

# Course Syllabi Distribution:

## *Policies & Practices*

Prepared for BCCAT by Academica Group  
July 2025

**BCCAT**

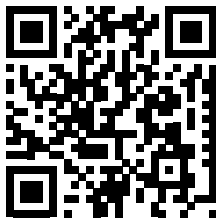
# Course Syllabi Distribution: *Policies & Practices*

*Prepared for BCCAT by the Academica Group*

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# Acknowledgements

Academica's office is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Chonnonton/Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, and Lenape peoples. This land is part of the McKee Treaty of 1790 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. The region continues to be home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, including the Deshkan Zibiin (Chippewas of the Thames), Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Nalahii Lunaapewaak (Munsee-Delaware Nation)—sovereign nations with longstanding relationships to this land. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work on these lands and are committed to actively seeking ways to deepen our understanding and strengthen our relationships with Indigenous communities.

Academica acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of post-secondary communities in Canada and recognizes the contributions of members of diverse communities. We are committed to inclusive research with sensitivity to the needs of equity-seeking groups such as those of racially and culturally diverse backgrounds, the LGBTQ2S+ community, and persons with disabilities. Our research team strives to reduce barriers to research participation and to ensure accessibility for all participants. We know that genuine inclusivity within our research ensures its accuracy and relevance to post-secondary leadership as well as to each member of the post-secondary community.

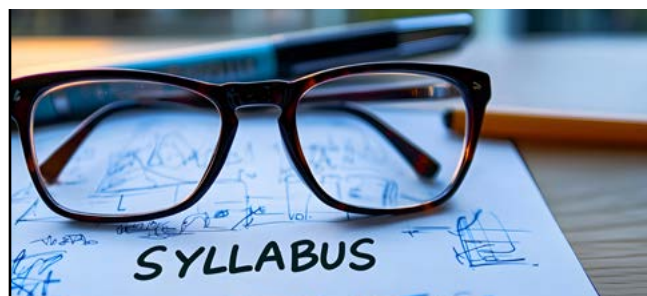
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# Executive Summary

## PROJECT PURPOSE

Access to information and the “right” timing of when a course syllabus is provided to students can facilitate student success and retention at the course level or even at the institutional level. Ultimately, the timing of syllabus distribution and the syllabus content should be student-centered. However, determining this ideal timing and syllabus structure depends on the current post-secondary landscape, institutional policies, administrative practices, and student registration behaviors.



Access to information and the "right" timing of when a course syllabus is provided to students can facilitate student success and retention at the course level or event at the institutional level.

This research assesses the policies and practices of course syllabi distribution at BC post-secondary institutions through a literature review, a review of published institutional policies and practices, and consultations with students and institutional staff and faculty members. Timing of course syllabi distribution and the impact on student success and retention, including the transfer student population, is examined.

## KEY FINDINGS

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *SETTING THE TONE*

The course syllabus is the section-specific course outline that is distributed to students. It generally includes course-specific information such as the email address and office number of the instructor teaching the course, the content to be covered in class, and assignment deadlines. Most of the literature examined refers to the course syllabus as a “first impression” of the course or its instructor. A syllabus can provide insight into the instructor’s teaching philosophy, classroom values, and their level of dedication to the course. Additionally, the length of the syllabus and whether it is available online or through the learning management system (LMS) may impact student engagement. The tone of the syllabus, whether it be welcoming or authoritative, could affect students’ feelings of confidence regarding their potential to perform well in the course. Ultimately, students’ initial perceptions and impressions may determine whether they choose to register or remain registered in the course.

#### *LEARNING-FOCUSED, LEARNER CENTERED*

Much of the literature focuses on syllabus content in relation to student satisfaction – that is, their likelihood of remaining in a course. Students are more likely to remain enrolled in a course when they feel their learning experience is valued, and they typically have a more positive perception of a course if its syllabus is “learning-focused” or “learner-centered,” meaning that it is engaging and question-driven. Connecting learning outcomes to assignments or providing the rationale behind

learning activities can allow learners to feel their education needs are valued, thus improving their connection to the course.

#### *EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND DECOLONIZATION (EDI-D)*

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDI-D) are becoming increasingly important in the design of course syllabi. Based on the literature examined, students may be more likely to participate in a course when they feel included or recognized. Considering the diversity of the student population—including but not limited to ethnic or racial identities; religious and spiritual practices; and international, mature, or transfer student identities—when developing course syllabi may facilitate a more positive classroom culture and overall course experience for students.

#### *COMMUNICATION TOOL*

The syllabus has traditionally been regarded as a contract between instructor and student, but it is also an important communication tool both internally within the classroom, and externally across the university or outside of the institution when it comes to transfer credit evaluations. In terms of credit transferability—that is, transferring credits earned at one institution to another post-secondary institution—the syllabus must include specific information to support the receiving institution in conducting a transfer credit assessment. Institutional policies or links to where to access pertinent information, such as withdrawal policies or general campus resources, should be included in all course syllabi regardless of the course level as new transfer students enrolled in upper-year courses may not be aware of certain details. Additionally, the syllabus should be updated regularly in case of policy or curricular changes.

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## **REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES**

Institutional policies regarding course syllabi at BC (n=35), out-of-province Canadian (n=10), and American (n=5) institutions were reviewed. At the time of the review, only 19 of the 50 institutions examined had policies specific to course syllabi. Eleven institutions had course outline policies, and seven had other university policies which made mention of syllabi but did not impact them. Five institutions had guidelines for syllabus development, though no publicly available policies. Three did not offer any policies pertaining to syllabi or course outlines, and five did not have any relevant publicly available information.

In terms of policies pertaining to syllabus availability, syllabi are not normally accessible to prospective students who may be looking to map out their educational journey prior to applying to post-secondary studies. Additionally, syllabi are not normally required to be released prior to course registration, which could impact student decision making. Not all schools differentiate between the course outline and the course syllabus. For those that did differentiate between the two, the syllabus was most frequently regarded as the course-specific contract between instructor and student.

Of the schools with information related to timing of syllabus distribution (22/50), distributing the syllabus on the first day of class was most common (n=7). Two schools noted that syllabi may be subject to change after they are reviewed with students on the first day of class.

In terms of syllabus content, some schools list required information or recommended details instructors could include in their syllabi. Statements related to EDI-D and transfer are not commonly included in course syllabi based on the institutional policies reviewed, and syllabi are only made publicly available by select institutions (n=5).

## INTERVIEW CONSULTATIONS

Current post-secondary students (n=10), staff (n=10), and faculty members (n=5) in BC were interviewed regarding their experiences with course syllabi practices and policies. Interview participants provided responses surrounding the availability, distribution, and content of course syllabi at their institutions. Five core themes emerged surrounding the importance and weight of the syllabus for students, staff, and faculty.

### *IMPRESSION OF FACULTY*

Students may look to the course syllabus to get an impression of the instructor's expectations and attitude toward the course. If the syllabus were to be provided ahead of course registration, students could use it to "shop" for courses and instructors. One instructor shared that within their department, instructors create a short video syllabus with the intention of assisting students in selecting electives that align with their interests. Allowing students the opportunity to select a course taught by an instructor with a teaching philosophy that aligns with their interests may result in students being more actively involved in their education.

### *TIMING OF DISTRIBUTION*

In terms of when students should receive a copy of the syllabus, it was most commonly noted by participants from all three groups that syllabi should be distributed ahead of the first day of classes to support student preparedness.

### *CO-CREATION WITH STUDENTS*

Some participants expressed interest in the concept of co-creating the syllabus or including student preferences in a final syllabus. This process involves students in their own learning and could lead to increased satisfaction and success in a course. However, instructors noted potential issues. For example, finalizing the syllabus with students could contribute to a late release, and not every student will be pleased with the final syllabus. Additionally, a more rigorous course structure or requirements may be needed for programs with specific accreditation criteria. If modifications are made to a course, its learning outcomes need to be considered.

### *USE OF THE SYLLABUS*

Based on the responses received from faculty members, there is a common belief that students do not always engage with the syllabus. Students, particularly new or international cohorts, may lack familiarity or understanding of the syllabus as a medium. In this regard, timing may be less of an issue compared to students' understanding of the importance of the syllabus itself. Participants across the three groups highlighted the benefits of instructors going through course syllabus together with students in class. This process ensures language or course terminology is understood and provides students with the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification before the course content is delivered.

There may be opportunity to improve the format of the syllabus, including reducing the length by removing any information that is not directly related to the course, or by organizing the information in a way that is easier for the students. Many participants expressed that a standardized format that is followed across the institution would assist students in becoming familiar with the syllabus and as a result, be able to navigate it more easily. Full-time students may have four or more syllabi to familiarize themselves with each term, so creating a syllabus that is engaging and easy to follow may support student retention.



and success in a course. Furthermore, developing a policy focused on the frequency of reviewing and revising syllabi, as well as keeping reliable records of historical syllabi could also support previous students in accessing these documents for transfer credit assessment purposes.

#### *A REFLECTION OF EDI-D PRINCIPLES*

It is important to equitably support students from diverse backgrounds through the course content and syllabus as a whole. Some institutional syllabi include policies or links that address equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDI-D). Examples include information related to accessibility (n=10), decolonization and Indigenization (n=7), sexual or gender-based violence (n=4), and religious accommodation (n=2). Although information related to EDI-D may support students' comfort or satisfaction in a course, it was noted that EDI-D principles need to have a meaningful purpose in the syllabus and classroom setting and cannot simply be regarded as a checklist item.

**Overall, syllabi should ideally be accessible, engaging, inclusive, and clear. The literature policies reviewed, and consultations conducted, strongly indicate that syllabi should be updated regularly.**

## **IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Overall, syllabi should ideally be accessible, engaging, inclusive, and clear. The literature, policies reviewed, and consultations conducted, strongly indicate that syllabi should be updated regularly. At institutions where syllabi are not subject to Chair or departmental approval, it may be prudent to provide all instructors with a template or guidelines to ensure syllabi comply with accreditation requirements or transfer credit evaluation standards.

Apart from brief mentions of when syllabi are typically distributed, there is no evidence that suggests the ideal timing of syllabi distribution to support student registration, satisfaction, and retention. However, interview participants were able to shed some light on this question, indicating that making syllabi more widely available and sharing them with students before classes begin is helpful.

Many participants indicated that having syllabi available to support student decision-making during registration would be ideal. Consultations with academic advisors or program directors to go over the syllabus may also prepare students' expectations for a course or assist them in selecting courses that are a good fit. Additionally, having a centralized database or online repository that makes syllabi from previous years accessible to current students could provide them with an idea of what the final syllabi for their future courses may look like and aid in their decision-making process. Finally, there could be an opportunity to make course syllabi publicly available to support prospective students in making an informed decision before they apply to an institution. Further research many focus on the use of software to support syllabi development and availability.

Based on the interview consultations conducted, including EDI-D-related policies in course syllabi is currently being discussed at some institutions. A close analysis of the wording used in EDI-D statements and the individuals responsible for drafting them was not a main focus of this work, though there may be opportunity to further explore the development of EDI-D statements for use in course syllabi.



# Introduction

The design of course outlines and syllabi have been topics of study examined by BCCAT in the past. Although previous research has identified that the course syllabus is commonly provided to students early on or at the start of a course, the timing of course syllabi distribution has not been an area of focus. Academica's research assesses the policies and practices related to course syllabus content and distribution in the British Columbia (BC) post-secondary landscape to determine whether the timing of syllabus distribution and syllabus content has an impact on student success, satisfaction, and in turn, retention.

The report body focuses on the research findings, with a section dedicated to the literature review, review of institutional policies, and interview consultations, respectively.

## METHOD

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Academica completed a literature review examining research related to the influence of course syllabi on student registration behaviours, as well as student satisfaction and retention at colleges, polytechnics, and universities. Particular attention was paid to studies that focus on the student experience in North America, along with the transfer student experience.

### REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Institutional policies on course syllabi distribution published on post-secondary institutions' websites were examined. The analysis focused on all post-secondary institutions in the BC Transfer System, along with 10 out-of-province and five American colleges, polytechnics, and universities.

In total, 50 institutional websites were scanned for policies and recommendations related to the distribution of course syllabi. Of the institutions reviewed, 35 are located in BC, 10 are in other Canadian regions, and five are located in the United States (**Appendix A**). All of the BC Transfer System's member institutions<sup>1</sup> were analyzed, and any member institutions with campuses outside of BC were categorized as out-of-province or American depending on their campus location. Out-of-province and American institutions included:

- The University of Alberta (U of A) - Alberta
- Athabasca University (AU) - Alberta
- Concordia University (Concordia) - Québec
- Dalhousie University (Dal) - Nova Scotia
- Red River College Polytechnic (RRC Polytech) - Manitoba
- Humber Polytechnic<sup>2</sup> (Humber) - Ontario
- Trent University (Trent) - Ontario
- University of Saskatchewan (USask) - Saskatchewan
- Yorkville University<sup>3</sup> (Yorkville) - New Brunswick
- Yukon University<sup>4</sup> (YukonU) - Yukon
- American institutions reviewed included:
  - City College of San Francisco (CCSF) - California
  - Fairleigh Dickinson University<sup>5</sup> (Fairleigh Dickinson U) - New Jersey
  - New York University (NYU) - New York
  - University of Florida (U of Florida) - Florida
  - Washington State University (WSU) - Washington

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bccat.ca/system/overview/#Member>

<sup>2</sup> Humber College became Humber Polytechnic following the review of its institutional policies.

<sup>3</sup> Yorkville University participates in the BC Transfer System

<sup>4</sup> Yukon University participates in the BC Transfer System

<sup>5</sup> Fairleigh Dickinson U participates in the BC Transfer System

In selecting the institutions, effort was made to include representation from various provinces, territories, and states, as well as institutions of varying sizes and types to align with the institutional landscape in BC. Additionally, commonality of transferability, involvement in the BC Transfer System, and the public availability of course syllabi policies were factors considered when selecting out-of-province and American institutions. The list of institutions was shared with the BCCAT project team for feedback prior to the analysis taking place.

## INTERVIEW CONSULTATIONS

In-depth interviews with institutional staff, faculty, and students were conducted (**Appendix E**). The lists of potential staff and faculty participants, along with the three interview guides, were shared with the BCCAT project team for review and input before interview invitations were distributed. Student participants were recruited through Academics's StudentVu panel. In total, 25 interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams between October 10 and December 11. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 54 minutes in duration and were recorded with permission for transcription purposes<sup>6</sup>. Student interview participants received \$50 for their participation. Faculty and staff participants were not incentivized.

## LIMITATIONS

Interview invitations were sent to individuals from all post-secondary institution types in BC. Most who responded to the invitation and agreed to participate worked at or attended a university. As such, the university perspective may be overrepresented.

It is important to contextualize the evolution of the language used throughout this project. At the time the interview guide was developed, the project used the term Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). As the project progressed, the terminology was expanded to EDI-D—Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization—for reporting purposes. This shift reflects a growing recognition that decolonization and Indigenization, while related to EDI, are distinct areas of work that warrant separate conceptual and methodological consideration. Accordingly, this report consistently uses EDI-D to respect and uphold this distinction.

This limitation is most apparent in the literature review section, where much of the existing scholarship continues to reference EDI without explicitly addressing decolonization or Indigenization as distinct concepts. As such, the review may reflect terminological inconsistencies with the framing used elsewhere in the report. Where possible, efforts have been made to clarify these differences.

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<sup>6</sup> A recording was not produced for one of the staff interviews due to their institution's inability to share a recording.

# Research Findings

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### SETTING THE TONE

The beginning of an academic term can be filled with uncertainty for students. Students may experience uncertainty surrounding course scope, content, teaching methods, evaluation and assessment methods, and the classroom environment. The course syllabus is used as a tool to transmit this information and is typically posted on the learning management system (LMS) and distributed on the first day of class. Students tend to use the syllabus more frequently at the beginning of the semester to familiarize themselves with the course schedule, assigned readings, and due dates (Gin, 2021). Course syllabi can be regarded as a first impression of what instructors will offer, setting students' expectations. In their study on the role of syllabi in forming impressions, Nusbaum et al. (2021) state that "students are often introduced to the course and instructor through the syllabus, perhaps even before meeting in class for the first time. As such, this document may play an important role in students' initial impressions of both" (p. 131). Not only does a syllabus serve as a first impression of a course, but it can present the course instructor and their expectations.

Students who have experience in higher education typically expect to receive a syllabus with the following sections: baseline course information and teaching staff information; fit and function of the subject in the degree program; calendar, venues, and facilities location; competencies; didactic units and teaching methods; evaluation systems and assessment activities; tutorships; student-teacher communication; textbook and readings list (Rubio et al., 2022). Previous research suggests syllabi that express enthusiasm for course content, uses clear headers, and includes a clear explanation of how performance will be assessed positively impact students' perceptions of a course (Nusbaum et al., 2021). In addition to the content and organization of the syllabus, the documents "often appear to carry legal weight, suggesting a contract between the institution, the instructor, and students in a course" (Dou et al., 2019). In this regard, both the instructor and student are held accountable to following the syllabus.

In terms of retention, while there are many factors that impact completion, one factor that could support student success is the strength of the faculty-student relationship. The syllabus is part of this relationship as a contract between the student and the instructor. While it must be recognized and accepted by students, it also allows them to ask questions and access the instructor, which ultimately can support students' willingness to remain registered in a course. As emphasized by Rubio et al. (2022) in their article focused on best practices in syllabus design and course planning, contributions made by students, or having an instructor propose deadlines or test dates for feedback from students can lead to greater student satisfaction. Actively involving both the instructor and students in syllabus design is desirable not only because it leads to a higher degree of student satisfaction, but because students' "motivation to approach the subject and achieve the learning objectives is enhanced, and therefore, an improvement in their academic performance is attained" (Rubio et al., 2022, p.135). Ultimately, students' satisfaction in a course can lead to retention and overall success in a course.

Syllabi may also provide insight into the teaching philosophy of an instructor and can "serve as rich data for evaluating the teaching and learning culture at a university" (Goodwin et al., 2018). Students may evaluate the instructor based on the syllabus alone, as the content of a syllabus can indicate the instructor's level of dedication to the course, as well as their values. How instructors create and present their syllabi reflects their attitude and approaches to teaching. Based on the instructor interviews conducted by Dou et al. (2019), it is common for instructors to update their previous year's course syllabus or simply use the last year's syllabus for the new semester. However, the interview findings suggest that it is important to update the syllabus each term before it is distributed to students to ensure adherence to accreditation requirements. Additionally, updating the syllabus

with language that can be recognized across academic disciplines can support students who may be taking the course as an elective. Most commonly, instructors initiate the partnership between teacher and learner on the first day of classes through distributing a syllabus that includes supportive language or components which address student success, such as information regarding support for students with disabilities, equity and inclusivity, and make up work or missed assignment policies (Dou et al., 2019).

If choice is available, some students may consider enrolling or remaining registered in a course based on their perceptions of the instructor's teaching quality, level of support provided, and their classroom values. When presented with the course syllabus, wording and formatting could come across as welcoming or not. Nusbaum et al. (2021) conducted an experiment using a welcoming syllabus to assess participants' perceptions of a course. The welcoming syllabus was visually appealing and user-centered, and included encouraging words and images. Welcoming syllabi present mutual respect between instructor and student, and convey the message that there is space for creativity and goal-setting within the course. Ultimately, format and design matter.

Additionally, the freedom to take charge of their learning experience may support students' level of interest in a course. In autonomy-supportive classrooms, both instructor and student are responsible for the learning experience. In a study on autonomy-supportive language in the syllabus, students reported that they would be more likely to enroll in a course that is perceived as autonomy-supportive, suggesting that "students are positively influenced when teachers make small educational environment changes, such as adapting the syllabus language" (Young-Jones et al., 2021). This indicates that an autonomy-supportive syllabus is more valued, as students feel more encouraged to learn.

## LEARNING-FOCUSED, LEARNER-CENTRED

In recent years, teaching methods have become increasingly learner-centred. Karanja & Grant (2020) define a learner-centred pedagogy as one that "leans heavily towards learning and teaching and seeks to find a balance between the roles of teacher and the students, course content, and the tools and techniques utilized in the assessments and evaluations of the course content." One aspect of a learner-centered approach could be to digitize the syllabus and make it web-based to promote engagement and accessibility. Firdousi et al. (2024) focused on student satisfaction and academic performance, and included a recommendation that policy makers make technology and innovation part of the syllabus, particularly for undergraduate students. There are many benefits related to creating a web-based syllabus, especially for student engagement in remote or hybrid learning settings. In their study exploring how online course syllabus formats impact students' intentions behind taking the course and their levels of engagement with the course, Kim & Ekachai (2020) suggest that providing students with a more interactive, web-based syllabus can effectively foster student engagement resulting in their intentional enrolment or willingness to recommend the course to other students. They also note that although a downloadable syllabus is accessible, it does not necessarily support online engagement as certain features would not be included in the document compared with those features available on a website, such as tabs separating sections of the syllabus, or videos. Overall, the study conducted by Kim & Ekachai (2020) found that those who read the syllabus on the instructor's website were more likely to engage with and to intend to remain enrolled in the course than those who read the syllabus through the LMS. One challenge to consider, however, is that some instructors may not have experience in web design and may require additional resources and assistance in making their syllabi accessible online.

Another example of a learner-centred syllabus is one that is developed in consultation with students. Negotiating the syllabus with students can allow for more thoughtful design and intentional presentation of course material; additionally, student satisfaction is likely to be greater if students feel that they have contributed to course design or development (Kaplan & Renard, 2015). Engaging students in the development of the course syllabus will increase their commitment to the course. When it comes to putting this

theory into practice, Murray (2021) suggests that after students create a list of anticipated needs and paths, the students and the instructor can work together to compile a list of potential assignments based on student interests and the instructor's expertise. This co-created list may include some core assignments for all students to complete and other assignments that could be chosen based on individual students' personal goals.

If an instructor chooses to involve students in the development or finalization of course syllabi, negotiation tactics should be strategic to benefit students' learning while also providing them with some degree of choice (Kaplan & Renard, 2015). It is recommended that instructors spend 75-100 minutes negotiating the syllabus at the beginning of a course, which is approximately one class session. Instructors may offer students the syllabus and explain what they are expected to know by the end of the course, and then, they can collectively negotiate the development of one standard, final syllabus for the class. The final syllabus should be presented by the next class, which would be the second class of the semester. Similarly, Murray (2021) recommends a 90-minute collaborative process in which students discuss their career goals so instructors can develop course materials accordingly. Although faculty are typically expected to have a syllabus prepared prior to the start of classes, there is opportunity to prepare a skeletal version of the syllabus to be posted earlier on, alongside a statement about collaborative syllabus construction. To properly finalize the syllabus, the instructor may ask that students sign the final version before the end of the course add/drop period, with a disclaimer that continued enrolment without signature reflects their acceptance of the syllabus and its contents (Kaplan & Renard, 2015).

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND DECOLONIZATION (EDI-D)

As the syllabus is presented to students before or at the beginning of a new course, "the timing and versatility of these documents allows instructors to set the tone of a course" (Bernardi et al., 2024). Equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDI-D) is receiving considerable attention in higher education; however, limited advice is given to faculty on how to design a syllabus, especially in response to the ever-evolving diversity of the student body (Fuentes et al., 2021)<sup>7</sup>. There may be opportunities to further consider aspects of diversity, including but not limited to gender, religion, race, disability and student status when designing a course and its corresponding syllabus.

Syllabi can also present how inclusivity is valued in the classroom. In their study focused on cultivating inclusivity in course syllabi, Bernardi et al. (2024) share that 71% of survey respondents consider the presence of an inclusivity statement to be important, with 36% labeling it as "very important" and 35% labeling it as "somewhat important." Fuentes et al. (2021) provide considerations for course syllabus development, including the recommendation of highlighting diversity in the course description along with the commitment to intersectionality in the classroom. One example is to include a diversity statement and diversity-centered learning objectives within the syllabus, the document which is specific to one section of a course. According to their research, Fuentes et al. (2021) note that diversity statements that appear earlier in the syllabus are more likely to be recalled by students. To emphasize cultural and religious inclusivity, through the syllabus, including a list of holiday dates apart from just Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter, and potentially considering the timing of these holidays when determining assignment deadlines, could be valuable. Finally, establishing a syllabus style that considers the experiences of students who may be parents or guardians allows the student parent population to feel acknowledged and understood. Family-friendly policies or statements addressing bringing children to class and breastfeeding are examples of what may be included in the syllabus.

Course content should also be reflective of the commitment to EDI-D, and designing the syllabus with inclusivity in mind can support improved learning outcomes. When designing or reviewing curriculum, "faculty may want to consider what aspects of the course will promote or address intercultural competence, inclusion, or the nuanced aspects of diversity" (Fuentes et al., 2021; p.70).

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<sup>7</sup> The literature consulted did not explicitly address decolonization or Indigenization - see Limitations section above.

For example, some students consider whether an instructor includes course materials written by women and gender minority individuals when evaluating the instructor's attitude (Bernardi et al., 2024). In the analysis of EDI in nursing syllabi, it was found that syllabi should describe the content students will be learning in terms of caring for diverse patient populations, must clearly state how inclusive teaching strategies will be used in courses, and must include links to university and school policies on EDI<sup>8</sup>. Regardless of the type of course, syllabi could include evidence of inclusive teaching strategies and institutional policies related to EDI-D.

In terms of student supports, Gin et al. (2021) suggest that an explanation of inclusivity in the classroom is ideal information for students to receive before a course begins. When considering policies related to inclusivity to include in the syllabus, individuals involved in syllabus design may consider the unique needs of transfer and mature students, understanding that their pathway to the course is not necessarily linear (Gallo et al., 2022). International students may face cultural or language difficulties, and international transfer students are likely accustomed to practices at their previous institution which may be quite different from practices in the Canadian higher education landscape. It is important to be mindful that using a detailed syllabus is more common in the North American context, and the distance between instructor and student may be greater in other countries (O'Connell & Resuli, 2020). Students who feel recognized, understood, or included are more likely to remain registered in the course.

## COMMUNICATION TOOL

The syllabus can be regarded as a central channel for communication between the instructor and students in a course, but it may also be consulted externally for various purposes. In addition to providing a detailed overview of a course, a syllabus may be used to organize and guide teaching or the pace of the course, communicate with other instructors, abide by university regulations, and comply with accreditation standards (Dou et al., 2019). In terms of internal use, students may find the course schedule and deadlines to be the most critical element, though the syllabus should also communicate attendance policies and expectations for professional behaviour. Course syllabi may appear to be authoritative in nature, though engagement with the course syllabus should invite students to participate in meaningful learning experiences. In their analysis of the evolving role of syllabi, the syllabus has the potential to "positively affect student motivation before students even enter the classroom, making the possibility for meaningful engagement in the course more likely" (Palmer et al., 2016). Although longer or more detailed syllabi are valued by some students, instructors should be cautious about "syllabus bloat combined with dwindling student attention to syllabus detail" (Wagner et al., 2023).

On an external level, the syllabus may be used by faculty and administration to explain how the course aligns with curricular requirements. The syllabus also includes information that is necessary for transfer credit evaluations. To facilitate the transfer credit evaluation process, the syllabus should connect learning outcomes directly to course assignments and readings (Nor, 2019). In addition, the course outline must be up-to-date in order for it to be used for transfer credit assessment purposes (McQuarrie, 2024). It is recommended that the syllabus be updated annually in case of updated policies or materials, but it should ideally be a living document that can be adjusted to meet the needs of students, faculty, and administration (Wagner et al., 2023).

Not all students are familiar with how to navigate the university and its policies and procedures. Outlining essential information in the syllabus can mitigate knowledge gaps, making the syllabus a source to support an equitable understanding of course and university policies. Such policies may be most relevant for direct from high school, first-generation, or college transfer students who may be new to navigating the university. Gin et al. (2021) found that upper-level course syllabi were not as likely to include university policies and campus resources, because instructors of upper-level courses may assume students have already

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<sup>8</sup> The scope of this research did not allow for an investigation of the different strategies that could be used to improve EDI uptake in a diverse array of subject areas, though there may be opportunity for this through future studies.

become familiar with these policies. Leaving this information out of the syllabus could contribute to transfer shock, the drop in grades for college transfer students in their first semester at their new institution (Gin et al., 2021). Clearly communicating policies or directing students on where to find them can support student success, especially for new or transfer students. Furthermore, the syllabus can provide students with cultural capital, making the course expectations known by “converting information that could be unknown by some individuals into a written document that is accessible to everyone” (Gin et al., 2021).

## REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

A scan of publicly available institutional policies related to the distribution of course syllabi was conducted between August 19 – September 10, 2024<sup>9</sup>. Of the 50 institutional websites reviewed, 19 had policies specific to course syllabi which were publicly available on their website (BC = 10, out-of-province = 4, USA = 5). Many of these institutions had distinct definitions for course outlines and course syllabi, differentiating between the two document types. The course outline is commonly defined as a contract between the institution and instructor which cannot be altered without approval of senate or education council, whereas the course syllabus is regarded as the section-specific document, contract or agreement provided by the instructor to students with information about a particular course. Most institutions without syllabi-specific policies had course outline policies (n=11), other policies that mention syllabi (n=7), or offered guidelines for developing course syllabi (n=5). Three did not offer any policies pertaining to syllabi or course outlines, and five did not have any relevant publicly available information.

**Table 1.** Availability of course syllabus policies at BC (n=35), other Canadian (n=10), and American (n=5) institutions

	British Columbia	Out-of-Province	American
<b>Syllabi-Specific Policies</b>	n=10	n=4	n=5
<b>Course Outline Policies</b>	n=8	n=3	n/a
<b>Other Policies (mention syllabi)</b>	n=6	n=1	n/a
<b>Offers Guidelines (no policies)</b>	n=4	n=1	n/a
<b>No Syllabi-Specific Policies</b>	n=2	n=1	n/a
<b>No relevant information</b>	n=5	n/a	n/a

<sup>9</sup> Policies are subject to change, and webpages may be updated at any time.



## TIMING OF SYLLABUS DISTRIBUTION

Across the Canadian and American institutions examined, it is evident that the timing of syllabus distribution varies. However, there are four apparent trends in terms of when syllabi are normally distributed to students:

- **Before courses begin:** British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Concordia, U of Florida;
- **First day of classes:** Camosun College (Camosun), Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECU), Simon Fraser University (SFU), AU, Dal, RRC Polytech, USask;
- **Beginning of term/course:** Capilano University (Capilano U), University of Victoria (UVic), U of A, Humber, NYU;
- **By the end of the first week of class:** Coast Mountain College (CMTN), Vancouver Island University (VIU), YukonU, CCSF, WSU.

Two institutions note that faculty members must submit their course syllabi to their department Chair or program Director prior to the beginning of the term (Ascenda School of Management, University of Canada West [UCW]).

Most institutions with information regarding the timing of course syllabi distribution mention that syllabi are distributed on the first day of class. USask also recommends that instructors give students online access to syllabi prior to the beginning of class, and that instructors review the contents of the syllabus with their students at the beginning of the course. Although it is not a strict policy, CNC and Langara recommend that course syllabi should be made available to students in a timely manner, ideally on or before the first day of classes. CNC also notes that for instructors using Moodle, the learning management system, it is good practice to add a copy of the course syllabus to their Moodle page. Similarly, at Yorkville, course syllabi are embedded in the online classroom, which students have access to one week before courses begin.

Two institutions consider the changes made based on student consultations to course syllabi in their policies (University of British Columbia [UBC], Trent). At UBC, instructors are required to provide students with the syllabus within the first week of class unless the syllabus will be created in consultation with the students at the beginning of the course. If students will be involved in creating the syllabus, the syllabus must be finalized prior to the last day on which students are permitted to drop a course without receiving a "W" on their transcript<sup>10</sup>. At Trent, the instructor is to review the syllabus with students at the first class, and any change in grading scheme must be agreed to in writing by all students present at the following class. The revised syllabus must be posted or communicated to students.

## SYLLABUS CONTENT

At the institutional level, components of the course syllabus may be required (n=17), recommended (n=4), or may include both required and recommend details (n=12). In general, most course syllabi must include the description, prerequisite(s), learning outcomes, readings and materials, evaluation/grading scale, and assignments listing. Other details that are typically required—but are sometimes simply recommended—are a listing of unique learning activities such as labs or field trips, and the course drop deadline.

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<sup>10</sup> At UBC the drop deadline is typically within the first few weeks of the term, though the date may differ depending on the course.

**Table 2. Components of a Syllabus by Institution**

	British Columbia	Out-of-Province	American
<b>Required Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BCIT</li> <li>• Columbia</li> <li>• Douglas</li> <li>• KPU</li> <li>• Langara</li> <li>• NVIT</li> <li>• NIC</li> <li>• NLC</li> <li>• TWU</li> <li>• UCW</li> <li>• UBC</li> <li>• VIU</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AU</li> <li>• Humber</li> <li>• USask</li> <li>• Yorkville</li> <li>• YukonU</li> </ul>	n/a
<b>Recommended Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNBC</li> <li>• UVic</li> <li>• VCC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trent</li> </ul>	n/a
<b>Both Required &amp; Recommended Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CNC</li> <li>• ECU</li> <li>• SFU</li> <li>• TRU</li> <li>• UFV</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U of A</li> <li>• Concordia</li> <li>• Dal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSF</li> <li>• Fairleigh Dickinson U</li> <li>• U of Florida</li> <li>• WSU</li> </ul>

Course syllabi also often include policies on attendance, late or missed assignments, and electronic device use, which are typically specific to the course and not standardized institution-wide. Standardized institutional policies included in course syllabi are most frequently related to academic integrity and the student code of conduct. 12 institutions in BC, four out-of-province institutions, and three American institutions require that EDI-related statements be included in the course syllabi. The most common EDI-D-related statements pertain to accommodations for students with disabilities or accessibility needs (n=12), classroom diversity and inclusivity (n=5), and the territorial land acknowledgement (n=5). Other more specific information includes religious accommodations (n=2), a multifaith calendar (n=1), and chosen name policy (n=1).

Transfer-specific policies are less common, with five BC, two out-of-province, and one American institution including transfer-specific policies in their course syllabi. Most of these policies pertain to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) (n=4). Other transfer-specific policies include course transferability (n=2), challenge for credit process (n=1), and student responsibility for retaining course syllabi for personal use or future transfer credit assessment requests (n=1).

## PUBLICLY AVAILABLE SYLLABI

It is generally uncommon for syllabi to be publicly available. However, some schools that do not post their syllabi publicly will allow students to request current or historical syllabi through an online form (UNBC, RRC Polytech) to support ease of accessing these documents. At Fraser International College [FIC], historical course outlines are available through the student portal.

Among the schools that do post their syllabi publicly, syllabi may be posted on departmental websites (n=2), learning management systems (CCSF), or through an online repository (CNC). Camosun College only posts their historical syllabi publicly. At U of A, posting syllabi online is not a requirement, though many instructors choose to publicly post this information or detailed course descriptions. Similarly, at CCSF, individual instructors may choose to post their syllabi publicly for prospective students to view but doing so is optional. At UFV and AU, syllabi are not publicly available, but course outlines are. UFV course outlines are accessible through the academic calendar. Humber posts some of their historical and current course outlines through their online repository, but students are directed to contact their academic faculty for this information should it not be included in the repository.

Overall, the availability of course syllabi policies and content recommendations vary by institution, as does the timing of syllabus distribution. There is not one distinct time when syllabi are released, but it appears that common practice is to distribute these documents early in the academic term. In some cases, syllabi must be reviewed and approved by departmental Chairs or program Directors. This review process may contribute to the timing of when finalized syllabi can be released to students, and impact whether the syllabus can be posted publicly prior to course registration.

## INTERVIEW CONSULTATIONS

Faculty members (n=5), staff (n=10), and students (n=10) in BC participated in interview consultations to provide their thoughts and experiences related to practices, trends, and challenges in the distribution of course syllabi. Each participant group received an interview guide with each question in advance of the scheduled meeting (**Appendices B, C, and D**).

## PRACTICES

Faculty and staff participants were asked about their familiarity with policies regarding syllabus distribution. Two participants noted that their institution is currently reviewing or creating syllabi-related policies, while three others indicated that they are unaware of what policies exist. At some schools, there may not be specific policies regarding syllabus distribution, though templates may be provided to faculty members to assist in creating their syllabi (n=2).

When it comes to the way in which syllabi are distributed, it appears to be common for syllabi to be uploaded through the learning management system:

- *"We have our course shells on eLearn, and professors usually upload the syllabus there."* (Student 2)
- *"We use this platform called Moodle, so the professors would upload the syllabus there and then send an email letting us know it was available. No one's ever given me a paper copy."* (Student 8)
- *"Most instructors print 'em and hand them out, but also we post them on our eLearn sites."* (Faculty 2)

For the most part, course syllabi are distributed on the first day of class:

- *"It's expected that students get the syllabus on the first day of class unless there's a problem or a pedagogical reason not to do so."* (Faculty 2)

- *"General practise is the first day of classes, the course syllabi go out."* (Faculty 4)
- *"Course syllabi typically aren't released to students until the first day of class."* (Staff 7)
- *"The professor creates the syllabus and hands it out at the start of class. In the online, asynchronous environment, the instructional design team typically develops the course materials, including the syllabus, and posts them in Moodle for everyone to access."* (Staff 8)
- *"By and large, syllabi are handed out on the first day of class."* (Student 10)
- *"If it's an in-person class, you get it during the first class; if it's an online class, you get it in the first week."* (Student 3)

Each participant group was asked about the effectiveness of syllabi in decision-making during course registration, and perceptions varied. Many participants indicated that syllabi are not helpful during registration because the syllabus is not available at that point, or because the program already has set requirements with little choice in course selection:

- *"I don't think it would affect registration because they wouldn't see the syllabus before they registered."* (Faculty 2)
- *"From my perspective, I'm not aware of students looking at course syllabi prior to registration. So, part of it is that...students are coming into the program and the program already has set courses that students are taking. So there's less choice. If they want [to] complete that full diploma, then they must take the courses. When it comes to the master's [program name], there's definitely choice. It is an elective course, but I'm not sure if students look at the course syllabus, I'm sure that they would have access to the course description."* (Faculty 3)
- *"I don't think it affects me as much as I thought it would. I think that's mainly because we only receive the course syllabus once classes actually start, not before. Naturally, that makes me more likely to stay in the course. For one, since I'm already enrolled, I tell myself that if I drop it now, I might not get back in later. And secondly, if it's a course I'll need eventually, I figure I might as well stay in and get it done."* (Student 1)

Although most schools do not offer the syllabus in advance, they may offer some information to help inform course selection during registration:

- *"For now, the only information available during registration is the course description included in the course schedule. It's just a short paragraph, and that's all students have to base their registration decisions on."* (Staff 7)
- *"Instead, we rely on course information sheets, which are critical. They're often very similar to the syllabus but don't always go into the same weekly structure or depth."* (Staff 8)

Syllabi may be helpful in selecting electives when there is choice in program requirements. Students may "shop" for instructors or course content they perceive to be easy or interesting:

- *"A lot of our students are doing word of mouth with other students as to whether and what they want to take and what the course entails and how many exams or there are in it and things like that."* (Staff 1)
- *"And so they actually have an opportunity before the course begins for most courses, not all, but the elective ones to view a one and a half minute clip or video of a professor talking [about] the course. So essentially reviewing the syllabus but in their own words and their own body language and emphasis on the different areas."* (Faculty 1)
- *"As an engineering student, I don't really have the liberty of electives quite yet. So I do know that if there's a [professor] that especially has a bad reputation, that's the only sort of thing that would make me change."* (Student 4)

- *"Honestly, a course syllabus plays a pretty big role in my decision to stay registered in a course. It gives me a clear idea of the workload, the assignments, and the overall expectations. For electives, especially, I'll look at the syllabus during the first week to see how much work is involved. If it seems overwhelming or if the dates for assignments and exams conflict with my required courses, that might make me reconsider." (Student 8)*
- *"I think that what is available for us too, like insights of the course, I think that that's enough to get an overview and know what [it's] going to be about. But it would be good to know beforehand how the professor, each different professor will evaluate so we can take a grasp of understanding how deep [it's] going to be, how hard or how demanding, trying to understand the workload of each course so we can manage to enrol in liked courses and make a balance of those courses and those going to be hard, but I think that that's not possible right now." (Student 6)*

Having the syllabus available earlier on may be most important for transfer students or those with accommodation needs:

- *"From a transfer credit perspective, the biggest impact of a course syllabus is actually on transfer students. This is the tool they use to decide if they should request transfer credit for a course, which ultimately determines if they'll be repeating coursework or not. For international students especially, this is crucial—they don't want to be paying for courses they've already completed elsewhere and received credit for." (Staff 4)*
- *"So, students can book an appointment with an advisor and view the course outline ahead of time. So, we have access to the bank of outlines and so to give them an idea what exactly the class would require them to do. And it's important for so many reasons. We have students who are struggling with mental health and sometimes they know that they will be missing classes. So, understanding of the attendance policy and how the assignments are offered in what format is quite important." (Staff 5)*

There may be opportunity to provide more detailed course information during registration, but providing a finalized syllabus may be difficult at this time due to late hiring or staffing-related issues:

- *"We want to ensure better quality control before making them more publicly accessible. But in principle, it would definitely help students make more informed decisions when choosing courses. What would also be helpful is to integrate more of that information into the student planning tools we already have online. Right now, students have limited access to information that helps them plan their courses to meet diploma requirements. Expanding that to include more details—such as assessment methods or learning outcomes—would be ideal." (Staff 2)*
- *"I think it is also important for them to know what the expectation is for that course when they're actually registering. So I do feel it is important for students to be able to have a course syllabi at point of registration, but I also know logistically it may not be possible, especially when as an institution you may sometimes be hiring sessionals much later after registration and you don't actually know who the instructor is that's going to be teaching that course and you're still doing your hiring." (Staff 6)*

The perceptions of whether or not the timing of course syllabi distribution impacts enrolment or student registration behaviours are mixed, with nine of the 25 participants indicating yes, nine indicating maybe depending on the students' circumstances, and seven indicating that timing has no impact.

Participants who indicated that the timing of syllabus distribution does have an impact noted that students who do not receive the complete syllabus in advance of the first day of classes may decide to change their registration after they review the syllabus:

- *"Since students don't get access to the full syllabus until the first class or during the first week, it makes sense that we see some of them coming forward wanting to make changes—dropping classes, picking up different ones, or trying to switch sections. They probably compare notes with classmates in other sections and notice significant differences in things like assessment methods, schedules, or expectations. That could definitely lead to adjustments in their registration." (Staff 2)*
- *"I think so, very much so. I think that, and this is what it's also communicated, students, you go to your first class, you go through the course outline, you listen to the instructor explaining the document to you and what their particular expectations are and are, this is the moment where you may choose to change courses, change switch classes. I think the student engagement is directly related to that moment and to the first class and to that specific document. So, we do communicate that the students and we do see those changes in the first week of classes for sure." (Staff 5)*
- *"It definitely would have made a difference. If I had gotten the information earlier, like you said, I probably would have dropped certain courses and rearranged my semester." (Student 9)*

Those who stated that timing may have an impact on registration mainly commented on the fact that some students have a choice of what classes they take, and others do not, making the timing of distribution impactful for some but not others:

- *"I don't actually have a choice in my classes. I have six courses, all of them required, and in first year, we don't get to pick our schedules. Even the class timings and professors are assigned. There are three sections, and you're placed into one—I'm in section 93—so even the professors for your section are predetermined. There's not much flexibility in that. In undergrad, though, it was different. Obviously, there were required courses, but even for those, you could choose the timing and build your own schedule. For electives and minor requirements, you had full control over what you picked." (Student 8)*
- *"I think I'm going to lean more on the no side of that purely because we don't really have the choice. I would say it would have more of an impact for people who are taking electives and optional things, which is something that I was able to avoid personally last year. But I do remember people who thought they wanted an elective that would be easier without midterms or [a] big final and then they look at the syllabus and then they said, oh, that's going to be too much work. I'll drop it and retake a similar course in the future year." (Student 4)*
- *"If we had more options, we're a very small institution, if we had more variance in what we were offering, I would say yes, it would definitely make a difference. And because they don't release them straight away, we would see late drops for sure, because students' hands are somewhat tied by what we're offering." (Staff 1)*

Most of the individuals who stated that timing does not have an impact said so because they believe that syllabi availability does not impact choice:

- *"I guess maybe I'm doing my students a disservice. They don't really get the course outlines or course syllabus until that first day. So, for me, I really view that first day as that's the day I need to make a good impression, not just through the course outline or the course syllabus, but just on a relational piece." (Faculty 3)*
- *"I don't think it affects too much my registration or dropping of the registration just because again, if I need to take that course, I need to take that course." (Student 5)*

Faculty participants were asked about observed patterns in student behaviour related to syllabus availability. Three of the five faculty participants expressed their belief that students do not necessarily read the course syllabus, so timing and availability may not be the key issue<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>11</sup> The scope of this research did not allow for an investigation of the differences between mandatory and elective courses when it comes to students' level of attention to the syllabus.

- *"There is a general problem. To be honest, it does not matter what I put in my course syllabus because the students don't actually read it. And so at the department level, we're constantly talking about that. And this has started to get to be a serious problem in the last five years, I would say, where we constantly get questions from students by email or in class about things that are actually covered in the course syllabus. And so there is considerable evidence that they just don't read it or they're reading it and don't understand it or don't attend to it or whatever, but it's not going in. And so, I don't quite know how to answer that question because it has nothing to do with the availability of the syllabus. It has to do with what the students do with that document."* (Faculty 4)
- *"I asked students to ensure they read it. But definitely in one of my classes, how the students presented, I would say they didn't engage with it. They didn't read it."* (Faculty 3)
- *So, in my experience, the only pattern is really that they're not using it."* (Faculty 2)

When asked if having a course syllabus ahead of the course start date impacts their engagement, students shared that having the syllabus ahead of the course start date supports preparedness for the semester, and assists in planning for potential absences:

- *"But having the syllabus means I can manage my attendance more intentionally. It also helps with class engagement, because when I know the general topic we'll be covering, I can focus my attention and absorb the material better. It's like, 'Okay, today we're focusing on this,' and that makes it easier for me to stay engaged and process the information."* (Student 2)
- *"I would say that it's nice going into a lecture knowing exactly what is going to be covered. So, if I foresee any sort of weakness in a topic, I definitely want to make it to that lecture and I might want to read up ahead of time. And it being able to be prepared definitely makes it easier to pay attention in class because I certainly know that if I ignore what's going on in the class for a little while and then when I finally sit down and pay attention to it, what's going on, I'm going to not pay attention and probably be on my phone or something."* (Student 4)

One student participant noted that having the syllabus in advance did not help support their engagement because the syllabus was discussed during the first class:

- *"From my experience, having the course syllabus distributed in advance didn't really help with my engagement during the first lecture. Since I'm the kind of person where when the course syllabus is distributed in advance, I'll make sure to read it over, note of all the details, but then inevitably, once I get to the lecture, we'll read over the entire syllabus again. And I feel like if it's distributed in advance, we don't really need to go through every single detail as a class."* (Student 7)

Six of the 10 student participants felt that discussing the syllabus in class contributes to overall satisfaction and success in the course:

- *"Yes, definitely. I think it really helps to set the professor's expectations. Every professor has different expectations for how to do well in their class, so going over the syllabus helps students understand how they can succeed."* (Student 1)
- *"Yeah, it definitely does. A syllabus helps you feel more prepared because it gives you an outline of what to expect. For example, if you have any questions about the course, you can address them right away on the first day and get everything clarified upfront. It sets the tone for the course and helps you decide whether it's something you're ready to commit to."* (Student 8)
- *"Yeah, like I said, it makes the expectations clearer. Some things don't always translate the same in writing as they do when you're hearing it directly from someone. So, yeah, it'd probably help me ask questions, too, since I'm right there."* (Student 3)



Based on the responses received from faculty and staff involved in the transfer credit assessment process, information requirements for completing transfer credit assessments may vary by institution or even by individual instructor. Most commonly, learning outcomes are required to determine the degree of overlap between courses:

- *"[I typically look for] both the description and the learning outcomes, what students are leaving the course with. So those outcomes and for me to be able to assess how that capacity or competency was assessed in the course." (Faculty 1)*
- *"Typically, we look for the learning outcomes matching and ideally I think it's 70% or something like that of the content being matched so that it can be, there's a couple different ways of being transferred, a direct transfer used as an elective or just not at all. And so, for a direct transfer for a one-to-one, it's got to really speak to the fact that they would've walked away from their course pretty much learning fairly similar things and doing similar things to what our course is going to have...Content, and I would say the assignments, but that's less important. Every teacher is unique to their assignments. It's more of just the learning outcomes and content, I would say." (Faculty 5)*
- *"For transfer credit assessment, the key components that comes to mind are the course credits, the total course hours, the learning objectives, the course description, and the assessments. These are definitely the essentials that would help ensure a smooth transfer credit evaluation. Including learning objectives and how the student will be assessed is particularly helpful in determining equivalencies between institutions." (Staff 2)*
- *"A detailed description of the course content learning objectives. I think that's a very important component. What is the goal and the outcomes expected from the course? Because if you don't know what the learning outcome and the goals of the courses, it's hard to assess whether that's going to be equivalent to something perhaps we are offering [at] another institution because are we achieving the same outcome here in the learning objective?" (Staff 6)*

When asked if the timing of syllabi distribution affects student outcomes, such as course satisfaction or performance, most faculty participants could not answer the question. One noted that they do not feel that timing impacts student outcomes, but that it can set up course expectations:

- *"No, I don't, but I definitely think it can set expectations pretty quickly and just set them up for what they should sort of prepare for the term. I'm a big advocate of handing out as many things on day one as I possibly can and letting them figure out their own schedule. And so for me, it tends to lead to a good understanding of what they're in for." (Faculty 5)*

On the other hand, Staff participants were more likely to agree that timing of syllabus distribution affects student outcomes (n=4), with the inability to enroll in an alternate course as the main area of concern:

- *"Definitely course satisfaction because they like to know what's coming. And so when it takes ages for the syllabi to actually be distributed, that's when we get students that are disgruntled." (Staff 1)*
- *"Yes...when students have the flexibility to make adjustments, they definitely will. But the deeper issue is that, in many cases, students don't have another option. Either the alternative section is full, or there aren't other courses available that fit their schedule or program requirements. This lack of flexibility during the first two weeks—the add/drop period—can be problematic." (Staff 2)*

Some staff were uncertain (n=6), mainly because the impact of timing would depend on the individual students' unique needs or preferences:

- *"I'm not sure if students getting the syllabus on the first day ultimately impacts their success in the course. Usually, the first midterm, if there is one, doesn't happen until the following month. That said, some professors assign quick tasks or assignments early on, so knowing about those ahead of time would definitely help. Does it impact their ability to succeed? I think*

*it depends. Students approach coursework in different ways. We do have some who show up late—two or three weeks into the semester—and if they don't have access to the syllabus or materials beforehand, they can fall behind. When students share that concern with me, I always encourage them to reach out to the instructor before class starts to see if there's anything they can do to prepare in advance. In some ways, yes, it does have an impact. But is it still doable for students to be successful if they only receive the syllabus on the first day? I think so." (Staff 7)*

- *"Yeah, that's a good question. Again, speaking anecdotally from my own experience or from some of my friends' experiences, I would guess that syllabi do have an impact. There's an element where you pick courses based on the calendar description, assuming you'll be able to handle them. But then sometimes you get the syllabus and start panicking because it turns out to be way more work than you expected. For some students, that realization might lead them to drop the course. For others, it's more like, 'Well, this is the way it is, and I'm just going to try and push through.' Whether they're successful with that strategy often depends on how the course unfolds." (Staff 9)*

All participants were asked about when they think students should receive the course syllabus. Only four of the 25 participants stated that receiving the syllabus on the first day of classes is ideal. Two of these participants were faculty members, both of whom indicated that providing the syllabus earlier would be preferable, though this is not always possible:

- *"The first day makes sense to me. I mean, it wouldn't hurt to send it out prior to the class, but I know as the person who reviews them all that people aren't done them before then. Because I know I spend my Labour Day weekend and my Christmas last holiday weekend reviewing all the last-minute ones that come in, which is a large percent. So yeah, I don't know. The first day makes sense to me. I don't think later would be ideal, earlier could be nice." (Faculty 2)*
- *"Yeah, for me it's day one because I can go over it sometimes. I like to get it out a week in advance, but that's not always possible for me." (Faculty 5)*

Some participants felt that timing is dependent on individual preferences, but most stated that receiving the syllabus before the first day of class would be beneficial to support student preparedness or decision-making around enrolment:

- *"Having information available before enrolment begins is key for students to choose the best courses early on... If students had clearer details upfront, they could make more targeted decisions rather than filling up on courses they later drop, which could open up more spots for those with later enrollment dates. Since there's a lot of shuffling, we have a specific waitlist system that works for some students but leaves others waiting through the first week. Early access to information would really help students make firm choices and improve the overall process." (Staff 3)*
- *"I think it would be good if they could receive their course syllabus maybe before the first day of class instead of the first week. I think as an ideal, I don't know if as a reasonable to actually receive it before they register because that's couple months in advance. But I would say ideally as the students are preparing for their start of class, I think maybe the week before classes start as they can be able to prepare and read what is expected of them in their first day of class that week. And so then it helps students prepare more as they start their first day of class to know what is expected of them." (Staff 6)*
- *"Ideally? Well, at the very least, a little bit before class starts. I'm not sure if it should be available closer to when students are registering, though. On one hand, that could help some students for accessibility reasons, but it might make things harder for professors. The syllabus also gives you an idea of the workload, which is an important consideration when you're registering for classes." (Student 3)*

Overall, the benefit of receiving the syllabus at the point of registration is a common sentiment, but many comments suggest that this may not be feasible or realistic due to staffing issues and faculty workload.

## CURRENT TRENDS

When asked if syllabi at their institution include an EDI-related statement or information<sup>12</sup>, most respondents said yes (Faculty =3; Staff=7; Students=8). This information may be in the form of statements or links to information on the institution's website. Two institutions have one catch-all statement that refers to specific elements of EDI.

Based on the responses received, the information most commonly used in course syllabi include the following: an accessibility statement or information (n=10), decolonization and Indigenization statements (n=7), sexual or gender-based violence statements (n=4) and religious accommodation information (n=2).

- *"We do have an accessibility statement and we have a sexual violence policy statement. Again, [information removed], everything we do is grounded a little bit in EDI."* (Staff 1)
- *"I think one of my syllabi definitely addressed harassment and similar topics. It also mentioned accessibility. All my professors included something about accessibility in their syllabi, but only one specifically covered gender-based harassment. It provided a contact number and mentioned the school's resources for support. I think there was also something about racism, but it was only a line or two. It basically said to contact a specific person if you were experiencing anything like that."* (Student 9)

Six participants stated that their syllabi do not include EDI-D-related information (Faculty=2; Staff=2; Students=2). At some institutions there are no policies, but there are suggestions for including EDI-D-related information in the syllabus:

- *"We don't have policies about that. Strict policies. We are provided with information about what we might want to include around that, but I think there are committees now. I think that it's going to change. I think that it's going to end up very soon being a requirement because we have working committees discussing that very thing. But as it stands right now, it's not a requirement."* (Faculty 4)

EDI-D-related policies and initiatives are currently under review at some institutions:

- *"It's been changing in the last for us as well. So, definitely a trend. We now have a new EDI director that only got hired on last year. So, with that, our syllabi and what was being said on our syllabi has actually been or is being reviewed."* (Faculty 5)
- *"To summarize, while I don't believe there's a singular policy covering all aspects of EDI, these areas have been identified as priorities. Offices and initiatives are being established to address them. It's an evolving space with plenty of challenges, as I'm sure you're seeing across Canada and the US right now. These are interesting—and complex—times."* (Staff 8)

For syllabi with EDI-D-related statements or information, respondents generally feel that this information could facilitate a sense of belonging in the classroom, and through the course content in general:

- *"For students to feel more included that there is a sense of belonging, that there is less difference. And then also recognizing that because we're coming at it in different ways, there's an ethic or culture that is supportive and I think that's super important. It's a message already given to students before they begin the course."* (Faculty 1)

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<sup>12</sup> The interview guide question asked about EDI-related information, and gave the examples of multi-faith calendar & accessibility statement. Land acknowledgments/elements of Indigenization or decolonization were not provided as examples in the guide. However, some respondents interpreted EDI-related info as referring to land acknowledgments.

- *"I would say it definitely lets students know what is expected of them, that this is what [the institution] values if we don't tolerate discrimination and students have to be respectful. So, it is setting an expectation for students to know that this is what we expect their behaviours to be as a student. I don't know if it would have an impact, but I hope students feel that they are those who might be marginalised, who are discriminated historically, maybe have had biases. Hope they do feel more safe with that statement that there is this value there." (Staff 6)*
- *"From what I've observed, I think the policy likely impacts how faculty approach their courses, both in terms of content and its application. There seems to be a shift toward opening up course content to include more perspectives and incorporating diverse resources. This aligns with broader changes in the university's demographics. Over time, there's been a lot more variety in the student population, particularly in terms of cultural backgrounds. I think this has fostered more openness to dialogue about different cultural perspectives and how they influence learning." (Staff 9)*
- *"For me personally, the content in the syllabus hasn't affected my experience in the course too much because it did feel a bit to me, it's just the standard statement that they have to say at the college, but depending on how the instructor would introduce it or address similar topics to it when going over the syllabus, I think that definitely helped with making the room feel a lot more comfortable because sometimes you have statements like this in the syllabus and when the instructor does go over them, they just kind of gloss over it versus an instructor who makes sure to make it clear that everyone has different accommodations that are welcome. And yeah, I think it didn't affect my experience directly, but it did help me see some instructors more positively overall." (Student 7)*

Institutions should be cautious to ensure that these statements have a positive impact:

- *"Maybe my criticism is maybe because I am an international student and in the administrative way, I am not the same as a domestic student, mostly because of the tuition fees of course. But yes, it's like it makes you feel different, and they want to present themselves as inclusive, but this kind of segregation, we are different in the end and it makes you kind of feel like different. You are not the same as someone who was born here and is studying." (Student 6)*
- *"I think it's a wonderful thing. Including those kinds of statements and information is important, but you have to be really careful to ensure it's not just lip service. That's especially a concern with land acknowledgments—there's always the risk they could feel hollow or lack real meaning. It's crucial to be mindful about that. By and large, though, I think including statements about equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility is a great step. It always makes me happy to see those things included because they matter. Making sure everyone has the best chance and feels welcome is so important. Of course, the process of working toward true equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility is a work in progress. It's flawed—most things are—but it's happening. Conversations are being had, and work is being done. It's not perfect, but progress is being made, and I think that's what really matters." (Student 10)*

When asked if including students' ideas or preferences in the course syllabus contributes to student satisfaction or retention, most respondents said no. Ideas for student involvement presented by participants included providing feedback on deadlines or being able to choose some assignments or readings:

- *"The way that I've tried to include some student choice or some freedom for students is by having sometimes multiple due dates for things or choices of readings. So it gives them a little bit of autonomy in their decision making, but it's already built into the syllabus when I distribute it on the first day." (Faculty 2)*
- *"For example, one professor didn't know which days she'd hold them, so we did a poll to see when most students were available, and she scheduled them based on that. Another professor adjusted assignment due dates if we had several assignments due in the same week. She might extend a deadline by a few days to make it more manageable." (Student 9)*

A few respondents noted that the syllabus sets the expectations for a course and may be set based on accreditation criteria, so altering it may not be suitable in all courses:

- *"I believe that giving students this kind of input can positively impact student satisfaction and could lead to higher retention rates. But now, as a staff member—and even as a former student—it also makes me wonder how the university can maintain consistent standards. I also think about equality, since students do talk to each other, and variations in course structure could raise concerns about fairness. Those are just some of the concerns I have." (Staff 4)*
- *"It's an interesting idea, but one that divides opinion—some people love it, and others aren't fans. Whether this approach works likely depends on the course content. For example, in accounting, where we need to meet CPA regulations, there's little room to adjust. The curriculum is strict because of accreditation requirements. In contrast, an arts-based course, or one discussing current topics, might lend itself better to a student-led approach. In those contexts, students could bring their perspectives to the table and help guide discussions in meaningful ways. It's similar in trades programs, which we also offer at [the institution]. Those are highly structured for safety reasons, and there's no room for experimentation—you can't take chances when teaching skills that involve heavy machinery or potential hazards. On the other hand, courses like modern-day politics or digital media might be much more open to liberating structures. Ultimately, I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all answer here. It depends on the course, the subject matter, and the instructor. I've seen this student-centered approach done very well in some cases, and when it works, it's impressive." (Staff 8)*

Finalizing the syllabus with students could contribute to the late release of syllabi:

- *"Many, many of our faculty absolutely do that. And that also contributes to the late release of the syllabi usually. So, you can't please everybody obviously all of the time. But it is important and it does get practised here a lot." (Staff 1)*

## CHALLENGES

When it comes to receiving the course syllabi and essential information regarding courses, timing (n=6), use of unfamiliar language or jargon (n=11), and formatting (n=11) are perceived barriers:

- *"There might be language issues in the sense that there's pedagogical language that professors tend to use, and we sometimes think that it's part of the general language use and it isn't... So sometimes the language might be a barrier, but it's also a way to force them to interact with me or to engage with the syllabus." (Faculty 4)*
- *"Some faculty write in ways that are filled with jargon, which can be difficult for students to understand, especially for international students who might interpret things differently." (Staff 2)*
- *"There is sometimes the use of jargon which will make sense at the end of the course, but without a literal meaning at the beginning of the course, it could definitely be difficult to sort of understand." (Student 4)*
- *"Timing is definitely an issue for me. I'm the type of person who loves to look at things ahead of time because it helps me feel more prepared. I'm also a pretty anxious person, so having that information early reduces my anxiety and helps me stay more organized." (Student 8)*
- *"I think timing is definitely an issue for us. I always appreciate when the syllabus is provided ahead of time, so you can plan which courses you want to take. If you have two conflicting courses that you're interested in, but they're in the same time slot, getting the syllabus early can help you decide which one to choose. So, for me, timing is the number one factor." (Student 1)*

- *"From my perspective, I also think that early access to syllabi would make a big difference for students. I understand that might not always be feasible for faculty, but it could significantly reduce stress and help students plan better if they could see their syllabi before the semester starts."* (Staff 9)
- *"...but one thing that really bugs me about course syllabi is that every professor uses a different format, and that can get confusing. Some will list what we're doing week by week, while others just give a general statement. The formats vary too—some use tables, some use bullet points. It would be nice to have one standard format that all professors follow."* (Student 2)
- *"I would definitely say that the consistency of formatting can be a barrier. Even as a staff member, when I'm reviewing syllabi from other institutions, it sometimes takes me twice as long to find the information I'm looking for. It's just not what I'm used to, and different institutions word things differently. I've particularly noticed this in some arts disciplines, where instructors might include stories or take a more creative approach to their syllabi. While I'm sure students find that engaging, from a staff perspective, it can be harder to navigate and locate key details."* (Staff 9)
- *"Sometimes the length, like I said, I think could be a bit overwhelming, print as a medium - maybe not the best way to reach students."* (Faculty 2)

When it comes to unfamiliar language, some participants noted that students should have the ability to ask questions, or learn the unfamiliar terminology through their academic program:

- *"I can see how jargon, especially in specialized programs, could be a potential barrier. But I also believe that if you've been admitted into a program where specialized jargon is used—even in first-year course outlines—then you should have the ability to navigate it."* (Staff 4)
- *"I think instructors are meant to dedicate the first class to go over this document and hopefully unpack any kind of language that is not clear or maybe perhaps too formal."* (Staff 5)

In terms of distribution, syllabi should be available before classes begin, ideally at the time of course registration. Some participants noted this may not be feasible, but providing some baseline information may support students in their decision-making during registration. Additionally, some participants noted that having an online repository to house course syllabi may help students obtain syllabi for transfer credit assessment purposes:

- *"It seems like it is working for students to receive in the first class, but certainly if students wanted to receive it earlier, that would be doable as well. In some cases, it would be challenging. Dare I say, we're often filling positions kind of last minute [...], so that's kind of the challenge, is that if you don't have somebody in place to teach a course, then the person that's not there can't really develop that course outline or that course syllabus. So unfortunately, sort of the hiring processes gets in the way of students having that course syllabus in their hand... they're paying money for these courses, so they deserve the right to have a look and see what's going to be expected of them, for sure."* (Faculty 3)
- *"I'd say it would be helpful if the syllabus could be communicated or even distributed online earlier—ideally before course enrollment or while planning courses. If the syllabus were attached at that stage, you could read up and learn more about each course in advance. Right now, we only get brief, very general course descriptions during enrollment, which don't really give a clear picture of what we'll be learning."* (Student 1)
- *"I think the process of distributing course sale by could be improved by making them available ahead of registration, such as having them accessible through the same core search system available to students who are logged in to their student accounts."* (Student 7)

- *"I think to improve the experience, to have a consistent way to have the course syllabi is attach it to, if possible, in the student information system, when the students actually register that they can actually see the course syllabi for that section because then at least it's one because everybody has to register through the student information system, whatever institution uses." (Staff 6)*
- *"One professor will organize things one way, another will do it differently, and yet another will have their own approach. It makes it tricky to figure out, like, 'Where is this?' or 'How do I access that?'" (Student 9)*
- *"Overall, while we strive for consistency, making the system easier to navigate and having a centralized, easily accessible database would certainly improve the experience." (Staff 3)*
- *"We could definitely, like I said, have an online repository for older ones that's a bit more public facing at the moment, especially if students are transferring to a different institution and they need a copy of the syllabi for transfer credit purposes." (Staff 1)*

Each participant group had an opportunity to share their suggestions for policies or practices that could better support students in making informed registration or enrolment decisions. The most consistent recommendation surrounded improving the availability:

- *"Yeah, just an online repository that was public facing. I think especially if we were a bigger institution that would allow students to make more educated choices." (Staff 1)*
- *"A consistent standard outlining the minimum information required on syllabi, including assessments, would also help, especially if this information is available through a single, universal system instead of being scattered across different platforms." (Staff 3)*
- *"One issue I've noticed, and I think it's broader than just our institution, is a sense of gatekeeping around course syllabi. In some places, you have to contact the department or faculty to access a syllabus, while others centralize it within the registrar's office. Personally, I think having all syllabi housed in a centralized, accessible area would be beneficial. With staff turnover and organizational changes, it's easy for documents to get lost. As soon as a syllabus is distributed to students, it's essentially public. So, I think institutions should have a clear, uniform policy for storing and sharing these documents to support both students and staff." (Staff 7)*
- *"I'd say the institution's website, where the list of courses is posted, should have the most up-to-date syllabi attached to each course—keeping them as recent as possible. If I'd had fully up-to-date syllabi when I was first applying to this university, it might have influenced my decision. I could have looked at the course outlines and thought, 'Hmm, maybe this isn't for me,' and chosen not to apply. Or it might have had the opposite effect—I could've seen the courses and thought, 'Yes, this is exactly what I want,' and felt confident going for this program without looking at other options. So, I'd say making sure everything is up to date on the website would be really helpful for students making these decisions." (Student 2)*

Several participants noted that a policy or practice for providing the course syllabus earlier on would be prudent:

- *"Personally, I like the idea of distributing syllabi earlier than the first day or even making a draft copy from previous semesters available to students in advance. However, we don't have a formal policy around that. If such a policy were implemented, it would need clear guidelines to ensure that faculty don't feel overwhelmed by the added expectation." (Staff 9)*
- *"I feel like I'm just going to be a broken record. The earlier you have your syllabus, say you do get it a week early, I feel like there's three things that could happen. You could either prepare yourself enough for the course, you're about to prepare*



*yourself and understand the syllabus enough to understand if that's maybe something you can't do at the moment and put it off for a year or two. Or if it's a course that's an elective and you just don't even really need it and there's something else you could take, or maybe you fully want to take it that week, would give you the time to either make sure you can mentally afford to take it or totally throw it out the window and choose a completely different course. So yeah, I feel like I think everything comes down to when you get it and sometimes you have no choice but to take it, but it's still nice to have that preparation time." (Student 5)*

- *"I think, as I mentioned before, having information about exams is really important—like what format they'll be in and what kind of software will be used. It would also help to know the textbook policy ahead of time. For example, will the textbook be online, or do we need a physical copy? Is it required or just recommended? Having those details early on would make a big difference in helping us prepare." (Student 8)*

Four participants provided suggestions that would allow the instructor's approach to a course or expectations to be voiced within the syllabus. This, which could be available ahead of the course start date:

- *"The only other thing I can think of, like I mentioned before, is providing a rough syllabus from previous years. Just attaching it would give students an idea of what to expect, like how much work there might be. It would also help compare professors—one might assign less work, while another might offer more bonus opportunities. It would let you weigh your options and decide which approach works better for you." (Student 9)*
- *"Just having a syllabus where you see someone's grading scheme or someone's policies towards class in general, and maybe there are some people whose learning styles work well with that kind of instructor. So just like any kind of heads up that, hey, this instructor may not work very well with how I learn and how I present my work. Or maybe there is someone who's like, everyone says this professor that everyone's been talking about is bad, but I actually really like a lot of these projects and the grade distribution. Then I think either way that could encourage students to sign up for courses that suit them." (Student 7)*
- *"I have no idea how doable this would be, but I think in an ideal world, it would be lovely to have a little message from that faculty member that goes along with the course syllabus... I think I would see it as an opportunity to show how, and maybe to show how I've created the course outline to align well with a student-centered approach or a student success approach, which I think can just get lost in the outcomes and course description." (Faculty 3)*
- *"I think if students can hear and see what a course is about in the faculty member's words and word choices, that really gives them an idea of the culture of the course in a very subtle way versus just reading something that doesn't really translate as well what the course culture and sense is." (Faculty 1)*

Overall, participants shared a variety of suggestions for improving the distribution and availability of course syllabi. Consistency in syllabus content and format, as well as providing syllabi earlier on to support student decision-making may improve student satisfaction and informed decision-making during the registration process.

# Appendix A:

## Institutional Policies/Guidelines Consulted

Links to institutional policies/guidelines consulted:

Alexander College (BC)	<a href="https://alexandercollege.ca/about-us/college-policies/">https://alexandercollege.ca/about-us/college-policies/</a>
Athabasca University (AB)	<a href="https://www.athabascau.ca/university-secretariat/policy-and-procedures/index.html">https://www.athabascau.ca/university-secretariat/policy-and-procedures/index.html</a>
British Columbia Institute of Technology (BC)	<a href="https://www.bcit.ca/about/leadership-vision/policies/">https://www.bcit.ca/about/leadership-vision/policies/</a>
Capilano University (BC)	<a href="https://www.capilanou.ca/media/capilanouca/about-capu/governance/policies-amp-procedures/senate-policies-amp-procedures/S2009-06-Course-Outlines-of-Record-and-Course-Syllabi.pdf">https://www.capilanou.ca/media/capilanouca/about-capu/governance/policies-amp-procedures/senate-policies-amp-procedures/S2009-06-Course-Outlines-of-Record-and-Course-Syllabi.pdf</a>
City College of San Francisco (CA, USA)	<a href="https://www.ccsf.edu/about-ccsf/participatory-governance/academic-senate/making-great-syllabus">https://www.ccsf.edu/about-ccsf/participatory-governance/academic-senate/making-great-syllabus</a>
College of New Caledonia (BC)	<a href="https://cnc.bc.ca/docs/default-source/student-services/ctl/course-outline-and-course-syllabus_2021.pdf?sfvrsn=c5f84285_0">https://cnc.bc.ca/docs/default-source/student-services/ctl/course-outline-and-course-syllabus_2021.pdf?sfvrsn=c5f84285_0</a>
Concordia University (QC)	<a href="https://www.concordia.ca/ctl/course-design/syllabus.html">https://www.concordia.ca/ctl/course-design/syllabus.html</a>
Coquitlam College (BC)	<a href="https://www.coquitlamcollege.com/about-us/policies/">https://www.coquitlamcollege.com/about-us/policies/</a>
Dalhousie University (NS)	<a href="https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/www/about/leadership-and-governance/university-policies/syllabus-policy.pdf">https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/www/about/leadership-and-governance/university-policies/syllabus-policy.pdf</a>
Douglas College (BC)	<a href="https://www.douglascollege.ca/sites/default/files/docs/Curriculum%20Development%20and%20Approval%20Policy.pdf">https://www.douglascollege.ca/sites/default/files/docs/Curriculum%20Development%20and%20Approval%20Policy.pdf</a>
Emily Carr University of Art and Design (BC)	<a href="https://d1bdilxpumkn65.cloudfront.net/assets/content-images/4.4.1-Course-Outline-Procedures.pdf">https://d1bdilxpumkn65.cloudfront.net/assets/content-images/4.4.1-Course-Outline-Procedures.pdf</a>
Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ, USA)	<a href="https://www.fdu.edu/about/university-leadership-offices/university-provost/academic-policies/fdu-syllabus-policy/">https://www.fdu.edu/about/university-leadership-offices/university-provost/academic-policies/fdu-syllabus-policy/</a>
Humber Polytechnic (ON)	<a href="https://academic-regulations.humber.ca/2022-2023/9.0-COURSE-OUTLINES-and-EVALUATION">https://academic-regulations.humber.ca/2022-2023/9.0-COURSE-OUTLINES-and-EVALUATION</a>
Kwantlen Polytechnic University (BC)	<a href="https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/facultyinstructionalstaffhandbook/chapter/course-outlines-and-course-presentations/#:~:text=A%20course%20syllabus%20must%20be,so%20on%3B%20tentative%20schedule%20of">https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/facultyinstructionalstaffhandbook/chapter/course-outlines-and-course-presentations/#:~:text=A%20course%20syllabus%20must%20be,so%20on%3B%20tentative%20schedule%20of</a>
Langara College (BC)	<a href="https://langara.ca/about-langara/policies/college-policies/category.html">https://langara.ca/about-langara/policies/college-policies/category.html</a>
New York University (NY, USA)	<a href="https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/gallatin-faculty-portal/teaching/planning-your-course/syllabus-guidelines">https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/gallatin-faculty-portal/teaching/planning-your-course/syllabus-guidelines</a>
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (BC)	<a href="https://www.nvit.ca/institutional/policies/boardgovernance/educationcouncil/a37courseoutlineandcoursesyllabus.htm">https://www.nvit.ca/institutional/policies/boardgovernance/educationcouncil/a37courseoutlineandcoursesyllabus.htm</a>
North Island College (BC)	<a href="https://www.nic.bc.ca/about-us/leadership-and-governance/policies-procedures/">https://www.nic.bc.ca/about-us/leadership-and-governance/policies-procedures/</a>
Northern Lights College (BC)	<a href="https://www.nlc.bc.ca/schedule/regulations/">https://www.nlc.bc.ca/schedule/regulations/</a>
Red River College Polytechnic (MB)	<a href="https://www.rrc.ca/legal/policies/course-outlines/">https://www.rrc.ca/legal/policies/course-outlines/</a>
Simon Fraser University (BC)	<a href="https://www.sfu.ca/cee/teaching-resources/new-faculty-resources/faculty-guide-to-teaching/course-outlines-and-syllabi.html">https://www.sfu.ca/cee/teaching-resources/new-faculty-resources/faculty-guide-to-teaching/course-outlines-and-syllabi.html</a>
Thompson Rivers University (BC)	<a href="https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/ed08-35663.pdf">https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/ed08-35663.pdf</a>
Trent University (ON)	<a href="https://www.trentu.ca/governance/sites/trentu.ca.governance/files/documents/Course%20Syllabus%20Policy.pdf">https://www.trentu.ca/governance/sites/trentu.ca.governance/files/documents/Course%20Syllabus%20Policy.pdf</a>

# Appendix B: Staff Interview Guide

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking the time to participate in an interview. Please note that not all questions may be relevant to your primary role, and if there are any that you cannot or prefer not to answer, we can skip. Before we begin, please confirm permission to begin recording.

Your personal information is collected under the authority of Section 26(c) & (e) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). This information will be used for the purposes of planning or evaluating a program or activity of BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT). Questions about the collection of this information may be directed to Elle Ting, Research and Projects Officer, 604-412-7680, eting@bccat.ca.

## STAFF

### BACKGROUND:

1. Could you start by telling me a little about your background/experience working in higher education in BC?
  - a) Are you involved in developing or reviewing course syllabi?

### PRACTICES:

1. Are you aware of any policies related to the distribution of course syllabi at your institution?
  - a) If yes, what do you know about these policies?
2. In your opinion, how effective are course syllabi in supporting student decision-making during registration?
3. From your experience, do you think the timing of syllabus distribution impacts student registration behavior, such as early or late registrations, course drops, or switching courses?
  - a) Can you provide any examples?
4. Course syllabi are often used in transfer credit assessments. With this purpose in mind, is there information that must be included in the syllabus in order for the transfer credit assessment to be completed? (*For staff involved in transfer only*).
5. Students often decide whether or not they are going to be successful in a course before it begins, simply by reviewing the course syllabus. Do you feel that the timing of syllabi distribution affects student outcomes, such as course satisfaction or performance?
  - a) Based on your experience as a staff member, when do you think students should receive the course syllabus?

## CURRENT TRENDS:

6. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is becoming increasingly important in the design of course syllabi. Are you familiar with any recommendations or policies that require the inclusion of an EDI-related statement or information (i.e. multi-faith calendar, accessibility statement, etc.) in your institution's course syllabi?
  - a) If yes, how might this information impact student behaviours or classroom culture?
  - b) If no, do you think an EDI statement or information would impact classroom culture?
7. Some institutions or instructors allow students to be involved in designing or finalizing course syllabi, often during the first week of class.
  - a) How might including students' ideas or preferences in the course syllabus contribute to student satisfaction or retention?

## CHALLENGES:

8. Based on your experience, what barriers do students face when it comes to receiving course syllabi and essential information regarding their courses?
  - a) Is timing an issue?
  - b) Is language a barrier to understanding?
  - c) Is format a barrier to success in the course?
9. Based on your experience, how could the process of distributing course syllabi be improved?
10. Do you have any suggestions for policies or practices that could better support students in making informed registration or enrollment decisions?

## CONCLUSION

11. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding course syllabi policies and practices?

# Appendix C: Faculty Interview Guide

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking the time to participate in an interview. Please note that not all questions may be relevant to your primary role, and if there are any that you cannot or prefer not to answer, we can skip. Before we begin, please confirm permission to begin recording.

Your personal information is collected under the authority of Section 26(c) & (e) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). This information will be used for the purposes of planning or evaluating a program or activity of BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT). Questions about the collection of this information may be directed to Elle Ting, Research and Projects Officer, 604-412-7680, [eting@bccat.ca](mailto:eting@bccat.ca).

## FACULTY

### BACKGROUND:

2. Could you start by telling me a little about your background/experience working in higher education in BC?
  - a) Are you involved in developing or reviewing course syllabi?

### PRACTICES:

12. Are you aware of any policies related to the distribution of course syllabi at your institution?
  - a) If yes, what do you know about these policies? Are they effective?
  - b) Do these policies address the timing of course syllabi distribution?
  - c) If there are no policies, would it be useful to have a particular policy regarding course syllabi distribution?
13. In your opinion, how effective are course syllabi in supporting student decision-making during registration?
14. From your experience, do you think the timing of syllabus distribution impacts student registration behavior, such as early or late registrations, course drops, or switching courses?
  - a) Can you provide any examples?
15. What patterns have you observed in student behavior related to syllabus availability, such as course attendance, preparedness, or engagement?
  - a) Is the syllabus typically discussed in class? When?
  - b) If discussed: Does discussing the syllabus with students support their satisfaction and success in the course?

16. Course syllabi are often used in transfer credit assessments. With this purpose in mind, is there information that must be included in the syllabus in order for the transfer credit assessment to be completed? (*For faculty in subject matter expert roles*).

17. Students often decide whether or not they are going to be successful in a course before it begins, simply by reviewing the course syllabus. Do you feel that the timing of syllabi distribution affects student outcomes, such as course satisfaction or performance?

a) Based on your experience as a faculty member, when do you think students should receive the course syllabus?

## **CURRENT TRENDS:**

18. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is becoming increasingly important in the design of course syllabi. Are you familiar with any recommendations or policies that require you to include an EDI-related statement or information (i.e. multi-faith calendar, accessibility statement, etc.) in your course syllabus?

a) If yes, how might this information impact student behaviours or classroom culture?

19. Some institutions or instructors allow students to be involved in designing or finalizing course syllabi, often during the first week of class.

a) Have you ever included students' ideas or preferences when finalizing your course syllabus?

b) If yes, how has this contributed to student satisfaction or retention?

## **CHALLENGES:**

20. Based on your experience, what barriers might students face when it comes to receiving course syllabi and essential information regarding their courses?

a) Is timing an issue?

b) Is language a barrier to understanding?

Is format a barrier to success in the course?

21. Based on your experience, how could the process of distributing course syllabi be improved?

22. Do you have any suggestions for policies or practices that could better support students in making informed registration or enrollment decisions?

## **CONCLUSION**

23. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding course syllabi policies and practices?

# Appendix D: Student Interview Guide

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking the time to participate in an interview. This interview will be focused on course syllabus policies and practices. A course syllabus is the section-specific course outline that is distributed to students. The syllabus generally includes information such as the email address and office number of the instructor teaching the course, the content to be covered in class, and assignment deadlines.

Please note that not all questions may be relevant to your specific situation, and if there are any that you cannot or prefer not to answer, we can skip. Before we begin, please confirm permission to begin recording.

Your personal information is collected under the authority of Section 26(c) & (e) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). This information will be used for the purposes of planning or evaluating a program or activity of BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT). Questions about the collection of this information may be directed to Elle Ting, Research and Projects Officer, 604-412-7680, [eting@bccat.ca](mailto:eting@bccat.ca).

## STUDENTS

### BACKGROUND:

3. Could you start by telling me a little about your experience as a student?

### PRACTICES:

4. Are you familiar with when and how course syllabi are distributed at your institution?

5. To what extent does a course syllabus impact your decision to register or remain registered in a course?

6. From your experience, does the timing of syllabus distribution impact your course enrolment, such as early or late registrations, course drops, or switching courses?

a) Can you provide any examples?

7. Does having a course syllabus ahead of the course start date impact your attendance, preparedness, or engagement?

a) Is the syllabus typically discussed in class? When?

b) If discussed: Does discussing the syllabus in class contribute to your overall satisfaction and success in the course?

c) If not discussed: Do you think discussing the course syllabus in class would contribute to your overall satisfaction and success in the course?



8. Based on your experience, when do you think students should receive the course syllabus?

## **CURRENT TRENDS:**

9. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is becoming increasingly important in the design of course syllabi. Do any of your course syllabi include an EDI-related statement or information (i.e. multi-faith calendar, accessibility statement, etc.)?

a) If yes, how has this information impacted your experience in the class?

10. Have you ever had an instructor involve your class in finalizing the details of the course syllabus?

a) If yes, how has this contributed to your satisfaction or enrolment in the course?

## **CHALLENGES:**

11. What barriers have you faced when it comes to receiving course syllabi and essential information regarding your courses?

a) Is timing an issue?

b) Is language a barrier to understanding?

c) Is format a barrier to success in the course?

12. Based on your experience, how could the process of distributing course syllabi be improved?

a) Do you have any suggestions for policies or practices that could better support students in making informed registration or enrollment decisions?

## **CONCLUSION**

14. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding course syllabi policies and practices?

# Appendix E: Participants Listing

**Table 3. Interview Participants**

Participant	Institution Type	Participation in Transfer Credit Assessment Processes
Faculty Member 1	Public University	Yes
Faculty Member 2	Public University	Yes
Faculty Member 3 <sup>13</sup>	Public University	Yes
Faculty Member 4	Public University	Yes
Faculty Member 5	Public College	No
Staff 1	Public Polytechnic	No
Staff 2	Public College	Yes
Staff 3	Public University	Yes
Staff 4	Public University	Yes
Staff 5	Private College	Yes
Staff 6	Public University	Yes
Staff 7	Public University	No
Staff 8	Public University	No
Staff 9	Private University	Yes
Staff 10 <sup>14</sup>	Public College	Yes
Student 1	Public University	No
Student 2	Public University	No
Student 3	Public University	No
Student 4	Public University	Yes - Received transfer credits from high school
Student 5	Public Polytechnic	Yes - Previously completed a university degree in BC
Student 6	Public College	Yes - Previously completed a university degree internationally
Student 7	Public College	Yes - Preparing to transfer to a university
Student 8	Public University	Yes - Previously completed a university degree in BC
Student 9	Public University	No
Student 10	Public University	No

Please note that not all questions may be relevant to your specific situation, and if there are any that you cannot or prefer not to answer, we can skip. Before we begin, please confirm permission to begin recording.

<sup>13</sup> Participant teaches in both diploma and degree programs at a university.

<sup>14</sup> Direct quotations are not available for this participant as a recording was not produced.

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