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## Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences In Designing A Quality Syllabus For Online Education

Yusuf Adam Marafa

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HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES IN DESIGNING A  
QUALITY SYLLABUS FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May  
2022

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## **ABSTRACT**

Higher education is rapidly changing, and instructors are striving to match the needs of 21st-century digital learners. There is a growing demand and shift from traditional classes to the online mode of instruction for most post-secondary learning institutions. Additionally, with the recent pandemic (COVID-19), post-secondary institutions had to transform and revise their courses to online and hybrid models. Higher education institutions struggled with limited knowledge, skills, and resources to design syllabi and implement online education courses to meet the needs of their students to attain quality education.

The purpose of this study was to explore higher education faculty members' experiences in designing quality syllabi for online education. This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology through interviews. Data obtained from interviews were recorded and stored on a flash drive reserved only for this research. The researcher analyzed interviews by carefully listening, reviewing, and reading the lived experiences of each participant. Then the researcher transcribed recorded interviews into written text using the FTW Transcriber software. This helped the researcher get a deep and rich understanding of the phenomenon (designing a quality syllabus) through finding “significant statements” and determining the “themes” of each participant's experiences.

Findings indicated that this phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived experiences in teaching and learning will help faculty and researchers to understand how to design a quality syllabus for online education that will satisfy the needs of diverse students. Ten themes emerged from the in-depth interviews conducted to gain insights into higher education faculty members' lived experiences. These themes included: title section, course description, learner outcomes, course organization, course evaluation, course accessibility, course policies and calendar, academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity. These themes are the components required in a quality syllabus for an online course. These research results will contribute to efficient pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in online education setting.

**Keywords: Higher Education Faculty; Quality Syllabus; Online Education; Phenomenological Study**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Higher education is rapidly changing, and instructors are striving to match the needs of 21st-century digital learners to those changes. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions had to transform and revise their courses to online and hybrid models of learning. This change required instructors to identify innovative strategies for designing courses that promoted positive student learning experiences. Instructors had to design, create, and implement their courses online to facilitate and support quality education during pandemic lockdowns. Although course outcomes may vary, university instructors are expected to employ efficient processes that will assist them in planning and structuring their course syllabus in order to attain instructional goals (Burdina & Sasser, 2018). An efficient syllabus starts with understanding the kinds of students who will enroll in a course, figuring out what they already know and what to learn, and determining how to quantify their learning throughout a semester.

A syllabus is an important part of online education because it sets the stage for teaching and learning throughout a semester (Lo, 2019). A syllabus gives an instructor and students a contract, an outline of what will be taught, based on best practices in teaching and learning (Gannon, 2018). Instructors are encouraged to prepare and plan ahead by defining what they expect from students by the end of a course. Tokatlı and Keşli (2009) explained that a course syllabus provides valuable information that

facilitates meaningful communication between students and faculty. Stewart (2014) suggested that a well-prepared syllabus answers students' questions and comments beforehand and contributes to a productive classroom atmosphere in which students are engaged in class activities.

This study explored the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for online education. The study focused on the phenomenon of designing a quality syllabus by using the descriptive phenomenological method of research. The goal of this study was to learn how to design an effective syllabus for online education through the lived experiences of seven higher education faculty members at a research university in the Midwest United States. For confidentiality purposes, I will use a pseudonym—Dissertation Research University (DRU)—as the name of the university (research location/data collection field) in my study. Results obtained from this study could be used to learn new ways to design a quality syllabus for online education. An example of a quality syllabus for an online course as suggested by study results was provided. Literature examined during this study included topics such as: preparation of designing a syllabus, goals and objectives, syllabus construction, instructor and student roles, assignments, assessments, grading, teaching methodologies and strategies, and motivational strategies. Faculty members could benefit from this research by integrating research findings into their syllabi designs for successful online education courses.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been a growing demand and shift from traditional classes to the online mode of instruction for most post-secondary learning institutions. Also, due to COVID-

19, many institutions have been mandated to completely move their courses online to avoid spread of the COVID-19 disease and follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) here in the United States and other countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, about 23 countries closed their educational institutions for more than 41 weeks as they were not able to shift to online instruction (Elavarasan & Pugazhendhi, 2020; UNESCO, n.d.). However, for institutions able to alter their mode of instruction to online learning, some of them struggled with limited knowledge, skills, and resources to design syllabi and implement online education courses that met the needs of students to attain quality education; thus, accomplishing each course's objectives.

There have also been an increased number of instructors required to design online courses as demand for online learning has continued to increase. To that end, it is imperative to understand faculty members' experiences in designing a quality syllabus for online education. This study will help to address the literature gap in this area. Understanding these experiences will better prepare faculty members to design syllabi that will satisfy the needs of students and faculty members and ultimately generate positive online education experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Due to COVID-19, many institutions are restructuring their education to meet the social distancing requirements mandated by the World Health Organization (WHO; Elavarasan & Pugazhendhi, 2020). Institutions are moving from regular traditional classrooms to online and hybrid models of instruction. Thus, to have quality education available that is comparable in effectiveness to that of the conventional model of education, there is need to learn about aspects of faculty members' experiences that are

beneficial for delivery of online education. One of these aspects is designing a quality syllabus for an online education course. Consequently, the purpose of this study has been to explore and get an in-depth understanding of higher education faculty members' experiences in designing a quality syllabus for online education.

### **Rationale**

There has been limited research conducted on faculty members' experiences in designing syllabi for online education courses (Wingo et al., 2017). Many researchers support learning and understanding about faculty members' experiences in designing syllabi that accommodate learning styles of all students (Baran & Correia, 2014). Hence, conducting a phenomenological study on higher education faculty members' lived experiences will help faculty and researchers to understand how to design an effective online syllabus that will satisfy the needs of students and their instructors. The descriptive phenomenological method of research used in this study will help to provide rich and detailed experiences of higher education faculty members regarding a phenomenon (designing syllabi for online courses), which will assist faculty in designing quality syllabi and implementing online courses successfully (Peoples, 2021).

### **Research Questions**

1. From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?
2. What type of *additional* information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?



## Definitions of Terms

**Blackboard:** Name of a company that developed a learning management system

(Blackboard Learn) used by institutions to deliver online courses.

**CDC:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a United States federal agency

dealing with public health.

**COVID-19:** “COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2” (Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021a, Basics: What is COVID-19

section, para. 1). “Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical

conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for

developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness” (CDC, 2021b,

Watch for Symptoms section).

**DRU:** Dissertation Research University—pseudonym of the university where I

conducted my research.

**Epoché (or Bracketing):** "Suspending your judgments to focus on the studied

phenomenon. It is not about eliminating biases but suspending them or setting

them aside" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30).

**Horizons:** Present experiences an individual has with a phenomenon. In data analysis,

horizons are clustered into themes and then organized into meaning units of a

particular phenomenon.

**Internet:** “A global computer network providing a variety of information and

communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using

standardized communication protocols” (Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,

2006, para. 1).

**Lived Experience:** A detailed personal encounter with an event narrated by a person who lived through the event.

**Methodology:** A process and procedure by which a researcher explores a specific research problem and seeks answers (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

**Online Course Materials:** Academic materials such as documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and audio/video recordings that are designed and implemented for the purpose of online education.

**Online Learning:** A mode of instruction that takes place through the use of the internet. Online learning is also called distance education because an online course can be accessed from different geographical zones as long as there is an internet connection. Online learning includes hybrid or blended learning, which is the combination of online and face-to-face instruction (Harasim, 2017).

**Phenomenology:** A philosophy and a methodological approach to a study in order to understand lived experiences. There are two types of phenomenology: Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology.

**Phenomenological Reduction:** “Intentional consciousness using the process of bracketing or epoché (suspending judgment to focus on the analysis of experience)” (Peoples, 2021, p. 32).

**UN:** United Nations, an international intergovernmental organization formed in 1945 to maintain political and economic collaboration and peace among its 193 member countries.

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

**WHO:** World Health Organization, United Nations specialized agency dealing with international public health.

**YouTube:** An online platform or website for free sharing of mostly videos and some audio files.

### **Significance of the Study**

In online education, the foundation of a positive relationship between an instructor and students is creating a sense of presence (Lehman & Conceição, 2011). Through findings of this descriptive phenomenology, faculty members will review the importance of presence in an online environment by understanding the components of a quality syllabus. This will help them design a syllabus that will promote positive learning in an online environment. In sum, this study will contribute to the field of teaching and learning as well as higher education, as it will help college instructors propose, design, and implement a rich syllabus for great online instruction.

### **Overview of Research Methods**

Phenomenological interviews were used in this study. The researcher developed the study's instrument to answer research questions. The researcher interviewed seven faculty members from a research institution in order to get deep and rich data for the study. There are no specific guidelines for determining the right sample size in phenomenological research (Johnson, n.d.). However, Morse (2000) recommended a minimum of six participants. Johnson (n.d.) added that other qualitative researchers such as Giorgi and Creswell suggested a range of three to nine participants. The researcher used the descriptive phenomenological approach to answer research questions and

understand the importance of designing a quality syllabus for online education through higher education faculty members' lived experiences.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the sample size. While seven participants were enough to reach “saturation” of data in the study, more participants could be added. Saturation refers to achieving a level of informational redundancy where no new information is uncovered in the study; therefore, additional data collection contributes nothing new to the study (Merriam, 1998; Gentles et al., 2015). One of the ways to lessen this limitation is by adding more participants. However, according to Moustakas (1994), Morse (2000), and Creswell (2014), seven participants are sufficient to carry out quality phenomenological research.

Another limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher of this study used triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher also used bracketing to reduce bias. The term “bracketing” and “epoche” was developed by Moustakas (1994) to minimize researcher bias and to test as well as increase validity. Bracketing is putting aside things unrelated to a study to focus solely on a topic and questions. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.-a), epoche is “the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging” (para. b). This means that researchers need to keep their preconceptions and biases separate from their data while carrying out their studies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and a methodological

approach to a study; methodology is a process and procedure by which a researcher explores a specific research problem and seeks answers (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Over the years, researchers have adopted different research methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutic phenomenology, ontology, and epistemology. Outcomes of phenomenological research widen the mind, enhance thinking capacity, and allow researchers to see the future through an intentional understanding of lived experiences. This is despite the subjectivity and personal knowledge of individuals based on descriptive and interpretive phenomenology in perceiving an interpretation of events from participants' points of view.

Phenomenology serves as a philosophy and methodological inquiry that goes beyond knowing to include intellectual engagement to consciously interpret and understand humans. Heideggerian analysis of interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology offers a broader analysis of human beings' lived experiences (Lavery, 2003). Under the Heideggerian approach, bracketing operates as a granted assumption to describe the natural reflection of a phenomenon by gaining insights into human beings' lived experiences, including the meaning they possess. Bracketing is the procedure of recognizing an individual's assumptions about the nature of a phenomenon and grouping it as reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology is a framework that is essential in educating individuals' visions, defining their positions, broadening how they see the world, and analyzing lived experiences at a deeper level (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Phenomenological reduction is "intentional consciousness using the process of bracketing or epoché (suspending judgment to focus on the analysis of experience)" (Peoples, 2021, p. 32).

## **Summary**

This chapter presented an introduction and the background of the study, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, rationale for the study, research questions, definitions of terms, significance of the study, limitations, theoretical framework, and overview of research methods.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Preliminary Considerations to Syllabus Design**

Before designing a syllabus, the Stanford Teaching Commons (2021) highlighted that an instructor should consider what core knowledge students should learn and remember from a course. Stanford’s Teaching Commons explained that instructors should provide on a syllabus essential ideas students should understand after taking a course, which involves theories, approaches, perspectives, and other broad themes in a course. Essential skills students should develop after taking a course should also be considered. Similarly, according to the Centre for Teaching Excellence (n.d.), designing a syllabus requires instructors to consider responding to the following questions:

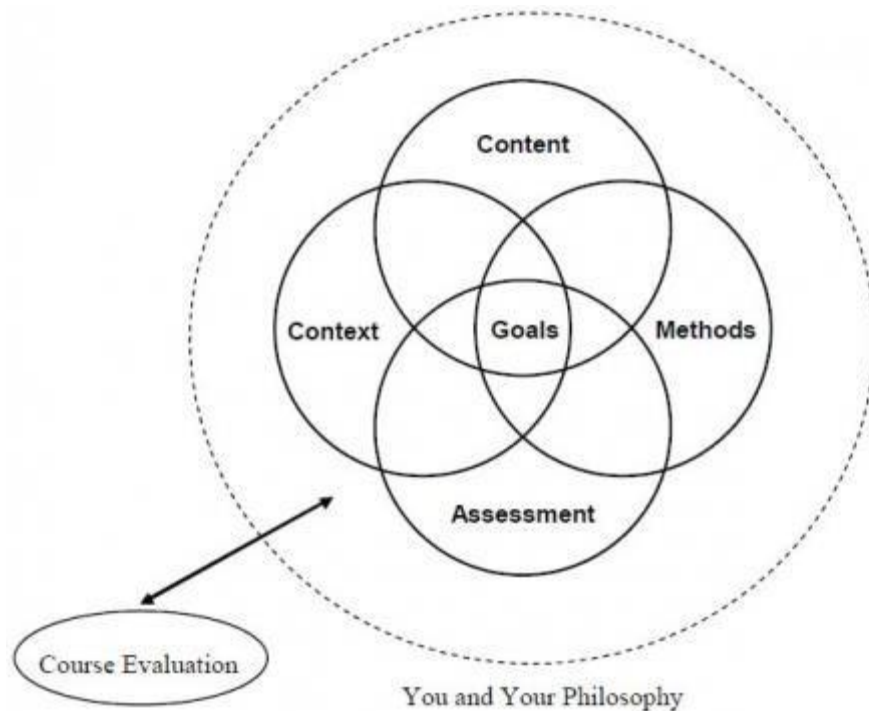
- Are the intended learning outcomes reasonable . . . ?
- How well do my content and methods work to ensure that students can achieve the learning outcomes? . . .
- Are the learning outcomes specific, attainable, and measurable?

(Centre for Teaching Excellence, n.d.)

These questions are categorized into five areas—intended learning outcomes, context, content, teaching methods, and assessment methods (Centre for Teaching Excellence, n.d.)—and are depicted in the model in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Model of the Components of Course Design*



*Note.* From “Principios Fundamentais para um Planejamento Curricular Eficaz” by D. E. Ellis, 2008, *Pedagogia no ensino superior*, 2, as cited in “Course Design: Questions to Consider” by Centre for Teaching Excellence, no date, University of Waterloo (<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/planning-courses/course-design/questions-consider>). Copyright 1992-2021 by the University of Waterloo.

Figure 1 articulates that learning occurs as a successful outcome or pillar of successful course planning. A model such as that shown in Figure 1 may help instructors construct what students are supposed to learn in a course. Instructors should “take time to think about who you [they] will be teaching, how your [their] course fits within their



studies, and about the facilities and resources that you [they] have access to as an instructor” (Centre for Teaching Excellence, n.d., Contextual Issues section, para. 1). Knowing what resources will be used and where to find them will enable instructors to choose appropriate materials that will fit the needs of their courses. Assessments will evaluate students’ performances and attainments of courses. Teaching methods include lecturing, facilitating discussions, inviting in guest lecturers, and group discussions. Davis (2009) mentioned that each teaching method has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Instructors should choose their teaching methods by considering their students’ needs, including principles of diversity and inclusion. Davis (2009) suggested that instructors should design a course with principles of universal design. She further explained that universal design is "based on the premise that barrier-free, inclusive design benefits everyone—those with and without a disability—and thereby eliminates or reduces the need for assistance and accommodation" (p. 4). Scholars have recommended that institutional constructs, curricula, and dominant philosophies in higher education need to be intensely entrenched in the value of diversity (Berman, 2018). This way, higher education institutions may become agents of positive change by designing syllabi that support equal educational opportunities for all.

### **Course Goals and Objectives**

To establish course goals, instructors must employ needs assessments through “a systematic process for determining goals, identifying discrepancies between goals and the status quo, and establishing priorities for action” (Burton & Merrill, 1977, p. 21). This will help to determine what should be taught to students. Goals help students recognize

the purposes or outcomes instructors want students to achieve in courses. Goals relate directly to knowledge and skills and are sometimes broad in nature (Teachnology, n.d.). Similarly, course objectives identify skills instructors hope students will achieve through participating in the learning process. Objectives are tasks students are expected to perform and are based on student-centered learning outcomes. Objectives describe what instructors are looking for in students' performances and serve as essential parts of a lesson plan (Teachnology, n.d.).

Both goals and objectives play tremendous roles in a syllabus design, helping students achieve learning outcomes (Stowell et al., 2018). Articulating learning objectives by aligning course objectives with assessments and instructional strategies will lead students to complete a course successfully (Eberly Center, n.d.-a). From a student's perspective, "a well-crafted set of course goals can provide a handy framework for organizing and synthesizing the material throughout the term" (Gannon, 2018, p. 1). In the "learning goals" section of a syllabus, instructors lay out promises and opportunities a course offers students (Bain, 2004). Strong course goals contribute significantly to students' performances in class and strengthen instructors' abilities to teach (Davis, 2009). This section of a syllabus describes goals for students, helping instructors to outsource their passion and goals for teaching (Burdina & Sasser, 2018).

Through learning objectives, students develop knowledge on philosophical questions, terminology, theory and methodology, and historical context. This enables students to develop stronger critical thinking skills. An action verb should be used while creating and describing learning objectives for a syllabus to encourage students to

evaluate, analyze, create, and encourage them to approach their courses and learning in their patterns (Eberly Center, n.d.-a, Slattery & Carlson, 2010).

### **Designing an Online Course Syllabus**

As indicated by Saquicela et al. (2018), a syllabus serves six purposes. A syllabus serves as the primary guide and introduction to a course to students. A syllabus sets the tone for a course—it motivates students to plan and achieve goals for the course and works as a planning tool for instructors. It structures students' work and distributes that work over a semester and helps faculty to plan and meet course goals on time. It is a contract between faculty and students—what students can expect from instructors and what instructors expect from students. Lastly, it serves as a portfolio for faculty. Students' success in a course can be determined by how well students' performances match the instructor's expectations; therefore, a well-designed syllabus should be straightforward and transparent in terms of format and wording (Tokatlı & Keşli, 2009).

Davis (2009) suggested that an effective syllabus should have the following: detailed information, a simple layout, course information, list of prerequisite courses, instructional technology requisite(s), an overview of the course's purpose, learning goals/objectives/outcomes, class activities, textbooks and other additional materials needed, assignments, exams, grade assessments, course policies and requirements, accommodations, and course calendar. According to the Eberly Center (n.d.-c) at Carnegie Mellon University, a syllabus usually includes the following components described in Table 1.

**Table 1***Components Usually Found in a Syllabus*

Component	Description of Component
Title page	Includes course number and title, number of units, semester and year, meeting times and location, instructor’s information—name, office, office hours, and way to contact the instructor.
Course description	Brief introduction to a course: scope, purpose, and how relevant the material to be taught is..
Course objectives	Skills and knowledge students will gain at the end of a course.
Course organization	Explanation of the topical organization of a course.
Materials	Required textbooks, software, and supplies with information about where they can be obtained.
Prerequisites	Courses students need to have completed before taking this course.
Course requirements	What students will have to do in the course: assignments, exams, projects, performances, attendance, and participation.
Evaluation and grading policy	Explanation of grading policies, and what the final grade will be based on.
Course policies and expectations	Policies concerning attendance, participation, tardiness, academic integrity, missing homework/exams, and laptop use. Description of expected student behavior.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	List of acceptable accommodations for students with special needs. This could include policies, equipment or a statement of support.
Course calendar	A day-to-day breakdown of topics and assignments—readings, homework, project due-dates, etc.

*Note.* Adapted from “Write the Syllabus,” by the Eberly Center, Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation, n.d.-c, What’s in a Syllabus section

(<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/syllabus/index.bak.html>). Copyright

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**Syllabus Design and Diversity**

Higher education has transformed immensely in recent decades. Nevertheless, some institutional issues persist in the areas of “social and historical context related to the

intersection of race/ethnicity, low-income status and first-generation background in higher education” (Azizova & Felder, 2017, p. 154). Thus, instructors should design their syllabi to fit diverse students' needs (Davis, 2009). The role of college teachers in designing their syllabi is to support the success of every student (De Welde, 2017). Many minority students have not been performing well in their classrooms because of instructors' teaching styles and methodologies (Gupta et al., 2018). The issue is not so much why diversity is significant in designing an online course syllabus, “but *how* to achieve it” (Berman, 2018, para. 4). Davis' principle of universal design, which prioritizes diversity, can be a robust unifying force to the success of minority students (Davis 2009). Therefore, college teachers can benefit from the concept of universal design while creating and implementing their course materials.

### **Student and Teacher Roles**

The role of an instructor is to make sure students accomplish learning objectives for a course. Therefore, an instructor should make sure students fully understand a course syllabus and its contents. Teachers promote a learner-centered course by making a “syllabus as well as class activities flexible” (Davis, 2009). Teachers answer questions and recognize students’ contributions so that students understand the direction and expectations of a course of education. Stewart (2014) underscored the role of faculty in creating communities of learners engaging in active and collaborative learning. A course should create a cooperative learning environment. Hence, an instructor should try to make sure students are familiar with the learning process in that course to enable students perform and attain desired results. An instructor should also learn effective teaching methods and determine how class goals can be made more meaningful.

An instructor should describe course expectations to students clearly. These course expectations include tracking students' progress, attendance, academic honesty, due dates, and consequences for violating expectations. An instructor should use course objectives to direct development of assignments in order to assist students in meeting course goals. Stowell et al. (2018) explained that outlining expected and prohibited behaviors decreased students' engagement in distracting behaviors. Stowell et al.'s conclusion suggests instructors should emphasize professional behaviors throughout a course. This allows an instructor to play some leadership roles.

An instructor should facilitate class activities that will impart knowledge and practical skills by guiding students through a course in order to meet their needs and learning outcomes. Alutu (2006) implied guidance is a platform of service that helps students obtain the capacity for self-direction and brings about positive changes to a learner, faculty members and their teaching plans, the learning process and curriculum, and assessments of learning. One of the practical skills an instructor should convey to students is "critical thinking." Critical thinking involves solving problems, calculating likelihoods, formulating inferences, and making decisions (Foo & Queck, 2019). Critical thinking is the cognitive skill that increases the probability of a student's success in a course. Critical thinking will enable students to reason, be goal-directed, and maintain focus in a class.

An instructor should empower students by giving them opportunities to contribute. One of the roles of students is to contribute to course structure. Students should be given opportunities to share their opinions respectfully with an instructor for possible course adjustments. It is vital to have a safe and respectful learning environment;

therefore, students should play a key role in promoting a positive learning environment and make a necessary contribution to collaborative learning. It is also the students' role to follow professional behavior and communication guidelines, as stated in a syllabus. Davis (2009) suggested students should be able to look through a syllabus to get a sense of who is teaching the course, things they will learn from the course, materials and resources required to participate in the course, whom they should contact if they need help, and things they should do to be successful in a course. Students' responsibilities are to review a course syllabus, ask questions, obtain the necessary text(s) for a course, and come to class on time prepared to participate. Students should be alert to due dates of every assignment and every test and avoid being absent. Students are required to abide by the rules and regulations stated in a syllabus, as it serves as a contract between students and their teacher. Students should also be familiar with the expectations of their instructor(s). It is also a student's responsibility to follow course guidelines and be familiar with grading criteria. Students are encouraged to take active roles in their learning and recognize that they are accountable for their success in a course (Davis, 2009). If both students and instructors play their roles and responsibilities effectively, they will have a productive semester.

### **Assignment, Assessment Design, and Grading**

In order to meet the goals and objectives of a course, various assignments are given to students. Banta and Palomba (2015) described assignments as lessons or tasks for students to reflect on what they learned in classrooms. Banta and Palomba further explained that assignments are used to evaluate students in courses and to determine their course grades. Assignments should be closely linked to learning objectives (Banta &

Palomba, 2015). Assignments help students apply concepts learned in a course. This encourages strategic learning and profound thinking, thus giving students the ability to think critically with concepts and information (Bain, 2004).

The purpose of academic assessment is to help improve student preparation for graduation while accomplishing learner outcomes (Banta & Palomba, 2015). Further, including students' assessments in online education contributes to a significant increase in the success of online education. Through assessment, instructors carefully examine students' learning and find information on students' knowledge and performance, students' approaches to class assignments, and learning habits. Hence, instructors can utilize information on student performance in their classroom to solve some potential problems, such as student misconceptions (Banta & Palomba, 2015).

According to Davis (2009) and Bain (2004), there are two types of assessments to examine students' learning. These assessments are formative and summative. Formative assessments are assessments that evaluate *how* students are learning course material throughout a course. According to the Eberly Center (n.d.-b) at Carnegie Mellon University, formative assessment is used to determine what areas of a teacher's methods might need improvement or what areas of learning a student may need help with. So, formative assessments are used to improve teaching and/or learning methods. Formative assessments usually have "low stakes"; they have little or no value as far as grading goes. A good example of formative assessment is a weekly quiz (Bain, 2004; Davis, 2009). Formative assessments can also have students: "draw a concept map in class to represent their understanding of a topic," "submit one or two sentences identifying the main point



of a lecture,” or “turn in a research proposal for early feedback” (Eberly Center, n.d.-b, para. 2).

Similarly, summative assessments evaluate *how much* students have learned throughout a course (Bain, 2004; Davis, 2009). The purpose of summative assessments is to measure level of knowledge gained from a course; summative assessments are “high stakes” assessments that affect final grades, and good examples include: mid-term exams, final exams, research papers, final projects, and other high point projects that contribute to a final grade (Eberly Center, n.d.-b).

Irving (2020) agreed with Davis (2009) and Bain (2004) that formative assessments are quizzes and tests that evaluate how a student is learning course materials. Formative assessment supports classroom environments that allow students and instructors to assess learning practices. Irving added that formative assessments and feedback could be facilitated through technological means such as videography and online quizzes. This would improve communication skills among students through formative assessment practices. Like Davis, Bain, and the Eberly Center (n.d.-b), Irving felt summative assessments are quizzes and tests that evaluate how much a student learned throughout a course. So, Irving explained, summative assessments could be the final evaluations at the end of a course or semester.

Steps involved in creating assessments encompass selecting rich instructional materials that present opportunities for student engagement and productive classroom discourse (Irving, 2020). For formative assessments, students can be evaluated on how they are learning course materials by taking quizzes at the end of every unit. Quizzes can consist of multiple-choice questions. For summative assessments, instructors can give a

final exam. Students should be tested on their overall understanding of a course at the end of a semester. A final exam should comprise all chapters covered in a course. Another summative assessment that could be given to students is a group presentation. This would allow students to share their course projects with their classes. This kind of summative assessment helps students apply what they have learned in a course in a practical fashion and builds communication skills. Both formative and summative assessments should help to fulfill student learner outcomes, as stated previously.

Bain (2004) highlighted that examinations and grades are not incidental performances that come at the end of learning, but are a substantial part of education that influences how to assist and support students' learning. Each student's performance can be translated into a letter grade (Gray & Bunte, 2021; Sgan, 1970); grading motivates students to work harder to attain the highest grade they can (Gray & Bunte, 2021).

Assigning letter grades usually follows a pattern based on number of points a student earns. For example, an instructor may decide to give a Grade "A" to students who demonstrate mastery of course material by scoring 90% to 100% of possible points in a class. Students who demonstrate a thorough understanding of a course by scoring 80% to 89% of possible points might be given a grade letter of "B." Letter "C" might be assigned to students who accomplish correct answers 70% to 79% of the time thus demonstrating a basic understanding of their course. Students who perform below average in a course might score 60% to 69% of possible points correctly. This might be assigned a grade letter of "D." Grade "F" is generally considered a failing grade and is often given to students who only earn 59% and below of possible points; students in this category demonstrate a poor understanding of a course.

Stanford Teaching Commons (2021) explained that both formative and summative assessments could sum up to 100% of possible points in a course. Instructors are encouraged to allow students to revise their works based on feedback they receive for formative assessments. However, for summative assessments, students might not be given an opportunity to re-write the assessment because it may be a final paper for their course, a mid-term exam, or a final exam. Both formative and summative assessments can help students synthesize and apply what they have learned throughout a course.

### **Teaching Methodologies and Strategies**

Teaching method refers to the general principles of pedagogy and management strategies used for classroom instruction (Bain, 2004). There are many approaches to teaching. A teacher-centered approach and student-centered approach are good examples. A teacher-centered approach focuses on direct instruction, where a teacher has full or formal authority. On the other hand, a student-centered approach consists of inquiry-based learning and cooperative learning, where a teacher serves as a facilitator. Focusing on a student-centered approach to learning, teachers and students play equally active roles in the learning process. Davis (2009) explained that combining modalities of communication such as visual, aural, and written communication contributes significantly to students' learning. Davis (2009) advised college teachers to help students participate in class discussions. Discussions keep students talking to each other on the same topic, and encourage students to think creatively and critically.

Some examples of teaching methodologies and strategies that help students achieve goals and objectives for a course might be lectures with elements of kinesthetic learning, presentations, demonstrations, and reading. These teaching methodologies

facilitate students' learning and their overall understanding of material covered in a course. Teaching and assessments should be connected in a course because students' learning should continue to be measured throughout a course. Walker (2020) indicated that giving students the opportunity to move around during group activities boosts active participation. Therefore, it is beneficial to allow students to move around and participate in class discussions and speak with hands and gestures. This is important because when students are able to freely communicate their ideas and contribute to class discussions; this promotes a positive classroom atmosphere. Students also learn by participating in hands-on experiences. Covington (2007) explained that students who participate in hands-on type classrooms retain more information in their courses. One way of doing this is making arrangements for students to visit some key offices at an institution to learn more about departmental functions and other business areas. Another method might be using case studies as class activities. Role-playing and case studies help students to be successful in classrooms (Davis, 2009). When case studies are used as class activities, students can imagine themselves as educators. This helps students apply knowledge acquired in a course to the real world.

An inquiry-based learning model should also be utilized in a course's lectures. This allows an instructor to serve as a supportive figure who provides guidance and support for students throughout their learning process. Instructors are advised to apply the concept of diversity and inclusion in their classrooms where every student has an equal opportunity to participate and learn in their classes. Instructors should facilitate and guide students, act as role models, and delegate students to have considerable autonomy in the learning process.

Walker (2020) described competent instructors as people who exhibit a number of characteristics, including learning to be well prepared to teach online, having a positive attitude towards online education, and setting high expectations that every student will succeed. Further, instructors should be creative and inventive in teaching, fair and just in their treatment of students and grades, approachable, have a personal touch, and develop a sense of belonging (Walker, 2020).

### **General Motivational Strategies and Techniques for Students**

Davis (2009) elaborated that some students might be naturally enthusiastic about learning, while others need their instructors to “inspire, challenge, and stimulate them” (p. 279). Davis added that there is no single formula for motivating students, as there are many factors that contribute to motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) explained that “motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality—all aspects of activation and intention” (p. 69). This means that motivation is a catalyst, which causes a person to make desired choices and maintain direction until becoming successful. Students can be motivated in different ways. Davis (2009) explained there are four general strategies to motivate students in an online environment. These strategies suggest that instructors should be enthusiastic about their course, address students’ basic needs and desires, create opportunities for active participation, and hold realistic expectations. Davis noted that in order to maintain students’ motivation throughout a term, instructors are required to build on students’ strengths and interests, give choices, and increase difficulty of course materials as a semester advances.

Whatever level of motivation students bring to a class can be transformed based on what happens in the class (Davis, 2009). One motivational technique that is important

is being able to provide consistent and early feedback that contributes to students' beliefs that they can be successful in a course. This feedback will continue to encourage and give students hope as a semester goes by. Another motivational technique instructors should use is to give moderate tasks to students that are neither too easy nor too hard and then continue to increase the level of task difficulty as a semester progresses. By doing so, it will set realistic goals for students and motivate them to engage and be actively involved throughout a course. Setting realistic goals is giving students a reasonable amount of work (Burdina & Sasser, 2018). Additional motivational strategies that could be employed throughout a course are being able to “communicate personal interest in the students by calling them by name, initiating conversations with them before and after class, asking questions during class, and referring to ‘our’ class” (Davis, 2009, p. 279).

Instructors should strive to foster intrinsic motivation in students to help students succeed and promote positive changes in their lives. Intrinsic motivation depends upon three needs being met as specified by self-determination theory. These three needs are competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci, when these three needs are met, individuals experience higher self-motivation and mental health, but when these needs are not met, individuals do not feel so motivated or healthy.

Instructors can help develop intrinsic motivation in their students by giving students challenging tasks, giving effective feedback on completed tasks, and avoiding demeaning evaluations (Ryan & Deci, 2000); this nurtures *competence* in students. Giving students a certain amount of *autonomy* in their tasks also fosters intrinsic motivation. Instructors can foster *relatedness* in students by providing a secure caring

environment. Applying Ryan and Deci's ideas on relatedness suggests students who learn in an environment where they feel the teacher cares for them, where they feel safe and secure asking questions and getting feedback, fosters intrinsic motivation and adds to a student's ability to succeed.

According to Pekrun (2006), the control-value theory of achievement emotions is the idea that:

Appraisals of control and values are central to the arousal of achievement emotions, including activity-related emotions such as enjoyment, frustration, and boredom experienced at learning, as well as outcome emotions such as joy, hope, pride, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, and anger relating to success or failure. (p. 315)

If an activity lacks any incentive value, the result may be boredom. One incentive of a course is a student's ability to attain a high grade in order to pass a class. Instructors should give a realistic amount of work in which students will be able to successfully carry out and earn an incentive value, like a passing grade. Assigning grades makes students realize the importance of a course. Similarly, instructors should avoid being highly strict and putting too much pressure on their students. In this regard, instructors might be flexible by providing multiple assignment options for a class's activities, yet moderately strict in making students follow a classroom's rules.

### **Conclusions**

Designing a syllabus involves considering the articulation of learning outcomes that will contribute to a successful course planning experience for college teachers (Davis, 2009). A quality syllabus aims to recognize the purposes or outcomes an

instructor wants students to achieve in a course. A course syllabus presents vital learning tools and formulates the goals or general education covered in a course and outlines teacher expectations and students' responsibilities for their success in an online course (Lo, 2019). Assessment techniques of learner outcomes could include written homework, objective exams, quizzes, and projects. Class presentations could be through lectures, demonstrations and presentations, and reading and writing assignments. Students' final performance grades could be translated into letter grades. The skills discussed in this dissertation could be used by college teachers in their careers and beyond, thus serving as a lifelong learning experience.

### **Summary**

Chapter II discussed preliminary considerations to syllabus design, course goals and objectives, designing an online course syllabus, syllabus design and diversity, student and teacher roles, assignment-assessment design-and- grading, teaching methodologies and strategies, general motivational strategies and techniques for students, and conclusions. Chapter III covered research design. Chapter IV presented results of the data analysis, and Chapter V presented a discussion of results, implications, and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Study Synopsis**

This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for an online course. Conducting a phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived experiences may help faculty and researchers understand how to design a quality syllabus for online education that fits the needs of students and their instructors.

This study used a qualitative design approach consisting of in-depth interviews from a sample size of seven participants to answer research questions. A survey instrument was developed by the researcher using open-ended questions to guide interview sessions. The researcher sought and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Dakota (Appendix A) before conducting the research since the study involved human subjects. Research participants were informed of their rights through both an informed consent form they had to sign (Appendix B) and verbal confirmation of measures taken to ensure the protection of their privacy.

#### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions for this study were:

1. From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?
2. What type of *additional* information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?

### **Sampling Method**

The researcher used a purposeful or criteria sampling technique to recruit participants who were able to provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon of designing a quality syllabus for online education. Peoples (2021) suggested that a researcher generate qualifying criteria each participant must meet in order to be part of a study. This allows a researcher to have detailed information on a study's phenomenon from participants' experiences.

### **Population and Sample Size**

To reach saturation, an ideal number of participants' depends upon the nature of a topic, a study design, and quality of a study's data (Peoples, 2021). Hence, in this study, a sample size of seven individuals participating in in-depth interviews would give satisfactory results (Creswell, 2014). At the time of this study, there were no specific guidelines for determining the right sample size in phenomenological research (Johnson, n.d.). However, Morse (1994) recommended a minimum of six participants. Johnson added that other qualitative researchers set a range at three to nine participants. The quality of data plays a tremendous role in a phenomenological study.

The study population consisted of faculty who taught online courses for a minimum of 2 years. All eligible participants met the following inclusion criteria:

- Was a full-time faculty member from a research institution who taught online courses for at least two consecutive years.
- Taught either graduate or undergraduate online courses to students earning college credits, not pre-college or professional courses.
- Had a doctorate in the field the participant was teaching in.
- Had experience working with a diverse group of students.

The sample size of the researcher's participants who met the criteria above was seven.

### **Selecting Research Participants**

Information about this study was sent by email (Appendix C), to faculty members who met the study's criteria for being eligible to participate in the study. The email encompassed a detailed explanation of the study, which included purpose, benefits, and deadlines. Faculty members who were interested in participating in this study were requested to reach out to the researcher via email or phone. Faculty members who contacted the researcher were screened to make sure they met the criteria for eligibility to participate in the research. An interview was scheduled with eligible participants at their convenience for a maximum of 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded with permission from each participant.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection in this research occurred through Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and each interview

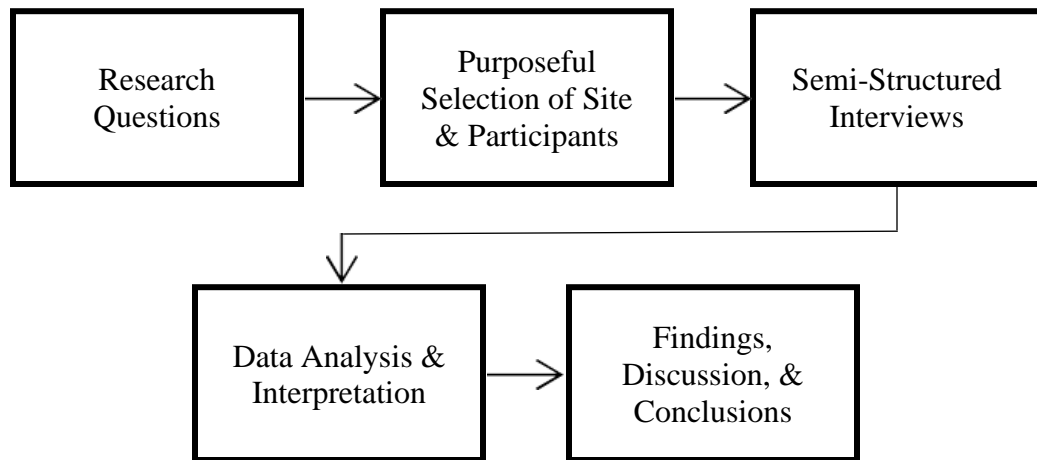
was one-on-one. This gave research participants an opportunity to narrate their lived experiences in teaching and learning that contributed to designing a quality syllabus. The researcher asked survey questions with follow-up probing questions when needed in order to obtain deep and rich data for the study.

The survey instrument (Appendix D) was developed by the researcher using open-ended questions. The initial draft of the instrument was shared with the researcher's advisor and dissertation chair for errors and suggestions. The researcher also worked with the University of North Dakota writing center and some phenomenological research method experts to assess the suitability and validity of the instrument. Demographic questions (Appendix E) were asked during the interview in order to get to know the participants and to make sure that they met research criteria. The semi-structured type of interview used in this research was classified into background questions and questions related to designing a syllabus for online education courses.

In a phenomenological data collection study, interviews, physical artifacts, archival records, and observations are mostly used in order to have quality and reliable data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this study utilized an online platform with the use of the internet to obtain data. The name of the online platform used in this research was Zoom. Each interview was transcribed, and data from interviews analyzed using line-by-line coding. Figure 2 illustrates the step-by-step process of this research study.

**Figure 2**

*The Research Process*



**Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis of Lived Experiences**

Data obtained from interviews were recorded and stored on a flash drive reserved for this research only. The researcher analyzed each interview by carefully reading, reviewing, and listening to the lived experiences of each participant. Then the researcher transcribed each recorded interview into written text using the FTW Transcriber software.

Research data were analyzed using a thematic analysis of lived experiences of participants to understand the meaning of the “designing a quality syllabus” phenomenon. According to Sundler et al. (2019):

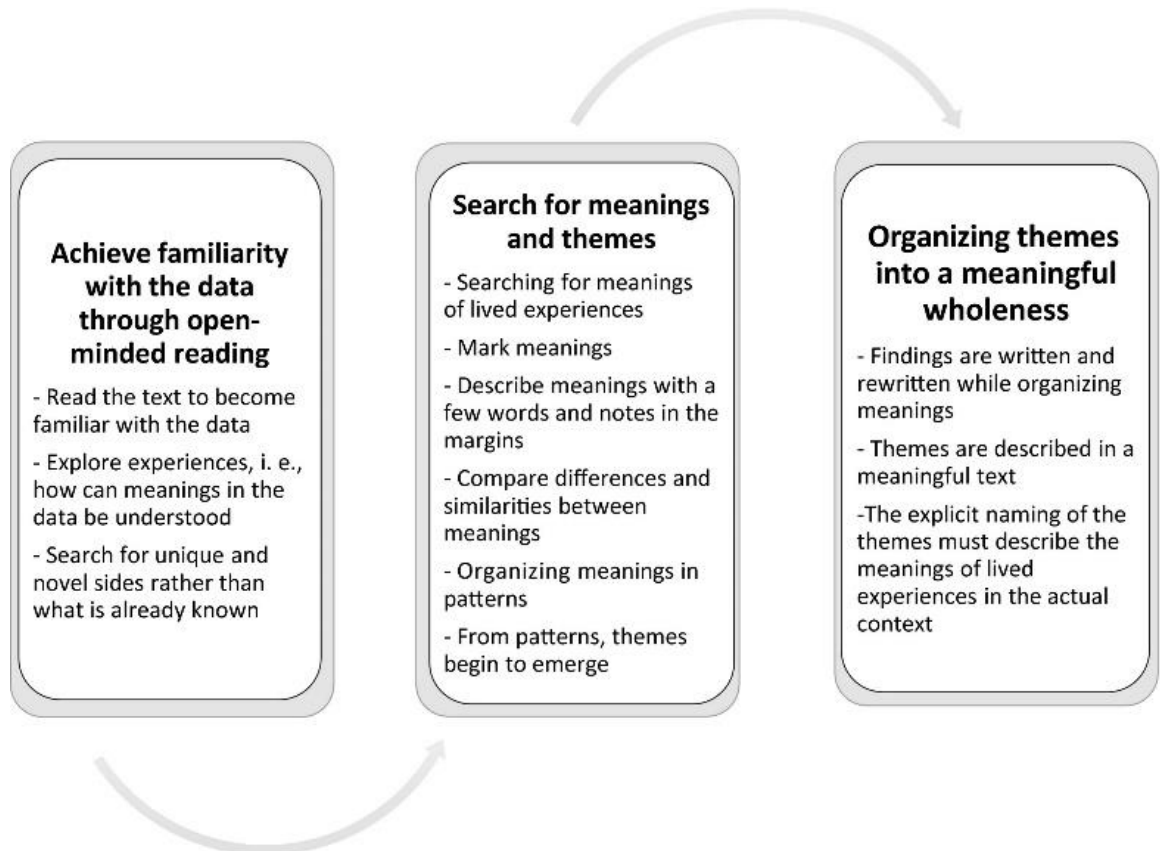
The goal of the thematic analysis is to achieve an understanding of patterns of meanings from data on lived experiences (i.e., informants' descriptions of experiences related to the research question in, e.g., interviews or narratives). The analysis begins with data that needs to be textual and aims to organize meanings found in the data into patterns and, finally, themes. While conducting the analysis,

the researcher strives to understand meanings embedded in experiences and describe these meanings textually. (p. 376)

Therefore, the researcher followed the summary of thematic analysis in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

*Summary of Thematic Analysis Adopted by Sundler et al. (2019)*



*Note.* From “Qualitative Thematic Analysis Based on Descriptive Phenomenology,” by A. J. Sundler, E. Lindberg, C. Nilsson, and L. Palmér, 2019, *Nursing Open*, 6, p. 4 (<https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275>). Copyright 2019 by the authors. *Nursing Open* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

To analyze data for this study, the researcher used the concept of bracketing and collected data from higher education faculty members who had experienced designing a

quality syllabus. The transcribed interview data was analyzed line-by-line in order to find significant statements, codes, categories, and finally, themes. An example of data analysis used in this study is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Sample of Data Analysis by Yusuf Marafa*

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following data:

	A	B	C	D
	Significant Statements	Codes	Categories	Themes
1				
2	This is my first semester of college teaching	First Time Teacher	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
3	adjunct faculty	Adjunct Faculty	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
4	I like college teaching thus far	College Teaching	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
5	always trying to learn ways to improve	Learning to Improve	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
6	my teaching styles	Teaching Style	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
7	meet the expectation of my students	Expectation of Students	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
8	I had previous teaching experience in nursery, primary, and post-secondary schools.	Teaching Experience	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience
9	college teaching is a way of educating students	Education/College Teaching	Enjoy Being Faculty	Teaching Experience

Figure 4 shows how a transcribed interview may be analyzed line-by-line in order to find significant statements, codes, categories, and finally, a theme. This is how the researcher's deep and rich data was analyzed.

### **Trustworthiness, Creditability, and Dependability**

Trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability were accomplished in this study through members checks and debriefing of results. According to Chowdhury (2015), the quality of phenomenological research is not measured by a single method. Therefore, validity and reliability are the backbones of phenomenological research. These help researchers learn about the authenticity of their phenomenological studies, which involve trustworthiness, creditability, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Peoples, 2021). Trustworthiness is a state in which a reader comes to believe a researcher has ethically, rigorously, and correctly collected and analyzed their data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This contributes to producing an ethical and credible interpretation of a set of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility describes how accurately a researcher presents participants' experiences and can be achieved through the use of triangulation. Dependability makes researchers provide a detailed account of their research process; whereby similar results can be presented if a study is carried out by a different researcher (Chowdhury, 2015).

Bracketing was used in this research study to set aside any prior knowledge the researcher had in order to gain trustworthiness. The researcher recorded interviews used in the research to get the exact words used by participants. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure validity. Transcripts from recorded interviews and research findings were returned to participants for their review and approval to ensure



credibility and confirmability of participants' words. Thematic analysis of lived experiences was used to analyze data gathered in the research and followed a qualitative research process, as shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4. This process aims to ensure dependability of data and results.

### **History of Phenomenology (Philosophy and Methodology)**

Phenomenology serves as a philosophy and methodological inquiry, which goes beyond knowing to include intellectual engagement to interpret and understand humans consciously. According to Qutoshi (2018), a historical reflection of phenomenology, as presented by Husserl, describes the concept as a science aimed at understanding human beings deeply by gazing at a phenomenon. Merriam-Webster (n.d.-b) has defined a phenomenon as "an observable fact or event" ("Full Definition" section, para. 1). On the other hand, Heideggerian analysis of interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology offers a broader analysis of the lived experiences of human beings (Lavery, 2003). Under the Heideggerian approach, bracketing operates as a granted assumption to describe the natural reflection of a phenomenon by gaining insights into human beings' lived experiences, including the meaning they possess. Bracketing is the procedure of recognizing an individual's assumptions about the nature of a phenomenon and grouping it as reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Under phenomenology, data collection and analysis occur to illuminate particular experiences used in identifying phenomena perceived by participants in specific situations. Phenomenological outcomes include broadening researchers' minds, enhancing thinking, understanding participants' futures, and defining the purpose of a researcher's study using experiences lived by participants (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Nonetheless, the subjectivity and personalized views of researchers in the perception and interpretation of phenomena based on participants' points of view represent the center of all phenomenological studies; hence, its extensive use in social sciences. Qutoshi (2018) asserted that phenomenology acts as a theoretical guideline for researchers to comprehend phenomena subjectively at every level when using phenomenology as a philosophy. This subjective approach helps researchers understand a subject around a specific event and encourages researchers to understand phenomenology from historical and philosophical perspectives. According to Fochtman (2008), philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle presented the phenomenological roots of understanding human beings. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) described Edmond Husserl as the most successful German philosopher to link phenomenology to studying lived experiences of human beings based on a conscious level of comprehension. Similarly, Heidegger, who worked with Husserl and was informally trained by Husserl in phenomenology (Lavery, 2003), developed interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology, adding to its descriptive nature to offer a broader understanding of lived experiences studied as key to understanding phenomena using consciousness (Cohen et al., 2018).

Phenomenology is a framework that is imperative in educating individuals' visions, defining their positions, broadening how they see the world, and analyzing lived experiences at a deeper level (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). These factors reveal the features of both a philosophy and a method of inquiry. Sloan and Bowe noted it is impossible to explain phenomenology using a single style, thus making it hard to establish a univocal interpretation of phenomenology. For instance, the Husserlian phenomenological perspective is pegged on a descriptive analysis of invariant elements of phenomena as

they are linked to consciousness. Conventionally, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) defined phenomenology as a descriptive scientific method because of concrete descriptions of experienced events from daily lives of participants used in this type of study. This concrete description is accomplished by allowing a researcher to engage in analyzing the structure of a phenomenon. Therefore, through the Husserlian framework, classical phenomenological research tries to search for realities and does not pursue truth presented as a manifestation of phenomena. Husserl's transcendental framework focuses more on describing the invariant phenomena elements as they appear from a conscious point of view (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010).

### **Descriptive Phenomenology by Edmund Husserl**

Husserl was referred to as the father of phenomenology, which is not surprising considering his initial work on mathematics focusing on calculus variations. However, Husserl changed interest, choosing to study philosophy as influenced by Franz Brentano, shifting attention to phenomenology using both an objective and subjective approach, and later focusing on pure phenomenology to establish a universal foundation of philosophy and science (Qutoshi, 2018). In his descriptive analysis, Husserl criticized psychology as a science because of introduced natural science methods to explain human issues. Husserl indicated that such an approach ignored the essential fact that psychology is associated with living subjects that respond to their own perceptions of the meanings of stimuli and do not just react automatically to external stimuli (Qutoshi, 2018). Therefore, researchers choosing to analyze external physical stimuli isolated and correlated with other specific responses, miss significant variables, and ignore contextual analysis instead of focusing on artificial attributes (Lavery, 2003).

Descriptive inquiry reveals that "the world" is lived by each individual, and there is no one interpretation of the world, of reality, but many interpretations. Descriptive inquiry concentrates on individual experience. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of human beings and their perceived surroundings. These lived experiences represent what individuals experience pre-reflectively, without the need for categorization or conceptualization. According to Qutoshi (2018), in most cases, a lived experience includes what people take for granted or things viewed as common sense. Phenomena focus on re-examining experiences taken for granted and uncover forgotten meanings. Husserl believed this was a promise for new science because the methodology allowed for the discovery of a realm shown as an absolute certainty from real experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). It is, therefore, a phenomenological method that reaches true meaning by penetrating deeper into reality, according to Husserl.

With the focus on consciousness, Husserl believed minds and objects happen within the experience, thus moving away from mind-body dualism (Qutoshi, 2018). Qutoshi's descriptive phenomenology views consciousness as a co-constituted dialogue between an individual and their world. Similarly, it has been possible to access consciousness structures through direct grasping of a phenomenon instead of the usual generalization and induction (Qutoshi, 2018). Lavery (2003) defined grasping as an intentional process guided by human intentions and not the usual mechanistic causation. Similarly, descriptive phenomenology regards intentionality as a process that directs a mind towards study objects. A starting point includes building an individual's knowledge of reality and directing one's focus to describe particular realities (Qutoshi, 2018). The process allows one to come face to face with key structures of consciousness, essences

that make an object identifiable as a specific experience different and unique from others (Laverty, 2003).

Different authors describe phenomenological reduction, also known as bracketing, as the main element of consciousness to achieve contact with essences. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined bracketing as the process of identifying an individual's presuppositions about the nature of a phenomenon and grouping it as reality. According to Husserl, it is not a good idea to ignore theories, presumptions, and presuppositions. Husserl believed in *intentional analysis* (studying experiential processes or how individuals experience a phenomenon) and *eidetic analysis* (how "intuition of essences" adds meaning to an individual's experience of a phenomenon; Qutoshi, 2018). Qutoshi challenged researchers to expand their comprehension of bracketing beyond suspension of an understanding to cultivate doubt that aids oneself in a work at hand. Despite Husserl not denying the uniqueness of this stance and potentiality to criticism, he still supported it as a viable pursuit (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The solution includes understanding the bracketing process, which is three-fold, by including exemplary intuition, imagining variation, and synthesizing essence.

According to Laverty (2003), exemplary intuition represents a process where a “researcher chooses a phenomena [*sic*] and holds it in his/her imagination” (Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl section, para. 7). The next step involves developing examples of similar experiences using an imaginative variation of the phenomenon being studied followed by integration of the variations by synthesizing the essences of interest. Accordingly, the free variation allows a researcher to describe the invariant and essential structures of the phenomenon without which it would not be recognized (Laverty, 2003).

Qutoshi (2018) stated that intentional analysis values concrete experiences as it describes how they are constructed. Husserl's purpose took the approach to include a desire to observe phenomena as utilizing intuitive seeing. This is to show a pure and intrinsic character of conscious experience using a careful description.

### **Epistemology and Ontology**

Phenomenology is a philosophy as well as a methodological approach. Maxwell (2013) also explained that phenomenology is a qualitative research design that is flexible rather than fixed and should be a reflexive process that is operative through every stage. Maxwell further explained that phenomenology as a method should involve "the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and addressing validity" (p. 2).

Smith (2013) elaborated:

The discipline of phenomenology forms one basic field in philosophy among others. How is phenomenology distinguished from, and related to, other fields in philosophy?

Traditionally, philosophy includes at least four core fields or disciplines: ontology, epistemology, ethics, and logic. Suppose phenomenology joins that list.

Consider then these elementary definitions of field:

- Ontology is the study of beings or their being—what is.
- Epistemology is the study of knowledge—how we know.
- Logic is the study of valid reasoning—how to reason.

- Ethics is the study of right and wrong—how we should act.
- Phenomenology is the study of our experience—how we experience.

(Smith, 2013, “5. Phenomenology and Ontology, . . .” section, paras. 1-2)

This information shows that there is a link between phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology and describes how these philosophical disciplines differ from one another. Narh (2013) argued that the philosophical frameworks of ontology and epistemology are fundamental to all science. Narh further explained, "Ontology is basic to all meaning in reality and knowledge construction. Ontology refers to what is out there to know. It has to do with whether something exists as real (realism) or as perceived (subjectivism)" (p. 2). Therefore, no science can occur without ontology, as ontology is a theory of existence that is concerned with the nature of reality (Lee, 2012). According to modern epistemology, phenomenology contributes to the definition of phenomena on which knowledge claims rest (Smith, 2013). Narh claimed that epistemology is the theory of knowledge that is entrenched in theory, methodology, and method; thus, explaining and understanding how humans learn what they already know and other knowledge about reality. In a qualitative research study, focal epistemological questions include what type of knowledge researchers believe will be attained and what features the knowledge will have (Narh, 2013). This shows that epistemology contributes to an understanding of how human beings can acquire and utilize knowledge.

## **Methodological Issues**

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explained that the phenomenological approach to collecting data is more than deciding whether to do observations or interview subjects. Creswell and Guetterman highlighted five processes of collecting phenomenological data. These five processes are: identification of participants and sites, gaining access to participants and sites, determining types of data to be collected, developing data collection instruments, and administering data collection processes in an ethical manner (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). However, in carrying out qualitative research in phenomenology, there are two methodological issues that can contribute to the failure of a study. These two issues constitute authenticity and validity threats to a study. Maxwell (2013) stated that researcher bias and reactivity are the major validity threats to qualitative data as well as methodological issues in qualitative research. These methodological issues mostly happen during the sampling stage of a study. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) called qualitative sampling "purposeful sampling" and explained it as the ability of "researchers [to] intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 204). According to Robson and McCartan (2016), validity is the accuracy of a result based on a realistic perspective.

Maxwell (2013) highlighted researcher bias as a threat to validity. Researcher bias can occur during the selection of data to accommodate an examiner's preconceived knowledge of their study or existing information. Maxwell further explained that reactivity is a researcher's influence on the individuals or setting studied. An example of these two issues is that researchers include fake data in their study that will fit their idea



or conclusion and have a significant influence on answers given by participants of the study.

Eliminating these issues in a study will enable researchers to avoid negative consequences. Creswell (2014) stated, "Validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity" (p. 124). Therefore, one of the ways to eliminate validity threats is by having researchers utilize a genuine gatekeeper. A gatekeeper may be a teacher or group leader who has an official role at the site of a study; they can officially provide entrance to a research site and contribute to a study by locating subjects (potential participants) and places (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Roulston (2010) also recommended using an Institutional Review Board (IRB) and following ethical research standards. How do you validate the accuracy of your findings? Creswell and Guetterman (2019) noted:

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, you need to make sure that your findings and interpretations are accurate. Validating findings means that the researcher determines the accuracy and credibility of the findings through the strategies such as member checking or triangulation. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes. Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account. (p. 261)

This information highlights a tangible process of eliminating methodological issues through validating study data and findings. Accurate information will help researchers to synthesize and critically analyze their studies and to maintain accuracy.

Creswell (2014) also emphasized that researchers are expected to review and examine methods, procedures, and conclusions for bias in order to avoid methodological issues, thus following the standard of validity and reliability of research. This enables researchers to eradicate methodological issues of validity and reliability in their research.

### **Conclusions**

This descriptive phenomenological research aimed to understand the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for online education. The research answered the questions:

1. From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?
2. What type of *additional* information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?"

The sample size of this study was seven. An instrument was developed by the researcher using open-ended questions to understand deep and rich information from participants. The researcher received approval for this study from the University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board prior to conducting the research.

Phenomenology represents a way of thinking about knowledge, with this project focusing on philosophical and methodological viewpoints to explain what people know and how they know it. After reviewing literature relevant to this study, the researcher concluded phenomenology represents a methodological place in social science, essential in understanding human phenomena at a deep and conscious level to comprehend lived

experiences. The most significant factor of phenomenology includes understanding lived experiences of individuals depending on and in relation to a phenomenon under study.

### **Summary**

Chapter III discussed the overall research design of this study. The chapter explained the following: study synopsis, research questions, population and sample size, sampling method, selecting research participants, trustworthiness-credibility-and-dependability, phenomenological background, history of phenomenology (philosophy and methodology), descriptive phenomenology by Edmund Husserl, epistemology and ontology, methodological issues, and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for an online course. This research would assist faculty to learn ways to design a quality syllabus for online courses. In-depth interviews from a sample size of seven faculty members, who met the research criteria, was used to answer the research questions.

In this chapter, the purpose of this study and research questions were reviewed and answered. The demographic data of the participants was provided. The process of data collection and analysis strategies was explained, and in-depth review of findings was analyzed and presented using thematic analysis of lived experience. The analysis of interview data produced significant statements that were converted into codes and further chunked into categories and emerged into themes.

#### **Purpose and Setting of Research**

This study aimed to get an in-depth understanding of higher education faculty members' experiences in designing a quality syllabus for online education. The rationale for conducting this study was that there has been limited research conducted to learn about faculty members' experiences in designing syllabi for online education. Hence, conducting a phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived

experiences would help faculty and researchers understand how to design an effective online syllabus that will fit the needs of students and their instructors.

Information about this study was sent by email to faculty members who met the study's criteria for being eligible to participate in the study. The email consisted of a detailed explanation of the study, which included purpose, benefits, and deadlines. Faculty members interested in participating in this study were requested to reach out to the researcher via email or phone. Faculty members who contacted the researcher were screened to make sure they met criteria for eligibility to participate in the research. An interview was scheduled with eligible participants at their convenience for a maximum of 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded with permission from each participant.

Data collection in this research occurred through Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and each interview was one-on-one. This gave research participants an opportunity to narrate their lived experiences in teaching and learning that contributed to designing a quality syllabus. The researcher asked survey questions with follow-up probing questions when needed in order to obtain deep and rich data for the study.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?
2. What type of *additional* information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?

## Demographic Information

This section explains demographic information of the study's participants and their years of experience teaching online courses. Pseudonyms were given to the seven participants to abide by IRB research ethics. These names are Emily, Sam, Nura, Auwal, TJ, Christelle, and Suhaila. Three participants were male, while four were female. The research participants' ages ranged from 28-62 years old. Table 2 illustrates participants' demographics reported during interviews.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Participants' Demographic Information*

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Race	Highest Degree Earned	Years of Teaching Experience
Emily	Female	18-30	White/Caucasian	Doctorate	5
Sam	Female	40 & Above	Asian American	Doctorate	8
Nura	Male	40 & Above	White/Caucasian	Doctorate	7
Auwal	Male	30-40	White/Caucasian	Doctorate	15
TJ	Male	30-40	African American	Doctorate	10
Christelle	Female	40 & Above	White/Caucasian	Doctorate	25
Suhaila	Female	18-30	American Indian	Doctorate	5

### Emily

A White/Caucasian female who was within the age range of 18-30 years, Emily had a Ph.D. in elementary education with 5 years teaching experience in a higher education field. Emily was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for 3 consecutive years. She mainly taught undergraduate online

courses to students in a teacher education program at DRU. All the courses she taught for the past 5 years were credits courses. Emily had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. Emily's background and experiences made her an ideal candidate for this study based on the criteria assigned. Emily answered the semi-structured interview questions for this study and did a "member check" review of her responses to interview questions to support validity.

### **Sam**

At the time of her interview, Sam was an Asian American female who was within the age range of 40 years and above. Sam had an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with 8 years teaching experience in the field of higher education. Sam was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for 8 consecutive years. She mainly taught undergraduate online courses to students from an education leadership program at DRU. All the courses she taught for the past 8 years during spring and fall semesters were credits courses. However, she taught seminar and professional courses in the summer. Sam had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. Sam was originally from South Korea, and she first lived in New York City for more than 10 years after her arrival to the United States. Sam answered semi-structured interview questions for the study and did a member check review of her responses to interview questions to support validity.

### **Nura**

A White/Caucasian male who was within the age range of 40 years and above, Nura had a Ph.D. in reading education with 7 years teaching experience in a higher education field. Nura was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had

taught online courses for 7 consecutive years. He mainly taught undergraduate online courses to students from a teacher education program at DRU. All the courses he taught for the past 7 years were credits courses. Nura had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. Nura's background and experiences made him an ideal candidate for this study based on the criteria assigned. Nura answered the semi-structured interview questions for the study and did a member check review of his responses to interview questions to support validity.

### **Auwal**

A White/Caucasian male who was within the age range of 30-40 years, Auwal had a Ph.D. in teaching and learning with 15 years teaching experience in a higher education field. Auwal was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for 10 consecutive years. Auwal was the director for the Ph.D. program at his department and he mainly taught graduate research methods courses online to masters and doctoral candidates at DRU's College of Education. All the courses he taught for the past 15 years were credits courses. Auwal had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. Auwal's background and experiences made him an ideal candidate for this study based on the criteria assigned. Auwal answered the semi-structured interview questions for the study and did a member check review of his responses to interview questions to improve validity for the study.

### **TJ**

At the time of his interview, TJ was an African American male who was within the age range of 30-40 years. TJ had an Ed.D. in education administration and planning with 10 years teaching experience in the field of higher education. TJ was a full-time



faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for 10 consecutive years. He mainly taught graduate online courses to students from the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program at DRU. All the courses he taught for the past 10 years during spring and fall semesters were credits courses. TJ had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. TJ answered the semi-structured interview questions for this study and did a member check review of his responses to interview questions to support validity.

### **Christelle**

A White/Caucasian female who was within the age range of 40 years and above, Christelle had a Ph.D. in counseling psychology with 25 years teaching experience in a higher education field. Christelle was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for more than a decade. She taught both undergraduate and graduate online courses at DRU. All the courses she taught for the past 25 years were credits courses that would lead to obtaining a degree or certificate. Christelle had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting and served as chair in different projects/groups organized by DRU. Christelle's background and experiences made her an ideal candidate for this study based on the criteria assigned. Christelle answered the semi-structured interview questions for the study and did a member check review of her responses to interview questions to support validity.

### **Suhaila**

At the time of her interview, Suhaila was an American Indian female from Hawaii, in the United States, who was within the age range of 18-30 years old. Suhaila

had a Ph.D. in public health education with 5 years teaching experience in the field of higher education. Suhaila was a full-time faculty member from a research institution and had taught online courses for 5 consecutive years. She mainly taught undergraduate online courses to students from DRU. All the courses she taught for the past 5 years during spring and fall semesters were credits courses. Suhaila had experience working with a diverse group of students in a higher education setting. Suhaila was a native of the Turtle Mountain tribe, but was living closer to where she taught at the time of this study. Suhaila answered the semi-structured interview questions for this study and did a member check review of her responses to interview questions to support validity.

All participants met the following criteria prior to conducting their live interviews:

1. Was a full-time faculty member from a research institution who taught online courses for at least two consecutive years.
2. Taught either graduate or undergraduate online courses to students earning college credits, not pre-college or professional courses.
3. Had a doctorate in the field the participant was teaching in.
4. Had experience working with a diverse group of students.

### **Thematic Analysis of Lived Experiences from Interviews**

Detailed interviews of seven participants were conducted to explore the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for online courses. Transcripts generated from interviews were analyzed in order to understand patterns of meanings in the data obtained from lived experiences of higher education faculty members. This helped the researcher get a deep and rich understanding

of the phenomenon (designing a quality syllabus) through finding “significant statements” and determining “themes” of each participant's experiences.

**Research Question 1**

The researcher used thematic analysis to address the primary research question for this study: *From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?* By applying this approach, the transcribed interview data was analyzed line-by-line and significant statements were identified and extracted, then assigned codes. The codes were then grouped into categories, and then seven themes emerged from those categories. Table 3 shows codes, categories, and themes that emerged from data pertaining to Research Question 1.

**Table 3**

*Codes, Categories, and Themes Pertaining to Research Question 1*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of the college/university</li> <li>• Address and contact information</li> </ul>	Institution's information	<b>Title section</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course name and number</li> <li>• Course units</li> <li>• Semester and year</li> <li>• Beginning and end dates for the course</li> <li>• Location and mode of instruction</li> <li>• Prerequisites</li> </ul>	Course information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of the instructor</li> <li>• Office location</li> <li>• Office hours</li> <li>• Instructor's mode of contact</li> <li>• Response and email policy</li> </ul>	Instructor's information	

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief information about the course</li> <li>• What the course is about</li> <li>• Scope and purpose</li> </ul>	Course introduction	<b>Course description</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook</li> </ul>	Materials	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge students will gain at the end of a course.</li> <li>• Skills students will gain at the end of a course</li> </ul>	Goals and objectives	<b>Learner outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topical organization of a course</li> </ul>	Lectures and delivery	<b>Course organization</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formative and summative</li> </ul>	Assessment	<b>Course evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter grade</li> </ul>	Grading	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to Microsoft Word</li> <li>• Using email with attachments</li> <li>• Downloading and installing software</li> <li>• Uploading files</li> <li>• Viewing presentation software.</li> <li>• Familiar with Learning Management System (LMS)</li> </ul>	Technological requirement	<b>Course accessibility</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodate students with disability</li> </ul>	Accommodation for disability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies concerning attendance</li> <li>• Policies concerning participation and missing assignments</li> </ul>	Policy	<b>Course policies and calendar</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A day-to-day breakdown of topics</li> <li>• Assignment due dates</li> <li>• Reading and other class activities</li> </ul>	Calendar	

The researcher used themes as a guideline for types of information needed for developing a quality syllabus. Figure 5 shows a graphical representation of the types of information needed in a quality syllabus that address Research Question 1, based on results of the themes that emerged from the researcher's data analysis.

**Figure 5**

*How Themes Show Data to Include in a Quality Syllabus – Research Question 1*



## **Relationship Between Research Question 1 and Themes**

### ***Theme 1: Title Section***

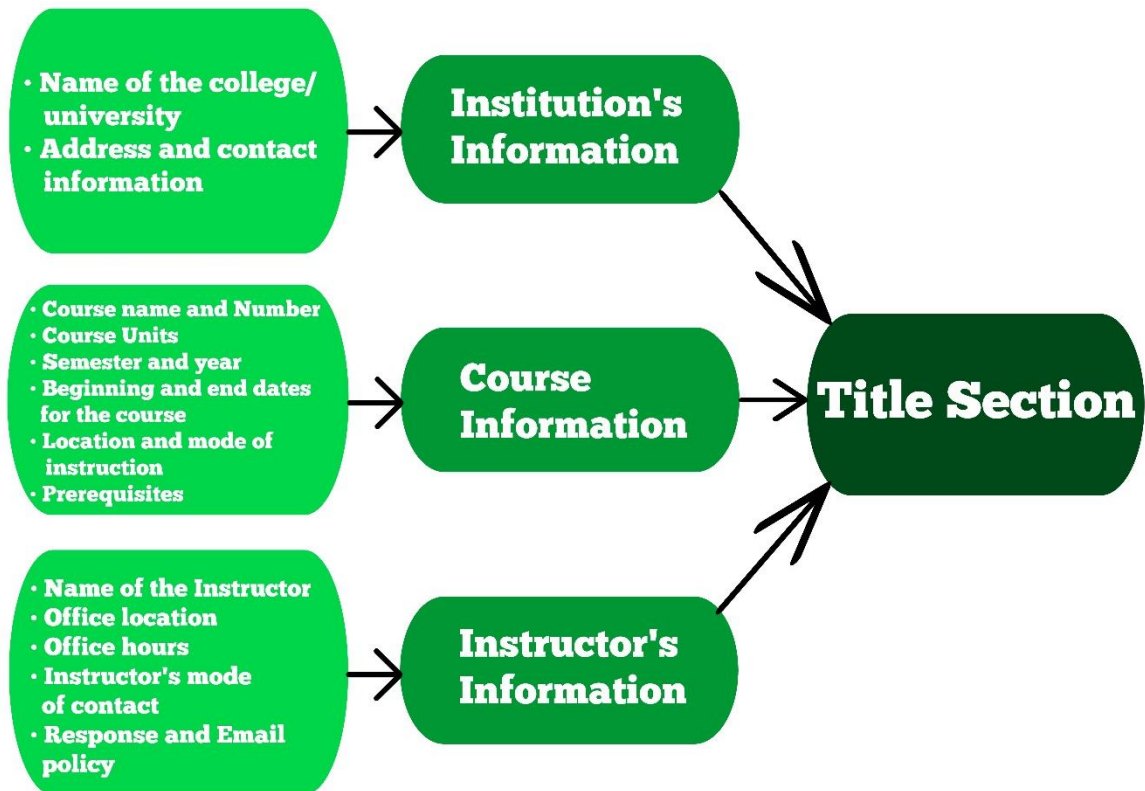
The first theme that emerged in this research was the “title section.” The title section of a syllabus is located at the top of the syllabus. All participants explained a title section is the first thing readers review when reading a syllabus. TJ stated, “It gives a reader an idea of what the content of the syllabus will be . . . would I be interested in continuing reviewing the syllabus or no?” Sam added, “[An] institutional name in the syllabus also grabs the attention of a reader, being the reader a student who will be taking the course, teacher, or anyone.”

Categories of data under the title section of a syllabus include the following: institution’s information, course information, and instructor’s information. Emily, Sam, Nura, Auwal, TJ, Christelle, and Suhaila explained that an institution's information in a syllabus should consist of the institution's official name, not acronyms or abbreviated forms of the name. It should also contain the logo of an institution. Auwal and Nura added that an “institution’s logo represents the culture of an institution, and it should be included at the top of each page . . . especially if the institution has a sports team. Suhaila recommended inserting both logo and other syllabus’ title section information on every syllabus page. However, Christelle and Emily argued that the insertion of both logo and other syllabus’ title information should only be on the first page of a syllabus in order to minimize space, as a quality syllabus should be “concise and clear” because unnecessary information and spacing would lead students to feel uninterested in a course. The address and contact information of the institution should be included in the first page (title page

or title section) of a quality syllabus. Figure 6 shows one possible pattern of a title section of a syllabus and information to be included in that section.

**Figure 6**

*Information to be Included in the Title Section of a Syllabus*



All the participants shared that course information should include the course name and number, course units, semester and year, beginning and end dates for the course, location and mode of instruction, and prerequisites. Suhaila explained that besides the full name of a course, a quality syllabus should also contain an alphabetical course code and number. She gave an example:

A syllabus for Multicultural Education course should include the course or departmental code followed by the number. I mean, it should have TL 433. This

way, the students or readers will know the course comes from which department, and it would be easy to identify the course using course, the institution's course catalog.

TJ shared that providing information on a course unit will help students understand the course load and the hours they need to study. He also added that some instructors forget to update the semester in their syllabus, and it is "very important to update the year and the semester of a course on a syllabus in order to avoid confusion." Students might think they were being given outdated information.

Sam discussed that adding beginning and end dates of a course would help students know the exact dates for their course and plan accordingly. Emily emphasized the significance of adding a mode of instruction to a syllabus. She explained, "Adding mode of instruction of a course in a syllabus will be just like a confirmation of a course delivery method as indicated on the Campus Connection." Campus Connection is a learning management system (LMS) where a student views and registers for a course. Including mode of instruction on a syllabus also helps students be well informed and be prepared for the course delivery method.

Participants also felt a syllabus should list prerequisites for a course. A prerequisite is a course that is required before you can take or register for another course. Prerequisite guidelines differ from school to school. The reason why schools require prerequisites is to help students be successful in a course they will be taking, a course that may need students having prior knowledge or experience in the subject. For instance, Sam stated, "It is important to learn a basic knowledge of something prior to entering the actual course . . . that is why students take Biology 1 before proceeding to Biology 2."



Like Sam, all participants described their experience with adding a prerequisite course in their course syllabus as positive and recommended other instructors do so also.

Instructor's information is the last category in the "Title section" theme. All participants described their experience adding instructor's information in a syllabus as positive. Information on an instructor should contain the following: an instructor's name, who will be teaching the course and his/her title; class and office location, office hours, instructor's mode of contact, and response and email policy. Nura highlighted that knowing the name of the instructor gives students an opportunity to search and find reviews about an instructor and learn a bit more about him/her. He also added that building positive learning relationships among instructors and students will aid tremendously in making students comfortable learning from their instructors. Therefore, a teacher's name and title should be included while designing a quality syllabus.

Unlike Nura, Auwal felt since this research addresses a syllabus specifically for an online course, physical classroom information should not be added to the syllabus, but the type of LMS to be used for a course should be included. This way, students will get to know how they will access course materials for their online course.

Office location and office hours should be included in a quality syllabus, as explained by Sam. This gives students an opportunity to contact their instructor if they have any questions or concerns with course materials or activities. Similarly, TJ shared that an "instructor should explain the preferred mode of communication, be it an email or phone." If an instructor has more than one way of communicating, this gives students flexibility in communicating with their instructor. TJ also added that letting students know when an instructor will respond to their email will give them peace of mind even if

they do not receive a response right away. However, instructors should make sure they honor their policy. Sam gave an example of email policy as:

I will respond to emails within 48 hours when I have internet access.

Please include the course code, student's name, and short phrase describing the reason for the email in the subject line of every email—for example, **TL 499 Yusuf Marafa: Discussion Board Assignment #5**. This will allow me to know that you are from this class, and I will give a special priority to the email. Students should not use all caps in any message unless they are emphasizing something. A capitalized message is considered shouting. Professional behavior is highly regarded and recommended in this course.

### ***Theme 2: Course Description***

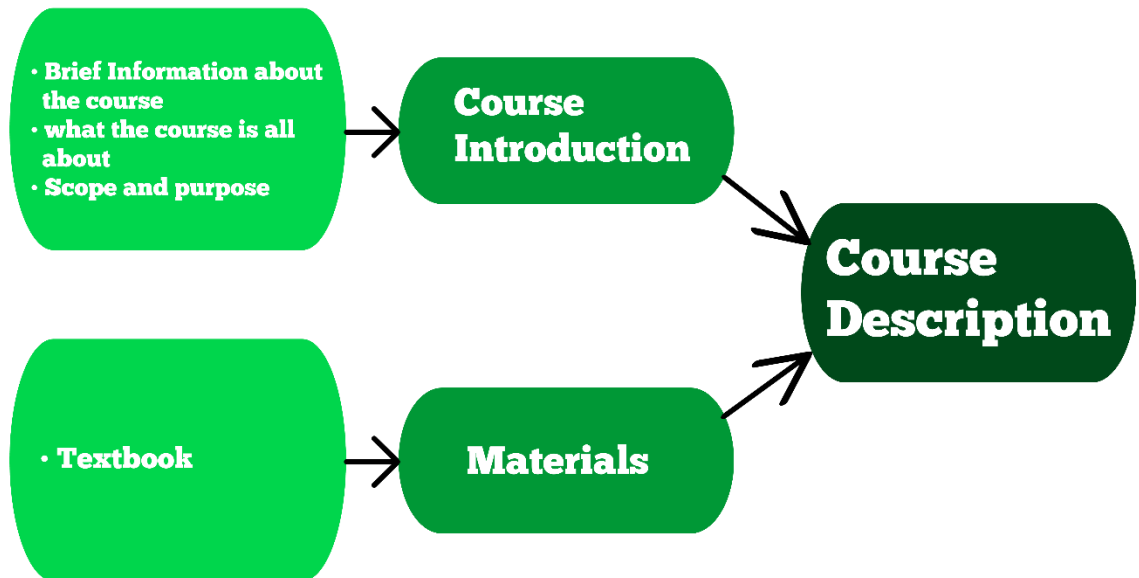
The meaningful categories relating to Research Question 1 in this theme were “course introduction” and “course materials.” A course description is a preliminary review of the substantial areas of a course. All research participants narrated that a course description of a quality syllabus for online courses consists of a brief introduction to a course. As explained by Sam, this introduction includes the scope and purpose of a course. TJ added that a course description should also describe the relevant material to be taught in a course. Like TJ, Auwal wholeheartedly supported the idea that a quality syllabus for an online course should have a course description which he felt is a brief statement that explains the subject matter, approach, and applicability of the course to students who enrolled in the course. Students who enroll in a course will learn more about their course in a course description in order to know what to expect throughout the

year. Suhaila explained that one of the benefits of a course description is, “If a student wants to transfer to a different university, especially transferring to pursue a graduate degree, many universities require course description[s] in order to know the content of the course that the student wants to transfer and get credit for.” In addition, not only do students who enroll in a course benefit from preliminary information about the course, but many researchers, students, or faculty use course descriptions to compile course lists for enrollment and other academic endeavors. A course name might be the same on various lists, but their descriptions may differ from school to school due to institutional policy and purpose.

While a quality syllabus for online education requires a course introduction that contains a description of course content, Christelle added that describing “course materials would guide students to know what type of book they will be using in the course and the resources that will be available to them throughout the semester.” All participants explained that course materials are the resources students will access to guide and support their learning. Some instructors prefer to have a structured textbook or any scholarly materials that require purchase, while others prefer to use open education resources, such as posting a textbook and other resources that do not require purchase. This choice differs from course to course and from instructor to instructor. Sam stated, “I like to give multiple textbook options, rather than using one single textbook for the entire semester.” Participants advised college instructors to write on syllabi where students will get access to needed course materials (e.g., the school library, online purchase, or the school bookstore). Figure 7 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “course description” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 7**

*Information to be Included in the Course Description Section of a Syllabus*



***Theme 3: Learner Outcomes***

The theme, “learner outcomes” focuses on one category, “course goals and objectives.” Codes to this theme are the “knowledge students will gain at the end of a course” and the “skills students will gain at the end of a course.” This section of a syllabus establishes what a learner will be able to know or do upon successful completion of a course. Emily stressed that course goals and objectives are established in different ways and could be based on a course’s culture and policies. TJ added that course goals are general information directly connected to a program’s goals and describes a practical purpose for a course. Sam explained that course goals are core competencies students are expected to know after taking a course. TJ stated that some institutions like Western Governors University use core competencies instead of course goals and there is not any difference between them as each course goal represents and sets a clear direction for a

course. Suhaila and Christelle emphasized that course goals describe general learning outcomes for a course and should be straightforward and clear in a simple language. It is very important to align course goals with the overall purpose of a program. Course goals are not measurable.

Auwal explained that course objectives are more specific than goals and address achievable and measurable skills students are expected to acquire. He added that a course objective describes knowledge and attitudes students are required to learn after taking a course. All research participants agreed that course objectives are specific terms that are measurable and explain in-detail what each and every student is supposed to gain by the end of a course.

Sam stressed that course goals and objectives help students recognize the purposes of a course as well as the outcomes a teacher aims for students to achieve by the end of a course. Course goals and objectives should be well organized, straightforward, and clear. TJ stated:

I always like to emphasize using blooms taxonomy action verb . . . good examples of blooms taxonomy action verb are judge, recommend, critique, choose, compare, conclude, contrast, defend, describe, discriminate, estimate, justify, appraise, argue, assess, attach, explain, judge, justify, interpret, relate, predict, rate, select, summarize, support, value, evaluate, and many more. . . . Course objectives should be broken down into modules or units, which will contain more details of specific learning activities.

All participants shared their lived experiences regarding designing course goals and objectives were positive and highlighted that course objectives should translate a

course goal into specific outcomes for students in order to break down complex lessons. Sam added that breaking down a goal into specific objectives helps students understand expectations clearly that they need to meet in order to pass a course and master competencies the course provides. A course objective should be measurable, understandable, and attainable within a given amount of time. Ideally, objectives should aim at what students should be able to know or do as a result of their learning experience. Figure 8 shows information to be included in a “learner outcomes” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 8**

*Information to be Included in the Learner Outcomes Section of a Syllabus*



***Theme 4: Course Organization***

All participants described course organization as an explanation of the topical organization of a course. Course organization focuses on how instructors present and deliver lectures to students. Auwal stated that course organization includes administrative tasks by instructors that are part of learning. He added that these tasks include weekly modules, organization of group work, scheduling of activities, and assignment due dates.

Christelle narrated that creating a clear and consistent course structure improves students’ learning experiences, especially in an online educational setting. Suhaila complained that students who take online courses become anxious and panicked when

they are unable to find content materials due to a lack of organization. She added that many students drop from online courses because of a lack of clear activities and course content, especially during the first week of a course. All participants advised and emphasized that those instructors who are teaching online courses should create a well-organized syllabus and be very clear in written descriptions of weekly class activities. Emily added that instructors should organize course activities into modules and lessons. It is always good to break down course topics into smaller learning steps. This will make students learn faster and appreciate their learning.

Overall, participants shared that a well-structured online course offers students coherent course navigation. It also increases motivation and the ability of students to easily find content materials, assignments, and assessments for a course. Figure 9 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “course organization” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 9**

*Information to be Included in the Course Organization Section of a Syllabus*



***Theme 5: Course Evaluation***

Categories that make up the “course evaluation” theme are “assessment” and “grading.” Codes for the assessment category consist of “formative” and “summative,”

while the code for the “grading” category is “letter grades.” A course evaluation section of a syllabus defines types of methods by which a learner will be assessed. TJ stated, “Online students should be aware of both formative and summative assessments for a course.” He added that course evaluation is a great way to learn about students’ understandings. Suhail advised instructors to design a syllabus to ensure their course evaluation section reflects course competencies and objectives. She added that it is important to ensure each course objective has a minimum of one assessment method.

An assessment is commonly known as a grading procedure. Auwal mentioned that a quality syllabus should have a clear list describing all assessments that measure students’ learning in a course. All participants agreed that assignments should be given to students to meet the goals and objectives of a course and help students reflect on what they have learned. Christelle emphasized that to evaluate students in online courses and determine their course grades, both formative and summative assessments that are closely linked to learning objectives should be given to students.

All the participants explained formative assessments evaluate *how* students are learning course material throughout a course, while summative assessments assess *how much* students have learned throughout a course. They all gave examples of formative assessments as being weekly quizzes or discussion board activities, while summative assessments were bigger assessments like a midterm exam, midterm research paper, a final exam, or a final research paper handed in at the end of a course.

Nura explained a course grade plays a huge role in students’ learning activities. He stated, “It is the extrinsic reward after learning is completed. Therefore, instructors should be very clear in their grading policy and criteria.” Emily added that grades should



normally be in compliance with a college policy or catalog and gave an example of grades as letters (A, B, C, D, F) to indicate students' performance. Participants narrated that instructors should include how grades are calculated in their syllabus and list any other information relevant to grading, such as if extra credit will or will not be given.

Participants also added that formative and summative assessments should equal 100% of possible points in a course. They gave an example of a standard grading scale (see Figure 10) and explained that Grade "A" is supposed to be given to students who demonstrate mastery of course material by scoring 90% to 100% of possible points in a class. Students who demonstrate a thorough understanding of a course by scoring 80% to 89% of possible points might be given a grade letter of "B." Letter "C" might be assigned to students who accomplish correct answers 70% to 79% of the time demonstrating a basic understanding of their course. Students who perform below average in a course might score 60% to 69% of possible points or a Grade "D." Grade "F" is generally considered a failing grade and is often given to students who only earn 59% or below of possible points; students in this category demonstrate a poor understanding of a course.

**Figure 10**

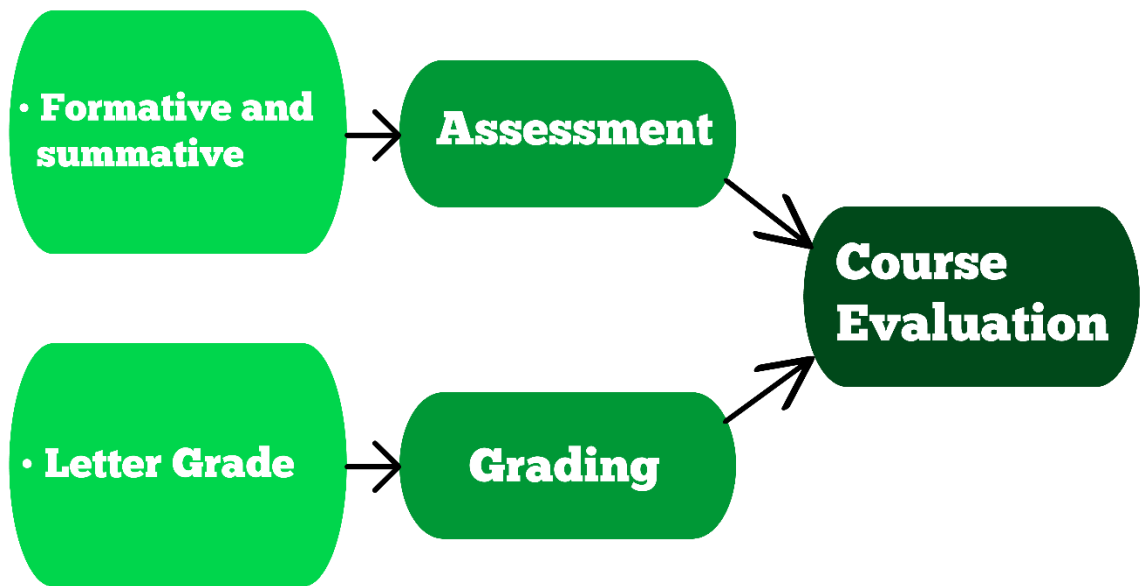
*Standard Grading Scale*

<b>Grading Scale</b>	
A	100%-90%
B	89%-80%
C	79%-70%
D	69%-60%
F	<59%

Figure 11 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “course evaluation” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 11**

*Information to be Included in the Course Evaluation Section of a Syllabus*



***Theme 6: Course Accessibility***

“Technological requirements” is the first category that contributed to Theme 6, and was derived from the following codes: access to Microsoft Word, using email with attachments, downloading and installing software, uploading files, viewing presentation software, and familiar with learning management system (LMS). Creating an accessible eLearning environment provides students with equal opportunities to learn. Sam stressed that without accessible content, most students who register for an online course would not be able to comprehend what is being taught.

All participants emphasized that every online course requires internet access. Therefore, Sam added that both instructor and students should make sure to have reliable

internet access in order to successfully complete a course and have a positive experience. Sam, Auwal, and Nura stated that students who don't have access to faster internet should make arrangements with their instructor to use a computer lab on their college campus or at a school/public library. Christelle mentioned that instructors should remind students to have a webcam and a headset or microphone in case there are proctored exams. Emily strongly suggested instructors should write clear technological requirements in their syllabus for online courses. This makes students aware of the technology needed to be successful in a course, she explained. TJ recommended both instructors and students should own a laptop because, according to TJ, a "campus computer lab or library has hours limitation[s]." Suhaila said the following information should be added to a syllabus by an instructor for an online course:

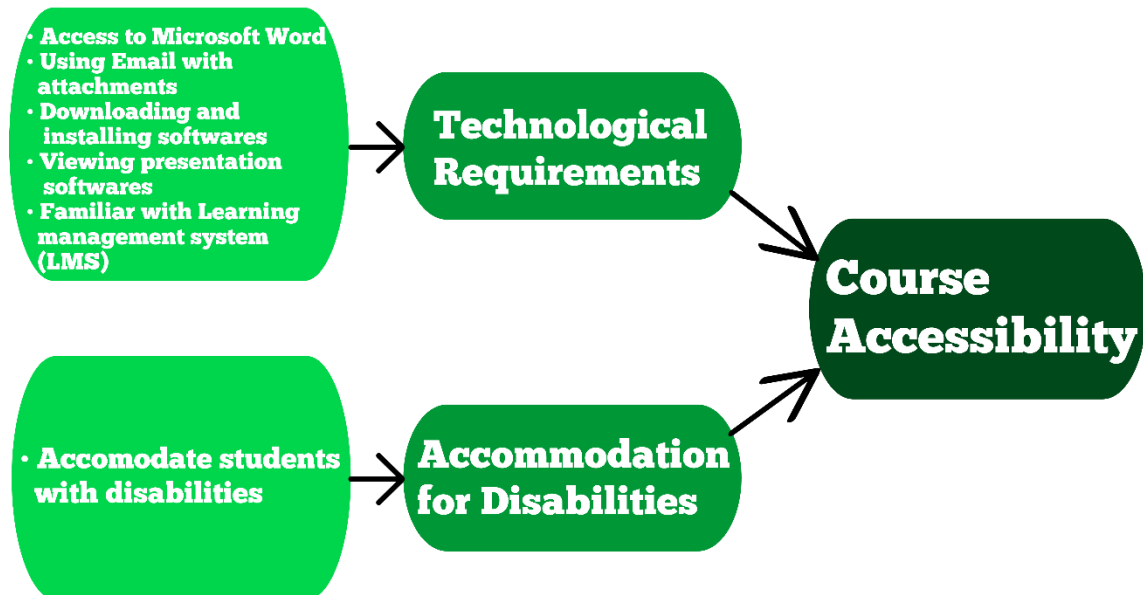
In order to easily navigate this course and be successful, students should be competent in:

1. Basic computer skills,
2. Sending/receiving e-mails,
3. Using a web browser,
4. Finding resources through search engines,
5. Downloading and installing software,
6. Using a word processing and presentation software,
7. Navigating the learning management system, and
8. Familiarity with a variety of file formats and being able to scan and print documents.

All participants suggested adding substantive information on a quality syllabus for the online course to accommodate students with disabilities who register for the course. They encouraged having clear statements regarding the course and institutional support for students with disabilities. Sam expressed that it is important to provide additional or outside resources for students with disabilities who register for an online course. She suggested adding not only an institution’s contact information, but the state contact information as well. Like Sam, TJ also explained that having a variety of resources for students with disabilities will tremendously support a student’s success in an online course. All participants highly recommended using accessible file formats while posting documents on an LMS and felt file formats to be used should be stated on a quality syllabus for an online course. Figure 12 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “course accessibility” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 12**

*Information to be Included in the Course Accessibility Section of a Syllabus*



### ***Theme 7: Course Policies and Calendar***

This theme comprised two categories, “policy” and “calendar.” The policy category consisted of two codes: “policies concerning attendance” and “policies concerning participation and missing assignments.” The calendar category consisted of: “a day-to-day breakdown of topics,” “assignment due dates,” and “reading and other class activities.”

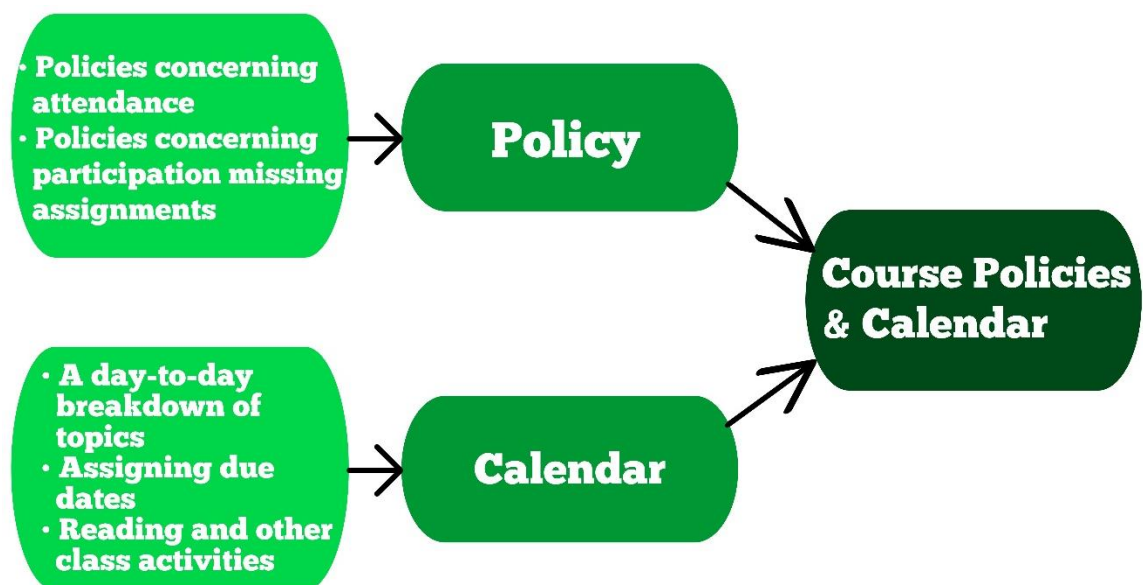
All participants explained in some way that course policy on a quality syllabus should include policies on late assignments, incomplete assignments, and revisions. A quality syllabus should also have an attendance policy and important dates. Since the syllabus in this research study focused solely on online courses, an attendance policy is not necessary unless an instructor wants to track the number of logins of students who have registered for an online course. Suhaila mentioned that course policies are policies pertaining to attendance, participation, tardiness, missing assignments, and exams. She added that in a quality syllabus, policies on class attendance and participation in discussion boards are given to encourage active participation and discussion. Auwal shared that an instructor’s role for an online discussion board is to serve as a moderator. He stated that course policy should be clearly stated on a syllabus for students to understand.

Nura explained it is important to add a course calendar to a quality syllabus for an online course because a course calendar clearly states what a student may expect during the course. A course calendar consists of the activities, quizzes, and assignments or exams for the course. Emily stated that a course calendar helps students to prepare in advance for what they are to learn. It also helps them balance their study schedule with other courses they are taking concurrently. Students would be able to balance personal activities and coursework through the help of a course calendar, she added.

Sam shared that a course calendar should have lecture topics for each week. Auwal mentioned course topics could be subcategorized by lecture hour or by week. A topic should be clearly descriptive for students to understand what will be taught so they may best prepare ahead. TJ narrated that a quality syllabus for an online course should have detailed assignments and due dates in the course calendar section of a syllabus. He enlightened that a course calendar should include a schedule of all assignments for lectures and due dates for projects and presentations. He continued to share his lived experience of designing a quality syllabus by stating that a course calendar should also include reading pages students are expected to read for a week or for a discussion board session or class session via Zoom. Emily emphasized including days in which classes are not going to be held or holidays. Figure 13 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “course policies and calendar” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 13**

*Information to be Included in the Course Policies and Calendar Section of a Syllabus*



## Research Question 2

Thematic analysis was also used to analyze the second research question for this study: *What type of additional information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?* In this approach, transcribed interview data were analyzed to identify significant statements, codes, categories, and themes. Table 4 shows codes, categories, and three themes that emerged from those categories for this research question.

**Table 4**

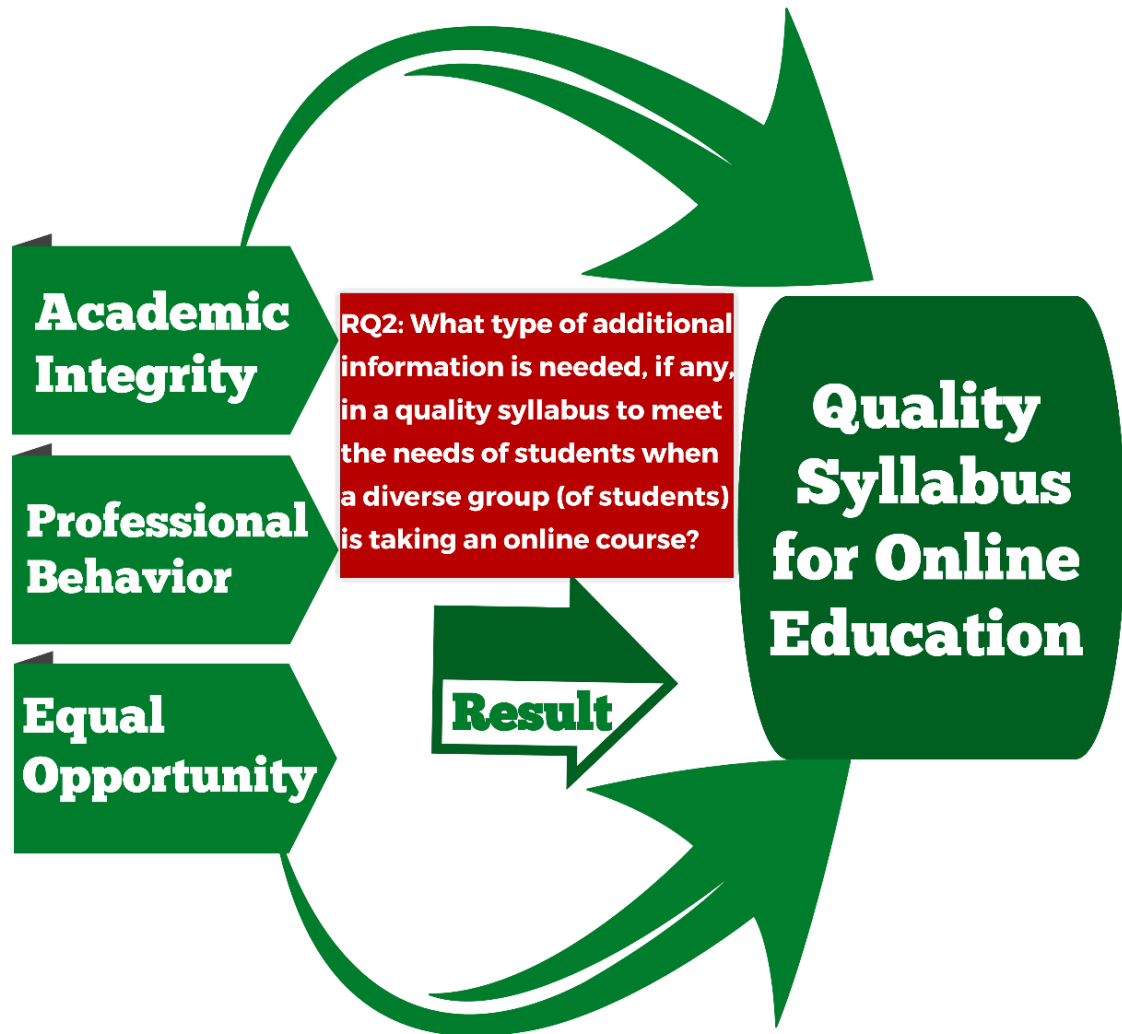
*Codes, Categories, and Themes Pertaining to Research Question 2*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Handing in homework copied from another student</li></ul>	Academic dishonesty	<b>Academic integrity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Giving one's work to another student</li><li>• Looking at another student's test/exam</li></ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Claiming authorship</li></ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students are always expected to act professionally</li><li>• Safe place to express ideas and opinions</li></ul>	Student behavior	<b>Professional behavior</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Notice of nondiscrimination</li><li>• Reporting sexual violence</li></ul>	Student support	<b>Equal opportunity</b>

The researcher used themes as a guideline for types of information needed for developing a quality syllabus. Figure 14 shows a graphical representation of the types of information needed in a quality syllabus to address Research Question 2, based on results of the themes that emerged from the researcher's data analysis.

**Figure 14**

*How Themes Show Data to Include in a Quality Syllabus – Research Question 2*



**Relationship Between Research Question 2 and Themes**

***Theme 8: Academic Integrity***

During her interview, Christelle enlightened that honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility are vital instruments and great ways to be a successful student in an online course. Sam added that not only does honesty, integrity and personal responsibility help a



student be successful but maintaining these tendencies help students be phenomenal characters and successful in life. Therefore, in Suhaila's and TJ's opinion, instructors should emphasize that students are expected to exhibit academic honesty in all aspects of a course. Nura explained that instructors should encourage students by letting them know that students that work on their own and submit their best work are highly unlikely to be involved in academic dishonesty.

Suhaila stated:

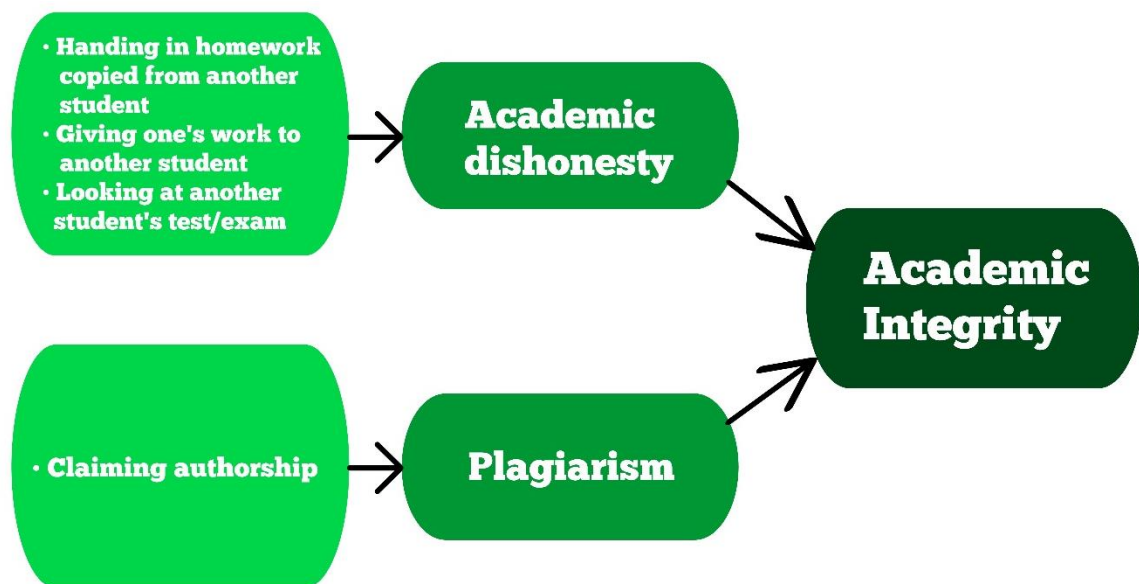
Academic dishonesty includes, but isn't limited to: violating clearly stated rules for taking an exam or completing assignments; claiming another's work or modifying someone's work as yours; buying or attempting to purchase papers or projects for a course from someone; fabricating information or citations; knowingly assisting others in committing acts of academic dishonesty; looking at other students' test/exams answers; submitting [the] same work in more than one course without the permission of the instructors for the courses. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Sanctions for academic dishonesty are usually assigned by the academic review board and may include failure of the assignment, failure in the course, or suspension from the college. . . . Therefore, instructors should state the consequences of academic dishonesty clearly in their syllabus for online courses.

Emily explained that plagiarism means using words or ideas from another person without citing that person and not putting quotation marks around any borrowed words. TJ also stated it is important for students to learn how to cite their works correctly. He emphasized that instructors should state what kind of citation they require for their

courses in a syllabus. All participants agreed that a failing grade for an entire course should be given to students who intentionally and directly plagiarize. Auwal shared that each institution has its own plagiarism policy and that policy should be followed when finding a student in the act of plagiarizing. Figure 15 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “academic integrity” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 15**

*Information to be Included in the Academic Integrity Section of a Syllabus*



***Theme 9: Professional Behavior***

The category to this theme is “student behavior.” Codes include “students are always expected to act professionally,” and “safe place to express ideas and opinions.” All participants explained that professional behaviors are expected for classroom interactions. They also added that students are always expected to act professionally and responsibly. As explained by participants, professional behavior includes but is not limited to communicating with an instructor when a late arrival or absence is anticipated,

arriving on time, and treating instructors and other students with courtesy and respect. A classroom (be it on location or online) should be a safe place to express ideas and opinions. All students are always expected to exercise self-discipline and respect the rights of others. Behaviors that obstruct academic freedom and fail to demonstrate mutual respect are not acceptable. Students who are disruptive, obnoxious, or otherwise act in an inappropriate manner should be removed from a class immediately.

Suhaila encouraged students should study as much as possible until they master the content of a course. Students must be transparent in their work and take responsibility for all decisions they make. Students should exhibit objectivity and apply independence of mind in making decisions. TJ also advised students to always dress appropriately for their surroundings, especially during Zoom or in-person class sessions. Participants recommended writing a professional behavior section on a syllabus for online courses so students who register for the course will be familiar with how they are expected to act. Auwal stated that students are supposed to act respectfully, especially while posting assignments or class activities on a discussion board. Figure 16 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “professional behavior” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 16**

*Information to be Included in the Professional Behavior Section of a Syllabus*



### ***Theme 10: Equal Opportunity***

Participants explained that a quality syllabus should include an equal opportunity section. Sam added that the whole syllabus should reflect being equal, fair, and just, especially when diverse students are registered for a course. Christelle stated there are many variables that determine whether or not students are being given equal opportunities in a course. Nura recommended giving students multiple textbook options to be used in a course. This gives equal learning opportunities for students and flexibility, he added. Emily mentioned that it is important to determine whether a student has equal access or not. She stressed that equal access guarantees every student has an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of a course. Sam highlighted, “This leads to equal educational opportunities which are providing the same resources, opportunities, and treatment for each student.”

TJ stated, “I recently read, ‘Notice of nondiscrimination and reporting sexual violence’ from [REDACTED] which I think every instructor should include in their syllabus in order to promote accountability and positive learning.” He stressed that no person should be discriminated against because of race, age, religion, gender, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, veteran’s status, marital status, and political affiliation. Equal opportunity and access to resources should be available to everyone. He added that if a student has experienced sexual violence, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or sex-based harassment, that student should contact the school administration immediately. Figure 17 presents a graphical representation of information to be included in the “equal opportunity” section of a syllabus.

**Figure 17**

*Information to be Included in the Equal Opportunity Section of a Syllabus*



### **Summary**

Chapter IV explained the purpose of this study, and research questions were reviewed and answered. Some demographic data on participants was provided. The process of data collection and analysis strategies was explained, and an in-depth review of findings was analyzed and presented using thematic analysis of lived experiences of participants. The analysis of interview data produced significant statements that were converted into codes, codes were grouped into categories, and categories analyzed for emerging themes. Ten themes emerged from the in-depth interviews conducted to gain insights into higher education faculty members' lived experiences. These themes included: title section, course description, learner outcomes, course organization, course evaluation, course accessibility, course policies and calendar, academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity. Based on respondents' lived experiences and perceptions, these themes comprise the components required in a quality syllabus for an online education course.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

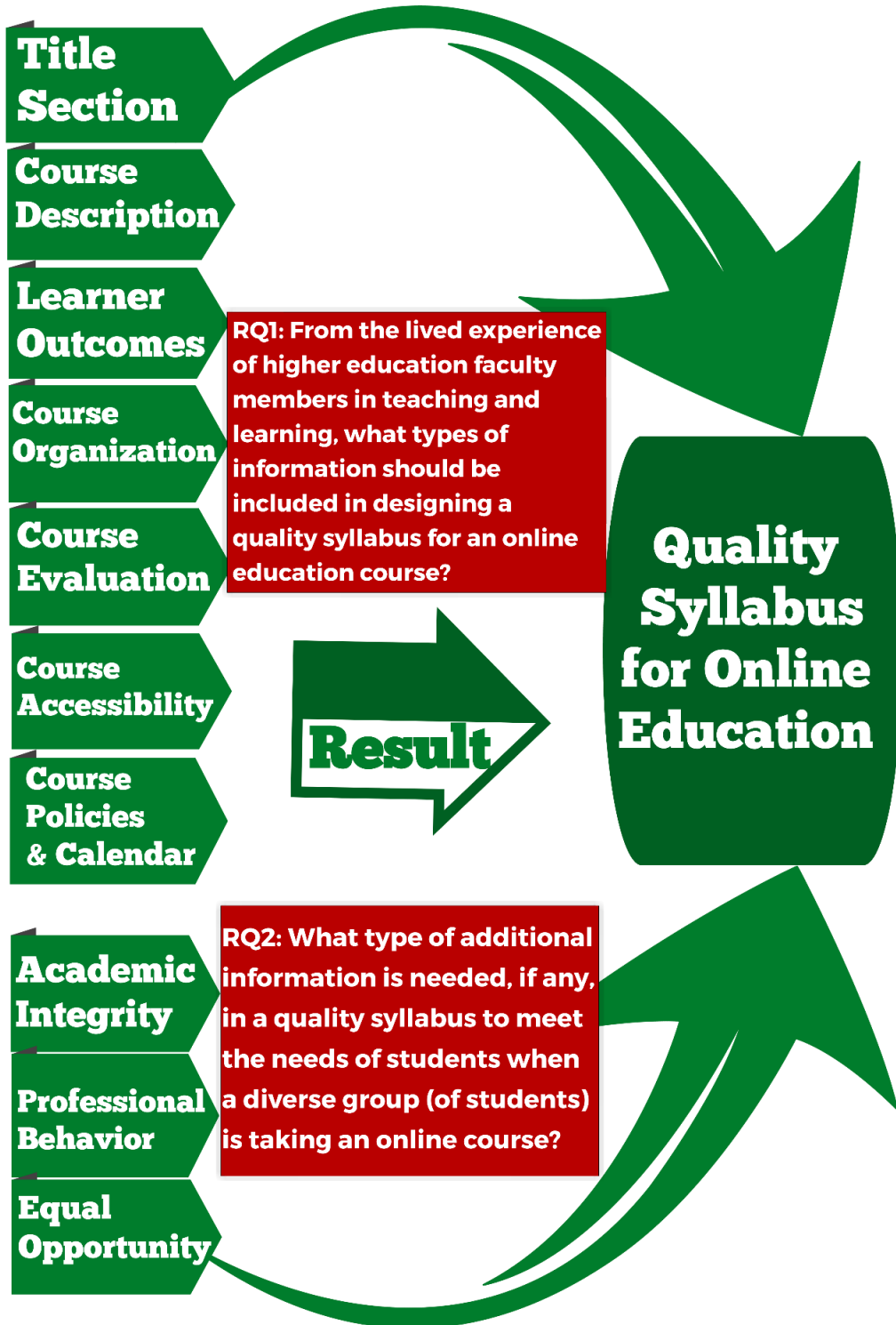
This descriptive phenomenological study explored lived experiences of higher education faculty members in designing a quality syllabus for an online course. This research can assist faculty to learn ways to design a quality syllabus for online courses.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses results from interviews conducted in order to learn more about lived experiences of higher education faculty members regarding designing a quality syllabus for online learning. The chapter also discusses research limitations and suggestions for future study. The analysis of interview data produced significant statements that were converted into codes and further organized into categories that showed 10 themes that emerged from the data. The discussions relate research findings to the literature review.

A syllabus can be defined as a written narrative document that contains all the necessary information a student needs about a specific academic course or class. It comprises what would be taught in a course; when it would be taught; and teacher expectations, student responsibilities, and potential learning outcomes. In short, it is an overview of the curriculum of a class. The quality of a syllabus is a fairly reliable indicator of the quality of teaching and learning that will take place in a course (Woolcock, 2006). Figure 18 presents a graphical representation of information to include in a quality syllabus based on results of this study.

**Figure 18**

*What to Include in a Quality Syllabus for an Online Education Course*



## **Discussion of Research Findings**

This research found that a quality syllabus for online education should comprise a minimum of 10 components: title section, course description, learner outcomes, course organization, course evaluation, course accessibility, course policies and calendar, academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity. These components will contribute to successful pedagogical approaches and teaching delivery. This research also supported and aligned with the literature presented in Chapter II with the addition of “professional behavior” and “equal opportunity” components that have been learned from data received from this study through the lived experiences of participants, all higher education faculty members.

### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, “From the lived experiences of higher education faculty members in teaching and learning, what types of information should be included in designing a quality syllabus for an online education course?” The themes below answered Research Question 1. The researcher used thematic analysis of participants' lived experiences by reviewing transcripts from interviews. Significant statements were identified from the interviews and codes were assigned to the statements, and then codes were arranged into categories, and seven themes emerged from those categories.

#### ***Theme 1: Title Section***

As indicated in this research, a “title section” is the first component to be included in a quality syllabus. The title section theme of this study contained 3 categories and 13 codes from interview data. All participants explained that a title section is one of the most critical components of a quality syllabus as it clearly defines basic information about a



course. The three categories in this theme (the title section) were “institution’s information,” “course information,” and “instructor’s information.” These three pieces of information are vital as they give students a clear direction for a course.

Previous research explained that an institution’s information describes all essential details of an institution, including its logos and location, as it will indicate that the syllabus is from a particular institution (Davis, 2009). Similarly, course information gives details about a course, such as when the course starts or ends, how many lessons would be in it, and how many minutes per lesson. This information in a syllabus is crucial because it assists students in preparing and planning ahead for a course’s activities and assignments (Habaneck, 2005). The last category of a title section of a syllabus is “instructor's information." Research shows students are more satisfied and feel more accommodated when syllabi contain instructor information (Covington, 2007). Walker (2020) suggested an instructor’s name should be clearly stated in a quality syllabus for online courses. There may be several times when a student may need their instructor's help or guidance. Therefore, as explained in Chapter IV, an instructor's email, office location, office phone number, and office hours should be present in a quality syllabus. Instructor information makes students feel connected to their course and feel they are being taken care of regarding the course (Parkes & Harris, 2002). Consequently, a quality syllabus is required to have a title section as it would result in higher productivity and better performance in a course.

### ***Theme 2: Course Description***

“Course description” describes and explains a course’s contents; it was the second theme that emerged from this research. This theme contained two categories: "course

introduction" and "materials." Participants suggested that a course introduction gives an introductory analysis to students regarding what the course will be. This is a necessary component of a quality syllabus since a course description provides students with a brief idea about what a course is all about. Moreover, in this theme, participants believed a course description gives an instructor the opportunity to let students know the scope and purpose of a course.

Previous research also found that it has been necessary to have a course description in a quality syllabus by detailing the scope and purpose of a course (Smith & Razzouk, 1993). Smith and Razzouk also added that the scope of a course discusses about how "in demand" a course's knowledge is in the outside market, and the purpose of a course explains the reason why a course is significant and should be studied. Another researcher also added that the scope of a course lets students realize that whatever they will be learning in a course would contribute to attaining skills needed for a particular job (Foo & Queck, 2019). Similarly, this research found that knowing the purpose of a course makes students know the exact information to be covered in the course, reason for the course, and helps tremendously to keep students focused on learning. Ryan and Deci (2000) explored those students who know the purpose of studying a course feel more motivated while studying, as they know exactly where and how the knowledge will help them.

The second category in this theme is "materials." Most participants explained that course materials refer to readings, textbooks, journals, and educational videos and audios that would be needed for a course's activities. The researcher also found that instructors who described needed course materials in a syllabus tended to produce significant results

at the end of a course. This may have been because when students read a syllabus before a lecture, they can prepare themselves ahead of time by learning from materials posted. By knowing a course description and having the needed materials ahead of time, students can be more prepared to learn from the course (Gray & Bunte, 2021). This will indeed help them score better and be brighter students.

### ***Theme 3: Learner Outcomes***

An outcome, in general, may be defined as "the result" or "a consequence" of something. Likewise, in quality syllabi, a "learner outcome" basically is what the learner would learn or know by the end of a course. A student must know desired learner outcomes to decipher how much to study and what to study (Njogu, 2012). Participants indicated that knowing the desired outcomes of a course motivates students to study more as they know beforehand what they should be learning throughout a course. This theme has one category and two codes, and the category is "goals and objectives." From previous research, Irving (2020) observed that students who knew a course's goals and objectives studied harder, more specifically, and with more interest. Goals and objectives are crucial to a quality syllabus because they give students a driving force. Objectives indicate what to study to reach a goal. The goal acts as a sort of "target" for students. Previous studies have proven that students who are given "targets" to complete assignments tend to successfully complete homework as they consider it a healthy competition (Banta & Palomba, 2015). This improves their performance academically, and they end up getting better grades. Therefore, it is imperative to add goals and objectives to quality syllabi.

One of the codes in this theme talks about the "skills" students will gain by the end of a course. After knowing desired outcomes, students may be driven towards finishing a course so they can exhibit those sets of skills. This explains that course goals and objectives are linked to professional standards and are required to be written in quality syllabi.

#### ***Theme 4: Course Organization***

The fourth theme that emerged from this study that stressed the component to be included in a quality syllabus is "course organization." Organization is the act of setting things in order; in a way where expectations and assignments are organized, straightforward, and clear. This study indicated that course organization in a quality syllabus refers to writing course topics in an organized manner so students can have a clear image of what they will be learning. This eliminates ambiguities and makes it crystal clear to students how they will be taught. This theme has one category, "lectures and delivery," and one code, "topical organization of a course." Evertsz (1991) suggested that students can prepare for their exams better if their syllabus is divided into topical modules. The author added that students could cross-check chapters in a textbook with information provided in a syllabus to better prepare for assignments or lectures coming up, leading to better outcomes or higher grades.

From one interview, Christelle narrated that creating a clear and consistent course structure improves students' learning experiences, especially in an online educational setting. Therefore, the topical organization of a course plays a vital role in a quality syllabus. Information to be included in the topical organization of a course might look something like this: Lecture/Module 1 (will cover one specific topic), Lecture/Module 2

(will cover another topic), and so on. This allows students to know in advance how their course will be broken down lecture by lecture. This information should be included in a good quality syllabus because it lets students prepare for lectures in advance. Therefore, including lectures and the topics to be covered in each lecture in syllabi can significantly improve a student's ability to master course materials (Matejka & Kurke, 1994).

### ***Theme 5: Course Evaluation***

“Course evaluation” is the fifth component (theme) required to be included in a quality syllabus. This theme contains two categories and two codes. The two categories are "assessment" and "grading," whereas the two codes are "formative and summative" and "letter grades," respectively. From the literature explored in this research, a syllabus sets forth course requirements for a class and what students expect to learn, and also, what grades students might obtain. Therefore, evaluating a course means forming a judgment on the course taught based on a student's experience. After forming a judgment based on real marks and class participation, an instructor awards a student a letter grade, which depicts their overall performance (Grade A being the highest grade and Grade F being the lowest).

This theme was supported by Nunan (1988), who discovered that letter grades are an integral part of a quality syllabus because they explained to students how their overall performance in the course would be translated. Adding course evaluation in a syllabus will help students know “which exams would have more weightage?” and “How much percentage of weightage does attendance have?” Therefore, including a grading system on a syllabus is imperative because students will know the method by which they will be evaluated.

Banta and Palomba (2015) argued assignments should be lessons or tasks designed so students reflect on what they learned in classrooms. Banta and Palomba further explained that assignments are used to evaluate students in courses and determine their course grades. Assignments should be closely linked to learning objectives. Moreover, according to Davis (2009) and Bain (2004), there are two types of assessments to examine students' learning. These assessments are formative and summative. Formative assessments are assessments that evaluate *how* students are learning course material throughout a course. Nura explained a course grade plays a huge role in students' learning activities. He stated, "It is the extrinsic reward after learning is completed. This leads to hardworking, thriving, and successful completion of the course."

#### ***Theme 6: Course Accessibility***

"Course accessibility" was the sixth theme discovered in this research required to be included in a quality syllabus. It contained two categories with seven codes from the interview data. Course accessibility is one of the salient components of a quality syllabus for an online course, where students need to be familiar with how to access all course materials and instructions or "technological requirements" (one category of course accessibility) of a course. In today's world, education has been upgraded in many ways. Teachers no longer teach students by textbooks alone; instead, they use multimedia, live problem-solving, and high-tech personal computers. As every student does not have immediate access to these items, they need to be informed in advance so they can arrange access to the required materials (Council of Ontario Universities, n.d.). This may consist of students having access to Microsoft Word, sending emails, downloading images, and logging onto an LMS portal. Including a course accessibility theme in a syllabus, all

faculty members should demonstrate their willingness to provide reasonable accommodations for their courses. This eliminates the chances of students being worried about the accessibility of course materials. As supported by Smith and Razzouk (1993), students who are not familiar with how to obtain or use technological requirements of a course can learn the basics of needed skills before taking the course.

The second category of the theme of "course accessibility" is "accommodation for disability." This category contains one code: to "accommodate students with a disability." Students of all abilities and backgrounds want inclusive classrooms where peers convey respect to all classmates including disabled classmates. Therefore, for those students with disabilities, a classroom setting may present certain challenges that need accommodation and consideration. An instructor needs to create an all-inclusive environment in their class so no student feels left out in any regard. This theme must be added to a quality syllabus for online courses to meet the needs of diverse students.

### ***Theme 7: Course Policies and Calendar***

Maintaining decorum in class is a big responsibility for an instructor, and the first step towards doing so is by informing students about class policies. This theme has two categories and five codes. As revealed from this research, course policies and a calendar should be required to be included in a quality syllabus. Participants explained that course policies define and set clear rules and procedures for a course. Course policies describe the rewards, penalties, as well as consequences for certain behaviors of students in a course. Most participants explained that course policies discuss class discipline, submissions of assignments, and attendance. Banta and Palomba (2015) underscored that it is imperative for a faculty instructor to state their late assignment policy clearly. This is

essential information for students because they will understand how late assignments will affect their grades. Bain (2004) added that stating defined and clear policies in a quality syllabus would help students be more responsible.

The second category included in this theme was "calendar." Including a calendar in a syllabus will break down day-to-day activities of how a course will be carried out. Flowerdew (2005) explained that academic calendars serve as great tracking tools for measuring progress and ensuring successful implementation of activities. All participants agreed that an academic calendar serves to keep students and instructors reminded of key dates throughout an academic semester and year. This way, students can prepare for each upcoming day and hopefully understand a lecture even better in class. Moreover, an academic calendar acts like a "student planner." It helps students organize and balance course activities and be aware of upcoming due dates (Rabbini & Gakuen, 2002). Consequently, this leads to students being better at academics and better at organizing their time, prioritizing different lectures, learning management, and gaining responsibilities. This also adds to a personality groom for a student because students are learning multiple sets of skills that may help them in their professional and personal lives.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked, "What type of *additional* information is needed, if any, in a quality syllabus to meet the needs of students when a diverse group (of students) is taking an online education course?" The themes below answered Research Question 2. Three themes emerged from a thematic analysis of lived experiences of participants' data. The researcher reviewed transcripts of interviews and identified significant statements. Statements were assigned codes, and codes were arranged into categories, and categories



into emergent themes. The three themes that emerged were academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity. These represent the additional information to be included in a quality syllabus for online education. The researcher of this study reviewed more than 100 syllabi from different post-secondary institutions across the globe, and the researcher found the following information. Out of 100 syllabi, the maximum number that addressed academic integrity was 49, only 20 syllabi addressed professional behavior expectations, and 30 syllabi discussed equal opportunity policy. Therefore, this research shows that it is wholeheartedly significant to include academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity in a quality syllabus for online education.

Some instructors who already include these three themes in their syllabi might argue that research question number two has not added a unique component to an online course syllabus. However, the data and analysis presented came directly from the participants' interviews, which validated the themes that emerged using the research process (fig. 2) and thematic analysis (Fig. 3). Amida (2021) conducted and supported the data analysis process used in this research and explained that thematic analysis of participants' data provides effective ways to understand and learn about the meanings of a particular phenomenon.

Overall, the results found in research question two represented academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity as the three unique components that could be added to a quality syllabus for online courses in order to meet the needs of diverse students.

### ***Theme 8: Academic Integrity***

From the interviews in this research, academic integrity consists of two categories and four codes. The eighth theme of what to include in a quality syllabus, as indicated in this research, is "academic integrity." Academic integrity is what keeps the academic system alive. Participants agreed that academic integrity has been recognized as fundamental to the work of a whole academic community, including students, teachers, researchers, coordinators, and administrators. Academic integrity leads to high self-esteem, which helps students develop negative attitudes towards plagiarism and other poor academic behaviors (Amida et al., 2021). Being honest, responsible, and fair are strong ethics in academia. Some participants gave examples of academic dishonesty such as cheating on homework, giving homework to someone to copy, and cheating during an exam.

The second category under the theme of academic integrity was "plagiarism." Plagiarism is definitely an infraction. Students need to be aware of this beforehand, that copying down someone else's work without giving credit to them and claiming authorship is absolutely unacceptable. Stewart (2014) supported this theme and added that including a description of plagiarism in a quality syllabus is proven to positively impact students' learning growth and development. The purpose of adding a description of plagiarism to a syllabus is to ensure that students do their own work so a teacher can know what each student understands.

Academic integrity allows students and staff freedom to build new ideas, knowledge, and creative works while respecting and acknowledging the work of others (Amida et al., 2021). The purpose of writing about this theme in a quality syllabus is to

draw attention of students to the consequences of not being academically integral and honest. Since a syllabus serves as a contract between a student and a teacher, students must abide by the academic integrity policies mentioned in the syllabus (Gannon, 2018).

***Theme 9: Professional Behavior***

The ninth theme that emerged from the data of information to be included in a quality syllabus was "professional behavior." This theme had one category and two codes. The category was "student behavior," derived from codes that emphasized "students are always expected to act professionally" and formally. However, students also should know that their classroom is a "safe space to express ideas and opinions" (the second code in this category). A quality syllabus needs to include professional behavior because a description of what constitutes professional behavior informs students on how to communicate and behave in a class. This theme teaches students appropriate behavior to maintain in a classroom. If there are clear boundaries, students can develop positive behaviors and auras in their classes (Maguire et al., 2010). When students are well behaved, they emit respectful vibes towards each other. While talking respectfully and maturely, students are welcome to speak about anything they like since a classroom would be a safe space to discuss things. Creating a safe space for every student to share and learn lectures motivates and increases their interest in academics.

Merrett and Wheldall (1993) supported the idea that adding a professional behavior section in a quality syllabus would help students to contribute freely to a course and attain a sense of belonging. Most participants shared that students would be connected and enjoy the course more. This helps students develop further interests in a course and strive for excellence. Writing a professional behavior section in a syllabus is

important because reading a description of required behavior would instantly boost a student's interest in a course.

### ***Theme 10: Equal Opportunity***

“Equal opportunity” was the last theme that emerged from this research data, and it is vital to include it in a quality syllabus. Equal opportunity is the act of giving everyone an equal chance, regardless of their color, gender, background, or academic performance. This research found that adding an equal opportunities component to a quality syllabus is quite important. This makes students who register for the course understand that their instructor is ready to ensure all students have equality of opportunity in terms of access and potential outcomes (Ghorpade & Lackritz, 1998).

Regardless of a student’s background, each and every student should have an equal chance to participate in class activities. Suhaila shared that “...equal opportunity recognizes and celebrates our similarities and our differences as individuals and groups.” Like Suhaila, a previous study supported this idea and added that equal opportunity recognizes that all individuals have an intrinsic right to be nurtured in such a way as they are able to reach their full potential (Didham, 1990). This supported the idea that a "notice of nondiscrimination" is vital to include while designing a quality syllabus. However, telling them we (teachers) support equal opportunity makes them feel much better and safer. A second code talks about the policy for reporting "sexual harassment." This is very important for students to know so they understand an instructor would fully help in taking action against a harasser. This makes students feel safe and protected. This is why sexual harassment or violence information and how to report it is essential for students to know.

## **Additional Information**

This study recommends that a quality syllabus for online education should include course rules, straightforward and clear, so students who enroll in a course will fully understand what is expected of them and what is expected to happen during a semester. A quality syllabus for online courses should also contain a substantive description of appropriate procedures and course policies. Students who enroll in a course should abide by course policy and follow guidelines provided in a course syllabus.

A quality syllabus for online education should contain what will be covered in a course, the course level, and credit units. A quality syllabus benefits students who register for a course at the time of instruction and can be used for accreditation and transfer equivalency. It could be used to evaluate an instructor and program development. These all help students become more effective learners in a course. An example of different sections of a quality syllabus follows (see Appendix F for a more complete sample):

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### ***Example – Course Evaluation***

Students' performance objectives and exams will be translated into points and the points into letter grades. A = 90 – 100% (mastery of the course), B = 80 – 89% (thorough understanding of the course), C = 70 – 79% (basic understanding of the course), D = 60 – 69% (below average understanding), and F = 59% and below (poor understanding of the course). If there are any questions or clarifications concerning assignments or grades received, it is a student's responsibility to make inquiries before their instructor posts the final grades (Davis, 2009). Students should make inquiries before final grades are posted because final grades often cannot be changed after posting.

Make-up assignments/tests will be given only in cases of emergency when students have a valid excuse for missing an assignment/test, and when they contact the instructor before an exam is given. All assignments should be placed in a “dropbox.” Spelling and grammar will be graded, and assignments will receive reduced points for spelling and grammar errors. Students are strongly encouraged to turn in homework as soon as possible, so that they may receive feedback on it before the unit tests, and to avoid the possibility of missing a deadline. Tests and quizzes will be given based on the topics studied. Students are expected to attend and participate in all class periods. Class participation is integral to students’ learning in their classroom. If a class is missed for any reason, it is the student’s responsibility to make up content missed. In the event of an emergency situation, students must notify their instructor if they will miss classes. Texting, emailing, chatting, and web browsing are not allowed during class lectures.

***Example – Minimal Technical Requirements for a Course***

Access to Microsoft Word, using email with attachments, creating and submitting files in word processing program formats, copying and pasting, downloading and installing software, uploading files, and viewing presentation software.

***Example – Accommodation of Disabilities***

Students with a disability that might affect their performance in class are strongly encouraged to contact the instructor at the beginning of the course. Accommodations can be set up through the [REDACTED]. They will provide the necessary documentation that needs to be given to an instructor for accommodations to take place. Tutors for this course are available for all students at no cost. Please, contact the [REDACTED] for this service as well.

***Example – Academic Dishonesty***

Students are required to follow the institution’s academic dishonesty policy. Violation of this policy will result in a zero on an assignment/exam/paper on which the violation occurred and will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs.

Example violations include: Handing in homework copied from another student, giving one’s work to another student, looking at another student’s test during an examination, giving answers to another student during an examination, and claiming authorship of work that is not your own.

***Example – Notice of Nondiscrimination and Reporting Sexual Violence***

No person shall be discriminated against because of race, age, religion, gender, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, veteran’s status, marital status, or political affiliation. Equal opportunity and access to resources shall be available to everyone. If a student has experienced sexual violence, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or sex-based harassment, please contact our [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

***Example – Professional Behavior***

Students are always expected to act professionally. Professional behavior includes but is not limited to: arriving on time to class, communicating with the instructor when a late arrival or absence is anticipated, and treating the instructor and other students with courtesy and respect. The classroom should be a safe place to express ideas and opinions. All students are always expected to exercise self-discipline and respect the rights of others. Behaviors that obstruct academic freedom and fail to demonstrate mutual respect are not acceptable. Students who are disruptive, obnoxious, or otherwise act in an

inappropriate manner will be removed from the class immediately.

***Example – Communication***

Email is regarded as a professional means of communication. Therefore, proper sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation are required. Please include the course code and your (student’s) name in the subject line of every email—example: TL 499 Yusuf Marafa. Students should not use all caps in any message unless they are emphasizing something. A capitalized message is considered shouting!

***Example – Course Schedule***

Attached (Appendix G) is a course calendar indicating dates for assignments and tests. The schedule is subject to change at the decision of the instructor. Students are encouraged to check their college email account daily as it will be the primary means of contact between the instructor and students outside the classroom.

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This syllabus helps convey to students a sense of support for their learning and well-being by providing information on academics, counseling, resources, and statements of support. It also serves as a transparent way of inviting students to seek guidance and support when needed.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the sample size. While seven participants were enough to reach “saturation” of data in the study, more participant could be added. Saturation refers to achieving a level of informational redundancy where no new information is uncovered in the study; therefore, additional data collection contributes nothing new to the study (Merriam, 1998; Gentles et al., 2015). One of the ways to lessen



this limitation is by adding more participants. However, according to Morse (2000) and Creswell (2014), seven participants are sufficient to carry out quality phenomenological research.

Another limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher of this study used triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher also used bracketing to reduce bias. The term “bracketing” and “epoche” was developed by Moustakas (1994) to minimize researcher bias and to test as well as increase validity. Bracketing is putting aside things unrelated to a study to focus solely on a topic and questions. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.-a), epoche is “the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging” (para. b). This means that researchers need to keep their preconceptions and biases separate from their data while carrying out their studies.

### **Future Research**

This descriptive phenomenological study explored and described the lived experiences of higher education faculty members’ experiences in designing quality syllabi for online courses. Both research findings and the literature review provided great insights on information that should be included in quality syllabi for online education courses and “other additional information” needed in quality syllabi when a diverse group of students are taking a course. However, there is a need to use other research methods, such as quantitative research methods or mixed methods, to look at a research topic from different angles, in this case for more insight into designing a quality syllabus for online learning.

While seven participants should be enough to reach saturation of data, future research could add more participants from diverse backgrounds that were not appropriately represented in this investigation.

Findings of this study provided descriptive data that can be used to guide future areas of research. Expanding this research may lead other researchers to formulate a new understanding of what is required in designing a quality syllabus for online education. Future studies may repeat this research while sampling for a more inclusive range of ages, genders, and years of teaching in online teaching.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to explore higher education faculty members' lived experiences when designing quality syllabi for online education. This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology through interviews. This helped the researcher get a deep and rich understanding of the phenomenon (designing a quality syllabus) by identifying significant statements in interview transcripts, assigning codes to significant statements, grouping codes into categories, and then determining themes (inherent in categories) of each participant's experiences.

Findings showed that this phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived experiences in teaching and learning will help faculty and researchers to understand how to design a quality syllabus for online education that will fit the needs of diverse students. This research supported and aligned with the literature presented in Chapter II. Ten themes emerged from in-depth interviews conducted to gain insights into higher education faculty members' lived experiences. These themes included: title

section, course description, learner outcomes, course organization, course evaluation, course accessibility, course policies and calendar, academic integrity, professional behavior, and equal opportunity. These themes form the components required in a quality syllabus for an online education course. These research results will contribute to efficient pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in online education.

It is important to note that the initial title for this dissertation research that the UND IRB office approved was *Efficient Pedagogical Approach to Teaching and Learning: A Phenomenological Inquiry of Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education* (Appendix Ai), and the sample size was six. However, some committee members made observations to concise the research topic to *Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education* (Appendix A) and increased the number of research participants to seven. Therefore, to abide by the research ethics, another IRB was requested to apply the committee member's observations/suggesions in the study. Thus, both IRB approvals were presented in Appendix A and Ai.

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
**Approval for Study – Institutional Review Board**



UND.edu

**Office of Research  
Compliance & Ethics**  
Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050  
4201 James Ray Drive Stop 7134  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7134  
Phone: 701.777.4279  
Fax: 701.777.2193

February 16, 2022

<b>Principal Investigators:</b>	Yusuf Marafa
<b>Project Title:</b>	Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education
<b>IRB Project Number:</b>	IRB-202108-009
<b>Project Review Level:</b>	Expedited 6, 7
<b>Date of IRB Approval:</b>	2/16/2022
<b>Expiration Date of This Approval:</b>	8/4/2022
<b>Consent Form Approval Date:</b>	2/16/2022

The Protocol Change Form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your revised consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. **You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/>

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP  
Director of Research Assurance & Ethics

Enclosures

Cc: Sagini Keengwe, Ph.D.

**Appendix Ai**  
**Initial Approval for Study – Institutional Review Board**



UND.edu

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Compliance & Ethics**  
Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050  
4201 James Ray Drive Stop 7134  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7134  
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Fax: 701.777.2193

August 6, 2021

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Yusuf Marafa
<b>Project Title:</b>	Efficient Pedagogical Approach to Teaching and Learning: A Phenomenological Inquiry of Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education
<b>IRB Project Number:</b>	IRB-202108-009
<b>Project Review Level:</b>	Expedited 6, 7
<b>Date of IRB Approval:</b>	08/05/2021
<b>Expiration Date of This Approval:</b>	08/04/2022
<b>Consent Form Approval Date:</b>	08/05/2021

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. **You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/>

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP  
Director of Research Assurance & Ethics

Enclosure

Cc: Dr. Sagini Keengwe

# Appendix B Informed Consent Form

1

## THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education

**Principal Investigator:** Yusuf Adam Marafa

**Phone/Email Address:** yusuf.marafa@und.edu

**Department:** Teaching, Learning, and Professional Practice

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Sagini Keengwe

**Research Advisor**

**Phone/Email Address:** jared.keengwe@UND.edu

### What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

### How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last 1 hour.

### Why is this research being done?

The purpose of the study is to get an in-depth understanding of higher education faculty members' experiences in designing a quality syllabus for online education. The rationale for conducting this study is that there is limited research conducted to learn about the faculty members' experiences in designing syllabus for online education. Hence, conducting a phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived experiences will help faculty and researchers to understand how to design an effective online syllabus that will fit the needs of the students and the instructor.

### What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

You will sign a consent form that will be sent via email. You will fill it and send it back to me. An interview will be scheduled for a maximum of 60 minutes at your convenience via zoom. The interviews will be recorded with your permission. During the interview, you will answer a

Approval Date: <u>2/16/2022</u>
Expiration Date: <u>8/4/2022</u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

structured survey questions to learn about their experiences in teaching and learning that will contribute to designing a quality syllabus for online education. You are free to skip any questions that he/she would prefer not to answer. You will be given three categories of questions to answer. First, you will answer demographics questions in order to learn more about your demographic information, which will last for about 10 minutes. Second, you will answer background questions in order to get familiar with who you are, and as a friendly approach to making you comfortable answering the survey questions. The background questions will last for about 10 minutes as well. Third, you will answer the actual survey questions designed for the research, which will be for about 35 minutes.

**Could being in this research hurt me?**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

**Will being in this research benefit me?**

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research. However, your contribution will help faculty members and researcher to learn how to design a quality syllabus for online education.

**How many people will participate in this research?**

Approximately 7 people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota.

**What other choices do I have besides taking part in this research?**

The only alternative is not to participate.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

**Who is funding this research?**

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**What happens to information collected for this research?**

Your private information may be shared with individuals and organizations that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- My advisor (Dr. Sagini Keengwe)

Approval Date: <u>2/16/2022</u>
Expiration Date: <u>8/4/2022</u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_



We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

All documentation or data collection that is associated with you will use codes (pseudonym) as identifiers. You have the right to review/edit the recordings.

Data collected in this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even if identifiers are removed.

All data will be saved on two locations for data redundancy: locally on an encrypted hard drive and in the cloud through Google Drive, which is a secure and encrypted cloud storage service. Copies of consent forms signed by the participants via docuSign and personal data will be on an encrypted flash drive. All methods are protected with a password and are only accessible to the principal investigator. Files will be deleted, and drives will be formatted after three years from completing the study. All data collected will be kept by the PI for at least 3 years on a password protected computer and encrypted flash drive in his locked office, after which time it will be destroyed.

**What if I agree to be in the research and then change my mind?**

You can withdraw from participating in the research at any time you decide. If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you email me, the PI, and tell me that you voluntarily quit from participating in the research.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at 701.777.4279 or [UND.irb@UND.edu](mailto:UND.irb@UND.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You may also visit the UND IRB website for more information about being a research subject: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Approval Date: <u>2/16/2022</u>
Expiration Date: <u>8/4/2022</u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Initials: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix C**

### **Email Introducing Study to Potential Participants**

*Dear Esteemed Faculty Members,*

My name is Yusuf Adam Marafa, and I am a doctoral candidate with the Department of Teaching, Learning and Professional Practice. I am currently working on my dissertation research, and I would be more than happy to learn from your experiences in teaching and learning regarding designing a quality syllabus for online education. Therefore, I am writing to invite you to participate in the research, “Higher Education Faculty Members’ Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education.” You can find some information about the research below, and I will follow up with a corresponding email about the research.

I sincerely thank you for your outstanding contribution to academia.

*Thank you,*

Yusuf Adam Marafa, Ph.D.c

### **Research Information**

Higher education is rapidly changing, and instructors are striving to match the needs of 21st-century digital learners. There is a growing demand and shift from traditional classes to the online mode of instruction for most post-secondary learning institutions. Additionally, with the recent pandemic (COVID-19), post-secondary institutions had to transform and revise their courses to online and hybrid models. Higher education institutions struggled with limited knowledge, skills, and resources to design syllabi and implement online education courses to meet the needs of their students to attain quality education.

The purpose of this study was to explore higher education faculty members' experiences in designing quality syllabi for online education. This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology through interviews. Data obtained from interviews will be recorded and stored on a flash drive reserved only for this research. The researcher will analyze interviews by carefully reviewing, reading, and listening to the lived experiences of each participant. Then the researcher will transcribe recorded interviews into written text by using the FTW Transcriber software. This will help the researcher get a deep and rich understanding of the phenomenon (designing a quality syllabus) through finding “significant statements” and determining the “themes” of each participant's experiences.

This phenomenological study about higher education faculty members' lived experiences in teaching and learning will help faculty and researchers to understand how to design a quality syllabus for online education that will fit the needs of students and instructors. Research results will contribute to efficient pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in online education.

## **Appendix D Survey Instrument**

### **Background Questions**

1. Could you please tell me what higher education degrees you have and describe your past teaching experiences?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. Could you describe why you chose to pursue a career in teaching at the higher education level?
4. What do you believe to be the essential skill sets and knowledge required to become a successful educator/instructor in higher education?
5. Do you prefer to teach online or face-to-face or do you prefer a hybrid method of teaching (partly face-to-face and partly online)? Why?

### **Questions Related to Designing a Syllabus for Online Education**

6. What is your definition of a quality syllabus for online education?
7. What preliminary considerations should a teacher focus on before designing a quality syllabus for online education?
8. What types of information should be included in a quality syllabus?
9. Do you know what is meant by a diversified syllabus for online education?
  - 9a. If yes, what is your definition of a diversified syllabus for online education?
  - 9b. If no, a “diversified syllabus” means the syllabus allows students many optional ways or methods to learn material because individual students connect to information in unique ways (Peabody, 2021).

10. Do you think having a diversified syllabus is important for online education?
  - 10a. Why or why not?
11. What are your perceptions of teachers' (and students') roles and responsibilities in designing and following a syllabus for an online education course?
12. How do you determine the kind of assessment design you will use in an online education course?
13. Should a description of that assessment design be included in a syllabus?
14. How do you determine the grading system you will use for an online education course?
15. Should you include a description of that grading system in a course's syllabus?
16. What teaching methodologies and/or strategies should be described in a syllabus for an online education course?
17. What motivational strategies would you employ in designing an online education course?
18. Would you include a description of motivational strategies in your syllabus?
19. What are the technological requirements that need to be available for online education?
20. Should a description of technological requirements of a course be included in a quality syllabus?
21. How can a quality syllabus contribute to student learning in online education?

**Appendix E**  
**Demographic Questions**

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**Higher Education Faculty Members' Experiences in Designing a Quality Syllabus for Online Education**

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Demographic Questions

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Please do not write your name or any identifying information on these sheets.

---

1. Sex:         Male     Female

2. What is your racial or ethnic identification: (Mark **ONE** only.)

- White
- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Alaska Native/American Indian
- Other

3. Highest degree earned:

- High School
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctorate

4. Have taught online courses for a minimum of two years?

Yes     No

5. Have taught either graduate or undergraduate credit online courses for two consecutive years?

Yes     No

6. Do you have a minimum of two years' experience working with a diverse group of students?

Yes     No

7. What is your age range? 18 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, or 40 years and above

## Appendix F

### Syllabus Sample as Implemented by Research Findings



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**CEHD Mission Statement:** The College of Education and Human Development, through collaborative partnerships and scholarship, engages in inquiry and innovation to influence inclusive development and learning of all.

This course is delivered in the Hybrid-Flexible “HyFlex” format. Students may attend class in person each session or alternatively participate in online activities. This choice may be made on a session-by-session basis. The attendance and participation policy will be discussed during class the first session. Additional questions should be addressed to the instructor.

### INSTRUCTOR & COURSE INFORMATION

This syllabus describes the requirements and procedures for TL 433. You are responsible for knowing this material, so please read carefully. Any changes will be announced on Blackboard Announcement. You will be responsible for any changes. Your continued enrollment in this course is your implicit agreement to abide by the requirements of this class.

**Please Note:** This course requires you to complete 10 hours of field experience working with students from diverse backgrounds. However due to COVID restriction, I will provide field experience alternative.

#### Professor Contact Information

**Name:** Yusuf Marafa, PhD

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Office Location:** Education Rm [REDACTED] and Zoom link for online students [REDACTED].

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m, by appointment.

#### Course Description:

This course is designed to help students to examine how race, ethnicity, and culture influence their experiences in school, and implement a multicultural approach to teaching. The course provides students with the knowledge and concepts they need to enhance the understanding of socio-cultural consciousness through culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy and develop appropriate, informed, and sensitive responses to the rich diversity (gender, sexuality, exceptionality, age, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, race, language, and culture) of student learners in the classroom as a pathway to be inclusive. This course explores issues of immigration and refugees and examines cultural assumptions, implicit biases, attitudes, and values that shape our perceptions and predicate our actions. This exploration prepares students to create spaces in their learning environments where all students are supported through acknowledgement of multiple identities, funds of knowledge and experiences to surface and interrupt oppression. This course highlights the effects of settler colonialism on Native Peoples and offers ways to reflect a decolonized attitude, which means, resisting and actively unlearning the dangerous and harmful legacy of colonization, particularly the racist ideas that Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color (BIPOC) are inferior to White Europeans.

#### Course Objectives:

**In keeping with the latest INTASC, CAEP, and ISTE standards, students will:**

1. Examine and carry out their own self-study to explore the influences of their culture, family history, and lived experiences to further explore how they have developed their own views and how this influences how they respond to others (INTASC 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9; CAEP 1.1; ISTE 6, 2).



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2. Investigate and use the current terminology used to address culture and diversity and understand the social, political and economic trends that impact the ongoing changes in their class discussion and submitted assignments (INTASC 4, 5, 9; CAEP 1.1, 1.2; ISTE 6)
3. Explore the impact of varied backgrounds including social, political, educational, economic, religious, and family structure and how these backgrounds impact students' educational outcomes and demonstrate their acquisition of this new knowledge in their course discussions and submissions (INTASC 1-10; CAEP 1.1, 1.2; ISTE 7).
4. Reflect on perspectives and knowledge of the American Indian experience and populations, including issues and educational approaches that have and continue to impact their educational outcomes (INTASC 1-10; CAEP 1.1 - 1.4; ISTE 3).
5. Distinguish the unique experiences and needs of immigrant and refugee populations within our communities as they adapt to the education and community settings in the U.S. to investigate how to best support them. Demonstrate knowledge through course discussion and application to course assignments and presentations (INTASC 1-10; CAEP 1.1-1.4; ISTE 7).
6. Explore and analyze various apps, websites, and online resources that could be utilized in the classroom when teaching students from diverse backgrounds (INTASC 7; CAEP 1.1, 1.2; ISTE 1).
6. Observe, investigate, and apply methods and strategies for working with English language students based on the English language and diverse students they have worked with this term and diverse students observed through visits to schools serving a wide range of economically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. (INTASC 1-10; CAEP 1.1-1.5; ISTE 4)
7. Read, analyze in small groups, and present to the class a final teaching demonstration project drawing on course information and experiences focusing on varied students' backgrounds and needs and determining classroom considerations and practices to establish an increasingly inclusive and equitable learning environment (INTASC 1-10; CAEP 1.1-1.5).

**Note: "InTASC STANDARDS" for a description of the standards are posted in the content section of the blackboard.**

### Course Structure and Assessment:

1. **Class Participation:** Active participation in class is not only central to constructivist learning, but also is expected of teacher education candidates. As such, your active participation is not only required but also essential to learning the central tenets of this course. Active participation requires prior preparation. You are required to demonstrate a continual understanding of the content by asking questions, relating the material to personal experiences, adding quality input into group discussions, and involving yourself in activities. **Discussion Board** will also be utilized in this course.

**Remember:** This course requires professionalism and active participation in the class in order for us to give you reflective feedback. Your participation is crucial. Missing class reflects negatively upon your dedication and will also result in a lowered grade. The grade attached to participation will include your active presence and contribution to class through discussions and reflection activities.

2. **Independent Readings, Reflections, Responses and Discussion Questions** based on assigned readings on each module. The instructor will assign independent Readings, Reflections, Responses or Discussion Questions based on the learning materials provided for each module.





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- 3. Book Talk Presentation:** Students will choose **one book for critical inquiry and a presentation**. This task can be done as a group or independently. Please discuss with instructor for your preference. The student will, **a)** break down key critical learnings by indicating specific examples and, **b)** apply those learnings to course content, lived/observed experiences, **c)** outline a personal “take away,” **d)** what do you hope your peers will take away from your book talk? **Student may use any media format for their presentation (minimum 10 minutes and maximum 15 minutes)**. Inclusion of visuals and activities to ground concepts are strongly recommended.

**Expectations:**

**Book Talk Presentation (10-15 mins max) video or audio file uploaded to BB together with your two-page written text.** Students can use **Yuja or VoiceThread** from blackboard. Each of you will be responsible for reporting on a book that focuses on some aspect or aspects of learners. You can choose from the books that are listed on this syllabus or you may get permission from the instructor for another book. Your presentation is to include the following:

**(1) summary of the book**, i.e., what it deals with. Provide some details so that the audience get a good sense of the topic the author addresses; **(2) critique of the author’s viewpoint(s) on the topic** (connections to course content may be needed); and **(3) your sales pitch as to why we should read this book (or not)**. You can deviate from the 1, 2, 3 sequence; it is up to you; however, we need to be able to follow your talk and make sense of your presentation. Visuals would be most helpful!

- 4. Diversity Statement (Field Experience):** I will provide two videos as well as biographies related to multicultural education to help you write you diversity statement. Then, throughout your experiences this semester and throughout the T&L program, you will develop your own philosophy of teaching and learning. For this assignment, you will reflect on what you’ve learned during the course and write 3-4 pages version of your teaching philosophy that incorporates multicultural education.

**Extra Credit: There are opportunities for extra credits.**

**Articles for Reflective Reading (Posted under Each Module) on Blackboard,**

1. Corbett, S. (2001). The Lost Boys of Sudan; The Long, Long, Long Road to Fargo. *The New York Times*, 1.
2. Ferguson, R. F., & Jehta, J. (2004). An unfinished journey: The legacy of *Brown* and the narrowing of the achievement gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(9), 656-669.
3. Gándara, P. (2017). The potential and promise of Latino students. *American Educator*, 41(1), 4.
4. Gebhard, S. (2006). The lost boys (and girls): Readers in Neverland. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(5), 454-463.
5. Johannesen, L.R. (2004). Helping “struggling” students achieve success. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 47(8), 828-847.
6. Kerwin, D. (2012). The faltering US refugee protection system: Legal and policy responses to refugees, asylum-seekers, and others in need of protection. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 31(1), 1-33.
7. Landsman, J. (2004). Confronting the racism of low expectations. *Educational Leadership*, 62, 28-33.
8. Reyna, C. (2008). Ian is intelligent but Lashaun is lazy: Antecedants and consequences of attributional stereotypes in the classroom. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 23, 439-458.
9. Yang, R. K., & Fetsch, R. J. (2007) The self-esteem of rural children. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 22(5), 1-7.

**Recommended Books for Critical Inquiry: Pick one book. I would encourage you to pick a book as soon as possible and start reading and making notes.**



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- Alexie, S. (2012). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.
- ISBN-10 : 9780316013697
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0316013697
- Anzaldúa, G. (2015). *Light in the dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*. Duke University Press.
- ISBN-10 : 9780822360094
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0822360094
- Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2016). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. Bantam.
- ISBN-10 : 0345528433
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0345528438
- Chin, S. (2009). *The other side of paradise: A memoir*. Simon & Schuster.
- ISBN-13 : 978-0743292917
- DiAngelo, R. J. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- ISBN-10 : 0807047414
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0807047415
- Hooks, B. (2018). *All about love: New visions*. HarperCollins.
- ISBN-13 : 978-0060959470
- Karabanow, J. (2004). *Being young and homeless: Understanding how youth enter and exit street life*. Peter Lang.
- ISBN-13: 978-0820467818
  - ISBN-10: 0820467812
- Karuka, M. (2019). *Empire's tracks: Indigenous nations, Chinese workers, and the transcontinental railroad*. University of California Press.
- ISBN-10 : 0520296648
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0520296640
- Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. Random House.
- ISBN-10 : 0525509283
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0525509288
- Lajimodiere, D. (2019). *Stringing rosaries: The history, the unforgivable, and the healing of northern plains American Indian boarding school survivors*.
- ISBN-13 : 978-1946163103
  - ISBN-10 : 1946163104
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life with an update a decade later* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- ISBN-10 : 0520271424
  - ISBN-13 : 978-0520271425
- Steele, C. M. (2011). *Whistling vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us (Issues of our time)*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- ISBN-13 : 978-0393339727
  - ISBN-10 : 0393339726



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### Technical Requirements/Assistance

You will use Microsoft Word to complete assignments (or if something different will be used, spell out specifics). Students are expected to use their official UND email in the course. Visit the [Office 365 Email webpage](#) for information on your UND email and how to download/install a free version of Microsoft Office. For technical assistance, please contact UND Technical Support at 701.777.2222. Visit the [University Information Technologies \(UIT\) website](#) for their hours, help documents and other resources.

### Minimum Technical Skills Needed:

In order to succeed in this course, at a minimum, you should be able to:

- Navigate in and use basic Blackboard functions
- Download and open electronic documents
- Create, save, and upload/attach electronic documents
- Send, receive, and manage email

### Course Logistics

#### Access and Log in Information

This course was developed and will be facilitated utilizing Blackboard. To get started with the course, please go to: <http://blackboard.UND.edu> and log in with your NDUS.Identifier, Username and Password. If you do not know your NDUS Identifier or have forgotten your password, please visit [Your NDUS Account page](#) on the UIT website.

#### Course Overview

The course content is organized into 16. Each week contains a purpose, learning outcomes, and a variety of links to articles, video/audio files, and other instructional resources selected to enhance the learning experience and support the various topics. Discussions, blogs, reflections, and assignments will be used to assess your learning outcomes as you progress through the lesson content and engagement.

#### What Should Students Do First During the First Day of the First Week of Class?

In preparation, you will review the syllabus and introduce yourself to the class.

#### How Students Should Proceed Each Week for Class Activities?

This is a simplified syllabus for navigational purposes. All lessons are contained in weekly modules. Each module contains assignments, readings and other materials required for that module's completion. Where possible, links will be provided for easy accessibility. There are two types of assessments. Assessment **FOR** or **AS** are Formatively based, and Assessment **OF** is based on the Summative. Both assessments will be based on rubrics that are posted at the introduction of specific assignments. You will notice that the assessments during the first part of the course are based on a **Formative rubric**, and this is because I care about your success through ample feedback supported by scaffolding strategies in learning. The second part of the course assignments are based on the **Summative rubric**. During this course, you will have many opportunities to work independently, as a group or in partnerships. And these activities will also support you with peer feedback and different perspectives that will enrich your pedagogical understanding of social justice, equity, and inclusive education.

#### Resources

Many services are available to online students such as writing assistance from the UND Writing Center, free



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online tutoring from Smarthinking, and more. Visit the [Student Resources page](#) for more information. Students also have access to the UND Student Resource Site via Blackboard. It is recommended that you become familiar with the tools and tutorials within the site to better equip you in navigating the course.

## Course Requirements and Expectations

1. The student will review the syllabus and course schedule posted in Blackboard.
2. The student will access and follow all course instructions found in the weekly folders/modules
3. The student will read/listen to all online lectures/activity instructions or PowerPoints and or view videos/PowerPoints provided in the individual weekly folders.
4. The student will read and or review all texts and complete, and submit assignments and exams by the dated noted in Blackboard and on the course schedule. **We will use Central Standard Time for due dates and times.**
5. The student will participate and collaborate fully and in a timely manner to get the benefits of learning from instructor and/or peers.
6. In the event of collaborative Zoom discussions and participation, all activities will be recorded.

## Communication

### **Announcement**

The student will check TL 433 **Blackboard Announcements** on a regular basis as they will contain important information about class assignments and other class matters.

### **Email**

You are encouraged to post your questions about the course in the FAQs discussion board forum in the Blackboard site. This is an open forum in which you and your classmates are encouraged to answer each other's questions. But, if you need to contact me directly, check the Faculty tab in Blackboard or the syllabus for my contact information. I will respond back to you within 48 hours during the week. Any emails received after 5:00 p.m. on a Friday will have a response starting at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, the following week in the order of receipt.

### **Discussion Forums & Blogs**

These tools are an excellent way for you to engage with the course material and with your peers. Each week we will have at least one of these tools in which for you to participate. You are expected to read all assigned discussion boards, blog posts, and/or wiki pages and provide thoughtful contributions according to the posted timelines.

### **Netiquette**

When participating in (an online) class it is important to interact with your peers and your instructor in an appropriate manner. Always use professional language (no netspeak) in your postings and emails. Please be respectful of your classmates/or the instructor at all times even if you disagree with their ideas.



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## Assessment & Grading

This course is made up of a series of assignments and assessments (both formative and summative) to assist you in achieving the course learning objectives and outcomes.

### Assessments

In this course your learning will be assessed in the following ways:

#### **Introduce Yourself on the Discussion Board**

Introduce yourself in the Week 1: Introduce Yourself. Include your name, something about yourself and goals, and a photo (if you wish). The "Introduce Yourself" is due on the first week of class. This is graded toward participation grade of 5%.

#### **Graded Online Discussion**

As this is a hyflex course, your participation in discussions will be an integral part of your grade. Your posts should demonstrate that you have watched the lectures/videos/peer posts, read the assigned texts, reflections, and have a clear understanding of the materials. You should provide evidence from the readings and/or other sources to support your arguments. You may also draw on your own personal experiences as responses to questions posed. However, since most of the responses are visible to all class members on discussion forums, please only share what you deem safe. **There are lesson plan activities in this section.**

#### **Four (4) Reflections**

You will reflect what you learned from the learning materials posted on blackboard and how you plan to apply your learnings to your future practice. In your reflection, you will address personal questions, insights, and challenges. Your responses must be substantive and offer valuable insights (300-400 words). Your discussion question will be posted under appropriate link within each module according to specific time and date allocations.

#### **Book Talk Presentation**

Book Talk Presentation (10-15 mins max) video or audio file uploaded to BB together with your two-page written text. You can use Yuja or VoiceThread in blackboard.

#### **Diversity Statement (Field Experience)**

Diversity statement assessment will consist of pass/fail grade.

## Grading Breakdown

Grading Scale		Breakdown of Weighted Totals
A	100%-90%	1. Self-Introduction on Discussion Board - 5%
B	89%-80%	2. Participation/Discussion Board Activities - 40%
C	79%-70%	3. Four Reflections - 25%
D	69%-60%	4. Book Talk – 15%
F	<59%	5. Diversity Statement (Field Experience) – 15%

## Course Evaluation

Near the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete an online course evaluation form (SEFI). Your feedback on the course is extremely valuable to me. I read my students' comments carefully and use them to improve the course the next time I teach it.



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## Course Policies

### Assignment Policy

All due dates for each assignment or activity are posted in courses schedule/Blackboard.

### Late Work

*It is important to submit the assignment on time. In most cases, everyone would prefer to have more time. I understand that your schedule is full, but it is important for you to manage your time and keep up with your work in this course. Late work will be considered depending on the circumstance. For any late work to be considered, you must submit a request for an extension to me by email prior to the due date and provide a requested date that you will submit by. This proposed date cannot be more than one week after the original due date.*

### Instructor Responsibilities and Feedback

- The instructor will provide feedback on assignments and activities within two weeks of the due date.
- The instructor will be available during appointed Office Hours to answer questions, provide feedback, and offer advice. Please see Office hours.

### Class Participation

- Students are required to login regularly to the online class site.
- Students are also required to participate in all class activities such as discussion board/forums and blogs.

### Incompletes

*It is expected that students will complete all requirements for a course during the time frame of the course. For reasons beyond a student's control, and upon request by the student or on behalf of the student, an incomplete grade may be assigned by the instructor when there is reasonable certainty the student will successfully complete the course without retaking it. The mark "I," Incomplete, will be assigned only to the student who has been in attendance and has done satisfactory work up to a time within four weeks of the close of the semester, including the examination period, and whose work is incomplete for reasons satisfactory to his or her instructor. ([See "Grading System" in the UND 2018-19 Catalog](#))*

### Copyright & Citations

All materials used in any student work that is not original must be properly cited and credited as per APA style guide, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.

## POLICIES FOR STUDENTS IN EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

### Dispositions:

The Council of Accreditation for Educator Preparation (CAEP) requires the university to monitor the academic progress and dispositions of every student enrolled in a program leading to an education license or credential. Dispositions refer to a student's actions and behaviors in terms of professionalism, ethics and human relations. Should a concern arise about a student's progress or dispositions, faculty, instructors and/or cooperating teachers may request a one-on-one meeting with the teacher candidate or advanced student to discuss areas of strength or concerns. Written documentation of this conference may be included in the student's permanent file. Specific procedures are delineated on the form, Professional Dispositions for UND Teacher Education.



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### Essential Abilities Requirements:

Essential abilities are academic performance requirements that refer to those physical, cognitive, and behavioral abilities required for satisfactory completion of all aspects of the educator preparation curriculum and the development of personal attributes required for professional licensure. The candidate must possess or be able to gain these abilities with or without reasonable accommodation. The essential abilities required by the curriculum are reflected by competencies in the following areas: communication, intellectual, behavioral, social, motor, and sensory (Handbook for Teacher Education).

Reasonable accommodations will be afforded to education candidates with disabilities as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Students who can no longer perform the essential functions of education candidates must report that to the Associate Dean of Student Services and Assessment and suggest any accommodations that they think will enable them to perform as education candidates. The Associate Dean will then determine if the suggested accommodations are reasonable or if there are any other reasonable accommodations that can be made. If accommodations cannot be made, the student may not be able to complete their educational program.

### College of Education & Human Development Academic Concerns and Grievance Process Policy:

*The grievance process can be found on the web at [http://education.und.edu/\\_files/docs/academic-concerns.pdf](http://education.und.edu/_files/docs/academic-concerns.pdf). Graduate students should follow the CEHD [Grievance Policy for decisions made at the course or program level](#) and should follow the [School of Graduate Studies Grievance Policy for decisions made by the School of Graduate Studies](#). **It is the student's responsibility to initiate and advance the grievance.** Please contact Dr. Donna Pearson, [donna.smith@und.edu](mailto:donna.smith@und.edu) the Associate Dean of Student Services and Assessment, for more information and assistance with the CEHD grievance process.*

## UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA POLICIES & RESOURCES

### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a serious matter, and any deviations from appropriate behavior will be dealt with strongly. At the discretion of the professor, situations of concern may be dealt with as a scholastic matter or a disciplinary matter.

As a scholastic matter, the professor has the discretion to determine appropriate penalties to the student's workload or grade, but the situation may be resolved without involving many individuals. An alternative is to treat the situation as a disciplinary matter, which can result in suspension from the University, or have lesser penalties. Be aware that I view this as a very serious matter and will have little tolerance of or sympathy for questionable practices. A student who attempts to obtain credit for work that is not their own (whether that be on a paper, quiz, homework assignment, exam, etc.) will likely receive a failing grade for that item of work, and at the professor's discretion, may also receive a failing grade in the course. For more information read the [Code of Student Life](#).

### Access & Opportunity, Disability Support and Medical Services

If you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need accommodations in this course because of a disability, please visit with me as soon as possible. My office hours are at the top of this syllabus. If you plan to request disability accommodations, you are expected to [register with the Disability Support Services](#) (DSS) office online, (180 McCannel Hall, 701.777.3425). If you have a temporary medical condition such as a broken arm or recovering after surgery, you may be able to arrange for courtesy services. In most cases, it is



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expected that you will make your own arrangements for these services. Examples of courtesy services include access to a test scribe if the student has a broken hand; lift equipped van transportation when the student has a broken leg or temporary accessible parking for a student using crutches for a short period. If you are unable to make your own arrangements, please contact DSS (777- 3425). Unlike services and/or accommodations provided to eligible students with disabilities, the University is NOT obligated to provide courtesy services.

### Resolution of Problems

Should a problem occur, you should speak to your instructor first. If the problem is not resolved, meet with Dr. Donna Pearson, [donna.pearson@und.edu](mailto:donna.pearson@und.edu) If the problem continues to be unresolved, go to the department Chair, and next to the college Dean. Should the problem persist, you have the right to go to the Provost next, and then to the President.

### Notice of Nondiscrimination

It is the policy of the University of North Dakota that no person shall be discriminated against because of race, religion, age, color, gender, disability, national origin, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, veteran's status, or political belief or affiliation and the equal opportunity and access to facilities shall be available to all. Concerns regarding Title IX, Title VI, Title VII, ADA, and Section 504 may be addressed to: Donna Smith, Director of Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action and Title IX Coordinator, 401 Twamley Hall, 701.777.4171, [UND.affirmativeactionoffice@UND.edu](mailto:UND.affirmativeactionoffice@UND.edu) or the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Dept. of Education, 500 West Madison, Suite 1475, Chicago, IL 60611 or any other federal agency.

### Reporting of Sexual Violence

If you or a friend has experienced sexual violence, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or sex-based harassment, please contact UND's Title IX Coordinator, Donna Smith, for assistance: 701.777.4171; [donna.smith@UND.edu](mailto:donna.smith@UND.edu); or visit the [Title IX webpage](#).

### Faculty Reporting Obligations Regarding Sexual Violence

It is important for students to understand that faculty are required to share with UND's Title IX Coordinator any incidents of sexual violence they become aware of, even if those incidents occurred in the past or are disclosed as part of a class assignment. This does not mean an investigation will occur if the student does not want that, but it does allow UND to provide resources to help the student continue to be successful at UND. If you have been the victim of sexual violence, you can find information about confidential support services on the [Title IX webpage](#).

### UND Cares Program

The [UND Cares program](#) seeks to educate faculty, staff, and students on how to recognize warning signs that indicate a student is in distress.

### How to Seek Help When in Distress

We know that while college is a wonderful time for most students, some students may struggle. You may experience students in distress on campus, in your classroom, in your home, and within residence halls. Distressed students may initially seek assistance from faculty, staff members, their parents, and other students. In addition to the support we can provide to each other, there are also professional support services available to students through the Dean of Students and University Counseling Center. Both staffs are available to consult with you about getting help or providing a friend with the help that he or she may need. For more additional information, please visit the [UND Cares program Webpage](#).





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### ***How to Recognize When a Student is in Distress***

The term "distressed" can mean any of the following:

- Student has significant changes in eating, sleeping, grooming, spending, or other daily activities.
- Student has cut off or minimized contact with family or friends.
- Student has significant changes in performance or involvement in academics, sports, extracurricular, or social activities.
- Student describes problems (missing class, not remembering, destructive behavior) that result from experiences with drinking or drugs.
- Student is acting withdrawn, volatile, tearful, etc.
- Student is acting out of character or differently than usual.
- Student is talking explicitly about hopelessness or suicide.
- Student has difficulty concentrating or difficulty carrying on normal conversation.
- Student has excessive dependence on others for company or support.
- Student reports feeling out of control of one's emotions, thoughts, or behaviors.

### ***UND Cares about Your Success***

Important information is available to you through Starfish, which is an online system used to help students be successful. When an instructor observes student behaviors or concerns that may impede academic success, the instructor may raise a flag that notifies the student of the concern and/or refer the student to their academic advisor or UND resource. Please pay attention to these emails and take the recommended actions. They are sent to help you be successful!

Starfish also allows you to (1) schedule appointments with various offices and individuals across campus, (2) request help on a variety of topics, and (3) search and locate information on offices and services at UND.

You can log into Starfish by clicking on Logins on the UND homepage and then selecting Starfish. A link to Starfish is also available in Blackboard once you have signed in.

### **Diversity Statement**

In this course, we will discuss how students' learning needs should be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity, language, and culture that students bring to class must be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. The activities and materials presented in this course will teach you how to be respectful of diversity (gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, race, language, and culture). Through class activities, readings, discussion, and reflection students will better understand the needs and perspectives of culturally diverse classrooms.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.

***\*Syllabus is subject to change with notice!***

**Appendix G**  
**Course Calendar Sample as Implemented by Research Findings**

**TL 499 – Introduction to Business for College Teachers**  
**Course Calendar**  
(Schedule is subject to change)

Date	Units/Topics/Important Dates
Aug. 27-Sept. 17	<u><b>Unit One - The Business Environment</b></u> Chapter 1 - The Foundations of Business Chapter 2 - Business Ethics and Social Responsibility Chapter 3 - Business in a Global Environment <i>Sept. 3rd - No Classes (Labor Day)</i> <b>Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> - Business Plan Part I</b> <b>Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> - Exam One</b>
Sept. 19-Oct. 1	<u><b>Unit Two - Starting and Structuring a Business</b></u> Chapter 4 - Selecting a Form of Business Ownership Chapter 5 - The Challenges of Starting a Business <b>Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> - Business Plan Part II</b> <b>Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> - Exam Two</b>
Oct. 5-31	<u><b>Unit Three - Management and Employees</b></u> Chapter 6 - Managing for Business Success Chapter 7 - Recruiting, Motivating, and Keeping Quality Employees Chapter 8 - Teamwork and Communication Chapter 11 - Operations Management in Manufacturing and Service Industries Chapter 15 - Managing Information and Technology <i>Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> - No Classes (MSCF Days)</i> <b>Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> - Business Plan Part III</b> <b>Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> - Exam Three</b>
Nov. 2-19	<u><b>Unit Four - Marketing</b></u> Chapter 9 - Marketing: Providing Value to Customers Chapter 10 - Product Design and Development <i>Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> - No Class (Veteran's Day Observed)</i> <b>Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> - Business Plan Part IV</b> <b>Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> - Exam Four</b>
<i>Nov. 23rd - No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday break)</i>	
Nov. 26-Dec. 17	<u><b>Unit Five - The Financials</b></u> Chapter 12 - The Role of Accounting in Business Chapter 13 - Managing Financial Resources Chapter 14 - Personal Finances <b>Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> - Business Plan Part V</b> <b>Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> - Exam Five</b> <b>Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> - Final Business Plan</b>
<b>Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm - Final Exam</b>	

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