



NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
GLOBAL CAMPUS

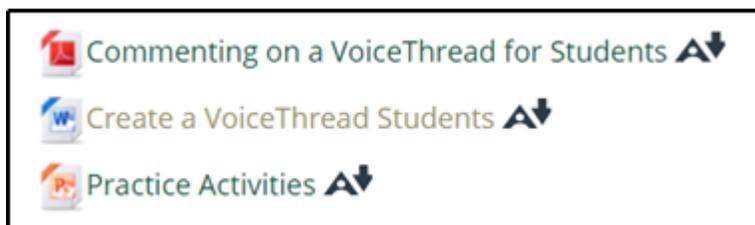
ONLINE BYTE OF THE WEEK, Vol. 2, Issue 18 & Teaching Tip #18
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The Teaching BYTE: Introducing Ally!

The Teaching and Learning Scholar, Dr. Lisa Flood, and the Extended Learning and Community Engagement Scholar, Dr. Stacy Boyer-Davis, are collaborating this week to combine a Teaching Tip with an Online BYTE to introduce Ally. This new tool will be enabled in all EduCat courses during the winter 2021 semester to provide students with alternate formats for course materials. This **Teaching BYTE** will offer information related to using Ally in your courses. We hope that you will find this information useful as we launch this new software. We wish to extend a special thank-you to the faculty and students who piloted the program last semester and acknowledge the work of the Ally Adoption Team members:

- Matt Smock, Center for Teaching and Learning (Ally Adoption Coordinator)
- Harger Boal, Disability Services
- Tom Gillespie, Center for Teaching and Learning
- Stacy Boyer-Davis, College of Business / ELCE Scholar
- Lisa Flood, School of Nursing / Teaching and Learning Scholar
- Linda Lawton, Department of Math and Computer Science
- Elizabeth Monske, Department of English
- Chris Lewis, Technical Support Services



Why does EduCat look different this semester? You may have noticed EduCat looks a little different when you log into your winter 2021 courses. Next to some course digital files is a new "A" icon. Clicking on the "A" icon will provide options for downloadable alternative format options created by Ally. Because courses have diverse students with unique learning needs and abilities who may be using a variety of devices, it's important for faculty to be able to provide

content in numerous ways. Course content created with inclusion in mind cannot only benefit students with disclosed disabilities such as visual and hearing impairments or dyslexia, but can also improve the learning experience for all of your students. Keep in mind that you will also likely have students with undisclosed or undiagnosed disabilities who may also benefit from having alternate format choices. The increased amount of content being delivered online during the pandemic makes it more important than ever to ensure that students can experience content in ways that best meet their learning needs.

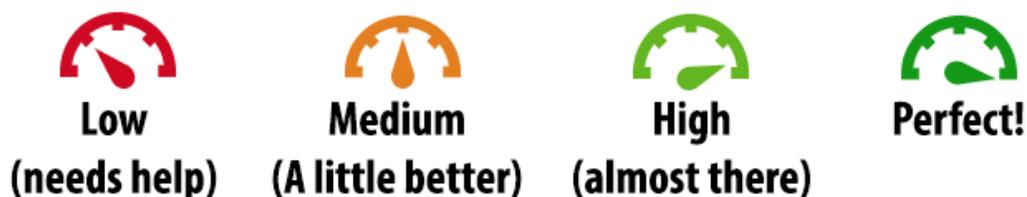
What is Ally? Ally is a new EduCat tool that helps address accessibility and universal design by:

- Automatically providing students with alternative formats for common course content, including Word documents, PDFs, and PowerPoints.
- Giving faculty feedback, tools, and coaching for improving accessibility in their courses.

How can I orient my students to Ally? Because Ally will be new to most students this semester, faculty should consider offering a short orientation. Faculty could add some syllabus language or simply explain Ally during their first class meeting or in an online orientation video. Faculty could also include similar information in a class email or EduCat announcement.

- **Include a syllabus explanation:** “Ally allows students to download *alternative formats* of digital course files to engage in content that works better with different devices and study tools in order to meet individual learning needs/preferences. How do you prefer to engage with learning digital content? Do you read on your phone or tablet, use a screen reader, or listen to an audio version? Do you like to annotate and highlight your digital notes? You now have several options. Click the “A” icon next to your course files to access the alternative format options. Or do not click on the icon and use the format provided by your faculty.”
- **Create an Ally folder in EduCat:** Faculty can use the two Ally documents below which describe the learning benefits and the alternative formats to orient students. Faculty could create an EduCat folder and simply add the following URL links.
 - [**Four Learning Benefits of Alternative Formats-**](#)
 - [**Download an Alternative Format: Find file formats that support your learning**](#)

What does Ally provide for me as the instructor? Ally automatically generates up to eight unique alternative formats of your course files and HTML content which are available for downloading. Ally also provides accessibility indicators (pictured below) next to your course files; these indicators are not visible to your students. To address an accessibility concern, select the indicator to view the percentage score, specific issues affecting the file, and instructions for improving the file’s accessibility. Ally will provide step-by-step directions for faculty to fix any of the identified issues. Addressing accessibility issues with your course content can improve the quality of the alternative formats provided for your students. For more instructor information, click on the two documents below.



[Ally Basics for Instructors](#)

[Ally Resources and Support – Instructor package](#)

What's the best way to start fixing my content? Ally provides a Course Accessibility Report located in the course dashboard. This report provides faculty with an overall accessibility score for all course files. The report also has three pathways faculty can use to address issues: 1) easiest ones to fix, 2) specific ones based on severity, and 3) individual files. The CTL is recommending that faculty start with the easiest ones to fix or tackle the ones that are the most severe in order to have the biggest impact on your overall course accessibility score. Some easy ways to improve accessibility include: using \geq size 12 font, ensuring tables contain column headings and are only used for tabular data, describing all images, and refraining from using scanned PDFs (Ally Accessibility Checklist found in the Instructor Package).

How can I incorporate Ally into my course content? For some disciplines, faculty might consider ways to integrate Ally into their course content. For example, in disciplines that include teaching methodology (such as education and health sciences), faculty might want to include descriptions and rationale for alternate formats or create discussions related to accessibility issues. For disciplines that are preparing students to provide formal communication and/or to work with persons with disabilities (journalism, communication, marketing/management, and social work), students could be encouraged to create alternate format resources as part of a course assignment.

Additional Resources and Help

The ideas and resources listed above are intended to help you get ready for using Ally this semester. Faculty who have questions or would like assistance with Ally should contact the Center for Teaching and Learning at ctl@nmu.edu or 227-2483. If you would like assistance to design or deliver your course(s), please contact your CTL liaison, the Teaching and Learning Scholar, or the Extended Learning and Community Engagement Scholar.

Upcoming CTL programs

Monday, January 11

- 1:00pm: *Online Course Reserves with Leganto "Reading Lists"*
- 3:00pm: *Live Collaboration with Jamboard Virtual Whiteboard*

Tuesday, January 12

- 12:00 noon: *Lessons Learned from Teaching in the Modified On-Campus Classroom – a Panel Discussion*

Wednesday, January 13

- 11:00am: *Next Level Zooming for Interaction and Collaboration*

Thursday, January 14

- 10:00am: *Strategies for Building Online Exams Using the EduCat Quiz Tool*
- 3:00pm: *Administering Online Tests with Respondus Monitor*

Friday, January 15

- 2:00pm: *Holding Multimedia Discussions Using VoiceThread [Note: Includes new VT assignment types]*

Friday, February 5

- 1:00pm: *Peer Observation Training*

To review a program description and to register, check out the [CTL's educational calendar](#). Stay healthy, safe, and strong, our faculty friends.

Best regards,

Lisa

CTL Teaching- Learning Scholar

Stacy

Extended Learning and Community Engagement (ELCE) Scholar

The Global Campus has adopted the *Seven Principles* to serve as the framework for online **course delivery** standards (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). The Quality Matters (QM®) peer-reviewed quality assurance program has been adopted to evaluate **course design** rigor. Both methodologies align with and parallel the call for learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content interactions to promote active learning engagement (QM 5.2). For HLC accreditation purposes, all online courses must include learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content interaction (regular and substantive, initiated by the instructor) because correspondence courses are not permitted.

For more information on the Global Campus online course requirements or the SoTL related to them, and/or to curate a conversation about high impact teaching design and delivery practices in your online courses, please reach out to Stacy, the Extended Learning and Community Engagement (ELCE) Scholar via email onlreview@nmu.edu or telephone (906) 227-1805.

REFERENCES

Blackboard Ally. (n.d.). Blackboard Ally: Accessible content is better content. <https://ally.ac/>

Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.