Coppin State University: Leading with Accessibility Long Before Title II

By integrating Anthology Ally into LMS workflows, Coppin State has improved the learning experience for all students.

For Coppin State University, a Historically Black College and University in Baltimore, Maryland, accessibility has been part of teaching excellence for years. Since implementing Anthology® Ally in 2018, Coppin State has built and sustained a culture of digital accessibility that long preceded the 2024 Title II updates that have many peer institutions wondering where to start. By embedding Ally into its Blackboard® courses and using the data surfaced by the tool to educate and train faculty, the university empowered faculty and students alike to take accessibility personally.

INSTITUTION TYPE:
4-YEAR-PUBLIC, HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY (HBCU)

LOCATION:
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

POPULATION:
2,100+

ANTHOLOGY SOLUTIONS:
ALLY
BLACKBOARD

The Challenge

Understanding the "Why"

When Wendy Vélez-Torres joined Coppin State's Instructional Technology Department—known as the Innovation, Development, Education, and Assessment (IDEA) team—in 2017, the university was preparing to modernize its learning management system (LMS) and had begun implementation of Anthology Ally. "I remember when I first saw the demo and I fell in love with Ally," Vélez-Torres said. "I liked that it made accessibility more approachable, and it explained why things mattered and how to fix them without jargon. And I knew the data we'd have access to would be an important part of ramping up our accessibility program. I was excited to share it with faculty."

Then she recalled when she viewed the early Ally data and bluntly stated, "Our scores were abysmal." The data pointed to a two-part problem: faculty were inconsistent in their LMS use, and even when materials were uploaded, accessibility wasn't yet part of the workflow, making after-the-fact remediation far more challenging. The training sessions held on campus for Ally drew limited engagement, and while awareness existed, sustained participation did not.

But then, like so many things, everything changed when the COVID-19 pandemic forced every course online. "Suddenly we had a captive audience," Vélez-Torres explained. "Every faculty member needed to shift their focus to online course delivery, and every training we offered on how to use Blackboard, our LMS, included a section on accessibility. We talked about not just how they could be using Ally, but how they should be using it to make their courses more accessible, and why it was important."

"Once [faculty] understand why accessibility matters," said Vélez-Torres, "they were all in. One professor told me, 'I don't mind doing the work—I just needed to know why.' That was the 'aha' moment for me. I knew we could easily change the perception of accessibility being an afterthought to being something that really impacts our students, and with the data from Ally I had numbers to back me up."

The Solution

Integrating Ally into Everyday Practice

The implementation of Ally enabled faculty to quickly identify accessibility issues within their courses and provided clear, step-by-step guidance for remediating content to meet accessibility requirements and better support students. On the student side,

alternative formats have been widely embraced across campus, and not only by those with formal accommodation needs. Between January and November 2025, Coppin State students downloaded 13,785 alternative formats, a number that far exceeds the institution's enrollment and demonstrates that students value flexible, user-friendly options.

By integrating Ally into multiple faculty professional-development touchpoints, Coppin State has helped make accessibility a consistent practice rather than an added task.

The university built an ecosystem of support and encouragement that included:

- **Department-level engagement:** Deans received monthly Ally score reports, fostering friendly competition and awareness among colleges to raise their averages.

- **Faculty-focused training:** Group sessions, one-on-one meetings, and a self-paced Blackboard course with badges and certificates for faculty who achieved "Accessibility Champion" status.

- **A Digital Accessibility Hub:** A central Blackboard resource offering quick "how-to" videos, templates, and checklists to make accessible design simple and repeatable.

- **Storytelling and recognition:** Student and faculty testimonials highlighted the human impact of accessible materials, reinforcing that accessibility benefits everyone, not only students with disclosed needs.

Insights Delivered

Commitment to Accessibility

Coppin State's early investment in Ally paid off. From 2020 to 2022, accessibility scores rose to as high as 95 percent in some departments, and the improvements have held steady ever since.

But Coppin State's success is perhaps best seen through the transformation that took place across its colleges. The College

of Business, once one of the lowest-performing units on campus in terms of their accessibility scores, became the strongest after its dean rallied faculty around Ally data and set a shared goal for improvement.

"When I first saw our Ally scores, it was a wake-up call. I knew our faculty cared deeply about student success and equity, but the data showed a gap between what we valued and what we were prioritizing day to day. Ally helped bridge that gap by making accessibility visible and measurable—without adding extra work. It gave us a clear way to see progress, celebrate improvement, and ensure that what we say matters to us and is reflected in how we teach. I also know my department is competitive, so having a benchmark of peers doing better than us helped get things moving along!"

Sadie R. Gregory, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Business, Coppin State University

The culture of friendly competition, progress over perfection, storytelling, and celebration has helped sustain progress across campus. Within the University System of Maryland, Coppin State has emerged as a model for what long-term commitment to accessibility looks like, and well before the Title II changes mandated it.

"Ally positioned us for Title II readiness before it even arrived. Our faculty already understand why accessibility matters, and Ally is a constant reminder and guide on best practices [so] it isn't anything new. It's just part of teaching and supporting every student."

Wendy Vélez-Torres
Senior Instructional Technologist and Digital Accessibility Specialist, Coppin State University

Looking Ahead: Sustaining a Culture of Accessibility

Today, Coppin State's focus has shifted from awareness to consistency. Regular data sharing keeps accessibility visible, and real-time guidance for remediation keeps accessibility scores high, while recognition programs celebrate faculty who go above and beyond. Each new Blackboard course shell includes built-in accessibility guidance, reinforcing that inclusion is part of course design, not retrofitted after the fact or only in response to specific accommodation requests.

As Vélez-Torres completes her doctoral dissertation on how Ally influences faculty adoption of universal design for learning (UDL) practices, Coppin State continues to push accessibility forward. What began as an initiative to support students with disclosed accommodation needs has become a community effort grounded in empathy, education, and evidence of supporting all learners.

"Accessibility has never been an afterthought at Coppin State. It's a fundamental expression of our mission of equity and opportunity; but it's a journey, not an endpoint. You can do everything right and still need to improve— and that's ok. What matters is that we keep learning and listening, and Ally allows us to do both."

Wendy Vélez-Torres
Senior Instructional Technologist and Digital Accessibility Specialist
Coppin State University

Ready to discover how Ally can help your institution along its accessibility journey? Learn more today.

Product highlighted in this customer case study:
Ally, **Blackboard**