Mariza Hernandez:
Hi, my name is Mariza Hernandez and I'm the Assistant Director of Instructional Technology. Let me introduce you to our guest, Dr. Maria Claver, who is a Professor of Gerontology and Director of Gerontology Program in the Family Consumer Science department.

Dr. Claver is going to share with us her experience using Blackboard Ally in her Perspectives on Aging, Gerontology 400 course.

To give some context, this semester the Family Consumer Science department decided to develop an optional pilot program to see how Ally performed in actual online courses.

Hello Professor Claver. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Maria Claver
Thank you so much for having me.

Mariza Hernandez:
Let me start by asking you, what motivated you to participate in the pilot program?

Dr. Maria Claver:
So as you mentioned, Casey Goeller--who is a longtime colleague of mine in Gerontology-- he is a faculty champion for a lot of technology innovations on campus. So of course, he always volunteers the Gerontology Program to become guinea pigs for whatever the new technology might be on campus, and I'm so glad that he did.

He also was able to get the Family Consumer Sciences department to pilot the program. He has honestly had such a major impact on my continued education and skill development in many aspects of online teaching, so of course I signed up right away.

I've also had several students over my years of teaching at Cal State Long Beach who have had different needs in the classroom and certainly online, so any other tools that I can acquire to help my students succeed in classes is a welcome tool in my toolbox.

Mariza Hernandez:
What was your first impression when you saw what I could do?

Dr. Maria Claver:
I think like many faculty- even though I just said that I was eager to learn this particular tool, especially in the last year- I know that a lot of my colleagues have had maybe technology fatigue and there's so many tools that are out there to help make our jobs more successful and maybe even easier. And I think because it's been such

my syllabus or some other reading material, right away a box popped up with suggestions as to what I could do to make that more accessible

So, you know, it was little things like just including headings, or maybe I missed a picture that didn't have a description in it. So most of the stuff was very intuitive, it did not take long. But for the most part, I maybe spent an hour going through all of the different things that popped up.

Mariza Hernandez:
What do you find to be the most useful aspect of Ally?

Dr. Maria Claver:

a way where you don't get all of those social cues and you know, you can't use the same tools that you would use in an in-person class.

So, I think that by prefacing "Hey, you know, this class is for all of you. Let me know what tools you need to be successful in the class," I think those are the things that will help build community amongst the students as well as the discussion boards that use--you know in in the courses that I teach, there's a lot of applying the information we're learning to one's own life if not the lives of family members, especially the ones who are aging and older. And so, I think especially in fields where we're talking about making sure that people of all abilities have access, this is just kind of doing so by example. I'm not just talking about making sure that our world is accessible to older adults that may have challenges, but hey, I'm giving an example by making sure that I'm using this tool so that all of my students have the same accessibility.

Mariza Hernandez:
Do you have any advice for other faculty about how to introduce Ally to their students?

Dr. Maria Claver:
I think my first recommendation would be make sure you are comfortable and familiar with how it works first. And I think once faculty take just a moment to see how easy it is and how easy it is to make sure that you get your class maybe from orange to green --that the explanation to students will be a little more authentic. And again, I think normalizing it and making sure that faculty let students know that this is for the benefit of every student in the class. I --

So I really would encourage faculty to just take a shorter. Even though, again, we've been faced with a lot of different options of different tools that we can use for our online instruction, this is one that is very worth taking the opportunity to do and to learn. Because it really helps your class be take it to the next level without that much of an investment of time and energy

Mariza Hernandez:
Do you feel more confident about making your materials accessible now that you have Ally as a resource?

Dr. Maria Claver:
Yes, yes. So seeing the way in which the resources were graded -- I'll say -- using red, orange, green, makes me think now, as I'm developing, you know, when I'm refreshing my content, or let's say I'm putting together a new class --it's going to have helped me think ahead about, okay, what is going to be accessible from the get-go? Whereas, you know, now, I'm kind of learning the new tool with my existing coursework. As I revise my classes going forward, it'll give me something to think about. And I think I'll just understand a bit more what accessibility means after using the tool. Because I've been through trainings and things, and those have been very helpful, but the actual seeing it in action and how that applies to the materials that provide for my students, really helped drive the points home about what does accessibility mean.

Mariza Hernandez:
Thank you, Dr. Claver for taking the time with us today and sharing your experience with Blackboard Ally

It's been great talking to you and thank you for being an early adopter and innovator of Blackboard Ally and we appreciate that you contribute to accessibility awareness here at csulb

Here at ATS, we think the work that you are doing for your students is amazing and we appreciate you contributing to accessible awareness here at csulb.

Dr. Maria Claver:
Thank you so much. I'm so proud to be part of a campus where this is a priority, so thank you for all of your support.