

# Scaling Accessibility Through Instructional Support and Effective Tools at Texas Woman's University

TWU made its accessibility program work at scale through training and instructional guidance, as well as by incorporating Blackboard Ally into daily workflows.

Texas Woman's University (TWU) is the largest university in the United States focused on women and has served a diverse student population across multiple campuses since 1972. As COVID-19 accelerated the scale of online and blended learning, TWU's accessibility program moved even further beyond responding to individual accommodation needs toward a more proactive approach through training, instructional guidance, and practical tools that fit naturally into everyday teaching. Blackboard Ally plays an important role in this strategy by supporting instructors in creating accessible course content from the beginning and lays the groundwork and data for iteration over time.



**INSTITUTION TYPE:**

4-YEAR-PUBLIC

**LOCATION:**

DENTON / DALLAS / HOUSTON, TEXAS

**POPULATION:**

15,000+

**SOLUTIONS:**

BLACKBOARD® ALLY



## The Challenge

### **Moving from Reactive to Proactive Accessibility Work**

When Terisa O'Dowd joined TWU in 2019 as an instructional accessibility designer, the University was already committed to accessibility, but much of the work was reactive. As O'Dowd shared, "A student need would surface, and we'd respond," which put pressure on Disability Services and instructional teams to fix materials quickly. TWU needed an LMS-embedded system that could identify accessibility issues early, guide instructors, and provide alternative formats for students. The University started actively looking into technology that could scale across courses and support Title II requirements over the long term.



## The Solution

### **Supporting Students with an LMS-Embedded System**

Teams across Faculty Commons, Disability Services, the TWU library, Universal Design Advisory Committee, and instructional design coordinated efforts to assess accessibility platforms, such as UDOIT, YuJa Panorama, and Pope Tech. Some tools were effective at spotting issues or producing reports, but they often involved extra steps for instructors or work outside the LMS. Ally proved to be a better fit because it integrated seamlessly into everyday teaching workflows and gave the University a clear "visibility into progress at scale," as O'Dowd noted.

The biggest test of TWU's new accessibility approach came when the University adjusted how Adobe Acrobat Pro licenses were allocated. Faculty no longer had the same widespread access to one of the primary tools used for OCR (optical character recognition) on scanned or image-based PDFs. Without OCR, those documents were inaccessible to screen readers and difficult for many students to use. What had once been a routine fix now required additional effort, creating friction for both instructors and students.

That's where Ally proved its value. As Adobe access became more limited, Ally's PDF Quick Fixes capability gave faculty a practical way to manage scanned documents within their existing LMS workflow.

"Ally stepped into that moment perfectly," O'Dowd said. "It identifies scanned PDFs instantly, gives faculty practical ways to fix or replace them, and supports students with alternative formats in the meantime."

*“From the faculty perspective, Ally isn’t just a checker; it’s a coaching tool. The gauges are so ‘in your face’ when you open a course that instructors immediately pause and think about what it means for their students. And the step-by-step guidance reduces friction, helping them improve content without becoming WCAG experts overnight.”*



**Terisa O’Dowd, Instructional Accessibility Designer,**  
*Texas Woman’s University*

David Gardner, PhD, interim associate director of the School of the Sciences and head of the Division of Computer Science at TWU, was one of the faculty leaders who helped bring about that cultural change. Drawing on his experience as both an instructor and a screen reader user, Gardner explained that accessibility is “about making people think about other humans and what helps them and how they work with those humans. Ally really is an ally in that sense.”

## **Insights Delivered**

### **Making Issues Visible and Improvements Manageable**

Today, Ally plays a key role in helping TWU improve course design and monitor progress. TWU saw instructors begin reviewing course pages as they built them, rather than waiting for issues to arise. “That’s exactly the kind of progress that supports our Title II efforts and long-term accessibility goals,” said O’Dowd.

She believes these three features were key to making accessibility part of TWU’s culture:

- **Instructor feedback and accessibility indicators** made issues visible and helped faculty decide what to address first, directly within the LMS
- **Guided remediation** gave instructors clear, step-by-step support, making improvements feel manageable
- **Alternative formats**, including OCR’d PDFs, ePubs, and audio versions, gave students more ways to access content while reducing the need for manual fixes by instructors

*“It puts the control in the students’ hands. . .sometimes you need content in a different format, and Ally makes that easy.”*



**David Gardner, PhD**, *Interim Associate Director of the School of the Sciences;  
Head of the Division of Computer Science; and Associate Professor,  
Texas Woman’s University*



## Epilogue

### Sustaining a Culture of Accessibility

Looking ahead, accessibility is at the heart of teaching and learning at TWU. The University recognizes this as evolving work to continually improve how courses are designed and experienced. Ally’s reporting helps teams understand where training is needed, how faculty can be better supported, and how to demonstrate progress over time, supported by continued cross-departmental collaboration.

Several principles will remain central to TWU’s sustainable accessibility efforts:

- **Framing Ally as support, not surveillance**
- **Pairing Ally with human training and encouragement**
- **Focusing on high-impact content types**
- **Celebrating progress, not perfection**
- **Using reporting to steer strategy**

Overall, Texas Woman’s University is building a unified campus-wide accessibility approach that sets the foundation for a more inclusive future.



Ready to expand accessibility across your LMS? Request an [Ally demo](#) today.

Product highlighted in this customer case study:

**Blackboard Ally**

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