCOM), Helen Read (CEMS), Brian Voight (RSENr)
- Guests: Mike Austin, Wendy Berenback, Veronika Carter, Thomas Chittenden (Faculty Senate President Elect), Andrew Horvat, Tessa Lucey, Alex Messinger, Julia Russell, Sarah Warrington

Regina Toolin called the meeting to order at 8:34 am in Waterman 427a.

**1. Minutes.** The minutes of the September 12, 2018 were approved as written.

**2. Registrar's Update, Veronika Carter.**

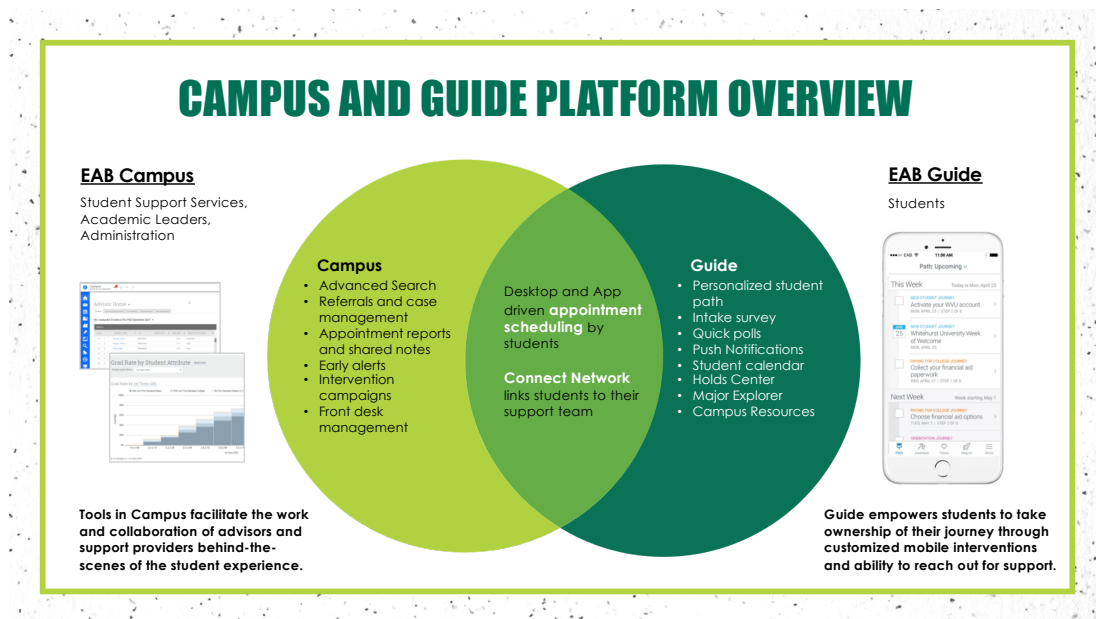
- a. Banner 8 to Banner 9.** The Registrar's Office was successful in launching the Student Financial Services landing page. Most of the initial work will be done by a contracted company; they should be done by early to mid November. After they get the pages back they have to test them all. Most of the Registrar's resources are dedicated to updating the administrative pages. Self Service aspects will be updated next. This will start happening over the next year.
- b. Non credit Software support.** Looking for a new vendor in the April – May timeframe. More information will be provided as the project continues.
- c. New Schedule of Courses Module.** Expanded course description software is currently on hold. The Registrar's Office is looking to form a committee in the next month to start looking at vendors. The Spring 2019 deadline for expanded course description is the end of October.
- d. On-Line Course Evaluations.** Working with Thomas Chittenden on this topic and will have a better update at a future meeting.

### 3. Advising and Retention Tool, Sarah Warrington.

The University of Vermont's  
**Advising & Retention Tool:**  
Education Advisory Board  
Student Success Collaborative

**Faculty Senate**  
**Education Research & Technologies Committee**  
October 10, 2018

**Sarah Warrington**  
Coordinator of Strategic Retention



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## Phase I Focus

Guide, mobile application, utilization and student communication

Learning period with phase I users

Asking a lot of questions of the vendor (Education Advisory Board)

Releases and new aspects of technology

Landing on phase II implementation plan

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## Phase I Functionality

Student Profile

Advising Summary Reports & Notes

Advisor-initiated Appointment Campaigns

Messaging Students (Text & Email)

Advanced Search & Lists

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## Next Steps

Ongoing student promotion of mobile application

Training phase II users

Considering additional functionality

January 2019 move to production for phase II

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## Advising Appointment Reasons

Appointment Reason	Number of Appointments
Academic Advising	681
Honors College Requirements	152
Major/Minor Selection	106
Study Abroad	89
Degree Audit Review	76
Resources Referral	47

#### 4. ACCESS Students, Tesa Lucey and Wendy Berenback.

### Blackboard Ally Evaluation

Prepared by the Center for Teaching & Learning

August 2018

#### Summary

In Spring and Summer 2018, as a follow-up to UVM Compliance Services' report, "The ADA Technology at UVM" (Nov. 2017), the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), with support from Student Accessibility Services (SAS), evaluated Blackboard (Bb) Ally, an application aimed at improving accessibility and compliance at the enterprise level. Bb Ally is an accessibility add-on that integrates with learning management systems, including Blackboard. This evaluation tested Bb Ally's functions and gathered feedback from faculty and academic staff on its ease of use and overall effectiveness.

The CTL recommends licensing Bb Ally. Based on the results of this evaluation, the CTL concludes that Bb Ally will improve UVM's capacity to provide accessible learning environments to all its students and comply with federal regulation. Specifically, Bb Ally will:

- Raise awareness about accessibility issues in course content.
- Provide instructors with guidance on how to make their content more accessible.
- Automatically provide content in accessible formats for students, independent of their instructors' actions.
- Collect data at a systems level, enabling UVM to identify training needs and track progress towards improved accessibility.

#### Background

Bb Ally works within the LMS assisting institutions to provide accessible learning environment via these primary functions: 1) for faculty, Bb Ally analyzes some types of content in the course, using WCAG 2.1 AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to determine an accessibility score. If a file doesn't meet these guidelines, Bb Ally provides information to faculty on how to improve its accessibility; 2) for students, Bb Ally converts course files to several different accessible formats enabling students to select the best format for their needs; 3) Bb Ally generates systems-level reports to help the University document and track its improvement in compliance. *For detailed information on Bb Ally's faculty features, please see Appendix A.*

#### The Bb Ally Evaluation Process

The CTL's evaluation process included several different methods:

- CTL and SAS technical staff rigorously tested its features to see if they functioned as expected (Spring 2018).

- Select faculty used Bb Ally in their courses to gain first-hand experience of interpreting file accessibility scores and then attempting to improve those scores by fixing the files using Bb Ally's help documentation (Summer 2018).
- These faculty were surveyed to gauge the likelihood of their using Bb Ally in the future (Summer 2018). *For qualitative information regarding our faculty testers' experiences using Bb Ally, please see Appendix B.*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

CTL concludes that:

- Bb Ally functions as expected and implementing it into UVM's existing Blackboard configuration requires minimal technical resources. No additional programming or integration with other UVM systems is needed.
- Faculty generally understood Bb Ally's rating system and its help documentation.
- The likelihood of faculty using Bb Ally is dependent on many factors, including what type of support is available.

While the full benefits of Bb Ally will require time and additional staff resources to realize, Bb Ally can provide some benefits immediately, providing a more accessible learning environment to UVM students, specifically:

- Students automatically have access to alternative versions (i.e. eBraille, PDF, and Audio/MP3) of files that faculty have uploaded into course spaces. However, to some degree these converted files are dependent upon the quality of the file uploaded by the faculty.
- Instructors automatically receive visual feedback regarding the degree to which their course materials are accessible. (See Appendix A.)
- Instructors can choose to improve the accessibility of their course materials by following Bb Ally's contextual help documentation on how to fix accessibility gaps. Faculty will have the ability to run course-level reports, receiving immediate feedback on their overall progress and specifics on how to address problems and issue severity.
- Administrators can run system-level reports to see how UVM is progressing in terms of improving accessibility of course materials. These reports allow UVM to identify training needs and develop targeted outreach strategies.

Bb Ally should be considered a first step, albeit a significant one. To fully realize Bb Ally's potential, UVM will need to develop a comprehensive outreach, education, and compliance strategy that targets faculty and academic staff to improve the accessibility of course content in Blackboard. Instructors must be able to apply the recommendations provided by Bb Ally to their materials and will need support given the time this likely to take. A comprehensive strategy needs to include the resources that are required to support faculty to revise the approximate 135,000 files that currently reside in Blackboard.

Bb Ally offers a pathway to increasing compliance with federal accessibility requirements. The CTL recommends that the University 1) license Bb Ally and 2) conduct a needs assessment to determine the appropriate level of staffing needed to train and support faculty in implementing the accessibility recommendations provided by Ally.

## Appendix A: Overview of Bb Ally Features for Faculty

Bb Ally works within Blackboard to increase the accessibility of content uploaded to course spaces. Once content is uploaded, Bb Ally analyzes and evaluates the files, using WCAG 2.1 AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to determine an accessibility score. Bb Ally displays a visual indicator, a meter, of the content's compliance [Fig. 1], instructions on how to improve it [Fig. 2], and a way to upload the content back to the course once it has been improved. Bb Ally does not automatically fix the problem and each type of problem must be fixed individually.

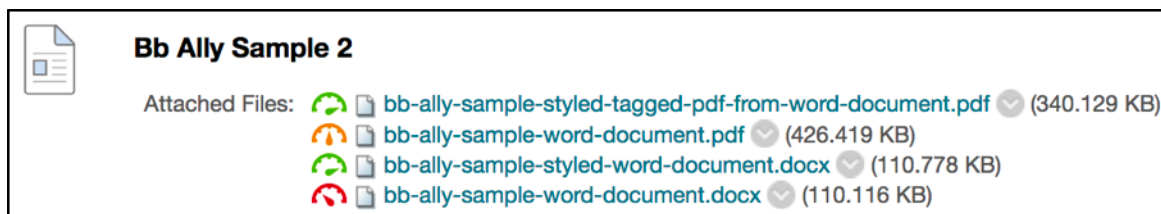


Figure 1: Four sample files that Ally has analyzed and scored. Red indicates a low score (less accessible), green a high.

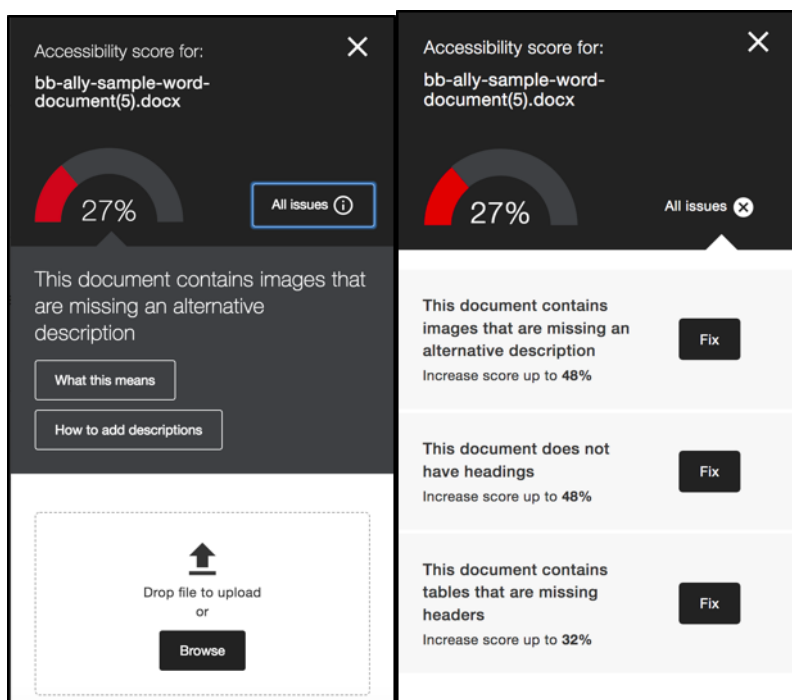


Figure 2: Bb Ally displays the score, provides information on the accessibility issue, and instructions on how to fix it. *Appendix B: Quotes from Faculty Testers*

Generally, testers commented that they appreciated the opportunity to make their files more accessible. In addition, they noted that building awareness around accessibility issues in files, even those they could not fix, was important. However, we identified two primary areas for concern regarding how Bb Ally operates:

1. Bb Ally relies on the premise that you can make changes to the original file, but that original is not always available. As one faculty tester noted, *“My class includes journal articles that have been scanned and published to online journal databases. The fact that these articles can’t be fixed by me means that I would certainly always have a ton of red Ally meters.”*
2. While Bb Ally provides contextual help, it sometimes assumes a level of knowledge that is not realistic for many users. Many users do not use features, such as styles and structured documents, that are key in creating accessible documents. In addition, PDF files, used by many faculty, can be especially difficult to fix due to the many ways in which they can be created. The frustration of testers who experienced that difficulty was apparent. As one faculty tester remarked, *“It seems to me that, if we do get Ally, the CTL is going to need to seriously beef up instruction in Word and PowerPoint as well as PDF files.”*

### **Sample of Positive Responses: What Bb Ally Does Well**

- Bb Ally encourages faculty to fix all issues with a file by providing an icon (a meter) that indicates success. *“Once I updated the document, it was rated as PERFECT. This is like a game and I want to be on the leaderboard!”*
- Bb Ally raises awareness all of the accessibility issues (and their fixes) associated with a document, even if the instructor does not choose to fix them all immediately. *“I like how Ally tells me specifically what is wrong with the document and provides contextual information on how to fix it. It made me more aware of the very simple things I could do to my documents to make them more accessible.”*
- Bb Ally encourages increased recognition of the types of issues as a path to understanding what else needs to be learned. *“Ally identified some issues that I was unfamiliar with. I didn’t fix them this time but now that I know what they are I will be more willing to incorporate them in new documents I create.”*
- Bb Ally does not force an instructor to make all changes at a single instance. Thus, files can be improved over time as fits with the instructor’s schedule and abilities. *“[After fixing several problems] I now have a High Accessibility document. The next time I teach the course I can work on updating more files.”*



## Sample of Negative Responses: What Ally Did Not Do Well & Unmet Expectations

- Error messages were sometimes more frustrating than helpful. A number of testers commented on this problem. *“This was a PDF of a scientific paper (The New England Journal of Medicine) downloaded from the journal’s website. Ally could not find needed information on adding tags and when I clicked on the file type the following message appeared: “Guidance is coming soon. We are working to extend this guidance.”*

*“Many of the problems with my files could not be addressed because it couldn’t tell me how to fix them; instead it just told me that “guidance is coming soon.”*

- The refresh rate of the meters was slow, and it was sometimes confusing as to whether or not it was accurate after fixes were made to a file. *“I couldn’t initially figure out how to get Ally to refresh and rate a new file I uploaded. I had to navigate away from the page and then return to get it to work, which was somewhat annoying.”*
- Testers commented on some apparent limitations related to file types and a requirement to use features that instructors may not use. *“My content is created with a tool called Storyline and also Screencast-O-Matic. It did not flag the lack of captions and only tagged when I didn’t have an alt-tag on images.”*  
*“Ally seems to want only PowerPoint slideshows that use the built-in templates. I design my own simplified templates that are also customized to display well in the classrooms I teach in (the students in the back cannot see the lower portion of the slides).”*

It is not clear if this is included in the current license costs. The last quote was \$22, 000 to \$25,000 a year. A new feature of Ally is that it can translate into about 20 languages. Amber Fulcher is the expert on the ADA and the requirements and would be a good resource with any questions moving forward.

**5. Unified Communications Platform, Mike Austin.** This platform is the next generation of communications on campus. This includes telephones, mobile device communications, video conferencing, etc. ETS may need to use different tools for different communication needs. Right now the two platforms that are being tested are Microsoft Skype for Business and SYSCO. ETS is looking for feedback on how to engage faculty and best collect information around their communication needs. Skype for business is totally different than Skype.

- a. Campus wide survey
  - Have Deans and Chairs encourage participation
  - Make very clear
  - Catchy subject line in e-mail with survey
- b. Associate Dean’s group would be a great place to gather some information
- c. Focus groups
  - Product demo, but not from vendor.

**6. Research Computing, Mike Austin.** UVM has a couple things they do to support research. ETS and and OVPR has a facility for high computing research that they manage together. There are over three hundred current users. There is also a research storage option for faculty. If faculty have storage needs they can contact ETS.

**7. Old Bussiness. None at this time.**

**8. New Business. None at this time.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:00am. The next meeting of the ERTC will take place in 427a Waterman on November 14, 2018 from 8:30 am -10:00 am.