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Conceptualizations of Teaching in the Higher Education Classroom

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School of the University of Missouri-St. Louis  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in  
Education with an emphasis in Teaching and Learning Processes

May 2022

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this multi-method study was to explore how faculty members, who teach at higher education institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience, view teaching and how those views inform their teaching practice. Teaching beliefs can feel like a messy construct (Pajares, 1992) but are important in determining what informs teaching practice. Pratt (1994) also explains beliefs inform conceptions of teaching practice. The conceptualizations of faculty, more specifically their teaching beliefs, were the focus of this study. Thus, this study investigated the following research questions: Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices? Participants completed an Approach to Teaching Inventory (ATI), answered oral interview questions, shared their course syllabi for analysis, and sent their students an anonymous student questionnaire. Data was analyzed to find patterns and themes to address the research questions using thematic analysis. Findings from this study have implications for higher education institutions and faculty to foster, support, and develop teaching beliefs and practices throughout the faculty member's teaching career.

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## Chapter I Introduction

Historically, higher education has been about attending a university or college where professors impart their disciplinary knowledge to the students because the professors are the experts in the discipline (Ramsden, 1984; Morrison, 2014; Trautwein, 2018). This depiction of education, where the professor holds all the knowledge, is often referred to as “sage on the stage” (King, 1993). The sage on the stage is based on the notion that professors are at the center of education and the only bearers of knowledge. There is an assumption that higher education is still practiced this way where the faculty are the sole bearers of knowledge. However, faculty in the 2020s and beyond need to innovate their teaching. Three key reasons for this needed change are these: students’ needs are beyond information acquisition, they are more aware of teaching methods, and they are a more diverse population coming to college.

Learning in higher education is no longer just about learning facts. Because information is now easily accessible via the Internet and mobile devices and society has become more democratic in that student knowledge is more acknowledged and valued, the stage on the sage approach needs to shift to a more inclusive instructional model where the student is a part of the learning experience. This shift in teaching is called the “guide on the side” approach where faculty are facilitators in the learning process (Morrison, 2014; Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Trautwein, 2018). With knowledge at their fingertips via the Internet and mobile devices, students want more from their education than facts and information they can locate on their own, and they want to know how this knowledge applies to their lives.

Today's higher education students have more expectations when it comes to their education. In fact, today's students are aware of diverse approaches to teaching instruction that students 15 years ago were not aware of (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018). This awareness impacts the students' experiences in the classroom. Prior to attending college, many students were exposed to a variety of teaching methods in P-12<sup>1</sup> schools (Shulman, 1987; Hockings et al., 2009). Since students have experienced more diversified teaching approaches, and they are also aware that one type of teaching will not meet all their needs, expectations of learning in the higher education classroom are different today than from previous years. This means that when students attend college, they expect their professors to know and use a variety of teaching approaches, too. Students want an education where professors engage them in the learning process and explain the relevance and importance of the concepts and learning (Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Seemiller, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Seemiller et al., 2019). Higher education faculty members may not be aware of this change and thus may not be meeting the needs of the current learner.

In addition to knowing more teaching methods, today's students are a more exposed student population than previous generations. Seemiller and Grace (2017), who surveyed 1,100 Generation Z college students from 15 various U.S. higher education institutions, found that:

generation Z [Gen Z] has been profoundly shaped by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, a volatile economy, and social justice movements.

While these issues also have affected those in other generations, the historical

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<sup>1</sup> P-12 preschool through high school



context of these individuals is much deeper than those in Generation Z, who may have never known anything different. Through smartphones, broadband Internet access at home, or an online connection at school, Generation Z students have had access to more information than any other generation at their age. (p. 22)

Generation Z students have had more exposure to racism, sexism, poverty, global climate issues, and economic disparity because of advancement in technology. Since Gen Z has more access to information about these tribulations, they also need and want support and direction for how to care for the world (Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Seemiller et al., 2019). The support can come from a variety of places, but one of those places is their education. Since today's students have had diverse and rich life experiences and the students are more savvy "consumers" of their educational needs, faculty members these days additionally have to learn how to best support the students to maximize retention, persistence, and degree completion (Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Gooblar, 2019). When faculty are more aware of what today's students are exposed to and have experienced, they can better help the students navigate their education and lives. Lindholm, professor and associate director of the Higher Institution Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program, studied 36 faculty and their experience with teaching in higher education at a research-focused institution. Lindholm (2004) writes, "Calls for a new generation of faculty that is more demographically inclusive of the diverse populations higher education serves are also intensifying" (p. 603). Lindholm identified there was a need for faculty to be diverse but to also be more aware of the various needs of learners

to best support their education. Faculty, however, may come from a different vantage point than students.

According to qualitative research by several scholars, when faculty earn a graduate degree, many view themselves as academics and not as teachers because much of their own post-secondary education and experience focuses on research and not on learning how to teach (Austin, 2002; Brown; Reybold, 2008; Nevgi & Löfström, 2015). In graduate schools, there is not as much emphasis placed on teaching as there is on learning the content of the discipline (Hockings et al., 2009; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012; Gooblar, 2019). However, education theory posits that content knowledge and teaching knowledge should be held in equal value (Shulman, 1987; Alsup, 2006). Even though graduate programs do not often provide teaching methodology courses, some faculty may have had some form of teaching experience or exposure to teaching in their graduate or undergraduate education, such as a teaching assistantship (Austin, 2002; Lindholm, 2004). When faculty attend graduate school, most of their education about teaching comes from their experience of observing their professors as graduate students, but faculty observing teaching from a student perspective is different from observing teaching from a teacher's perspective. Oftentimes students are not aware of what happens when faculty are preparing their courses or what planning lessons looks like, so the students (future faculty members in graduate school) might not have an adequate picture for all aspects of teaching, including have an adequate understanding or awareness of how to teach their own students using pedagogically sound approaches to teaching.

Since faculty were taught in a different era than current students, what worked for them as learners may not work for their current students, and the methods by which they

learned may not be as effective as more current models. Traditionally, faculty in higher education have used the “transmittal model” of education where the faculty impart their knowledge of their subject or content onto the student, who memorizes and regurgitates this knowledge later (King, 1993; Morrison, 2014). This professor-centric model is prevalent in colleges across the nation (Weimer, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Even within the advancement of technology and resources, faculty may still teach from a standpoint of authority and expertise and may not employ teaching methods that allow for students to discover and process rather than just “receive” information. King (1993), known as the individual to coin the phrase “sage on the stage” in her work as an education professor for many years, says that to encourage student autonomy, faculty would need to shift from the teacher-centric “sage on the stage” to learner-centric “guide on the side” where faculty are facilitators of learning. When faculty move away from a teacher-centric perspective, their courses are centered around the learning and the learner and not the facts or the professor.

One way faculty may approach teaching is with a perception that content knowledge is the only knowledge requisite to teach in the higher education classroom (Morrison, 2014; Nevgi & Löfström, 2015; Trautwein, 2018). This approach, called teacher- or content-centered teaching, is when teaching is a transmission of learning from the professor to the student, similar to the sage on the stage approach (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi, A, & Ashwin, 2006; Weimer, 2013). Conversely, a student-centered approach to teaching is when teaching is seen “as facilitating student learning or students’ knowledge-construction processes or as supporting students’ conceptual change” (Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell et al., 2006, p.

286). A student-centered approach to teaching focuses more on the learning and the student and less on the content and professor. Further along what might be considered a spectrum is learner-centered teaching, which is about the learning being at the center of the classroom. Like the student-centered model, that approach to learning may be somewhat different from how faculty were trained or what they know about teaching. Maryellen Weimer, an experienced educator for 35 years, the author of several books, and editor of *The Teaching Professor* (a monthly newsletter on teaching in higher education), states that learner-centered teaching “produce[s] a different kind of learning, developing learning skills, and move[s] students in the direction of autonomy and independence as learners” (Weimer, 2013, p. viii). Another distinction between student-centered teaching and learner-centered teaching is recognizing that faculty are also learners in the classroom, thus learner-centered teaching includes the faculty in the learning process with the students. Experts in teaching in higher education contexts are calling for a shift from the sage on the stage to guide on the side (King, 1993; Trowler and Cooper, 2002; Morrison, 2014; Weimer, 2013; Trautwein, 2018; Matthews, 2019). The experts are asking faculty to be more aware of the students’ needs as learners and consider adjusting their teaching approach accordingly.

Before digging deeper into various approaches of teaching, the concept of learning should be defined. Lattuca and Creamer (2005), professors whose research pertains to higher education faculty, define learning as “the personal and shared construction of knowledge. Learners are active participants in their worlds who seek to create personal meanings of their experiences” (p. 4). Lattuca and Creamer explain that learning is a construction of ideas, and information is shared between students and

faculty. Faculty need to think through their expectations of learning because their view of learning impacts their pedagogy and this perspective might shape how they see their students, deliver their content, and value their courses (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Kreber, 2010).

Traditionally, professors in higher education teach with a lecture-based approach (King, 1993; Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell et al., 2006), and solely lecturing has not been found to be a best practice approach to learning (Shulman, 2006; Weimer, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Since information is no longer controlled by one individual as the sage on the stage and is easily accessible, faculty need to shift their approach to teaching in higher education for a few reasons (Morrison, 2014; Trautwein, 2018). First, in the past university education was for the elite, but education today is for the masses and more accessible. Second, there are more and more students being classified as underprepared for college who need more emphasis on how to learn. Encouraging faculty to change their teaching is somewhat of a tricky situation because a change in teaching implies that the way professors were taught was not the best or most effective, and it could inadvertently communicate that faculty have been teaching wrong (Steinert, Cruess, Cruess, & Snell, 2005; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007; Brownell & Tanner, 2012).

Austin (2002), who contributed to a longitudinal study of about 100 participants that focused on the graduate student experience, states that “Although teaching and research responsibilities surely can provide training opportunities for the future faculty, these assistantship roles sometimes are structured more to serve institutional, or faculty needs than to ensure a high-quality learning experience for graduate students” (p. 95).

Austin continues to say that if a graduate student continues to teach the same class, they will never experience (or be taught) how to differentiate their approach to teaching. If the graduate school professors did not differentiate their approaches to teaching, then the graduate students may not be adopting differentiated teaching methods. Since many faculty members were taught solely in lecture-style classes (Nevgi & Löfström, 2015; Hermanowicz, 2016), they may emulate only that style of teaching, use this methodology in their own classes, and continue the cycle of not meeting the needs of every learner because they do not know or have not learned how to vary their approaches to teaching.

Because of the faculty's varied experiences with, exposure to, and approaches to teaching, it is important to first learn how faculty view themselves as instructors. Depending on the institution where they work, faculty might consider themselves academics and researchers before identifying as teachers. As stated in Marrs' (2009) work in the *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, the focus on institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience is a focus on "undergraduate teaching rather than the production of scholarly research. Course teaching loads are heavier than at most larger universities, and research expectations are minimal." Those liberal arts colleges that, by definition, prioritize teaching in the faculty workload should theoretically hire faculty who have more knowledge, experience, or exposure to teaching.

Conceptualization of teaching is complex, and beliefs about teaching are as unique as the individual teaching. For this study, I explored how faculty's conceptualizations and beliefs of teaching inform their teaching approaches and methods, in the classroom. Do faculty solely teach to deliver their content and impart knowledge to

their students instead of teaching to help students learn (King, 1993; Reybold, 2008; Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan, 2013)? Since professors are not expected to have had formal education surrounding best practices for teaching in higher education, I wanted to learn more about how they approach teaching and what they believe about teaching and learning. To understand more about how faculty view teaching in higher education, I studied how faculty conceptualize teaching and how this conceptualization informed their teaching—specifically in liberal arts institutions.

### **My Professional Background**

As I investigated how experiences may have helped to form a faculty member's teaching practice, it was also relevant for me to acknowledge my own experiences. I have taught for 13 years. I started my teaching career in elementary education and then moved into higher education. My undergraduate degree is a BA as a double major in Education (K-12) and Sociology, and my master's degree is an MEd in Education with a special emphasis in teaching reading K-12. Both of my degrees have provided me with formal training in education to teach students in K-12. When I started working at a Center for Teaching and Learning at a small liberal arts institution, I was surprised to learn that faculty are not required to have prior teaching experience or formal training to be hired to teach in higher education.

This realization was a big driving force in my interest to explore how faculty learn how to teach, particularly if they received no formal training. While working in the center, I heard students share their frustrations about faculty who do not teach like the students think teachers should, and I heard faculty share their frustrations about today's students as not being the same type of studious students they had been themselves or like

students were in the past. Both perspectives have led me to explore more about what teaching means for faculty and students.

These experiences have also led me to want to explore more about how perceptions of learning and experiences with teaching inform faculty's approach to teaching. If faculty have had no formal training, how have they developed what teaching looks like in their classrooms? How do faculty, who are not expected to have formal training in education, teach students who, prior to entering the higher education sector, have had teachers that have been formally trained in education? Since I have been formally educated as a P-12 teacher, I believe this training might be a missing piece in higher education. Faculty are not always provided with explicit opportunities to identify and reflect on teaching practices or approaches to teaching like I have had as an undergraduate student or as a practicing elementary teacher.

I have never conducted a formal study on this topic, but I became interested in learning more about the faculty's conceptions of teaching because of my own work in a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and because of my background in teaching. I have worked in a CTL for seven years in various positions directly and indirectly working with faculty and students. While there, I have seen various approaches to teaching and have wondered how faculty form their approach to teaching, especially if they have never been formally taught how to teach. In addition to working with faculty, I have worked with students. The students have confided in me about being frustrated by how the faculty teach and do not engage them or meet their needs as learners.

Prior to working in higher education, I taught in an elementary school for six years in various roles as an assistant and lead teacher. Prior to that I earned my bachelor's



and master's degrees, both in Education. These experiences inform my perspective and understanding of how to teach and the way I conceptualize teaching. I have been formally trained as an educator which, in turn, has formed my teaching philosophy and approach. My teaching philosophy is based on my years of teaching experience and academic study. Because I have found that students learn best in a community where they feel safe and comfortable in my years of teaching both elementary and college-aged students, I believe it is important to foster a learning environment where students feel valued and respected. I also believe this learning environment should challenge and encourage each student to meet personal goals, as well as my, the educator's, expectations. To achieve this supportive and inclusive learning environment, I believe in a hands-on and learner-centered teaching approach.

Since faculty at my institution are not expected or required to have formal teaching training, I noticed they had a range of teaching experiences. Some faculty members did not begin their careers in academia but rather came into teaching after working in the industry; thus, they often had little or no prior knowledge of teaching practices. Some faculty have been formally trained in education, specifically those who came from the field of education, and teach their field of study to college students. Other faculty worked in a career, went to graduate school for another discipline, and now teach in the new discipline. Due to the variety of teaching backgrounds, I wondered: What informs a faculty member's approach to teaching? This study aimed to learn what faculty believe about teaching and instruction and how these perspectives inform their approaches to teaching.

### **Theoretical Framework**

When learning about faculty and their concepts of teaching, I explored various theories, including influences and impacts using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky, in particular, was appropriate since his work focuses on the impact that social construction has on an individual. Vygotsky believed in the sociocultural approach to construction of self in that the individual's identity is shaped and structured by the environment, other people, or the surroundings of the individual (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Penuel and Wertsch, 1995; Holland and Lachicotte, 2007). Vygotsky's work provided nuanced interpretations of influences and factors that impacted how faculty have in how their own beliefs about teaching were and are formed, as well as the faculty's approach to teaching.

The second part of my theoretical framework was based on Trautwein's, Pratt's, and Pajares' works. To understand more about what it means to be a faculty member in higher education, Trautwein and Pratt provided context of what it means to be a faculty member in higher education. Trautwein, who conducted a study about professors' identity as teachers, argued that it is important to understand the three traditional roles for faculty: research, teaching, and service (Trautwein, 2018). Trautwein's work focuses on the evolution of faculty from the first year of teaching to becoming a seasoned professor. Using Trautwein's work, I explored these various roles of faculty to inform data collection and analysis and understand more about faculty's stance on teaching. In addition to Trautwein, I referenced Pratt (1992) because Pratt states "that conceptions of teaching inform, and are informed by, the practice of teaching" (p. 206). Pratt discusses the reciprocal relationship of teaching and believes that what one believes about teaching

influences the teaching practice and the teaching experiences influence what one believes about teaching. Also, Pratt discusses the evolution of teaching in that as faculty learn more about teaching, their practice of teaching changes. Pratt (1992) also says, “To ‘teach’ means different things depending upon one’s values, beliefs, and intentions” (p. 203). Here Pratt acknowledges the various influences that inform faculty’s teaching. For example, if a faculty member teaches at a private, religious institution, there could be influence from the institution that informs how the faculty teaches, or there could be influence from the faculty’s own religious beliefs about how they view students which in turn informs the way they view students and thus ultimately, how the faculty teach. From a study of interviewing 253 adults and teachers around the world, Pratt concluded that the five components of teaching are: content (what has to be learned); learners (nature of the adult learners and the learning process); teachers (roles, functions, and responsibilities); ideals (purpose of adult education); and context (external factors that influence teaching and/or learning). Pajares (1992), a scholar who focuses on teacher and preservice teachers (PST), explored the construct of teaching beliefs and the importance of knowing what the beliefs are and where they come from. Pajares’ work defined teaching beliefs and unpacked the notion that teaching beliefs can be a messy construct, and he argues that teaching beliefs need to be understood to be an effective teacher.

To further this study, I used Alsup’s (2006) work which explored the layered complexity of becoming a teacher and the importance of education professional development in identifying beliefs about teaching from a PST perspective. Alsup (2006) wrote how discourses impact the development of how a PST sees themselves as a teacher. While Alsup’s work focused on PST’s, her work provided a framework to

analyze how faculty view teaching and learning. Alsup (2006) discusses how a professional teaching identity is not fully developed until an individual engages in discourse about their teaching. When discussing teaching philosophy, Alsup (2006) realized that she, as do many PST's, generated a teaching philosophy that used appropriate discipline specific language that sounded like the philosophy of a teaching professional, but she recognized that the philosophy cemented for her when she had to engage in discourse about her teaching philosophy and experience. What Alsup (2006) discussed could provide a context for how faculty develop and see themselves as teachers. In addition, Alsup's work could provide structure and information in how the discourses we have with those surrounding us, whether it is our colleagues, family, or friends, impact the way we develop, or structure, our beliefs about teaching and learning.

The final theory that is part of my theoretical framework is using the work of Lee S. Shulman, a professional who structures much of his work on the importance of understanding that teaching is a profession and not just a practice. Discussing the complexities of teaching and the professional field, Shulman (2005) states, "In the work of a professional, the performances of practice must not only be skilled and theoretically grounded; they must be characterized by integrity, by a commitment to responsible, ethical service" (p. 18). He argues that professionals do more than practice their craft. In fact, Shulman (2005) says:

Professional education is about developing pedagogies to link ideas, practices, and values under conditions of inherent uncertainty that necessitate not only judgment in order to act, but also cognizance of the consequences of one's action. In the presence of uncertainty, one is obligated to learn from experience. (p.19)

Shulman also defines professional teaching as part content knowledge, part general pedagogical knowledge, as well as content-specific pedagogical knowledge. Shulman (1986, 1987) termed “pedagogical content knowledge” to explore how teachers use content within their teaching regardless of the grade level. He also discusses how knowledge is an integral part of teaching regardless of the level of learner. Shulman’s works consist of the complexity of teaching where the professional has to know their craft, apply the theory, and be pedagogically sound. By applying what Shulman explains about the professionalism of teaching to the dataset, I explore whether faculty approach their teaching with more emphasis on teaching, content, or both.

Vygotsky, Trautwein, Pratt, Pajares, Alsup, and Shulman all provide different but complementary perspectives of exploring faculty’s conceptualizations on teaching in higher education because they each explore the complexity of teaching. Each of these perspectives provides insight into how teaching is not solely about standing in front of students and sharing content knowledge, but rather teaching is about recognizing the diversity of the learner and learning style, knowing the content, understanding the physical learning environment, realizing the impact of the knowledge, engaging in discourse as an educator, and recognizing the learner’s educational experiences. These frameworks helped me analyze the data, find connections to faculty’s perceptions of teaching and who they are as educators in addition to how they view learning, and provide a deeper understanding of how faculty identify themselves as educators, how they approach teaching, and what they believe about teaching.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the teaching beliefs and styles of teaching of faculty who work at institutions in the United States that deliver a liberal arts experience. This study investigates what faculty think about teaching and how what they think about teaching and the influences that inform their teaching practice.

***Research Questions***

The research questions guiding my study are:

- Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching?
- How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices?

**Overview of Methodology**

This mixed method research study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2011), which used qualitative and quantitative data collection, explored conceptualizations of teaching among faculty in liberal arts colleges and universities. Data sources included interviews, an Approach to Teaching Inventory (ATI), course syllabi, and student questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data.

***Significance of the Study***

The significance of this study was to learn more about how faculty, who have had limited exposure to pedagogical scholarship and formal teacher training about research-based best teaching practices, explain and describe their understanding and how they approach teaching their students and the subject within their courses. In addition, this study sought to explore if and how an instructor's understanding of teaching might frame the students' learning, specifically at a liberal arts college where more emphasis is

traditionally placed on an instructor's teaching performance rather than on their scholarly efforts. Finally, learning more about how faculty conceptualize teaching can offer an understanding to their teaching, especially with students who have most likely had experiences with P-12 teachers who used active, engaging learning techniques in their teaching.

The exploration of how some faculty view teaching to better understand what happened in their classes and how that view might impact students' learning and experiences is worthy of further study (Kember, 2000). The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) by Trigwell and Prosser (2004; 2006) was the data collection point for faculty's perceptions of teaching. In addition to the ATI, interviews of faculty were conducted and their course syllabi were collected and analyzed to provide more of an understanding about how faculty conceptualize teaching. To grasp the students' perspectives about teaching and learning, student questionnaires were distributed to the participants' students. Ultimately, my study explored the faculty's perspectives of teaching in higher education and their approaches to teaching.

Given the lack of research about what faculty believe about teaching in higher education and the growing demands of students' perception of what they need as learners, exploring more about faculty's understanding of teaching and their own approaches to teaching was imperative.

#### Delimitations

Delimitations are factors or parameters that I can control within the scope of my study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The boundaries that I set for my study are:

- The study was confined to higher education institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience.
- The participants were tenured and non-tenured, full-time faculty, or visiting or adjunct faculty.
- The research collection occurred January 2021 through May 2021.

### ***Researcher assumptions***

Since I hold a bachelor and master's degree in education and have extensive professional development and formal training in educational scholarship and pedagogy, I recognize that other higher education faculty members may not share my same background and therefore may not have had the same training in classroom management, teaching pedagogy, and best teaching practices. However, this does not mean that faculty who have not had formal training as a teacher do not have effective teaching practices, so I remained open to alternate pedagogies and methods of student engagement when I collected and analyzed the data.

I also assumed that the picture a faculty member shared during an interview may or may not reflect the actual teaching practice. It is, after all, human nature to want to put one's best foot forward. Ultimately, I am aware that there may have been a disconnect between what participants reported and how I interpreted the data.

### ***Operational Definitions***

- CTL – Center for Teaching and Learning that supports faculty in their professional development.



- Faculty or Professor – is used to describe an individual who teaches in higher education.
- Liberal arts college – is an institution where students seek a 4-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) degree where teaching is a priority before research.
- Teacher – in this study, is an individual who teaches in P-12 schools.

### Summary

This study aimed to explore conceptualizations of teaching in the higher education classroom by collecting and analyzing data from faculty and students. This data was collected through interviews, an ATI, syllabi analysis, and a student questionnaire. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The purpose of this study was to learn more about how faculty view teaching and how this view informs their approach to teaching.

## Chapter II Literature Review

A picture of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century classroom depicts a professor standing in front of students conveying information to them (Austin, 2015). The professor is the center of the learning while the students face the professor waiting to hear the next piece of information. Knowledge has been passed from the professor to the students. Fast forward to today's higher education classrooms, over 700 years later, and there is often the same scenario. The faculty are still in the front of the room dispensing the information. So, if knowledge of learning and access to knowledge has changed, how have faculty and students evolved?

Today's students prefer intrapersonal learning (Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Seemiller et al., 2019). In a study comparing U.S. and Brazilian students, which included over 1,000 participants from 32 institutions, Seemiller, Grace, Dal Bo Campagnolo, Mara Da Rosa Alves, and Severo De Borba (2019) found U.S. Generation Z students preferred methods of learning that were intrapersonal and experiential (hands-on). Since today's students tend to learn more independently, often while observing someone do something first and then trying it out, faculty need to be aware of today's current learner preferences in order to be the most effective professors. If, on the one hand, students perceive learning methods as varied, and if on the other hand, faculty only teach the way they were taught or think they should teach, there is a disconnect between faculty and students about teaching. Literature and research which identify this disconnection between student perception of learning and faculty's approach to effective teaching is limited, especially in relation to how faculty view teaching and how that may

inform their teaching. Thus, this study provides key insight into a gap present in the literature.

### **Teaching in Higher Education**

In higher education, there are several types of institutions. Two distinct and mainstream models are research institutions and institutions that provide a liberal arts experience. A research institution emphasizes research, and faculty are expected to produce new knowledge that supports society and the planet (Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000; Austin, 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014). According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities website, a liberal arts institution is an “undergraduate education that promotes integration of learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum, and between academic and experiential learning, in order to develop specific learning outcomes that are essential for work, citizenship, and life.” The focus of the institution is on the education of its students. Therefore, one would expect a liberal arts institution to focus more on teaching to provide a better learning experience for its students.

While the literature does not clearly define the word “faculty,” since there are so many classifiers, there are three distinguishing roles that are associated with faculty position in higher education: teaching, researching, and service [administration] (Kreber, 2010; Darby & Newman, 2014; Trautwein, 2018; Gooblar, 2019). Each of these roles’ definitions differ for each institution, and the emphasis of each role is dependent on the institution as well, but for the purpose of this study, the roles are defined in the following manner. The role of teaching means instructing college courses. Research includes conducting studies internally or externally, publishing books or journal articles, and presenting at conferences and/or to the institution community. Service includes the work

faculty do to support the institution, whether that is to serve on a committee, attend internal workshops, participate in institution assessment, or work on institutional projects.

The priority of the three roles can be influenced by the university or college where faculty work. For example, at a large research institution, faculty might be expected to conduct more research than teaching and may have a teaching assistant or graduate student to assist with the teaching of courses (Austin, 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014). By having this support to teach their courses, faculty would be able to focus on their research and to publish and/or present. While faculty at a liberal arts college would still be expected to research and publish, the priority of the institution would be encouraging teaching and, therefore, making sure the education programming meets the needs of the students (Lindholm, 2004; Brownell & Tanner, 2012). At a liberal arts institution, teaching is often the primary role of faculty, so faculty members would be the individuals present in the classes teaching the content. Theoretically, an institution that provides a liberal arts experience would support and develop faculty members' teaching beliefs and potentially help them develop this perspective.

Prior to working in higher education, faculty might have been in the industry workforce, and they would have earned their graduate degrees in their field. A future career in academia may not have been a known career path at the time of the faculty member's graduate schooling; thus, their education may not have adequately prepared them for each of the three roles (Hilton, 2014; Trautwein, 2018). There is research and debate about the need for graduate programs to include teaching methods courses or have more socialization into the professoriate field (Austin, 2002; Reybold, 2003; Hemanowicz, 2016), but this is challenging because many individuals who become

higher education faculty are not aware that they will take this career path when they are in graduate school.

When P-12 teachers learn how to teach, they often take courses in their undergraduate or graduate programs that provide a foundation of theorists, pedagogies, methodologies, and perspectives about best practices and strategies for teaching. Upon completion of their programs, P-12 teachers should have insights, strategies, and theories about effective teaching and classroom management (Shulman, 1986; Fanghanel, 2007). However, when they go into a classroom, the practices they learned are often overpowered by stress or hardships during the first-year teacher experiences, so the teacher then reverts to how they were taught (Alsup, 2003; Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Nesje et al., 2018; Trautwein, 2018). This “retrospection” happens when teachers are so stressed that they cannot remember all they learned in their undergraduate and graduate programs. But as first-year teachers continue to teach and grow, they begin implementing the methods they learned and improve their teaching practice. The difference for P-12 teachers and higher education professors is that P-12 teachers have continuous pedagogical development in teaching philosophy and pedagogy, and professional development is often an expectation of their schools (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). Professional development is often required of teachers to maintain their certification, and sometimes the professional development is provided by the institution or incentives are given to individuals who seek professional development elsewhere.

Higher education faculty are not always aware that teaching students means meeting the needs of the student beyond teaching them content and the classroom

environment. Alsup (2006), a teacher research educator, studied six preservice teachers and learned how the significance of having a teaching philosophy impacted the effectiveness of the PST. Alsup (2006) stated that teaching “involves the emotional, spiritual, and even physical aspects of the individual” (p. 19). Alsup explains that teaching extends beyond sharing facts and information with the students. Teaching includes recognizing that students are multifaceted; therefore, the teacher needs to recognize all parts of educating students’ social, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. While Alsup’s study focused on PST’s, her work relates to teaching in higher education in that it links to the professors’ need to be aware that teaching is not just about delivering content. If faculty are teaching the students in the same way they were taught when they were students and in ways that are not relevant to current learners’ needs, there may be a disconnect between what is being taught in the classroom and the students’ perception of what learning looks like.

Without formal education about how and why to teach, faculty members may go through the motions of teaching without focusing on, or being aware of, the needs of the learner (King, 1993; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). If faculty do not have a strong understanding of how to teach effectively by diversifying their teaching approach or how to work with all student levels (honors or underprepared) students, then faculty may have a “knowledge gap” (Severs, 2017) that hinders their teaching and the students’ learning. An assistant professor of English, Severs has contributed to the field of teaching underprepared students. Severs (2017) argues that even if faculty do not teach a course specifically for underprepared or developmental students, faculty will still have to teach developmental students as underprepared and developmental students take a range

of courses. Thus, Severs argues the importance of faculty learning how to vary their teaching to include all learners.

The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI), created by Trigwell and Prosser (2004), was created as a way to learn more about whether faculty use a teacher-centered or learner-centered approach to teaching in higher education. Trigwell and Prosser (2004) surveyed faculty to complete 16 statements on a scale of 1 (only rarely) to 5 (almost always) that included guiding questions relating to various categories identifying particular phases of instruction. They collected the data by asking faculty to complete the Approaches to Teaching Inventory. The questions were categorized into five categories of approaches to teaching. Those categories are: a teacher-focused strategy with the intention of transmitting the information to the students; a teacher-focused strategy with the intention that students acquire the concepts of the discipline; a teacher/student interaction strategy with the intention that students acquire the concepts of the discipline; a student-focused strategy aimed at students developing their conceptions; and a student-focused strategy aimed at students changing their concepts (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004, p. 413). Further exploration of the impact of professors' approaches to teaching can be found in Trigwell and Prosser's (2004) work which explored what happened to faculty who took a more student-centered approach to teaching as opposed to a faculty-center approach. Trigwell and Prosser (2004) found that individuals who used a more student-centered approach helped improve student learning. When faculty acknowledge their understanding of and approach to learning and teaching, they will gain a more informed perspective of how to work with students beyond just imparting their expertise to the students. How faculty view themselves as educators will impact their teaching methods,

their relationships with their students, and their ability to thrive in the classroom (Shulman, 1986; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004; Lattuca & Creamer, 2005; Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell et al., 2006; Fanghanel, 2007; Kreber, 2010; Morrison, 2014).

Because lecture may have been the only, or predominant, teaching method when faculty were students themselves, it is no surprise that they often rely heavily on this method (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999; Åkerlind, 2003). Lecture is not a bad or wrong way to teach; however, this approach to teaching needs to be updated and supplemented with other methods of instruction (King, 1993; Morrison, 2014). Since today's learners prefer observation and application (Mohr & Mohr, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018), they need opportunities to see and do the learning. Much of the work of Lee S. Shulman, an educational psychologist and educator who has been the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has been centered on teaching. He argues that teaching is a profession and coined the phrase "pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman and Shulman, 2004). To explicitly include students in the classroom experience in higher education courses, Shulman (2005) argues, in addition to adding hands-on education, faculty should teach more seminar style courses, so students can apply their learning and be more engaged, learn even more about the content, and connect with their peers while learning. When faculty members learn how to diversify their teaching from one method to various methods, they provide opportunities for the students to engage with the material and to create ways in which their students feel successful. Furthermore, Shulman (1986) states that an emphasis on content and knowledge communicates that pedagogy and classroom management do not seem pertinent or important. When the emphasis is placed on the



amount of time an individual has had in the discipline and not on their ability to teach, then the question must be asked: Are they engaging as professors? Are they able to teach and reach the students to meet their needs as learners? If emphasis is placed more on the content and knowledge and less on the pedagogy or profession of education, then students' learning may suffer. Faculty need to have a balance of being experts in their field and having an identifiable and effective teaching approach to meet the needs of today's learners.

Within the balance between discipline expertise and engaging teaching, there also needs to be a balance between meeting the needs of the faculty as they develop their teaching beliefs while at the same time learning best practices as experts in their field. Alsup (2006) argues that the importance of training future educators is being aware of their needs as learners and states that "holistic teacher education advances the radical notion that teachers are people" (p.19). In her research about preservice teachers, Alsup (2006) explains that teachers should be treated as humans who have emotional, social, and physical needs which should be addressed during their teacher training instead of an emphasis on how to deliver content. Since there is limited research about higher education faculty's development of their teaching self or identity, Alsup's work is instrumental in learning how best to nurture faculty in developing their own professional teaching identity. For example, when faculty first enter a classroom, they should also have the support of being treated as humans first, while simultaneously learning about how to teach. Meeting these basic needs of the faculty would ensure they would be receptive to learning more about pedagogy and best teaching practices. Recognizing that

the faculty are more than just research producers would support their own approach to teaching and learning which, ultimately, would support their students' learning.

Shulman and Shulman (2004), whose research focuses on teachers' professional development, identify that the balance between teaching content knowledge and having an effective pedagogy is called "pedagogical content knowledge" (p. 257). Pedagogical content knowledge includes practices that strike the balance between content knowledge and effective teaching strategies. The pedagogical content knowledge can appear when faculty and teachers apply methods of teaching within a classroom to provide real life learning opportunities for the students (Shulman, 2005). Pedagogies can be specific to a discipline, but faculty can learn from faculty in different disciplines as to best pedagogical practices.

To improve their approach to teaching, faculty have to be aware of the importance and relation of their approach to teaching and how they structure their courses and assignments. Without the understanding of their approach to teaching, faculty may not have been or be aware of their own philosophy about how and why they teach (Norton et al., 2005; Hockings et al., 2009). Many faculty members, as experts in their fields, have a philosophy behind why they do what they do, but unlike P-12 teachers (who are often encouraged and taught how to develop a teaching philosophy to support their beliefs about teaching and learning), many faculty members often do not have a teaching philosophy (Kreber, 2010; Nesje et al., 2018). In addition to supporting faculty promotion or tenure, teaching philosophies encourage faculty to reflect on their teaching practices and strengthen their identity as professors. Once their beliefs about learning and teaching are established, then faculty learn practices within their teaching and how to best support

learners. An example of this can be found in Kreber's (2010) work. In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine faculty members. According to Kreber (2010), the structure of constructive developmental pedagogy "is to intentionally involve students early on in their studies in an inquiry-based and dialogical process of learning" (p. 189). The how and why of teaching could be learned and established in a variety of ways, including method courses in formal education training, interactions with colleagues or Centers for Teaching and Learning, and professional development workshops and resources. If faculty are aware of how they view teaching and their approach to teaching, then the course, assignments, and instruction could be structured to include a more learner-centered perspective, which would potentially promote student learning and engagement.

There are professional development resources to help faculty members recognize and develop their beliefs about teaching. Such resources are available to assist faculty in understanding how they view teaching and learning and could shape their pedagogy or best practices. Lindblom-Ylänne, et al., (2006) conducted a study of 340 teachers from a variety of disciplines outside of the United States. Their study concluded that "there is evidence that teachers' approaches to teaching are connected with their conceptions of teaching" (Lindblom-Ylänne, et al., 2006, p. 285). Student classroom experience affects persistence, time to degree, and student learning outcomes. This suggests that the importance of faculty recognizing their beliefs about learning and teaching could help establish an effective teaching identity and could impact student retention, persistence, and completion.

### **Conceptualization of Teaching**

Prior to learning best teaching practices, faculty need to be aware of their own teaching approach and perspective of learning. Pratt, a researcher and professor in higher education, conducted a study of 253 teachers around the world to learn more about their view of teaching and learning. He found “that conceptions of teaching inform, and are informed by, the practice of teaching” (Pratt, 1992, p. 206). Pratt (1992) says that “To ‘teach’ means different things depending upon one’s values, beliefs, and intentions” (p. 203). Pratt (1992) also states, faculty “view the world through the lenses of [their] conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world” (p. 204). Pratt says that faculty conceptualize their work from their experiences, and this has an influence on the role they play in students’ learning and understanding. Pratt (1992) said that:

learners experience more than the mechanics of teaching activities, that is, the roles, rules, and procedures of teaching methods. They also experience the teacher’s ideas and judgement as to which information will be examined, what sources will be respected, and whose frame of reference will guide the emergence of knowledge. In short, learners experience all aspects of a teacher’s conceptions of teaching, that is, their beliefs and intentions as well as their actions. What is learned will be determined as much by those beliefs and intentions as by the activities used. (p. 217)

Because faculty design and structure courses, it is therefore even more important for them to be aware of what they believe about teaching since these beliefs inform their approach to teaching and the teaching itself. In other words, if the conceptions (beliefs about) of

teaching are informed by the practice of teaching, then faculty must practice teaching in order to learn how to teach.

Teaching beliefs can be a messy construct, but author and scholar, whose work focuses on teachers and pre-teachers, Pajares (1992) states, “researchers have demonstrated that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content, and comprehension monitoring” (1992, p. 327). Pajares says that teaching beliefs are fundamental in understanding education and educators. Furthermore, Pajares (1992) argues that “teachers often teach the content of a course according to the values held of the content itself” (309). What the faculty believe about their content informs how they teach and what they believe, which correlates with Pratt’s work that concepts inform teaching and teaching informs concepts. There is a cyclical practice to teaching.

Furthermore, Pajares explains the importance of recognizing influencing factors that can inform teaching beliefs when he (1992) states, “attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot” (p. 329). Studying faculty’s teaching beliefs provides an opportunity to learn more about what informs their teaching and how they construct their teaching beliefs. In order to study their beliefs, faculty must be asked questions about what they believe about teaching and learning in order to better understand how faculty learn about teaching.

In addition, this learning can come from a variety of places, people, or experiences that shape how an individual learns. The famous educational philosopher Vygotsky (1978) claims learning begins before individuals attend school and the learner

brings a history of ideas, concepts, or experiences to the learning. Vygotsky also argues that individuals internalize their surroundings and the learned behaviors from the surroundings (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995). When faculty first begin to teach, they may have learned different ways to teach from their own schooling experiences, such as different teaching approaches in classes they enrolled in over their lifetime. Other influences could include their time spent in their industry, with their families, or in any social construct (Trigwell et al., 1999; Ponjuan et al., 2011). They bring their own experiences of what it was like to be a student throughout their lifetime. They bring interactions of working with family members, friends, coworkers, or colleagues to the classroom. All these experiences and relationships influence the faculty member's approaches to teaching.

A primary influence on a faculty member's concepts of teaching and learning comes from their discipline (Lindholm, 2004; Norton et al., 2005; Lindblom-Ylänne et al., 2006; Brownell & Tanner, 2012). As stated by Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan (2013), who are professors and researchers in higher education, graduate school is often "where individuals learn attitudes, actions, and values about the faculty group in their discipline and the profession at large" (p.11). The experiences faculty have during graduate school influence their beliefs about teaching and learning. During a study that analyzed transcriptions of faculty interviews, Dyer & Keller-Cohen (2000) discovered that within their discipline, faculty are expected to maintain status quo with research and continue to be experts in their fields. This means that the faculty's discipline has a significant influence in the faculty member's beliefs about teaching and learning because the faculty are pushed and pulled among the various roles of teaching, research, and service.

Trautwein (2018) conducted a study that explored the professional teaching identity of eight faculty in higher education. To learn how faculty view themselves as teachers, Trautwein studied how faculty described or self-identified into each of these roles. The data was collected through interviews and faculty reflections. The data was analyzed by looking for “change-passages” and was coded using a grounded-theory approach (p. 1000). The codes were then placed into three phases in what Trautwein calls the “different phases in the identity development of academic teachers” (p. 1000). The three phases follow the natural evolution of the teaching identities from first-year professors to seasoned professors and are as follows: Taking on the teacher role, settling into the teacher role, and finding a new teacher role. Taking on the teacher role is at the beginning of a faculty member’s teaching career and has several topics identified within the research that were identified as challenges: “feeling like a student,” “searching for external confirmation,” “challenged by conflict and critique,” and “pretending confidence.” The topics identified in Trautwein’s (2018) research contributed to the idea of taking on the teacher role. Settling into the teacher role is the second phase Trautwein identifies in teaching. This phase is about the faculty becoming more aware of what Trautwein identified for the participants as their “private self” and “teaching self,” one in which they felt more “at home” in the role of a teacher (p.1002). The third phase, finding a new teacher role as a teacher, is where as Trautwein (2018) states, participants “described how they were confronted with the ideas and methods of a learning-centered teaching culture and the changes this brought to their teaching-identity” (p.1005). Trautwein’s work begins to explore the connection between how the ways faculty

identified themselves as educators affected their view of themselves as educators and potentially their approach to teaching.

As stated above, there are several influences that impact what a faculty member believes about themselves as teachers (their professional teaching identity) and their beliefs about teaching and these influences contribute to the fact that their teaching should not be stagnant and will constantly be shaped and reformed. Based on the research, faculty teaching approaches are not fixed and often adapt or change depending on the faculty member's job responsibilities, the institution where they work, and their own sense of teaching identity. According to Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012), who wrote about the development of a professional identity in relation to a graduate student's learning experience, "a professional identity develops over time and rather than being coherent and stable is more likely to be fragmented and prone to change" (p. 748). Other factors that influence or shape how the faculty construct their professional teaching identity include, but are not limited to, institutions' expectations, faculty's personal lives, and societal standards. The literature states that these forces may influence how a faculty member views himself as an educator and shapes their teaching beliefs.

Alsup's (2006) work focuses on how individuals do not recognize their teaching identity until they have had a chance to engage in discourse about the experience. For example, when faculty interact with various individuals, they are constructing their teaching beliefs from these interactions (Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newstead, & Mayes, 2005; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012; Scartezini & Monereo, 2018). These interactions position the faculty member to create narratives which form their professional identities (Alsup, 2006; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012). At the root of



faculty constructing their identity and the dialogical self-theory is social constructivism. Social constructivism is the premise that individuals construct their identity based on social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Without these influences, faculty would not be able to form their beliefs about teaching and possibly their teaching identity.

Even though there are three primary roles of being a faculty member, the demands placed on faculty are increasing as they are frequently being asked to hold a higher course load, complete more administrative tasks, and serve on more committees (Lindholm, 2004; Clark, Hyde, & Drennan, 2013). The higher demands impact faculty members' ability to be better teachers when they are stretched thin due to more institutional expectations, especially as student numbers rise and seasoned faculty retire. If faculty have more demands and expectations on them, what impact do these influences have on faculty's ability to teach well?

The decision as to which role they would prefer to focus on and in what type of institution they work at is ultimately the choice of the faculty member (Lindholm, 2004; Scartezini & Monereo, 2018). The question remains: What impact does a faculty's decisions about which role and type of institution have on the formation of their beliefs about teaching and learning? The literature shows that the choice or priority of role and the type of instruction where faculty work does influence how faculty teach. Since the institutions do have an impact, Lattuca and Creamer (2005) argue that universities and stakeholders need to transition from simply having faculty produce work to encouraging faculty learning. This learning could happen in a variety of ways whether by attending conferences, working with a Center for Teaching and Learning, or having a peer mentor.

Summary

As stated in the literature, teaching in higher education at a liberal arts institution means having more emphasis on and expectation of teaching instead of research.

Theoretically, courses are more inclusive of the learner where a faculty member is teaching the concepts and including the learner in the process. The literature states that how faculty conceptualize learning and teaching impacts their design of their courses, daily classes, and assignments. This study explored how faculty conceptualized teaching in the higher education classroom at institutions that provide a liberal arts experience.

### **Chapter III Methodology**

The purpose of this multi-method study was to understand how faculty conceptualized their approaches to teaching, specifically studying faculty who work at institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience in the United States. The research questions were: Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices?

Since I wanted to learn how faculty understand themselves as educators and how this understanding has impacted their teaching, I explored the way that faculty interacted and derived meaning from their interactions with forces around them (i.e., colleagues, family, institutions where they work). I wanted to know more about how faculty saw themselves as educators. Do they see themselves as teachers? What impact does their conceptions of teaching have on their course design and approaches to teaching? To learn more about the faculty's experience, I collected descriptive, qualitative data in the form of interviews, questionnaires, and syllabi. I also explored more about faculty's conceptualization of themselves as teachers by conducting an Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) with quantitative data. In this chapter, I explain the methods I implemented to address the research questions. I also discuss where my research was conducted and how the data was collected and analyzed. Lastly, I discuss the trustworthiness and limitations of my study.

#### **Research Design**

Because of my work in a Center for Teaching and Learning, and my own training as an educator, I wanted to explore how faculty approach teaching. Merriam and Tisdell

(2016), researchers who write about qualitative research, state qualitative methods are appropriate for those who “are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). I wanted to know more about what the faculty believed about teaching and how they planned their lessons. I also explored how they professionally developed themselves as teachers. In order to do this, I studied individuals and their perceptions of teaching. By learning the faculty’s perspectives through in-depth qualitative inquiry, I gained more insight into my interviewees’ perspectives about teaching and learning. I was not able to generalize the results for all faculty because of the limited number of participants in this study, but I now have more of an understanding of the participants’ experiences and their approaches to teaching.

As for the descriptive research in my study, I wanted to learn more about descriptors of the faculty to find any patterns within the data and descriptions. I wanted to learn more about who the participants were and what descriptors they used to identify themselves on the ATI.

### **Context of the Study**

Since the focus of the liberal arts institution is on the education of its students and not on faculty research, then, in theory, the institution prioritizes the faculty’s teaching and professional development in ways that research-intensive institutions may not. Liberal arts institutions tend to value teaching when hiring faculty. Therefore, I chose institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience as opposed to a research-intensive institution for this study.

As stated in Chapter II, there is limited research regarding faculty's conceptualization of self as teachers in higher education, so I focused the research on faculty who work at liberal arts higher education institutions in the United States. Narrowing the scope of the type of institution removed the context as a variable and allowed for data analysis to focus on the professors' views on learners and ideals.

The participants for this study were selected using nonprobability (Creswell, 1994) and purposeful (Patton, 1990) sampling. According to Creswell (1994), purposeful sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.61). Therefore, because I wanted to learn more about faculty's conceptualizations of teaching, the participants were faculty who had more than one year of experience, taught a range of students, and came from a variety of disciplines. To gather my participants, I first compiled a list of schools that fit the description of a liberal arts school in the United States and used the POD Network listserv to reach out to CTL directors to distribute my email to their faculty via email (Appendix 4). Once I had voluntary participants, I sought approval from those institutions' IRB departments. The participants represented a variety of disciplines including math and natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and creative arts and communication.

This study occurred January 2021-May 2021 amid a global pandemic, so all data were collected online as it was difficult to travel or visit schools due to pandemic restrictions. The interviews were conducted in Zoom, and the ATI was created in Qualtrics and sent to the faculty via email. The student questionnaire was also created in Qualtrics and distributed via email. Lastly, not all the participants shared their syllabi as

many became busy, buried with teaching online. Teaching during the pandemic showed up in the data through the faculty emails and interviews as many faculty expressed they were overwhelmed with their workload while teaching online.

Because faculty interviews only present one part of the story, I sought to triangulate the interview with other data sources—namely the ATI, course syllabi, and student questionnaire responses. For this study, I collected data from institutions that offered a liberal arts experience to learn more about a faculty's conceptualization of teaching in institutions that place a high value on teaching.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (1994) writes that the role of the researcher should include statements about past experiences of the researcher, steps for the study, and how the study will be secure and safe for the participants. Since I studied faculty's conceptions of teaching, I investigated their perspectives (Creswell, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To gain understanding of the faculty, I interpreted and evaluated the findings. Therefore, I was the primary instrument. I decided what questions to ask the participants and how to analyze the data. Because I was the primary instrument, I had to be aware of my biases, so I did not misinterpret the data. In addition to being aware of my assumptions, I needed to be aware of my biases so that if disconfirming evidence appeared in this study, I did not discount it.

### **Data Sources and Collection Procedures**

The data sources for this study include: an Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI), interviews, course syllabi, and a student questionnaire. All these artifacts provided

triangulation during analysis as to how faculty view teaching and approach teaching in their courses (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Data Collection Methods Grouped by Research Question*

Research Question	Data Used to Address Research Question
Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews with participants</li> <li>● Compare the faculty's understanding to the students' perceptions of learning (student questionnaire)</li> <li>● Analyze syllabi</li> </ul>
How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews with participants</li> <li>● ATI</li> <li>● Compare the faculty's understanding to the students' perceptions of learning (student questionnaire)</li> </ul>

***Preparation***

To recruit faculty, I compiled a list of institutions that are in the United States and provide a liberal arts experience, and I sent an email (Appendix 4) to individuals at institutions that meet the above criteria. Using the same email, I reached out to the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network and posted the email to the POD listserv for more participants. Using the snowball effect, I reached out to those institutions, finding a point person, like an individual who works in the Center for Teaching and Learning (or similar office), to email and ask if they would distribute my request seeking faculty who were willing to participate in my study. Once the participants

were identified, I communicated with the institutions for approval to participate in the study. Once approval from the institution was gathered, the ATI was then distributed directly to the faculty member. The ATI was set up and analyzed using Qualtrics. I reminded participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point by communicating to me by email or phone call.

When recruiting participants, I received a variety of responses from the institutions that were contacted. Some individuals willingly sent the email to some possible participants while other institutions requested I submit paperwork to apply to collect data and have a principal investigator (PI) from the institution. Several institutions agreed that since the participants were recruited from outside of the institution via the Professional Organizational and Developmental (POD) Network, those faculty could participate in the study. Finding a larger number of participants was challenging since several institutions shared that their faculty might not participate because data was being collected during a pandemic when faculty members were teaching online, and many were not able to devote extra time to a research initiative. Overall, I contacted at least 35 different institutions using the POD Network to find willing faculty participants. From the institutions that did approve this study, there were 15 faculty participants representing four different institutions that provide a liberal arts experience.

### *ATI*

Once participants were gathered, I distributed an ATI (Appendix 1) to the faculty to collect self-reported data of their approaches to teaching. The survey consisted of 16 questions that faculty answered about their approaches to teaching.



This document provided faculty opportunities to identify their perspectives about teaching in higher education. This survey was collected as the first data point, and I used Qualtrics to generate and distribute it. As stated in Chapter II, the ATI provided additional information about what the faculty believe about themselves as teachers and how they approach teaching. The inventory directions included this statement: “This inventory is designed to explore the way that academics go about teaching in a specific context or subject or course” (Prosser & Trigwell, 2003, p. 424).

The ATI has 16 statements where the faculty indicate their rating on a 1-5 scale. The scale is as follows: 1—this item was only rarely true for me in this subject, 2—this item was sometimes true for me in this subject, 3—this item was true for me about half the time in this subject, 4—this item was frequently true for me in this subject, and 5—this item was almost always true for me in this subject.

### *Interviews*

To learn more about the faculty's stance on teaching, I wanted to hear about their experiences and learn from their vantage point. Conducting interviews allowed for in-depth data collection to come directly from the individuals who were being studied (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In their own qualitative assessment work, Chism & Banta (2007) said interviews are a way “to reveal participants’ thoughts on a topic and can be based on interchanges with a group or an individual” (p. 16). Therefore, interviews were the most direct way to collect data about faculty’s own beliefs about teaching and learning because the participants are the experts of their own experience. There are several ways to conduct interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there are three types of interviews: highly structured/standardized, semi-structured, and

unstructured/informal. This interview continuum allows the interviewer to have complete control of the questions and responses (closed responses) to little control as to how the respondents answer the interview questions (open-ended questions) during the interview process. Closed questions can lead the participant to only focus on what is being asked within the framework of the question, and open-ended questions encourage the participants to share more details about their experiences as opposed to closed questions, which limit the data being collected (Seidman, 2013). When the interviewer makes questions less structured and more open-ended, the interviewee has more rein as to how they respond, thus ultimately making data collection richer and more extensive. Since I wanted to learn as much from the faculty as I could about their perceptions of teaching, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another reason I conducted semi-structured interviews was to have flexibility to ask follow-up questions when a participant's responses were vague or unclear. I used a list of questions to conduct the interview (Appendix 2), but I was flexible with the order in which the questions were presented and asked follow-up questions when needed. The interviews were conducted in three parts, at three different times, to build rapport with the participants and be able to dig deeper with each interviewee.

#### **First interview.**

The first interview was to learn about the participant as an individual and to build trust with them, so they would be more comfortable with me and answer their questions honestly. The questions were: 1. Tell me a little bit about you, your interests, and passions; 2. Tell me a little bit about where you work; 3. Tell me why you became a professor; 3. Why do you work in higher education?; 4. How did you get into higher

education?; and 5. Tell me about a teacher or professor that you found most memorable or was your favorite. Why? How faculty responded to these questions varied significantly; some faculty shared information about their accomplishments with publishing and scholarly work while others shared about their travels, families, and hobbies. All faculty shared what drew them to work in higher education.

### **Second interview.**

The second interview had eight questions that focused on learning more about faculty's beliefs about teaching. The questions focused where faculty get their teaching resources as well as what influences their approach to teaching: 1. What does teaching in higher education mean to you?; 2. Where do you get your resources for teaching?; 3. What or who influences your teaching style? What is your teaching style?; 4. Have you faced struggles being an academic? If so, what struggles have you faced?; 5. What does the word "teacher" mean to you?; 6. Do you consider yourself a teacher? Tell me more; 7. What is the research environment/expectation in your field for scholarship? 8. Since you began teaching, have you published more or less? Why? Some faculty were able to answer where they get their teaching resources and other faculty were not sure what that meant and needed further clarification. Faculty shared their experiences with teaching and what they have learned since they started work in this field. Some faculty even shared their perspectives about teaching in higher education versus another grade level. The responses to these questions provided some insight into what faculty believe about teaching. Also, faculty were asked to define the word "teacher" and whether they themselves identified as a teacher.

**Third interview.**

The third and final interview was focused on faculty's beliefs about learning. Faculty were asked about their experiences working with students as well as the hardest and easiest part of working with college-aged students. In addition, faculty were asked to share their beliefs about being a professor and what their role is in the classroom.

In addition to conducting interviews and having faculty complete an ATI, I had faculty share their course syllabi.

***Syllabi Analyses***

I collected the nine of the 15 participants' syllabi to find common structures, themes, language usage (keywords and titles) and structures of the syllabi the participants used for their courses. I also compared the syllabi samples of each of the participants to find differences and similarities and possibly make some correlations between the syllabi and their responses to the ATI's and interviews. The analyses of the syllabi are included within the themes of the data.

The reader should note that the syllabus is an educational tool for more information about how faculty might teach, but it is not evidence that that is actually how they teach. The purpose of collecting the syllabi was to learn whether a particular teaching strategy or approach was used, but it is also important to note that just because a strategy or approach was not in the syllabus that does not mean the faculty member never uses a particular instructional practice. It could mean that they are using a template to structure their syllabi, or it could mean that the syllabus did not explicitly include information about the faculty's teaching practices.

***Student Questionnaire***

I asked the faculty participants if they would send out the questionnaire to their students. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain more perspective about teaching and learning from a student's perspective instead of solely collecting the faculty's perspectives about teaching and learning. The student responses are woven throughout the data analysis in Chapter IV.

**Table 2***Data Collection Timetable*

Data	Month/Year	Location	Data Collection Method
ATI	January 2021-March 2021	Online	Collected via Qualtrics survey tool
3 Interviews with faculty	January 2021-April 2021	Face-to-face (virtual)	Each interview was conducted via Zoom
Questionnaires from students	January 2021-April 2021	Online (Qualtrics)	Collected via email using the Qualtrics survey tool
Syllabi from faculty participants	January 2021-June 2021	Online via email	Collected from the faculty participant

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Within the data I collected, I looked for commonalities or patterns that helped answer my exploratory questions about faculty's approaches to teaching. To follow an appropriate format for thematic analysis (TA), I used Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012) six-phase approach. The six phases are: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Braun and Clarke (2012) state the research question can be known beforehand, but there are times when the question does not become clear until the data is analyzed. In addition, they discuss the ways in which the data is analyzed, whether from a deductive or inductive standpoint. Top-down or deductive is when the research question drives the analysis of the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), whereas the bottom-up, or induction approach, is when the analysis is driven by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Since TA is about analyzing the data to find patterns or themes that answer the research question or provide insight about an issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), the first step- after the data is collected- is to transcribe and then code the data. Since I conducted the interviews online, I used the transcript feature in Zoom to take all the spoken interviews and transcribe them into documents I could analyze. Once the software transcribed my interviews, I made sure to review the transcriptions and placed emphasis on the text where needed. I also made sure all “ahs” and “ems” were present within the transcription to accurately capture how the participants speak during their interviews.

There are two types of codes: semantic and latent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Semantic codes are codes that come directly from the data; they are exact words or phrases found within the data, but latent codes are codes that have implicit meanings from which the researcher must draw conclusions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Coding should be “inclusive, thorough, and systematic” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 62). Therefore, when I coded the data, I made sure I was consistent with both semantic and latent codes in each of these phases; I read and reviewed the data to code and find patterns or themes. I became extremely familiar with the data that I collected (Seidman, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend looking at the data corpus with consistency and accuracy. This approach means viewing and reviewing the data as a whole for patterns and themes to find connections with research questions. After coding the interviews, data was analyzed to find common themes of the responses with the participants' ATI and their syllabi. The student questionnaires provided the students' perspective of learning and what they believed was the teaching that best supported their learning. This was cross-referenced with what the faculty reported about their approaches to teaching to learn more about what faculty believe about teaching.

To increase trustworthiness while coding, I met with a peer to participate in peer debriefing so I could share what I was thinking and finding in my data with someone else who was familiar with qualitative data. This peer helped me to check my codes to increase trustworthiness and truthfulness. We looked at examples of my codes to make sure that I was drawing conclusions based on what the participant said and not on what I thought they said. These discussions with this peer provided an opportunity for me to make sure that I was not interpreting the data the way I wanted to see it.

After my initial round of coding, I then had three more rounds of reading and rereading the transcripts and codes to reduce my data into meaningful themes that could be supported and analyzed with all data (ATI, syllabi, interviews, and student questionnaires). The ATI analysis provided descriptive statistics. The frequency counts, means, and range of data (Creswell, 1994) were analyzed to find patterns among the participants. Since the primary data collection was the interviews, no other statistical analysis of the ATI was used.

### **Ethical Issues**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the ethical practice within the study comes from the “researcher’s own values and ethics” (p. 261). I included practices that encouraged validity, reliability, and ethics (Merriam, 2009). Since I had multiple data collection points, I used triangulation. I made sure to include my position or reflexivity which was “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p.228).

First and foremost, I made sure that a research proposal was submitted to and accepted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as an appropriate study that did not cause harm to the participants. Seidman (2013) discusses the importance of doing “good work” (p.139). He writes about the necessity of discussing the consent form with the participant and being thorough in ethical research practice. Seidman (2013) also shares that not every ethical issue can be proposed or thought through, but good research is able to identify possible ethical issues and handle them should anything arise. While I did come across unforeseen situations, how I handled the situation was based off the “good work” I have learned, as well as making sure to document everything. I also had an audit trail that showed my decisions, steps, and procedures for my study, data collection, and analysis.

Dependability, also known as reliability, is whether the study can be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There is debate as to whether social science is reliable since the focus is human subjects, but I had the same interview protocol for all my interviews (Appendix 2). This consistency increased reliability. I also maintained consistency in



terms of timing, since I interviewed all the participants within the same timeframe. There was variance in the questions asked because I needed to follow up with each participant differently depending on how they each answered the questions. When participants were not clear in their answer, I probed for more clarification and follow-up for information to make sure that I was being thorough when collecting the data. These strategies helped increase accuracy.

During the interviews, participants shared a part of themselves and became vulnerable (Seidman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so it was important to listen to what they had to say, and I tried to provide a safe and trusting environment where they felt they could open up and share their perspective with me as their interviewer. I also made sure to maintain confidentiality for those interviewed and used pseudonyms and removed identifiers of everyone (Seidman, 2013).

Due to COVID-19, I met with the participants via a virtual platform following guidelines to ensure that the interviews were done in a private and secure online platform, Zoom. I made sure to have a waiting room Zoom, so no one could unexpectedly interrupt. I also made sure to record the interviews within my platform. My Zoom account is a private account that is password protected. If for some reason, the participants did not want to conduct the interviews on Zoom, they were given the option to conduct the interviews by phone. All data collected was saved into a cloud that was password protected on a locked computer to help with safety (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were allowed to remove themselves from the study at any point during the process.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

### ***Limitations***

Limitations within a study are factors or influences that I could not control or determine (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Since my research was dependent upon human participants and their willingness to be interviewed, I was dependent upon humans to collect data. Another limitation with using human participants was their self-reporting or interpretation of real-life events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the interviews, the participants told their perspective of the event which could be inaccurate or a misperception of what happened. This was a limitation within my study. Another limitation was the global pandemic, which impacted how my data was collected; interviews were conducted online as opposed to in person, and I was not able to observe faculty's in-person teaching as most were teaching online. In addition, there were not as many willing participants as hoped for since faculty members felt overwhelmed by what was being asked of them during the pandemic and could not commit to another activity. Finally, there may be a limitation about the prior knowledge that I have from teaching, my experience working with some of the participants, and my experience as a Center for Teaching and Learning Director. All this prior knowledge could skew the interpretation of the data based on my own work and biases.

### ***Delimitations***

Unlike limitations within a study, delimitations are factors or parameters that I can control or enforce on my study to create a scope (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The boundaries that I have set for my study are:

- The study was confined to higher education institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience.
- The participants were tenured, non-tenured full-time, visiting, or adjunct faculty.
- The proposed research collection occurred January 2021 through May 2021.

### **Summary**

The study was designed to learn more about how faculty- who teach at institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience- approach teaching. By learning more about how faculty approached teaching, this study aimed to find out more about what faculty believe about teaching and how that belief might be shown in their courses and demonstrated in their teaching practice. This study addressed the following questions: Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices?

### **Chapter IV Data Collection and Analysis**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn more about higher education faculty and their beliefs about teaching. Since faculty are not always expected to have prior teaching experience when employed in higher education, I wanted to know more about the faculty member's perceptions of teaching. By compiling the data from the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI), interviews, syllabi, and student questionnaires, I explored what faculty believe about teaching. The focus of the study was centered on these research questions: 1. Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? 2. How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices? The following chapter provides the data findings.

#### **Research Data Collection**

The primary instruments for this study were the ATI surveys and the interviews. The secondary instruments were the syllabi and student questionnaires, which helped contextualize and triangulate the primary data sources to tell a fuller story.

#### ***Universities and Colleges***

There were four institutions represented in this study. All four institutions offer a liberal arts educational experience. Two institutions were small, private institutions while the other two were large, public institutions. All four institutions are in the United States. See Table 3 for more information about these institutions.

**Table 3***Institution Demographics*

Institution Pseudonym	Location	Student population (undergraduates)	Faculty size	Public or private institution
Midwest University	Midwest	2,500	200	Private
Midwest College	Midwest	under 1,000	120	Private
Southwest University	Southwest	under 25,000	380	Public
Northeast University	Northeast	under 1,000	70	Public

*Instructor Demographics*

Fifteen voluntary faculty members representing several academic disciplines, years of teaching experiences, and various levels of degrees participated in this study and included a variety of age ranges and employee roles. The median age of the faculty was 50; the youngest faculty member was 28, while the oldest was 74. There were 14 faculty members who identified as white, while one faculty member identified as Black or African American. There were seven male and eight female participants. The median years of teaching was eight, with the shortest number of years being two and the longest 26; the years of teaching include both part- and full-time teaching roles and represented their time teaching in college and P-12 grades. The faculty participants' positions ranged from full professor to adjunct or visiting professor. Some faculty were tenured while other faculty's institutions did not have a tenure track. The specific departments of the faculty are not mentioned in this study to protect the anonymity of the participants;

participants are referred to by pseudonyms. Rather than associate the participants with specific departments, they were designated into a division. The academic disciplines included Math and Natural Sciences (MNS), Humanities (HUM), Social Sciences (SSCI), and Creative Arts and Communication (CAC). More faculty demographics are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Faculty Demographics*

Faculty Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years teaching	Highest degree	Rank	Position	Level of Course in Study	Academic discipline
April Clark	F	59	18	Doctorate	Professor	Full-time	All	SSCI
Danielle Smith	F	72	26	Doctorate	Visiting fac.	Full-time	All	HUM
Dave Abello	M	28	2	Masters	Instructor	Full-time	100	MNS
Eric Mack	M	65	4	Doctorate	Professor	Full-time	200	SSCI
Hal Schmidt	M	74	7	Doctorate	Assoc. prof.	Full-time	All	SSCI
Hannah Clause	F	37	6	Masters	Instructor	Full-time	All	SSCI
John Hoss	M	40	3	Masters	Assist. prof.	Full-time	100	MNS
Kelly Webster	F	42	15	Doctorate	Professor	Full-time	200	SSCI
Marie Bond	F	49	14	Terminal <sup>2</sup> degree	Assoc. prof.	Full-time	All	HUM
Matt Watts	M	54	13	Doctorate	Professor	Full-time	All	CAC
Michelle Ray	F	50	4	Masters	Assist. prof.	Full-time	All	HUM
Mike Philip	M	42	9	Terminal degree	Adjt prof/ lecturer	Part-time	100	HUM
Samantha Bell	F	62	9	Doctorate	Professor	Full-time	300	MNS
Shelly Hill	F	56	15	Terminal degree	Assoc. prof.	Full-time	All	CAC
Will Geller	M	39	6	Masters	Assist. prof.	Full-time	100	MNS

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the three faculty who chose Terminal degree received a Masters of Fine Arts.

## **Findings**

The following section includes what the faculty believe about teaching. The first part of this section will show the results of the ATI and correlations. The second part of this section will show the themes that came from using a thematic analysis of the participant interviews. After codes were identified, they were then grouped into themes. The last section of this chapter provides triangulation of all these data (the ATI, interviews, syllabi, and student questionnaires) to connect the findings with the research questions.

### ***ATI Findings***

To learn about the faculty's understanding of teaching in higher education, the ATI (Trigwell and Prosser, 2004) (Appendix 1) was given prior to individual interviews. The ATI measures faculty conceptions of teaching using two scales: an information transmission/teacher focused view of teaching (ITTF) and a conceptual change/student-focused view of teaching (CCSF). Lindblom-Ylance et al (2006), researchers who applied the ATI, stated the CCSF approach to teaching is about “seeing teaching as facilitating student learning or students’ knowledge-construction processes or as supporting students’ conceptual change” (p. 286). The ITTF approach to teaching means that faculty “emphasize how to organise, structure and present the course content in a way that is easier for the students to understand” (Lindblom-Ylance et al., 2006, p. 286). The ATI included 16 questions where eight statements were centered on the ITTF perspective, and eight statements were centered on the CCSF perspective (Table 5).

The 16-statement ATI used a Likert scale ranging from “Only rarely” to “Always.” One challenge was that several participants expressed concerns that the ATI statements and Likert scale did not allow the opportunity to answer completely which may have affected how some of the faculty responded. One participant shared during the survey response was:

And speaking of survey development the questions below have at least two issues. First, there is no “never” option even though there is an “always” option, and so this isn’t really a Likert scale even though it’s set up similar to one; “Never” and “only rarely” aren’t the same thing. There’s also no opt out answer if a question doesn’t pertain to the reader or if something is unclear. For instance, question 16 references the students’ ideas, but it isn’t clear to me if this is original ideas or ideas about readings they had and my answer for each of those aren’t the same.

Another participant stated in an email to me, “There was one question that I would have answered ‘Never,’ but the only option was ‘Only Rarely’” (Smith, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

**Table 5**

*ATI Scales and the Related Response Numbers*

ATI Scale	Question number
ITTF	1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13
CCSF	3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16

Directions on the survey instructed professors to complete the survey with one course in mind since teaching different courses or levels can affect the approach to teaching (Trigwell and Prosser, 2004). The courses that professors focused on for their



survey responses varied from 100-level general education courses to an upper-level major course, and some faculty said they thought about all the courses they taught when completing the ATI. This information was asked on the ATI and/or shared during the interviews. When planning for a course, there are many things to consider. For example, the faculty must think about their lesson plan and the smaller pieces fitting into the bigger picture. The faculty must also think about the department and institutional outcomes fitting together. They also think about classroom management techniques and assessment techniques when teaching. There are many layers to teaching, so if faculty are thinking about their courses as one, some questions arrive. Are they distinguishing between the courses when they teach a variety of leveled courses? Are they targeting their teaching approaches specifically for the courses that are unique to the level or considering whether the course is a major or general education course?

**Group results.**

The compiled scores of the ATI are shown in score and percentage (Table 9). The higher the score of the ITTF statements, the more teacher-centered the faculty were classified; whereas the higher the score with the CCSF statements, the more student-centered the faculty were classified. Based on the work of Hood (2009), faculty scores were categorized by percentages; if faculty scored an 80% or more, they were identified as “strongly” teacher or student-centered. If the differences of the scores were 5% or less, the faculty were scored as “mildly” teacher or student-centered with the emphasis on the category with the higher score. Scores with more than five percentage points difference and that did not exceed 80% were categorized as “moderately” teacher- or student-

centered with the emphasis on the higher category. The results of the ATI survey for this study can be found in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*ATI Approach to Teaching Score Prior to Interviews*

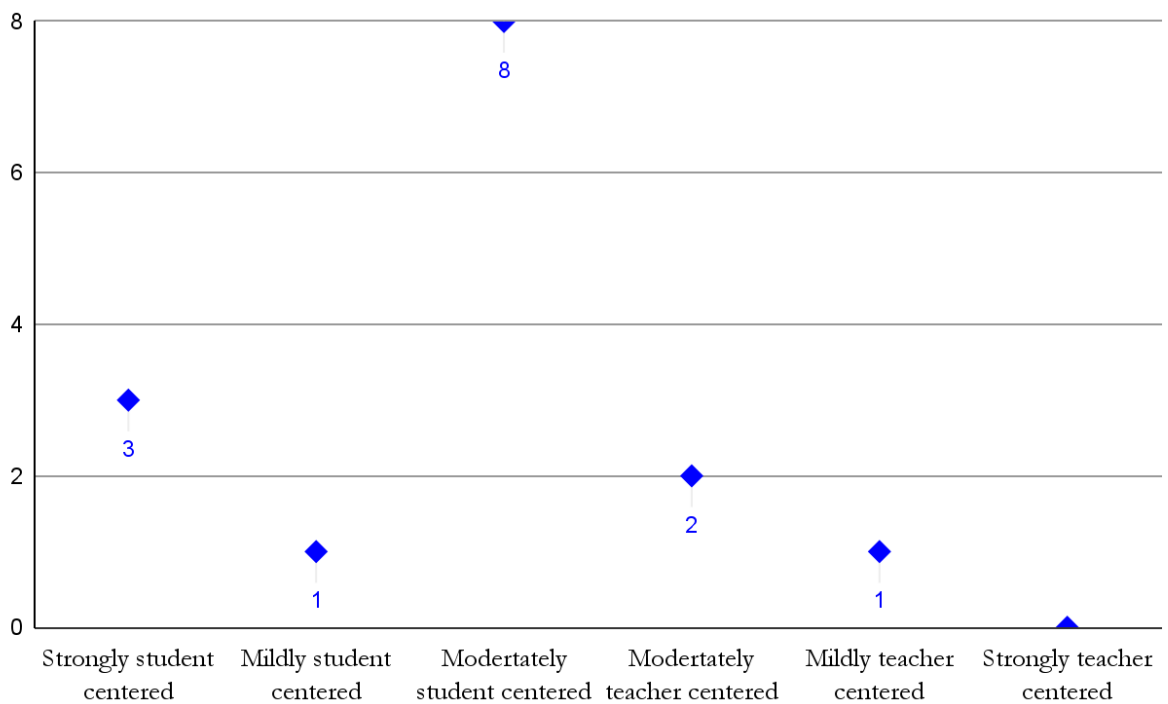
Instructor	Teacher-Centered Questions Score (% of answer/40)	Student-Centered Questions Responses Scores (% of answer/40)	Primary Approach to Teaching (80% score=strong approach)
April	12 (30%)	35 (88%)	strongly student-centered
Danielle	25 (63%)	27 (66%)	mildly student-centered
Dave	27 (68%)	22 (55%)	moderately teacher-centered
Eric	22 (55%)	29 (73%)	moderately student-centered
Hal	25 (63%)	32 (80%)	strongly student-centered
Hannah	19 (46%)	28 (70%)	moderately student-centered
John	25 (63%)	28 (70%)	moderately student-centered
Kelly	27 (68%)	18 (45%)	moderately teacher-centered
Marie	18 (45%)	27 (68%)	moderately student-centered
Matt	26 (65%)	24 (60%)	mildly teacher-centered
Michelle	18 (45%)	34 (85%)	strongly student-centered
Mike	26 (65%)	30 (75%)	moderately student-centered
Samantha	25 (63%)	28 (70%)	moderately student-centered
Shelly	16 (40%)	28 (70%)	moderately student-centered
Will	27 (68%)	30 (75%)	moderately student-centered

When looking at the results of the ATI survey, most faculty’s responses were moderately to strongly student-centered, and all responses had an element of being both student-centered and teacher-centered. Based on the responses the faculty chose on the ATI, three out of 15 were categorized as strongly student-centered (April, Hal, and

Michelle). One faculty was mildly teacher-centered (Matt), and one faculty was mildly student-centered (Danielle). Eight faculty were moderately student-centered (Will, Shelly, Samantha, Mike, Eric, Hannah, John, and Marie), and two were moderately teacher-centered (Dave and Kelly). While no one’s response scores were classified as highly teacher-centered, the faculty still had some identification to teacher-centered teaching. These results are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*ATI Faculty Results*



The faculty who scored higher in the CCSF scale indicates that those faculty are likely to employ more student-centered approaches to teaching. Conversely, those faculty who scored higher in the ITTF scale on the ATI are those likely to implement more teacher-centered teaching. The mode response score for CCSF was 28 out of the highest

score of 40, and the median was 28. The highest score was 35, and the lowest score was 18 for a student-centered approach. The mode response score for ITTF was 25 out of the highest possible score of 40. The median response score was 23. The highest score for teacher-centered approach was 27, and the lowest score was 12. The significance of these classifications was more information to learn how the faculty responded to statements about their teaching approaches while being encouraged to think about one specific course they taught. Based on the statement responses and the scores from the ATI, it appears that, for the most part, participants identify their teaching approaches more as student-centered, not teacher-centered. This relates to how faculty conceptualize teaching. Based on how they identify themselves as educators, the faculty believe they have more of a student-centered approach. The faculty identifying that they have more of a student-centered approach to teaching makes me wonder: Do faculty members know they have a more student-centered approach? And do they employ this approach in their classrooms?

After looking at the faculty demographics and the ATI responses, I tried to find patterns between the participants' demographics and their responses. There were not strong enough patterns to draw correlations or conclusions when comparing the faculty's ATI responses to their demographics. For instance, there were not consistent patterns among the years of teaching, the gender, the discipline, and the age with the ATI results. Therefore, I report no correlation results here.

### ***Student Questionnaire Demographics***

Student demographics were collected from some of the students of the faculty participants in this study. The purpose of this data collection was to learn more about

students' conceptions of teaching. The students' responses are woven throughout the themes of the data. Not all the institutions whose faculty participated in this study approved the use of student surveys, so the data is limited to students from two of the four institutions. There were 29 students who responded to the questions.

All student participants ranged from one to five years of college with the majority being in their fourth year of college. The student participants' majors included Education, Spanish, Creative Media and Film, Biology, Sustainability, Global Studies, Mathematics, Business, Studio Art, Political Science, Theatre, Mechanical Engineering, and Undeclared (Table 10). Many of the students were double majors, which is reflected in the number of majors.

**Table 10**

*Students' Majors*

Biology	4
Business	4
Creative Media and Film	5
Education	4
Geology	2
Global Studies	1
Mathematics	1
Mechanical Engineering	1
Political Science	2
Studio Art	1
Sustainability	4
Theatre	3
Undeclared	1

### *Data Analysis Methods*

After the ATI surveys were completed, faculty participants were interviewed about their beliefs about teaching and learning during three interviews. Each of the three interviews lasted anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes and provided rich data about faculty's perspectives of teaching and learning in higher education at institutions that offer a liberal arts experience. Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and coded.

Since all the interviews were held virtually via Zoom, they were recorded in Zoom while I took handwritten notes. The interviews were then transcribed using the Zoom software. Afterwards, I cleaned up the transcriptions to make sure the participant's ideas were accurately captured and represented with the correct spacing, punctuation, and emphasis. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were then coded.

In the initial round of coding, I identified 262 codes. The process of the initial round of coding included coding the interviews digitally in a Word document. I then printed the codes, cut up the codes, and sorted them into like ideas. This resulted in 21 categories with 141 subcategories.

From there, I looked holistically at the categories to find ways to collapse the codes and categories to reduce the codes while still representing the participants' ideas about teaching and learning. The second round of coding allowed me the opportunity to reduce the codes and only use codes that correlated with the research questions. To do this, I combined like codes within the categories to eliminate duplicates and to help clarify the subcategories even more.

The codes were then grouped together to form themes. This resulted in four total themes and the codes that comprise them, presented in Table 11.

**Table 11**  
*List of Themes and Codes*

Themes	Codes
Influences to teaching	Own education experiences inform teaching Institutional practices inform teaching Pandemic influenced the learning environment Curriculum resources inform teaching Perceptions of college students Ability level of student influences course design
Student engagement	Fostering curiosity in and with student Inviting the student into the learning process engages the learner Content relevance engages the student Connectivity between student, faculty, and learning engages the learner Faculty passion for the subject engages the learner
Faculty preparedness	Being a professor stretches you Being a professor is a calling Graduate school preparedness or lack of Institutional teaching support Faculty as reflective learners
Learning conceptualizations	Learning needs to be accessible Helping students unlearn Providing student support

### **Influences to Teaching**

Faculty may believe teaching the content/subject discipline is the priority, or they may believe that teaching is not just about the content but also about recognizing that

students have additional responsibilities or demands placed on them from outside influences in addition to their education demands. As evident throughout my research, how the participants in this study approach their teaching is unique to each faculty member due to their own beliefs about teaching. And those beliefs, quite often, are based on their own experiences as students and professors.

There are many layers as to how faculty think or what they believe about teaching, but the most consistent idea is that how faculty approach their teaching is based on their beliefs about teaching. Shulman's (1986, 1987, 2005) work explains the complexities of teaching where the professional must know their craft, apply the theory, and be pedagogically sound. In other words, how faculty view teaching has an impact on their approach to teaching. These findings echo what the literature stated about faculty needing to be aware of their beliefs about learning and how those beliefs impact their own beliefs and approach to teaching as well as how they see their students (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Kreber, 2010).

Beliefs about teaching and teaching practices are inextricably linked. Teaching practices executed in the classroom vary due to what the faculty believe about teaching. Faculty shared many ideas about their beliefs about teaching and their approaches to teaching, but a key factor is understanding how the faculty's conceptualization of teaching is established. How faculty conceptualize their teaching is based on their experiences with teaching. The way they view teaching informs their practice. Pratt (1992) would say that the influences faculty face, whether from their own teaching or how they were taught, informs the faculty's practice. Pratt also argues that teaching is informed by the faculty's beliefs, intentions, and values, which vary from person to



person, hence the complexity of the term “to teach.” Will believes that teaching represents educating the students to be deep thinkers. He said, “I really think to me, teaching is about getting students to think critically and ideally have a love of learning.” Participants also described an evolution of teaching. They said that teaching used to be about repeating what they had learned, but now they have different notions of teaching. Prior to being in the classroom, Will "had heard that teaching was about mimicking how teaching had been done to me before." He has since learned that being in the classroom is more than mimicking what he had learned. Hannah shared her understanding about the approach to teaching by saying “whenever we're in a new situation or we don't know how to do something, we tend to fall back on what we've always done or what we've seen done by others.” Hannah is speaking from her experience as an educator in that when educators first enter the classroom, they often fall back on the way they were taught as students. This affirms prior research (Alsup, 2003; Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Nesje et al., 2018; Trautwein, 2018) regarding how educators default to teaching from their own experiences as learners.

Since there were five faculty who shared their experiences with classroom environments that influenced their teaching, Vygotsky's (1978; 1986) sociocultural theory can be applied. Vygotsky's work focuses on the impact that social construction has on an individual. Vygotsky believed in the sociocultural approach to construction of self in that the individual's identity is shaped and structured by the environment or by other people. When asked questions about teaching during the interviews, all 15 participants shared their experiences with teaching and what influenced their teaching. One way that faculty conceptualize teaching is based on their experiences with teaching,

whether that is from their own education as a student or is from their own professional teaching experiences. A second way that faculty conceptualized teaching was to talk about what informs their teaching, and they highlighted a variety of teaching influences. Some influences were their own teaching experiences and learning styles while others were institutional policies and curriculum resources. All these influences provided explanations for how the faculty conceptualized teaching and how they self-reported their enactment of these conceptualizations in their classroom.

### ***Own Education Experiences Inform Teaching***

When thinking about how their own education experiences inform teaching, all 15 faculty shared stories of memorable teachers who provided both positive and negative experiences and thus were positive or negative models for the faculty's own teaching. When asked what influenced his teaching style, Will stated, "past experience with teachers. We know those who have done a great job and those who haven't done a good job and we can reflect on why." Will provided an example of a negative memorable professor:

There was a professor of computer science ... but I struggled with [computer science], and I went and talked to him about it, and he said, well, you need to figure that out. And just horrible, horrible, horrible, and so I ended up, you know, in the hole, and, and, failing that class because I could never catch up and I'd asked him for help, and I just didn't know what else to do. And so that's been a pretty valuable experience for me and how not to teach and to try to make sure I'm listening [to the students].

This experience made sure Will makes an effort to hear his students to best support their learning. His conceptualization of teaching, being there for the student, is based on his own negative educational experience. Michelle shared a similar situation in her education and said, “my own experience with, as a student, definitely informs my choices” and shared an example of a professor who killed her love of a subject:

And that professor was so, lackluster doesn't even cover it. It was so clear that she resented having to teach this class. And that she looked down on everyone else in the room. And I was so glad I had all my notes from senior year high school because the only way that I, not only was it the only way I would have passed the class because she was so confusing that I couldn't even understand what she was saying, after having taken it. Thank goodness I got an “A,” but I wouldn't have passed without my notes. So that, talk about a juxtaposition, and I realized this is the class that everyone takes because they have to have a math requirement. And she wants to teach the people who love math, and she doesn't realize that some of us are here and I, I never took math again, so there went my double major.

(laughed) She killed it.

Michelle's experience with this teacher changed her own education desire for a particular major and provided a model for what she did not want to do in the classroom. This experience informed how she views teaching, as indicated when she stated that her “passion is to help [students] find out who [they] are so [they] feel good about using [their] voice” regardless of how the students are using their voice in class. Michelle conceptualizes teaching as helping students uncover who they are as individuals. When talking to students, Michelle tells students:

My job as your teacher is not to make you a [professional], my job as your teacher is to help you figure out who you are. [To] find yourself, uncover, [and] get rid of all the junk that has been put on top of you.

Michelle shared that this discovery happens during her class when she provides class discussions and feedback on their assignments. Because her own educational experiences were about her professors telling her the information and always cramming for tests, Michelle tries to make sure that her students are involved in the learning activities, like activities where the students work collaboratively with her and their peers. Because Michelle structures her classes to include the student in the learning process, she conceptualizes teaching to be about the learner, which was evident in her ATI score, which identified her as a strongly student-centered teacher.

Similar to what Will's and Michelle's negative educational experiences, Danielle remembered a time when her degree program did not encourage her as a student. Danielle said, "So I'm able to bring in all kinds of elements into the, into the [subject]. And I think that's because as I told you yesterday, when I did my bachelor's degree, I had no variety." Danielle recognizes that her own educational experience informed how she taught in her classes. She mentioned that she makes a point to include choice in the course assignments, so students are a part of the learning process. Danielle's conceptualization of teaching is the value of the student being a part of the learning process. Danielle provided examples of how to includes the learner when explaining that she asks for their input about assignments, engages with them during class discussions, and encourages them to use discipline-specific vocabulary. Her belief about students

being a part of the learning correlated with her ATI score where she identified as a mildly student-centered teacher.

Not only did faculty express that their learning experiences influenced their teaching; they also shared that their own learning styles inform their practice. When speaking about her own educational experience, Michelle shared that her professors taught the subject as if it was the most important thing, as if it was God. She stated:

Because [teaching the concepts is] a conversation but it's not God, and I think it was too much of a god when I was a student and I felt that and it just, it was a turn off.... I was good at taking tests and I was good at cramming, and I was really good at taking good notes, so that I could cram later. I was a good on-paper student. I learned what I needed to learn from my craft, so I could talk about it, and do it, demonstrate it and what not, but I don't remember a whole lot of stuff um because I was taught to be a good on paper student because that was what the emphasis was it was not on the whole person learning this stuff.

Michelle shared that her professors thought the subject matter was more important than she was as a person and that turned her off from learning. She realized that she would do what was needed to complete the learning task and nothing beyond. It was not until she began teaching that Michelle realized what teaching and consequently learning was about for her and for her students. She believes her own education encouraged her to reflect on what she believed about herself as a learner changed as she understood more about teaching. Her learning experience taught her what kind of professor she did not want to be; someone who cares more about the content than the student. The desire to care for the student and help them develop personally is expressed throughout all her interview

responses, particularly when she talks about being an educator, which confirms that Michelle conceptualizes teaching as helping students uncover who they are individuals.

All 15 participants shared stories about their professors' teaching and provided examples of experiences that helped them in their conceptualization of teaching which include being there for the students, helping students uncover who they are as individuals, and including the learning in the learning process. These experiences included opportunities where the faculty felt heard, valued, supported, and encouraged in their learning process as students. In addition to what was learned from professors, one faculty member shared what he learned from his coaches, who were also his teachers in high school. Eric said, "some of the things that I've learned from coaches have helped me, uh, become a better teacher." Eric shared that he learned the importance of encouraging students in his classes, teaching strategies where his professors modeled analogies which he now uses a similar teaching approach in his courses, and the value of providing activity practice within his lessons. Eric mentioned how his own educational experiences informed how he wanted to be as a teacher. He conceptualizes that teaching is about including the learner in the process as well as providing opportunities for the students to practice what they are learning. Instead of Eric only lecturing the concepts and expecting the students to master the concepts, he shared that he provides practice activities within his class lessons.

Similarly, Hannah shared that her teaching style is based on what she "fundamentally believes about people as learners, um, that we learn when we get to do, and we learn when we get to interact." Hannah believes that learners' experiences impact their learning, and this is based on her own educational experiences. She said that she

doesn't "really remember the things that [her professors] did. What [she] remember[s] is how they made [her] feel and how [she] felt empowered and included." Hannah believes that how she was taught was more important than what she was taught. That sense of belonging was important to her and has helped inform her conceptualization of teaching in that she believes making sure the learner is a part of the learning. In fact, she makes a point to be available for her students and provides opportunities in class for interactions between students and with her to occur. In the ATI, Hannah's responses demonstrated that she is moderately student-centered. Hannah's ATI results and interview responses demonstrated that she conceptualizes teaching as an opportunity to engage the learner in a safe environment.

There were times when the participants shared both positive and negative experiences that impacted their own teaching practice. For example, while Michelle shared a negative experience that affected her education and perspective about teaching, she also shared a story about a math teacher that instilled a love of math:

She was passionate about pre-calculus—passionate about math—and she made it logical, and she made it fun and funny and the way she spoke about math it was something that was alive, it was, um, a conversation, not a formula and the formula was just shorthand for the conversation of a philosophy and WHOA, this is great. I mean I actually considered a double major in music and math because of her.

Together, Michelle's positive experience and negative experiences, provided the foundation for to her be a strongly student-centered teacher because she had learned ways to teach that enhanced and discouraged her learning. These experiences provided

Michelle with the foundation to learn what she believes about teaching, which is to provide opportunities for students to be the best versions of themselves.

Faculty's learning experiences inform the way they conceptualize teaching. They have learned about ways to teach (and ways not to teach) based on their own experiences in the classroom as students throughout their education. The faculty have taken those experiences to inform what they conceptualize about teaching and their approach to teaching.

### ***Institutional Practices Inform Teaching***

Institutional norms and policies also influence how faculty teach. For example, some institutions expect faculty to serve on committees, recruit students, publish scholarly work, assess institutional outcomes, contribute to the strategic plan, and present at professional development workshops or conferences in addition to teaching. There were nine participants who explicitly discussed how the institution where they work influenced their teaching practice due to expectations from the administration, the institution's mission statement, and the environment of the community.

Where the faculty work influences what the faculty believe about teaching and how they practice their craft. Trautwein's (2018) work shows that the hierarchical order institutions place on these tasks can influence how the faculty find the balance among the three pillars of the professoriate: teaching, research, and service. For the institutions that provide a liberal arts experience, there are times when the balance between teaching and other responsibilities such as publishing research, assessing institutional outcomes, recruiting students, and serving on committees is unclear. For instance, when asked about being able to publish, Eric said, "I feel like I spent a lot of time preparing for classes. And



I, I just I don't have the energy [to publish]." Will furthered the point about the difficulties involves and said "Uh, and so maybe I'd say feedback, having time for research or being pulled in too many directions to get research done. Those are, those are the challenges." Hannah mentioned the importance of work-life balance when teaching because she perceives that American culture is about being busy and doing more instead of "emphasizing a balance between life and work." Furthermore, if the institution's expectations about publishing are unclear, then faculty may find it difficult to balance teaching with the other institutional practices as they may decide what they are more interested in doing. Mike reinforced the idea that the institutional policies inform the teaching when he said, "depending on the institution, the amount of research would vary for sure." If an institution requires faculty to publish for a majority of their job, they might be unable to dedicate much time to teaching. For example, Kelly said:

One of our prongs [of working at Midwest University] is scholarship, but scholarship is a very broad term. And if you look in our policy manuals, if you look in like our annual self-evaluations, there is a lot of space and expectations for research. However, no one comes out and says that, and there's not a lot of release time for research. There, there is release time, but you have to apply for it. There are sabbaticals...[research is] supported, but it's minimally because [Midwest University] would call themselves a teaching institution. Like they have great pride and using that term, however, it's a prong. So if you showed up for promotion of any form, like if that's going from assistant to associate or associate to professor, you have to have scholarship and in my field that is research, other fields like art it would maybe be creative endeavors.

Kelly shares that scholarship is supported, but it is something the faculty have to request or ask for, even if it is a part of their job. If an institution prides itself on being a teaching college but also demands its faculty be accomplished in their fields, then the institution itself may impact how the faculty approach the balance of their teaching and scholarship load.

Scholarship is often how faculty learn more about their craft and strengthen their expertise in their field, learning insights about their subject. For example, Matt said, “part of the passion I bring back to the classroom [is] because I do these projects and I bring that passion back.” If institutions do not support the scholarship, then the faculty are not able to bring what they learned about their content into their courses. An argument for institutions supporting faculty in their scholarship includes the possible opportunities to involve students and support their academics. Kelly argues that if one is not publishing or producing scholarship:

How are you engaging and collaborating with professionals? You are using the same content and there’s no way your current; There’s just no way. And so like for me, I think it keeps me in the literature, it keeps me fresh.

Staying relevant in content means staying abreast of the literature and actively seeking scholarship opportunities whether that means writing or presenting. Therefore, if an institution expects their faculty to have scholarship but does not provide time or funding for this activity, they are possibly communicating that the scholarship is not an important part of teaching when the argument is that scholarship is a very active role in teaching in higher education. Samantha furthered Kelly’s sentiments and explained that scholarship is an integral part of the promotion process, as Kelly mentioned. Samantha said,

And I was on the promotion committee for a while. And the question always arises [from the faculty who are seeking promotion], why didn't I get promotion, where you're not really doing any professional development. [The faculty wonder] What does that mean? How many books do I need to publish? Am I supposed to be reviewer for a journal? Am I supposed to write a paper, do I have to go to a certain number? Just tell me what to do.

Sometimes the faculty are expected to publish, but the institution might not provide the course release, time, or space for publishing to happen. Kelly and Samantha's experiences show that the institution's influence can inform how much time faculty designate for teaching. If an institution, such as a liberal arts college, emphasizes the teaching prong of the three tiers of being an academic, then theoretically the institution promotes, supports, and encourages more time to be delegated towards teaching. Therefore, as echoed in Marrs' (2009) work, institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience, expect an emphasis on the role of teaching more so than scholarship.

One faculty shows that if the institution does not explicitly support the scholarship by providing time and funding, faculty might not be as passionate and as knowledgeable about their field which in turn could impact their teaching. Shelly shared how at her institution she does not feel she has time to work on her scholarship due to demands placed on her. She said, "I don't have time, um. Yeah. They're just there isn't time to [publish], not not as much as is asked of us. You know we don't have any, we can't do release time, classes won't get taught then."

Furthermore, the institution's emphasis within the three pillars of academia can influence how a faculty member approaches their courses. For example, one faculty

member shared that his purpose is not just about teaching. Mike said, “If I’m looking at [the purpose of being a professor] from the perspective of say, the administrative, my purpose is to prepare students for academic writing throughout their college career for the main courses that I teach.” Mike believes that while teaching is his job, as provided by the institution, he believes that is a part of his job. Mike continues by saying that another part of teaching is helping students adjust to college. If Mike’s institution emphasizes that teaching is more important than student/learner support, then the faculty member may not be able to support the student in a variety of ways to adjust to college life and learn about being an adult. Mike’s conceptualization of teaching is about having a sense that part of being an educator is teaching students academic skills while also supporting their growth as adults. Mike believes that a part of teaching is supporting students with learning how to balance being a student and a person trying to learn life lessons like balancing school and a job and turning in homework while practicing time management skills. April’s experience is similar to Mike’s in that the institution might not support the faculty to support the learner. April said:

the struggle of having some balance between being, being really engaged in the teaching part of it, caring a lot about the students, which as you know, some of them take a lot more attention than others do...I actually think that I’m working harder than I need to, to be effective. I guess one thing I’m grateful for is, at Midwest College we emphasize the teaching instead of the research. And that used to really bother me because I wanted to be doing more research and writing and conferencing and whatnot. But that I’ve kind of over the years yielded that desire to just being more focused on my current students and in my past, and my

previous students, I'm still pretty, pretty actively involved with a lot of my former students as well in terms of life support, job seeking and things like that.

When April first started teaching, she was annoyed that her institution was not as focused on scholarship as she wanted, but as she continued her teaching career, she saw the value of having scholarship and teaching expectations placed on her by the institution. April believes that teaching is about having a balance among content delivery, meeting students' needs, and being an engaging professor.

In their work about faculty motivation, Darby and Newman (2014) state that institutional support and offerings influence whether faculty feel supported in their teaching, scholarship, and service. Shelly provided an example of how the institution informs how she approaches her courses by including the students in the learning. Shelly said the purpose of her institution, "is to train people, to train younger, young people to be world citizens. [To educate students] to be more aware and alert to what's happening in the world and, and to serve the world in some way." Shelly shared ways in which she assigns projects and activities in class that challenge students. Michelle states that an institution that delivers a liberal arts experience should offer an education that is about "teaching people how to learn their entire lives." The mission of the institution influences how the faculty view teaching and, therefore, how they teach. Eric, Shelly, Danielle, and Kelly, who all work at institutions with a religious emphasis, shared that their institutions' focuses are to develop the whole person by providing a well-rounded education. These faculty shared that they could talk about God and religion, but also that they are encouraged to see the best in their students. This institutional policy influences the way the faculty view teaching and practice their craft.

The institution's structure of the three pillars can inform how faculty view teaching, and nine participants expressed the importance of being at an institution that sees the student as a person and a learner. Hannah said her institution has a "big emphasis on seeing our students as people and supporting them," and Kelly said that she likes that the institution sees the "student like not from a cognitive perspective, but from a holistic perspective, which I think goes to the whole mission of the university." Both faculty members work at institutions where the policies are centered around the student and see the student as more than just a number or price tag. The fact that these institutions value the student as a learner, this, in turn, encourages the faculty to view their students in the same way and conceptualize their teaching to match this approach to teaching.

Together or separately, the emphasis of the three pillars of the academy—research, scholarship, and service—; the type of institution; the institutional demands; and the policies that institutions have in place about students and its beliefs about teaching inform how faculty conceptualize teaching. The faculty may or may not feel supported to dedicate time to teaching as well as research depending on the institution's policies and expectations regarding scholarly publishing. In summary, the institution's policies influence how faculty conceptualize teaching, which in turn impacts their practice. Therefore, the demands placed on the faculty by the institution can then influence the faculty member's teaching practice.

### ***Pandemic Influenced the Learning Environment***

It is important to note that data from this dissertation was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic when many individuals in higher education struggled with teaching and learning. Students had trouble with school, and faculty had challenges with remote

teaching. While this study itself does not center on the pandemic, the pandemic is worth considering because eight participants shared their concerns and frustrations during their interviews. So, the theme pandemic influenced the learning environment came to light.

Most of the participants identified that their teaching and the students' learning suffered due to the switch to online learning because of COVID-19. Faculty felt they did not have interactive classes with the online platform. The faculty also expressed that their teaching approaches changed and that they were more lenient because of the need to support the students given the pandemic.

Because of the pandemic, many institutions closed their physical doors and switched to remote teaching and learning. This meant that faculty had to change their approaches to teaching because they switched from teaching in person to a digital platform. The participants in this study shared their experiences with the online platform Zoom. One participant shared that Zoom impacted how the professor taught and provided feedback to students. Matt said:

[Teaching is] a little bit harder over Zoom. And when in the classroom, I can be a bit more tough. On Zoom and with the pandemic in the classroom, I've purposefully been easier because everybody's going through a hard time anyways...So I think I let some people slide in my classes this semester. More so than I would in a live class, you know. They might have earned a letter grade more than they would have in a live in-person class situation just because I can't assess them that I want [inaudible] the edge and just give up.

Matt adjusted his teaching for students given the pandemic and the many factors associated with this worldwide issue, so his conceptualization of teaching is meeting the

students where they are, especially when there are factors outside of their control. This example demonstrates that Matt believes that teaching should be to meet the needs of the students especially during a time associated the stressful situation of rapidly switching to online teaching and learning and not necessarily having reliable internet or a conducive work environment when not at school. Participants, like Matt, felt they had to be more lenient because of classes being taught on Zoom. Their approaches have also been modified because of online teaching. For example, April said:

I guess the challenge in teaching with Zoom is that because everything takes so much more time, sometimes I end up being more lecturey than I would if I were in the classroom because I would be more bouncing back and forth with them.

April provided an example of what happened in her Zoom classes during remote teaching that made her feel that she couldn't have the students engage in the same way online as she did when they were in person. Marie expressed similar feelings when she mentioned that she has not seen students in so long. For her this meant that teaching was becoming difficult because the connection of being physically in the same classroom with the students was missing in her teaching and interactions with her students.

Another negative experience expressed about teaching online was that non-responsive students influenced teaching. Hannah said the "general negative thing that's happened a few times is [when] I'm teaching remotely over Zoom, asking questions and getting dead air and not having any response from any of the faces. And figuring out where do I go next?" As mentioned earlier in this paper, Hannah wants students to feel included in her classrooms and engaged in their learning. She conceptualizes teaching to be about making sure the learner is a part of the learning. Switching to online teaching



impacted Hannah's class because she felt she could not engage with the students the same way as when she was in the classroom, and she also felt she could not adjust her teaching accordingly in the same way.

Faculty felt their teaching was not as good because of this online platform. In fact, several participants expressed the need to address the pandemic and its impact in the classroom. April, Marie, and Mike all shared their experiences. For example, Mike said, "I feel like every time I'm asking questions, I'm annoying them because I have to ask, through, sort of [through] a back and forth." Questions cannot be asked in the same way or of the same frequency when teaching online as opposed to in class. Mike said, "The lectures are one way" so there is not as much collaboration online versus in person, and since Mike believes in helping the students learn the material as well as grow as an individual, then teaching in a platform that at times felt one way, would not allow him to feel he was teaching his best.

Even though faculty expressed frustrations with the switch to remote teaching and feeling inadequately prepared to teach online, not all faculty felt the switch to remote teaching was a negative experience. Marie said that teaching online "forc[ed] [her] to rethink some things." Marie continued to share how she made several videos for her students that would have taken up class time, but since the students could watch them at a different time, the information from the videos did not disrupt class time, so she was able to provide more time with the students to support their learning. Kelly shared that the pandemic could provide faculty with the opportunity to keep in touch with the student population. She said:

It's not necessarily always changing your craft, but it's looking at the, the

landscape. COVID is a fantastic example of that. All the conferences I attended this year, like the number one thing was focused on relationship building and staying connected to our students.

Several participants shared their feelings about remote teaching but specifically pointed to asynchronous teaching, both as learners and faculty. One faculty member, who is also seeking an advanced degree in an online program, and another faculty member both felt that asynchronous learning does not allow for authentic learning. They shared that asynchronous learning has more of a formula to follow which does not allow for the learning to be interactive and engaging.

While this study did not focus on the pandemic, this event is worth mentioning because faculty shared their pandemic teaching experiences during the interviews. Some faculty felt the pandemic encouraged them to think outside the box and try to integrate more videos for virtual learning while other faculty felt the authentic learning could not happen as easily since they were not in a traditional in-person education setting. All that to say is the pandemic did impact the way faculty conceptualized and approached their teaching.

### ***Curriculum Resources***

Another influence that impacts a faculty member's conceptualization of teaching is curriculum resources, such as student feedback (through classroom interactions or formal/informal written feedback), syllabi, textbook structure, colleagues who work at their institution, faculty professional organizations, and colleagues who work at other institutions. Six faculty identified in their interviews curriculum resources that they used for their course design and planning.

Student feedback and interactions can impact the design of courses or instruction. April shared her beliefs about the importance of knowing what the students are thinking and learning and that she craves “knowing what students are thinking,” which potentially informs how she will teach. She continued with an example, saying that she has set up Google folders where students write 1-minute papers, reflections throughout the class, or exit cards. This lets her collect the information to learn what the students both understood or missed, or any feedback they provided. She said she then adjusts her teaching to the students’ needs. April conceptualizes teaching to be about a balance between content delivery, meeting students’ needs, and being an engaging professor. Because April values the students’ perspectives, student evaluations and reflections prompt change in April’s teaching approaches.

Danielle shared a story about how students rated her with low scores when asked on the survey how the class helped with teaching how to research. The student evaluation scores taught Danielle that she could expect more from her students and give them more responsibility within the course and assignments. Typically, Danielle would have found students the information they needed, so she said, “Normally, I would have found them an interview and brought it into the class. So, I think that at [the college] level that it’s true, that they’re grown, and you [can] expect them to do more.” In this instance, Danielle learned that she could ask more from the students based on their feedback to her. This changed the way she viewed teaching and the students’ ability, which in turn altered her teaching practice.

Student interactions and feedback provide a resource that can affect the faculty member’s curriculum and course design. Matt said, a “negative student experience taught

[him] a lesson about being more flexible.” While working with a student, Matt learned how his teaching could be changed or impacted and thus acted accordingly. Hal also shared an experience where he learned how to modify his course syllabus to change some of the course policies. He said, “I became more flexible in terms of deadlines. And so the next time I taught the course, I changed the syllabus to allow, uh, for more flexibility in deadlines.” In this instance, Hal had thought one way about teaching, and his practice was altered because of learning something new from a student that then informed his course syllabus. Marie shared an experience where a student can have a negative impact on the classroom. She said:

[Student’s name] was just somebody who clearly did not want to be there and kind of just would derail the class as often as possible. So that's when someone, when a student seems to intentionally be derailing a class, that’s the most negative ‘cause it’s taking away from everybody else. That one person can be ruining tons of learning opportunities.

Marie mentions the impact students have on the class and the learning environment and that faculty might need to alter their teaching to either prevent or stop a student from derailing a course. This student influence can impact how the faculty structure their course. Thus, faculty learn to adapt teaching in response to feedback and interactions from students.

Participants shared several other curriculum resources they use to inform their teaching. Course syllabi are one such resources. The syllabus provides the structure and layout for the course and course expectations and policies for the students. At least three faculty mentioned their experiences in creating syllabi as well as the importance of the

document in their courses. When Mike was first hired as a professor, he had to quickly prepare his course and create the syllabus. He said:

I taught my first college courses with I think quite literally one week to prepare.

Um, so I relied quite a bit on syllabi from other people teaching at that school and also just sort of requirements that the school had.

He incorporated what he learned from his peers and the expectations from the institution into his syllabus. Mike shared that since he has worked with his colleagues and done his own trial and error teaching to learn ways that his lessons can be modified to best meet students' needs. Mike mentioned that he needs to make sure his courses or lessons engage the students. An analysis of his syllabus reveals activities that demonstrate his attempts to engage his students. For instance, activities and assignments that refer to "Ice breaker," "Pay Raise assignment," and "Claim your project discussion board" show that Mike sets the stage for both interaction among students and projects that will allow students to reveal themselves as individuals.

Another participant, John, shared the value of the syllabi in framing his courses, stating that in his courses the syllabus is the main guide in the course. When he first began teaching, John was supplied with syllabi from previous professors that he used to structure his courses because his colleagues told him to use the syllabus as the guide to the course. John said, "It was very early on, just like okay, this is your class, get the syllabus covered, and go." John also shared that he continues to use the syllabus as a guide for his courses. This resource keeps him on track; "Um, I've had to personally just go back to the syllabus and go, okay, what is, what does it say there? That is the absolute minimum I've got to get done." John's conceptualization of teaching is to keep the

students involved in their learning by structuring classes in a way so students can practice what their learning through projects and discussion. John shared that the syllabus keeps him focused and on schedule and allows him to see what can be removed or modified from his lessons.

Similar to John, Danielle mentioned that the syllabus is a main influencer in the structure of her courses; she said, “But the main thing is, the main underlying event is to complete my syllabus to get, to get them to that certain stage where they should be.” Danielle identifies how the syllabus provides the outline or guide for her course.

Another way the syllabus is used is to communicate the expectations of the course to the students. Hal used the syllabus to help with an issue that arose in a class with a student not following what was stated in the syllabus. He used his syllabus as a contract when working with a student to uphold his policies. Hal said, “And I was able to say, well, the syllabus says such and such, you know that you had this as the contract we have and so the grade is going to be in line with the syllabus.” He was able to point to his beliefs about teaching in the syllabus and make sure the student understood the situation. Therefore, faculty use the syllabus as a guide for their course design and classroom management. It is worth noting that the syllabi are not evidence for how a faculty member teaches because what a faculty member states in their syllabus does not necessarily directly relate to how they teach. For example, Michelle identified strongly as a student-centered teacher on her ATI, but her interview revealed that her syllabus states explicit and direct expectations that sounds more teacher-centered. She said:

One thing that is really hard for me and that is because of that sort of college level emotional thing regarding conflict and discipline... So sometimes my syllabi are

really nitpicky because if I don't put it in writing, I'll have a hard time enforcing something.

Michelle recognizes who she is as a professor and how the syllabus can support her beliefs about teaching but also how she is learning how to be more of a disciplinarian and using the syllabi to support her teaching. In an analytic memo about Michelle's comment, I noted her feelings about the syllabi and wrote:

[Michelle] also discussed the syllabi and how she felt that the syllabi were too nitpicky and that she'd have things more laid out and have consequences but didn't feel that matched what happened in her classes because she wanted the students to have accountability (as did they) but recognized that she needed to have it spelled out. This is a lesson that she's been trying to balance because she said that keeping track of attendance felt very elementary but also saw the importance of it as she's found it difficult to have outlined rules in syllabi without having the follow up. She'd like the students to be independent (as would they), so she doesn't have to take attendance to have them show up on time or purpose.  
(February 2, 2021)

In Michelle's comment and my memo, the syllabi are a way to learn more about how the faculty might teach, but the syllabi cannot be evidence to claim that is exactly how they teach. Michelle scored strongly student-centered on the ATI, and she believed that her syllabus is very stringent in its format. This example is evidence that faculty would benefit from more professional development on what to include in a syllabus that reflects their teaching style, approach, and beliefs so the syllabi can align with their

conceptualizations of teaching. To structure courses around their beliefs, faculty need to first know what those beliefs are which is one purpose of this study.

While there were 15 participants for this study, only nine provided me with one copy of their course syllabus. The syllabi shared similar layouts and structures. All nine syllabi started with the name of the courses and introduced the professor and ways to contact the professor (i.e., email and/or office or cell phone), a list of office hours, the location of the office, and the location of the course. In addition, all nine syllabi included a course description, textbooks or materials, and course and institutional outcomes.

The nine participants' syllabi ranged in page numbers from three to 20 pages. Some syllabi were overwhelmingly thorough while others were missing course and assignment information. To be more visually appealing, six syllabi attempted to include graphics, color, and/or varied the font.

The voice in which the syllabi were written varied by syllabus depending on the type of course, the level of the course, the discipline, and the faculty's own teaching beliefs. Each of these layers factored into how the syllabus was written and no patterns were found between the syllabus as to reasons why certain language was used. One syllabus was written in first person plural, using "we" statements to include the professor. This faculty participant, Matt, whose responses on the ATI identified him as mildly teacher-centered, used statements in his syllabus like "We will engage in critical and creative thinking" and "How do films grab us and pull us into their world, into experiences that are not our own?" Two syllabi were written to the students in second person, identifying them as the audience and using phrases such as "you will" or "you



must.” The remaining six syllabi were written in third person using phrases like “the student will.”

All this information about the syllabi is helpful to know what faculty believe about policies and their approaches in the classroom, but the language they used within their syllabi does not directly correlate with how they identified as student-centered or teacher-centered on the ATI.

Four syllabi included the institutional student resources available such as writing and student success centers, counseling offices, and tutor hours and contact information. One faculty member shared expectations, but also provided affirmation that students would learn how to complete expectations successfully. For example, she stated that all work needed to be completed in APA format but that there would be training in class on proper APA format and citation. All nine syllabi listed the institutional outcomes, and one syllabus also included discipline specific outcomes.

Five syllabi included a timeline of the classes as well as a timeline of the assignments, tests, and projects. Three faculty included descriptions of the assignment expectations, like discussion boards, class participation, and papers.

The syllabi provide more information about how faculty communicate their course and institutional policies to the students which may or may not reflect their teaching approaches. For faculty, the syllabi are used to communicate course policies and expectations and to be used as a guide throughout the course. The design and structure of the syllabus is what faculty may follow when they teach their courses and use as a guide.

Another resource that faculty use to provide structure in their courses is a textbook. In the ATI, statement seven says, “In this subject I concentrate on covering the

information that might be available from a good textbook.” The responses to this statement were fairly evenly distributed between “Only rarely” and “Always.” There were four “Always,” two “Sometimes,” four “About half the time,” three “Frequently,” and two “Always.”

John explicitly shared that he used the textbook to provide structure for course design by following the book chapters as a guide for the flow of the semester. He believes the textbook provides structure and guidance for him while he is teaching, saying, “And I still think for me, teaching from a textbook has been easiest and most effective.” Mike mentioned that working from a textbook provides an order to things: “Where at least a decent textbook seems to be, you can kind of work through it, and they have a good order to things.” Textbooks as a curriculum resource can provide the flow of information for faculty to gauge their instruction and courses, but they do not necessarily imply that the faculty are teacher-centered or student-centered professors.

Beyond the syllabi and textbooks as curriculum resources, three participants shared they seek support from other professors in their field. Will, who collaborates with other members of his professional field for resources, said he is “trying to rely on other’s expertise and seeing what the field is thinking about, as well as what [he] think[s] in [his] experience will prepare students.” Will continued, saying that he wants to stay current and relevant in his field to ensure he stays abreast of the field and teaches current information. Hal explains that he models his instruction or course design after other institutions; he goes online to find out what other colleges or universities are using or doing for courses and instruction. Both Hal and Will believe in learning from others in their fields to know more about their subjects.

The curriculum resources—specifically student feedback, syllabi, and textbooks that faculty use to design and structure courses—inform how the faculty conceptualize teaching. For example, faculty shared how they adjusted their classes based on students’ feedback as well as how the colleagues provided feedback or ideas for ways to diversify the teaching. The syllabi and textbooks provided structure for the faculty to follow and keep themselves on a schedule to orient themselves with the concepts and ideas they needed to cover. These resources provide guidance as to how the faculty think about teaching and structure their courses which then influences how they practice their craft.

### *Perceptions of College Students*

How the faculty support the students in the classroom is impacted by their perceptions of college students. There were six faculty who shared that they find students in college, as opposed to students in high or middle school, have more choice, so college-age students are in a class because they choose to be there. Dave said, “college is just a whole kind of different animal, I think, because the students get to choose all their classes; they’re here voluntarily.” Dave believes that college students have more autonomy and thus they are more involved in their learning, and this perception of college students impacts how Dave conceptualizes his teaching. Dave believes that students are independent learners and structures his classes and syllabi for independence in projects and assignments. He furthers this point by saying:

[teaching in higher education as opposed to in high school is] really that kind of higher-level thinking and you can really get into the deeper topics and more complicated things with the older students you see in college level.

Dave continued to share that teaching in higher education was more appealing to him because he works with students who are independent of their parents and who are more likely to be involved in their learning, their projects, and their academics.

How students behave in classes informs how faculty teach. Mike and Shelly mentioned that their experience with college students, instead of high school students, is that college students seem more mature so they can go deeper with the content and cover more concepts as well as have more engaging conversations. Because of the age of the students, faculty believe that learning is more independent in college. Danielle said that it is “just wonderful when you can give them not a lot of guidance, not a lot of guidelines and they surprise you with incredible creativity where once again, everybody got the right answer...I didn’t have to do the directing.” Danielle is saying that when she provided a space for the students to work independently, they surprised her with their productivity and work. Lastly, Matt, Danielle, and Dave said that when working with college-aged students, they do not have discipline problems in the classroom like they had working with high school students. Danielle said, “I don’t have discipline problems in classes. As opposed to teaching high school. I never have to stop for discipline problems. I can complete [the] syllabus every single semester because I don't have, I don’t have that extreme.” In this example, Danielle mentions that because she does not have discipline problems with college students, she can cover more material and content.

Marie recognizes that perceptions of college students can be tricky, especially when generalizations are made about all students as if generalizations will help in understanding the students more. Marie stated:

[The] hardest thing is fighting the generalizations maybe, like college age students. They're just way too different one from the next...hardest part is probably not having the time to get to know each one individually to understand how each one operates.

Here, Marie is saying that generalizing information about students is challenging as students are so different from each other. She believes that to learn more about students, faculty need to get to know them individually, and she says there is often not time to make that happen. When faculty do not have opportunities to get to know the students more, this impacts how faculty view their students which influences how they approach teaching because they may not have an accurate perception of their students and thus may not adjust their teaching accordingly to meet the learner needs.

Faculty recognized that working with a range of student maturity and ability is difficult in college classrooms. Dave said, "Dealing with that broad range of maturity is definitely one of the toughest things, especially in the intro class. And also, ability level is involved." Hannah also mentioned the range and ability of students is difficult to balance in the college classroom. Since the college students have unique needs as learners, faculty are sometimes unsure how to best support these learners. The idea emerged that sometimes, though, no matter how much the faculty support the students, there needs to be some input from the student, and there needs to be student willingness to learn. Dave said:

I'd also say teaching them how to think is a big one for me trying to get them to learn new ways to learn. And so, it's kind of a lifelong thing after college, you

know, you don't really have classes very much anymore. It's more just learning on the job and the ability to learn how to learn is pretty important, I think.

Knowing the motivation of the learner helps to know how to support the student. Matt said that the “motivation of why a student is there is important to discern.” He continued this thought by saying that the motivation of the student impacts the students’ desire to be there, and those students without motivation will not be successful.

Faculty perceptions of college students influence how faculty view teaching and thus impact how they teach. If faculty see the students as independent learners and thinkers, they are likely to structure their courses to encourage students to work independently and assume students will know how to complete assignments or tasks. What faculty believe about learners then informs how faculty view teaching which then influences their teaching practice and approach.

### ***Ability Level of the Student Influences Course Design***

When planning a course, there are several factors faculty should consider. First, the amount of course time during a semester influences how much can be taught. Second, another factor is institutional and departmental expectations of what needs to be taught to help the students progress within general education or their major curriculum. A third factor is the type of course: is it an honors course, a required course, or a general education course? The type of course can inform the student population within that course. For example, a general education course is more likely to have more of a range of student academic abilities, interests, and motivation than a major-specific course. When planning a course, faculty should consider the possibility of what type of students they could potentially have enrolled in their course because how faculty approach their course

can be influenced by the students within that course. For example, when talking about 100- and 200-level courses Will states, “in some classes where students are beginners, the professor does end up being the guardian of content or needing to deliver the content rather than thinking.” Will expressed the notion that faculty are more sage on the stage professors when they teach students who might not yet have the basics or foundations of the concepts learned, meaning the faculty explain more by providing content to their students. Will shared that this might look like giving more lectures. He believes that faculty can be more complex with their teaching in the upper-level courses. One could argue that Will recognizes the need to differentiate the approach to teaching depending on the level of the course and/or learner. It follows that in higher course levels, faculty can become more of a facilitator. Participants shared that it is easier to challenge students in upper-level courses. Marie said:

And then usually I get to a point where there is some sort of a project where they have to, um, really take ownership, um, of something that requires their creativity of thinking. And in the 300-level, a writing tutor class, that usually works. In [the] 100-level, first-year experience skills writing class, it's very hit and miss.

Therefore, the ability level of the student would then influence the structure of the course, thus impacting the faculty's teaching practice. Marie believes that she can ask more of her 300-level students than her 100-level students which would influence how the different courses are structured and what activities the courses have. For example, Marie said her purpose is, “to guide [the students] and that awakening of them. To give them opportunities, um, to learn the material, try out the material, apply it to something that I might establish for them.” Marie is saying that in a 300-level course, students understand

purpose of the course or assignments but in the 100-level course, students do not consistently grasp the purpose of the assignment or activity. The concepts taught in either course can be the same, but the grasp is different depending on the level of the student. This difference between the students' ability level then influences how Marie designs her courses. She provides activities that are more tailored to what kind of course is being taught to best support the learners' needs.

Another challenge of teaching is the variety of student abilities within any course. Student abilities can be seen in how they approach an assignment, how they respond to a class lecture, and how they best learn (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). When talking about teaching, Hannah said:

the hardest part is figuring out what they need because they come with such a variety of abilities... knowing who's who and figuring out how to teach in a way that differentiates for those needs [and] doesn't leave anyone behind, and [so] I'm also not neglecting or talking down to the students who do already know how to do things.

Hannah provided specific examples (differentiation of an assignment, leading a class discussion, and creating class activities that include and engage most, if not all, students) of how student abilities can influence how she may teach a course. She finds that sometimes there are challenges meeting the needs of all students when there is such a range in areas including students' conceptual understanding to their ability level. Hannah wants her teaching to include all levels and types of learners as much as possible. Eric furthers this point by talking about diversified student experiences and abilities:



I think that puts a lot of pressure on faculty. I feel like from the time of my youth in, in K through 12 school, that schools were taking on more and more responsibility for society at large. And I feel like that's now kind of moved into the college ranks as well. We're taking on more and more responsibility when we, we're constantly asking how are you doing, what's your mental [health]? Where are you mentally? And we're having to deal with that.

The faculty communicated their beliefs about learning and how learning in the classroom is influenced by the learning and ability level of the students.

Participants believe that for learning to occur in the classroom, curiosity must be prevalent. But the fact that the type of learner influences the teaching in the classroom shows challenges in this regard. Based on the ATI results and what was shared during their interviews, the faculty mentioned that their courses are different depending on the levels and involvement of the students. What became clear is that faculty could identify that student ability level impacted their courses and teaching. What was difficult to tell was if the faculty were adjusting their teaching when they noticed there were differences with the students. This furthers the point that faculty recognize student-centered teaching and want to provide this structure for their courses, but sometimes may not know how to be student-centered.

Student feedback, syllabi, and colleagues from faculty's fields are curriculum resources that faculty use to structure their courses and classrooms. All these curricular resources influenced how and what the faculty taught in their daily courses as well as how they structured the courses over the semester.

### **Student Engagement**

Throughout the interviews, 12 faculty participants discussed the importance of student engagement. The faculty expressed that student engagement was the key to teaching and having a productive classroom. If students were not engaged, then faculty felt learning was not happening. The interviews showed that faculty conceptualized their teaching practices based on student engagement. For example, when they felt the students appeared to be engaged in the class discussions or assignments, faculty believed that learning was happening. What is unclear is if participants believed it was their responsibility to engage the students or learners or if they believed the students would come to them with an already innate ability to be engaged learners. The data does not conclude that faculty identified their role in the student engagement as individuals who should or do foster the engagement, but rather as those who develop the engagement that is already evident within the learner. The theme student engagement revealed subthemes. The subthemes were: fostering curiosity in and with student; inviting the student into the learning process engages the learner; content relevance engages the student; connectivity among student, faculty, and learning engages the learner; and faculty passion for the subject engages the learner. The following sections are organized in the order of frequency of the subthemes were mentioned.

#### ***Fostering Curiosity in and with Student***

When asked what it means to be a learner, seven participants responded that being a learner is about curiosity. For example, Marie said, “To be actively involved in your learning, you have to be curious.” Marie expressed that the student needs to be engaged in the learning process. Hannah said learning is “a willingness to think about the world in

a different way than how you currently do...to be curious.” Hannah mentions the value of learning outside of self to think about the surrounding world. Hal believes that learning happens best when students are curious and stated:

To be actively involved in your learning, you have to be curious. I guess what I'm saying is there's some engagement on the part of the learner to learn. It's hard to learn when you just sit back and expect it to come to you.

Hal identifies the importance of student engagement within the classroom, and he also recognizes that the students have to be engaged with the learning process to be actively a part of the learning. Hal shared that he engages the learner by a three-step teaching process he uses during his lectures. The process is to tell the students the information, show them examples, and let them practice problems. This process is a way that Hal hopes to encourage curiosity by engaging the learner.

When asked about what a learner is, Matt said a learner is “inquisitive, curious about the world around them. Somebody who wants to learn more to make themselves better or learn something new in order to improve their life... [and] learning involves curiosity” and how important it is to instill “that sense of passion and excitement for the material so that [students] get excited about it, too, and that will help foster their own curiosity.” Matt’s experiences within his teaching informs him of this belief. Marie believes a part of learning is being curious. She stated, “I think curiosity is really important and an open mind is really important in my view of what I value in higher education.” Marie continued to share the importance of curiosity in learning, especially in working with college-aged students. Faculty believe that curiosity is a part of learning and seeing. The question, though, is do faculty know how to spark this curiosity in

students? Or do faculty believe that a learner is someone who innately comes with curiosity? It was clear that faculty felt curiosity was an important and a significant part of the learning process, but what was unclear was how faculty sparked curiosity within their students. If classroom observations had been conducted, I could have seen how faculty fostered curiosity within their courses and for the students, but as it is, the data can only reflect the self-report of the participants.

In addition to identifying those learners who are curious, faculty believed that learners are individuals who want to learn and want to apply that knowledge. Matt said that learners are those who “want to learn the different ways of thinking and ways of knowing that knowledge that they might need to know when you think about a certain subject but to apply it in later production classes.” Kelly shared that she wants the students to want to learn. She said:

I don't want you to learn. I want you to want to learn. And so, I think my goal as a teacher is I want you to want to learn. I don't want you just to learn. I want you to continuously learn. And so, I want to spark that fire to where they question things, and they see things from different perspectives and understand it's ever shifting.

Kelly's syllabus includes learning targets that are cross referenced with Bloom's taxonomy. These explicit connections of what students are learning to the levels of higher order thinking show how Kelly's conceptualization of teaching is communicated to her students.

The desire to spark curiosity and include the learner was evident both the interviews and the ATI survey. Statement eight from the ATI survey states, “I encourage students to restructure their existing knowledge in terms of the new way of thinking about

the subject that they will develop.” In the ATI, all participants chose “About half the time,” “Frequently,” or “Always” as their response, conveying their beliefs about the importance of curiosity in the learning process. Statement 14 from the ATI survey states, “I make available opportunities for students in this subject to discuss their changing understanding of the subject.” For this statement, 12 of the 15 participants responded “About half the time” to “Always,” again conveying the importance of curiosity in learning. Student engagement happens in a myriad of ways as evidenced by what faculty shared about their beliefs and experiences with students.

To reiterate, while the faculty believe curious students are important in the classroom, it was unclear how faculty encourage their students to be curious or if the faculty believe that students innately arrive with curiosity in class and the role of the professor is to foster the already existing curiosity.

### ***Inviting the Student into the Learning Process Engages the Learner***

Engaging the learner happens best when the learner is brought into the learning process. Students want to be a part of the learning, but they may not feel comfortable participating in class or engaging in discussions for a variety of reasons. One reason could be comfort level with the concepts or ideas. One way to support the learner is to invite them into the learning process. To include the learner, faculty can break down the concepts for students to comprehend. Michelle shared an example of breaking down a concept and thus engaging the student. She said:

And so, by just looking at one piece at a time, I expect students to realize how vicious the importance of [the concept] is and this is what it does. This is how [the concept] works and why it works and how it fits within the storytelling structure

so that they can then understand that [and] tell me how.

Michelle believes that when students are pulled into the learning process and can articulate their understanding, they then become engaged and more motivated to participate in the class.

Several participants shared that teaching is about caring for the students. Hannah said a teacher is “somebody who cares about me.” Danielle added to this sentiment by saying “A teacher is somebody who cares for you, who wants you to learn.” Michelle said, “Teachers should make their students feel confidently independent and yet like they’re always learning.” Michelle is saying that professors need to help students learn independence. This tendency is demonstrated in Michelle’s syllabus, where she provides an example as she sets up a menu of sorts for students asking them to “select one category to pursue, tailoring your goals realistically to meet your needs.” She provides a framework for them to follow to be independent learners in her class.

Inviting the learner to engage in the learning process is an integral part of student autonomy, and Dave believes that teachers need to make themselves obsolete to help students be autonomous. He said, “So I’m trying to not be, like, the first source of the information for them.” He encourages the students to try to solve the problem before asking for help. His encouragement of autonomous learning, which is seen in his syllabus where 50 percent of his students’ grade is derived from five major projects that each provide his students with the opportunity to learn as they go. Likewise, Marie demonstrates this same perspective of the importance of student autonomy. In her syllabus, Marie explicitly states:

Before asking, attempt to find your own answers. For questions related to class structure, such as due dates or policies, refer to your syllabus and course FAQ. Attempt to find the answers to any other questions on your own using a search engine. If your questions remain unanswered after a bit of effort, feel free to bring them up with your instructor.

Here, Marie encourages the students to answer their questions on their own prior to bringing them to her. Michelle said, “I believe it’s my job as a teacher to make myself obsolete as quickly as possible, which, you know, it’s not a quick process.” Dave, Marie, and Michelle all shared the perspective that teaching is about helping the students learn how to learn without overreliance on a professor.

Another way faculty encourage students’ engagement is when students have the language or vocabulary to use in class. For example, in ATI statement four, “I feel it is important to present a lot of facts to students so that they know what they have to learn for this subject,” about half of the participants (seven) chose “Frequently” or “Always” about feeling the importance of presenting a lot of facts to students, and three faculty chose “About half the time” for this statement. The results of this statement highlight the fact that faculty believe that to engage in a topic, students must use vocabulary and facts presented to them. This evidence shows that faculty want their students to engage with the material more so they can engage in the lesson and the learning. But having all the information does not guarantee student engagement.

One participant shared that one way to invite the student into the learning is to provide choice. April shared an example from one of her classes. She said:

[The student] had realized the content was relevant and that that was going to be

the hook that got him engaged. And and I don't feel like that's necessarily something I did; it just made me conscious of the fact that people do need to feel connected to have this sense of purpose for what it is they're learning. And I've tried to achieve that by giving students choices about what they can research, or what they study or try to make these connections.

Here, April shares an example of a student who was hooked by the concepts because it directly related to him as a person, and he could then make connections with the material.

College is about engaging students in a dialogue for the students to wrestle with the concepts. The faculty's conceptualization of teaching regarding student engagement became clearer based on some of the ATI responses. For statement 14, "I make available opportunities for students in this subject to discuss their changing understanding of the subject," 12 participants responded "About half the time" to "Always" when asked about making opportunities for students to discuss their changing understanding of the concepts. This was evident in how faculty talked about their teaching practices. For example, Matt believes that even though faculty are the experts of the subject, they can engage with students in a dialogue. This point is furthered by Marie's belief about learning. She said, "I believe that the learning happens when the students are the most, are engaged and that tends to happen when it's one-on-one." Marie shared that her conceptualization of teaching is when students have direct instruction to help them understand and apply concepts. Her courses often include workshops where she provides thorough feedback on assignments and time for the students to apply the feedback to their work as well as engage with their peers about the concepts or ideas. Marie recognized that learning happens best when she is interacting with students one-on-one. Thus, the



relationship of her teaching conceptualization, that learning happens best when students have explicit instruction and support, informs how she practices the craft.

Hannah provides more context as to how she conceptualizes teaching and the value of engaging the student into the learning. Hannah shares her experiences about how engaging students in the learning process supports her conceptualization of teaching, which is about making sure the student is a part of the learning. Hannah stated:

Learning happens in a lot of different ways depending on the learner and what works best for [the students]. You could look at it from the perspective of Gardner's multiple intelligences, which are not the same as learning styles, but they talk, they inform you about what ways connect with people better.

Hannah draws on what she knows about teaching philosophies and pedagogies which then inform her teaching practices. By inviting the student into the learning process through classroom activities, like discussions or practice activities as she mentioned in her interviews, Hannah engages the learning in the learning process. In fact, another faculty participant shared that she observed Hannah teaching a lesson where "[students] couldn't escape learning... [the students] couldn't just sit there and do nothing. And they were clearly learning and enjoying it as they went along." Because Hannah invited the students into the learning process and framed her activity to include the students, they were engaged and could not escape the learning process.

When students are invited to the learning process and included in the learning, they are more likely to be engaged. The way faculty can invite students into the classroom is by setting up assignments and lessons in such ways that encourage learning and allow the students to participate and be a part of the learning.

*Content Relevance Engages the Learner*

In addition to fostering curiosity and inviting the student into the learning process, making content relevant to students' lives will also engage the learner in the learning process. In the student questionnaire, one student responded that "A memorable teacher is someone who can get the student to truly interact with the material to be learned in a positive or negative way." This student shared that a teacher provides opportunities for the students to interact with the subject and provides an opportunity for the learner to engage with the material.

Six participants identified the importance of getting students involved. April provided an example of this from one of her classes where she had a student who appeared not interested and could not see the relevance of what was being learned. However, when she spoke about a conflict relating to the student's own personal experience, she said, "I knew right then, like the, the, he had realized the content was relevant and that that was going to be the hook that got him engaged." April's content did not change in her class, but she realized that in order to engage the learner, she needed to make the content related to the student's life. This connection for the student provided relevance for the student, which in turn encouraged him to engage more in the class through discussions and sharing.

Involving the students in their learning and providing opportunities for them to share their own experiences allows the concepts to become more concrete and attainable. For example, Hal shared an example of this from his teaching experience: "Two students talked from their own personal experience, and they were able to essentially teach this class based on their own experiences, and I think that in teaching it, they brought clarity

to their own experience.” Further evidence of supporting student learning by inviting in the learner appeared in the ATI. Statement eight of the ATI survey states, “I encourage students to restructure their existing knowledge in terms of the new way of thinking about the subject that they will develop.” This is the first statement where all participants chose “About half the time,” “Frequently,” or “Always.” Here, participants identified the importance of including the student in the learning process. One student said, “A memorable teacher I had really linked what we learned in class to real world scenarios. He included field trips in class to help us get a better sense of how what we were learning connected to the real world.” By including the student in the learning, the faculty are then providing opportunities for the content to be relevant and applicable to the students.

Faculty can make content relevant to engage the learner in a variety of ways. Another way to draw the learner into the learning is to engage the learner with prediction activities. For example, Marie said, “I’m a believer in predicting activity type stuff, really, really foregrounding whatever you’re teaching you’re going to do with, um, with a hook like that.” Marie shared how to engage the learner with a hook in order to make the content relevant to engage the learning.

Faculty recognize the importance of making sure the students feel their education is worth it, especially today when a liberal arts education is seemingly questioned more than ever due to cost and careers. Nine out of 21 students stated in their survey responses that they attend college to make sure they can get a career. Three faculty participants mentioned the pressure of making sure students are getting their value of education. Eric said that he is “reconciling with the needs of a fast-changing world, economy, and social system,” and he continued:

And so, it, it translates into how I teach because I feel the constant pressure of making sure that I'm not wasting their time in giving them something that will actually benefit them, both as individuals in terms of their life.

Eric wants to make sure that what he is teaching is worth the students' time and money. He identifies the need to ensure his courses are valuable to students. As he mentions, this adds a layer of pressure as Eric plans and organizes his courses. Mike also mentioned that he wanted to make sure to support the students in getting their money's worth, especially when they must choose between jobs and going to class. Students shared similar sentiments of feeling the pressure to go to college. For example, one student said:

The primary reason for attending college was because I had an interest in helping the environment in some way, whether as a renewable energy engineer, a conservation scientist, a biologist, a forester/park ranger, a teacher, etc. When looking at these types of jobs, a degree was usually required/essential. But I also felt like college was a good way to explore my options and meet really cool people and professors that could help narrow my interests down to something tangible in the world that I could actually do. Other reasons would include not having any idea what I would do if I didn't go to college and feeling the pressure of going to college from my parents.

Another student said:

I continued with my education after high school partially because it was expected of me to attend college. But I also decided to go to college because I value receiving higher education, and I wanted to explore my passions by majoring in one or two subjects.

Students shared a variety of reasons for attending college, but many shared the pressures of going to college to make sure they could get a well-paying job or career once they graduated.

Faculty can engage the learners in the classroom, but faculty also believe that students should demonstrate interest in the learning. Mike said, “You know, I tell my students like, nothing makes me happier than being a cheerleader for you, but that also requires you to meet me halfway. Um, sometimes it’s hard to cheer for someone who’s standing still.” He continues this idea by identifying different ways a learner can be engaged:

And I think the idea of being a learner does require, you know, it requires effort in one way or another, whether that means taking the time to read, or whether it means taking the time to listen, um, or also being willing to fail, you know.

Mike states while his job is to teach, he also believes the students must be engaged in the learning process, that education is not a one-sided activity. His course syllabus included language that reiterated this point further. For example, in his attendance policy, he stated:

While class attendance is necessary for you to benefit from the learning experience, web access is also something that isn’t always easy to possess. As such, while I will not be taking attendance, I do expect you to make your best efforts to attend any of our virtual meetings and participate in Northeast University classwork (remember, participation is 15% of your grade). As always, your learning in this experience-oriented class requires your involvement. Please let me know if there are any issues that will prevent you from contributing so we

can work out an alternate path for your success.

The language Mike uses in his syllabus demonstrates that he wants his students to be a part of the learning and that without their participation in class, the students will not contribute to the class community. Since Mike believes that learning is about more than the content, he sets up his classes in a way that encourages, supports, and promotes student engagement in the learning. Mike wants to provide opportunity for the students to be participants so they can get the most out of their experience in the classroom.

When the faculty participants discussed student engagement, they often recognized that courses were more successful when students were engaged. The faculty believed that courses were more fun to teach, and they attributed this success to student engagement. Faculty also expressed that for the students to learn in the classrooms, instructors must believe that while their passion for the topic contributes to student engagement, students need to engage with the content as well. How faculty structure their courses operates under the assumption that students will be engaged.

### ***Connectivity among Student, Faculty, and Learning Engages the Learner***

Another way students are engaged in learning is through the connections among students, faculty, and learning. Five faculty participants discussed ideas related to connectivity in teaching. Hannah shared, “Everything about education is about relationships so not just me and students, but students with each other and me with the other faculty.” Connectivity with learning can happen between students and faculty, students and students, and faculty with other faculty. That connectivity, though, happens when the individuals are a part of the learning experience. For example, April said:

If a student’s willing to partner with me, we’re going to have a good experience.

And if they're not so willing to partner for whatever reason, then it'll be, it won't be a bad experience per se, but it just won't be as complete as it could be.

The willingness to partner between student and faculty is what April identified as a key part of successful learning. The connection among the faculty, student, and learning provides a link between the learning and the learner. This connectivity between learning and the learner was evident in the ATI survey the faculty completed. For statement three, "In my interactions with students in this subject I try to develop a conversation with them about the topics we are studying," most of the participants (14 faculty) responded with "Frequently" or "Always," stating that they engage in conversation with students about the topics being studied. Statement three is about how often the faculty engage in conversation about the topic being studied with the students. Another ATI statement that asked about the importance of student interaction was in statement 14: "I make available opportunities for students in this subject to discuss their changing understanding of the subject." Twelve participants responded with "About half the time" to "Always." For the learning to happen, the student needs to have a connection to the learning through engaging with the concepts or through interactions with the faculty or the student's peers. The role of professor being more than content deliverer allows for interactions to happen between faculty and students where students can engage in discourse about their learning. Therefore, it is important to know the learner so a connection can form, and learning can happen. Mike recognizes that for the learning to occur, some form of interaction needs to happen. He said that learning:

Comes primarily from interaction. Whether that's interaction with fellow students, whether that's interaction with that teacher, whether that's interaction

with texts or whatever it is that you're using in the class. But I think learning comes from hearing your own voice in a conversation.

Hannah shared a similar sentiment and added to the idea that interactive learning happens when faculty provide an active and inclusive learning environment. She said:

Information that we just sit and passively take in doesn't sink in in the same way as information that we do or talk about or interact with...so just having that safe space really affects how I teach and how I interact with students. I try really hard to be myself and to be very, um, approachable.

The interaction between students and faculty encourages learning opportunities. Michelle said, "my whole teaching style is based on trying not to scare people but trying to encourage them to feel comfortable." Marie echoed this idea by saying "the learning process is like once you, yeah, once you find the light bulb moments, those are probably what's energizing." To help develop this energy, the faculty can foster excitement. Matt said:

My job is to really foster that excitement so they can really think critically about the material and speak to it in a coaching, a coaching way. Hopefully ask questions that are pertinent to the subject, to raise questions from the material they've seen or read so that they can discuss it in a way that they communicate their ideas in a clearer way.

Matt believes that his job is to encourage students to be involved in the learning process and engage them as students and learners. Learning is the evolution of thought in the classroom. How students begin with an idea or concept is then fostered and supported with the work faculty promote in the classroom. April said:



Learning is taking the opportunity to develop the way that you think to challenge yourself and how you think to be challenged to be more willing to learn to have that kind of freedom where you're not so much invested in what you think at, at this moment as being absolutely true.

These faculty express their understanding of learning by stating that part of the learning process is knowing that learning is interactive and needs to happen within the classroom through interactions with peers and the faculty, as well as knowing that the learning process is not a simple process and there are complexities to it.

To connect learning with students, faculty have shared that a two-way interaction is an important part of the classroom. Mike shared the importance of making sure students get to participate in the classroom and that he does not want to be the only voice in the classroom. He said, "I don't want to be the dominant voice in my classroom. I want to be *a* voice in my classroom." Hal shared that a student having a conversation with the professor makes the learning a two-way involvement. He said that discourse between faculty and students "takes education beyond what some of my students called plug-n-chug economics." In addition, Hal said, "And as [students] talk and, and make an argument, they, uh, they develop a clearer sense of, of, of what they believe. So, I think discussion is part of learning." Learning is about connection as Eric shared during his interviews, connecting with students, connecting the students and the material. Eric said he reflects on wanting to know how he connects with students because, "Learning about the students [is about] building those relationships uh, to be, uh to connect better with students in the classroom."

Learning happening by connections was also echoed during Kelly's interviews.

She said that the environment, culture, and dynamic of students matters with learning. She cited the lessons she learned from studying Vygotsky during her education that point to a constructivist stance. Kelly explicitly stated, "I'm very Vygotskian in theory like I feel that we should be learning from each other. I want to hear what you have to say. That goes along with the constructivist approach." Kelly recognizes the value of making connections with students and with learning using a Vygotskian approach. She shared that learning happens when her students discuss ideas and make connections with each other and with her. Kelly is sharing that the connectivity within the classroom allows the students to feel engaged and a part of their learning.

When talking about engaging the students, connecting with them, and connecting them to learning, five faculty discussed that these connections could lead to lifelong learners. Will said that someone is more likely to learn when "surrounded by people that like to learn." By encouraging learning in the classroom, faculty could be providing environments that foster engagement. To further this idea, Danielle said, "I think, I think the more fun learning is, the more likely a person is to be a lifelong learner." When learning is associated with fun, the learner is more likely to continue that learning past the classroom. One student expressed the value of being a lifelong learner when the student said, "I think learning is a lifelong journey, and the more you learn, the more of a difference you can make in the world." This student identified that being a lifelong learner is how individuals can support the world. When sharing how to encourage lifelong learning, Marie said, "We talk about training people to be lifelong learners. And that probably means we're asking them to be curious, flexible, um, and ask questions. Not, not just deep and probing questions, but just ask any questions." Therefore, faculty

recognize that to foster lifelong learners, they need to engage the students and bring them into the learning experience. Kelly believes that teaching in higher education “is taking the students where they’re at and developing them as lifelong learners and encouraging them to think critically, act ethically, and be responsible as they go forward.” Fostering lifelong learning in the classroom is a joint effort in that faculty need to engage the students, and students need to join the learning environment to demonstrate their engagement.

Shelly shared her thoughts about lifelong learning and how professors themselves are lifelong learners. She said:

I think most of us that are in, that are, that are teaching on any level are lifelong learners because we are continuing to find the best ways to present what it is that we love and are curious about, um, and so that’s and continuing to learn about our field and so and deepen our, our own understanding of it, our own experience of it.

Shelly says that faculty are lifelong learners and so they therefore value learning about their subject. This passion for their topic then translates into sparking conversations with the students and engaging them in the learning process.

Connectivity among the learner and the subject matter, the learner and the faculty, and the learners and their peers were all identified as valuable for student engagement. Without the connectivity of learning to the learner, the student is not as engaged. How faculty include the learner can determine the students’ engagement with their learning.

*Faculty Passion for the Subject Engages the Learner*

Three of the 12 participants believe that their passion for the subject will engage the learner and that the faculty's passion in the subject leads the learner to be more engaged. Matt shared his beliefs about his purpose and said, "My main purpose is to inspire the student with a certain amount of passion for the class that they're in." He continues this point, sharing that passion and excitement can inspire or engage a student. Matt said, "[Students are] not as excited about it as you are, but they might become just a bit more, uh, interested just from what you've done and some of it can just rub off, too." Matt believes that when faculty are passionate about their topic, this passion transfers to the classroom and the learning and helps determine how the instructor runs the classroom and designs activities. In fact, when asked about a memorable professor, two students responded specifically about Matt saying he was memorable "because he was more than just an average teacher." According to language on Matt's syllabus, his course "Engages an 'active learning' approach, where students must engage in assigned readings and [course materials] outside of class to gain foundational knowledge, and then practice higher levels of learning during class time. Lectures are minimized during class." Here Matt demonstrates how his conceptualization of teaching, engaging the student in their learning, informs his course practices, which he says includes minimizing class lectures because students are completing the reading and engaging in course material outside of class. Shelly also mentions the value of passion in teaching during an interview:

You know, initially you think to teach something that you know [is] to share something that you have expertise in and passion for. But I do think that, that it's more when you're in the classroom and you're teaching, it's more of a sharing

what you know and your passion for it excites them and kind of ignites a little spark. And so then together, you're discovering, uncovering, what's in them and, and what the possibilities are.

Shelly explains teaching is more than having a passion about the subject. Shelly's conceptualization of teaching is about sharing the passion with the students, igniting their passion, and then learning and growing together by engaging with the students about the topic and subject. She believes that being a teacher is about being a facilitator, and she shared examples of her teaching practice when she works with each student to provide them support in a way they need. Shelly said some students want direct, honest feedback, and others need a little bit more encouragement when given feedback. She believes that being a professor is about finding a balance between sharing your passion with the student while encouraging them to find their own passion.

Ten students shared that a faculty's passion was an important contributor in their learning. For example, one student stated:

I'd say the most memorable teachers I've already had are the ones who genuinely show a passion for the content material outside the classroom. They bring excitement and energy to the class every day, and it shows in their presentation/teaching style!

The students shared a similar perspective to the faculty and believed that a faculty's passion helped the student feel more engaged in the topic.

In addition to having passion about one's subject to engage the student, Danielle believes that being aware of the learner and learning how to engage the student as a learner influences how she teaches. She states:

I think the prime influence is that I put myself in that student's position. If I'm bored, they're bored. If I lack energy, they lack energy. If I'm not passionate, they're not passionate. I think that's the first thing, if I think about it, that influences my teaching.

Danielle's statement identifies that when faculty are aware of students' feelings and needs, the students feel more included and are thus more likely to engage. In her syllabus, Danielle states:

Grading is weighed towards the stronger work the student demonstrates in the different class requirements. If a student shows exceptional performance in one area, this will serve as compensation for a lesser performance in others, since each individual may choose where to place the greater emphasis in her/his learning.

This example from Danielle's syllabus circles back to what she shared about passion in the classroom. If a student struggles with a concept or assignment in her courses, she does not penalize the student but rather plays to their strengths by allowing their stronger skills to support their grades. Danielle explains that passion is an important way to engage the students; however, when a student does not have passion for the subject or struggles to comprehend, she does not penalize them for that. Instead, Danielle's practice embraces the student wherever they are as a learner to support student engagement. This example furthers Danielle's conceptualization of teaching where she values the student being a part of the learning process and how this conceptualization impacts her teaching practice, specifically her grading practice.

Faculty passion about their subject correlates with being experts in their field. If a faculty member is passionate about a subject or topic, there could be the assumption that

they know all about the area and can answer any and all questions from students. On the ATI, there was a question about knowing all the answers to questions students ask, and so when asking faculty this statement, who are often considered experts in their fields, I assumed they would respond with “Always,” feeling like they need to know the answers. However, when asked ATI statement 13, “I feel that I should know the answers to any questions that students may put to me during this subject”, no participants chose “Always” demonstrating that the faculty do not feel they should always know all the answers. There was a range of responses between the other choices: two chose “Only rarely,” three participants chose “Sometimes,” four participants chose “About half the time,” and six chose “Frequently.” These responses could mean that faculty do not feel they always have to know the answer, but for the most part, they feel that they should know the answers to students’ questions. The range in their responses demonstrates their thoughts about the importance of knowing the subject matter and being passionate about their subject, but also the recognition that they do not have to know everything.

Faculty stated that passionate teaching will lead to more student engagement. Thus, if faculty are passionate about their topic, then they believe students will be more engaged and drawn to the subject matter. If a faculty member is not comfortable with or confident in their subject area, then the student might not be as engaged. What was not clear from the data is whether the passion for the subject meant the faculty were proficient teachers.

Most of the faculty participants (12) identified the importance of student engagement. For learning to happen, faculty believe their passion for the subject will spark student engagement. Participants realized the importance of inviting the student

into the learning process and engaging the learner in their classes. Faculty also recognized the importance of student curiosity. Faculty believe learning happens when students are curious about the subject, but what is unclear is how faculty foster this curiosity. The faculty recognized the importance of curiosity but were not always clear about how to develop it. Lastly, the data showed that connection is a significant part of student engagement.

### **Faculty Preparedness**

Prior to entering the classroom, many institutions do not require faculty to have pedagogical knowledge or training about teaching. In fact, the literature states that preparation for teaching in higher education does not systematically and explicitly provide models of a variety of teaching approaches nor is it something the professors may have experienced (Nevgi & Löfström, 2015; Hermanowicz, 2016). This was reflected in the data. Throughout the interviews, specifically, faculty expressed an awareness of not being adequately prepared in graduate school to know how to teach. What faculty expressed about feeling the lack of graduate school preparation for teaching is exactly what is referred to in Austin's (2002) work. Most of the faculty participants (11 of 15) felt they learned how to teach from their own student experiences, from time in their careers, or from exposure to teaching in graduate school as a teaching assistant. Because faculty are not expected to have formal training in how to teach, faculty shared a variety of experiences with the challenge of teaching. These challenges impacted how faculty conceptualized teaching and caused the theme of faculty preparedness to emerge. This theme was evident in what faculty shared during their interviews, and is broken down in the following section this way: being a teacher is a calling, time commitment, graduate



school preparedness or lack of, faculty as reflective learners, being a professor stretches you, and institutional teaching support.

***Being a Professor Is a Calling***

When thinking of faculty preparedness, seven faculty participants identified as being called to the profession. They identified that teaching in higher education is not for everyone and takes a certain person to be able to successfully do it. When thinking about her own experiences with teaching a range of students and reflecting on those in her family who are teachers, Danielle said:

I mean teaching is a, I think it was a calling. I look at it as God's work and that's the way I approach it...Because that's the way I saw my parents approach it.

Because I feel I'm a better person ... so it does...I believe that education is what it's about. I believe that you know good education makes good people.

Danielle is not the only faculty member who believes teaching is a calling or a part of her nature. Michelle shared that teaching works for her because it "is more natural to me to nurture and help people." In fact, several participants shared that they were recruited to be a professor. Working at the college level was not something they were interested in or sought out, but other participants shared that they wanted to be a college professor and enjoy being in the classroom. Will, Samantha, and Hal shared that they were approached to be a professor. There was a person at their institutions that reached out to these now-faculty to join the department. Samantha said, "I just landed on it" when asked how she got into higher education. Will and Dave, the two youngest participants, both said that they assumed they would be teaching later in life after they had more career experience. Three faculty expressed that they knew they wanted to be a teacher from a young age.

Kelly mentioned that she wanted to be a professor after she had been teaching in younger grades. She said that teaching in college was not going to be a “default career” for her and that she had hopes and dreams of becoming a professor. Eric said that he “wanted to be a social studies teacher. I majored, as an undergraduate I majored in history.” There are ranges of faculty perspectives as to why they became teachers, but each perspective can be concluded to say that teaching is a calling, whether participants felt called to teach by someone else or by their own desires to teach.

Based on their personal education experiences in the classroom as a student and as a professor, seven participants believe that being a professor is a calling and that being a professor is more than the accolades of publishing or recognition from their professional field. The participants of this study felt that being a professor is about being an educator, a coach, or a mentor to support learning and students’ growth.

### ***Time Commitment***

One challenge of faculty preparedness is time commitment. Five faculty participants expressed some concerns about how much time is involved with teaching, alluding to the notion that many were not aware of the time necessary to teach. Eric said that teaching is time consuming. Samantha furthers this point by saying, “90-hour weeks...This is probably the most time-consuming job on the face of the Earth and it’s not the most well-paid job.” Even though teaching does have a significant time commitment, several participants mentioned that they have additional jobs to supplement their income as well as to maintain their professionalism in their fields. Samantha said, “I’m still involved with [an outside position]; I’m still the executive director.” Kelly is a private consultant and researcher. John runs an independent business in addition to

teaching at his institution. Hal is still a consultant for businesses outside of being a faculty member. Matt teaches at multiple institutions. All these faculty shared the time commitment that teaching involves, and being an educator requires a lot from the individual. There are courses to design, lesson plans to create, papers to grade, assessments to score and review, and students to support. One of the challenges for faculty is learning how much time commitment teaching requires. Faculty aren't often aware of the time commitment until they are in the job as professors. So how faculty conceptualize teaching prior to being in the classroom changes as they learn more about the time commitment teaching involves.

Another challenge of time commitment worth noting is that students have other courses they are taking in addition to the faculty's course, which impact the students' own time commitment. One student shared that college has "way too much work. Not enough understanding from staff or administration to try and lighten loads and encourage work-life balance." Most faculty are competing for time, focus, and energy with other courses, which can impact how the faculty approach their teaching. For example, a faculty member might design a lesson or activity a certain way and then have to change it based on the impact of another course the students are taking or something that is happening in the students' lives. For example, Mike shared that the "hardest part can be sort of expecting a certain amount of work and also realizing that you're, you are just a small cog in the giant machine of this person's life." Here Mike is hinting at the idea that the students have multiple things happening in their lives besides their education, as he explicitly shares in this vignette about his experience with students. He said:

For some of these young people there are so many pressures being put on them that something like education gets back burnered. And for some students it's like, well, you know, my boss wants me to keep coming in and and and, you know, you're torn between the saying to them, I get it, you know, you don't want to lose your job at Kohl's or the supermarket or wherever it is that you're at. And then the other part of you that's like you're here because you don't want to be doing that for the rest of your life. You want to do this other career that you're really passionate about. And by taking those extra shifts, you are not saying to your boss, "you know, I have this class that I really need to be at." You're, you're tripping yourself up to, to that future that you're hoping to get to. And so, if anything, you know, it can be frustrating as the person who, who really wants to see them succeed, to see people self-sabotage to some degree. And then also to have just life experiences that force them to make decisions that pull them away from their education. I mean, it's frustrating both because you want to see them succeed and also because you know how expensive it is to go to college.

Here Mike shares the student perspective that sometimes students' time commitments impede their education, but they may also have to work due to finances. The students could be employed somewhere that competes for their time. In addition, the students could be in courses that are more demanding than others thus pulling their time from one course to another. For example, Danielle said:

And what is the most difficult is that they have a lot of reading for other courses.

They have a lot of work to do. And so there may be a time when my work gets put

to the side because they have something else to do. And I have to understand that and be able to work with it, around that.

Here Danielle is recognizing that her class is not the only course a student is enrolled in, and she plans her courses accordingly. This recognition is how Danielle tailors her courses to meet the needs of students. How she conceptualizes teaching is impacted as well as her practice in the classroom because she has to plan her lessons and assignments with the awareness that students have other activities or experiences impacting their productivity.

Overall, faculty have learned that teaching is a time commitment for themselves and for students. This realization has led to policies stated in the course syllabi about accepting (or not accepting) late assignments, as well as communicating to the students the importance of them telling their professors when they may have a conflict or need extra support. Since faculty recognize that teaching requires time from them and their students, they are learning ways to make sure they address the needs of the learners.

The time commitment that faculty face being academics has two layers. One is to identify how much time faculty dedicate to the profession when planning their courses, working with students, and supporting the learning process. The other is the time commitment related to what is required of students and the impact the students' divided time and energy has on their courses. Students may be involved in their own personal matters in addition to their time commitment to college which could impact their participation in their education which, in turn, may affect their education.

### ***Graduate School Preparedness or Lack of***

Another layer of faculty preparedness relates explicitly to the faculty's education

and schooling. One thought that five faculty shared during their interviews was how their graduate school did or did not prepare them to be higher education faculty members. Even still, some faculty were grateful for the graduate school experience. Eric said, “I’m grateful for all the things I’ve learned and I’m grateful actually to [my graduate institution].” With this example, Eric shared that he was grateful for the knowledge gained about his discipline and subject matter. Similarly, Dave shared that his graduate school did not provide teaching pedagogy support or know-how, but instead featured courses were focused on content and field instead of on the teaching profession. Kelly mentioned that her doctoral program provided opportunities for her to teach, so she learned to teach college students while she earned her Ph.D. Michelle shared that she also “taught all through [graduate] school” as a teaching assistant.

Some faculty did not have any formal teaching opportunities in graduate school, but they provided examples of how experiences in their career helped prepare them for the teaching world. Hal shared his experiences in the corporate world and how those experiences helped him with telling stories that he could share with his students to provide relevant experiences from his time in his career field. Danielle, Eric, Hannah, Michelle, Matt, Samantha, Marie, Shelly, and Kelly all explained their prior teaching experiences while Hal, Mike, Dave, Will, John, and April shared experiences where they taught in the workforce, their community, or other non-formal education sector. There is a myriad of ways professors gain teaching experience which can add to the diversity of their teaching experience in the classroom. These experiences provided some insight into faculty preparedness, specifically with teaching in higher education, and how faculty approach their teaching and helped me learn more about what faculty believe about

teaching and why they teach the way they do. For example, based on his experiences in his career field, Hal believed that his time in the corporate work prepared him for classroom management as he trained professionals in his field. Other participants shared similar experiences and felt that their time outside of education helped inform their teaching practice and beliefs in the classroom, especially from their own learning experiences and wanting to make sure they taught in ways that worked for them as learners.

### *Faculty as Reflective Learners*

An element to being a thorough teacher is utilizing reflective practice, and five faculty stated that they would appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning throughout their time teaching. This reflection would allow them to continue their growth as educators. Shelly said:

And I always remember [the former center for teaching and learning director] saying where the learning happens is in the reflection. But I don't take time to do that myself. And so it would be great if there were, I don't know a couple days each semester where it would just be no meetings and you're going to just take time to think about your teaching and reflect on that and reflect on it with colleagues in your department or reflect on it with a cross section of people... But we just don't have time to, to have those ref- that reflection and those conversations.

A way that faculty can prepare themselves for the classroom is by reflectively approaching their teaching. Eric shared how he practices this: "I have to go back and look and say, 'Well, did I approach this properly? Did I, what could I have done differently?'"

Faculty are learners and therefore are students of sorts, too. Michelle said, “And I still feel like I’m a student, which I actually really love.” Michelle references her work in the classroom as well as her work when interacting with students. In my analytic memo notes from February 2, 2021, I wrote this statement after an interview with Michelle:

She provided me with so much information about being a learner and how that has shifted for her as she became a teacher. She realized that she was a good student but not a good learner. So now she’s learned this and is working to impart this to her students with examples throughout her courses and assignments.

Being a reflective practitioner allows the faculty member the time, space, and energy to improve their teaching thus ultimately supporting the students and the learning in the classroom. To further the idea of teaching as a reflective practice, Shelly mentioned that “I have a philosophy about that and myself as a teacher, myself as a learner, and even the students as a teacher as a learner. I mean, I’m learning from them.” Alsup’s (2006) work echoes Shelly’s recognition that her teaching philosophy cemented for her when she had to engage in discourse about her teaching philosophy and experience. When Alsup and the PST’s engaged in a reflective discourse, then they were able to engage in discourse about themselves as educators.

Faculty preparedness has many layers. Faculty recognized that being a professor challenges them, but also encourages growth as teachers. Some faculty recognized that being a professor is a calling, whether that call was from someone else or from their own belief. Faculty’s preparedness, or lack of preparedness, came from their graduate school or career field. Another way faculty can be prepared for teaching is from the institutional support available to them. How faculty conceptualize teaching, in turn, determines their



approaches and teaching practice.

***Being a Professor Stretches You***

A common idea expressed surrounding the idea of faculty preparedness is that being a professor stretches faculty. There were four faculty who specifically expressed that being a professor stretching them. In an analytic memo that I wrote after talking with Will during his interview on February 9, 2021, I reflected on our conversation and wrote:

Teaching needs to be less about sage on stage and faculty need to not only be the bearers of knowledge. They instead need to help students know how to understand the vast information that they are subjected to everyday.

My notes referenced what Will said during his interview about the importance of faculty shifting from being sages on the stage, the sole governors of knowledge, to guides on the sides to help students sift through all the information that is at their fingertips. He said that faculty should not only have content knowledge and expertise about the subject matter, but they also need to know teaching practices and strategies to support the students. April mentioned the two parts of teaching-- meta and content level—during her interview. April said:

At the meta level, I'm hoping to see what I can do to hold students accountable for being who they are and being comfortable with who they are, but also recognizing their obligations to others. And to see that, to, to see them, um, you know, wrestling with their own senses of limitation, and how to either make their peace with their limitations or find ways to, to overcome it doesn't seem like the right word, but to dissolve this, to dissolve those limitations, to see their way free of, of the sense's implementation. So that's, I'd say at the meta level, and then

how I'm doing that in [my field] is trying to, trying to get them to look at the substance of the content of my field with a critical eye.”

This shift from being content bearers to facilitators in the classroom is recognizing that teaching in higher education is not only about the content. This conceptualization of teaching is recognizing that teaching in higher education is about faculty's metacognition, reflecting on their own teaching practice and supporting students. Dave mentioned that he realized that teaching is more difficult than he anticipated. He said:

It's definitely a lot harder than I thought it would be. (laughs) It's made me appreciate teachers I've had a lot all throughout [my time in school] because I never really realized kind of how much goes into it. You wear a lot of hats: disciplinarian, you're creating homework assignments, you're grading, you're writing lesson plans, lectures, figuring out the syllabus, figuring out Canvas, all the academics too. It's just like so many different pieces that you have to be good at, or at least passable at all of them pretty much from day one. Um, and so yeah you can kind of learn as you go too but like, it's it's a lot of pressure to do it right, because you have the students right there, like you have immediate results.

Dave expressed the complexities of teaching and how those complexities can be a lot for faculty to balance, especially if unfamiliar to teaching prior to entering the professoriate. Since Dave believes that teaching is about helping students be autonomous, knowing how best to support students can be difficult for faculty who are unfamiliar with how to help students be independent learners.

Sometimes various teaching roles can impact how faculty view themselves. Eric shared his doubts as a professor and said there is always the question of whether he is

good enough. Eric said:

And I would say also, the struggles are, you know, always the questions of whether I'm good enough at what I am doing. What am I doing enough to connect with the students? And there's always some new idea or some new way of trying to reach out to students, particularly when they come to you with such varied, um, backgrounds, interests, capabilities, you know, we work hard here.

Eric is not the only faculty member to question if they are doing a good job for the students. But sometimes there is not always an awareness or way to know if what they are doing in the classroom is working. However, students do pay attention to how faculty teach, and the students recognize what they want from their professors. One student said:

Something that also helps a lot is if teachers have time that is specifically used for students to ask questions. Because in some classes there is just no time for that. It also helps if teachers make sure that students understand that every question they ask is a valid question and that they won't be judged for it.

Another student said:

I feel anytime a teacher has created an activity or assignment where I need to voice my original opinion is when I have learned best. Having class discussions about difficult issues has widened my perspective and has helped boost my problem-solving skills. I also feel like classes that include student presentations have really helped me learn best. They force me to really dive into the material so that I can adequately explain the topic to the class.

And finally, one student summed up the replies of many students by saying, "The two most effective tools I have seen teachers use are: 1. Teaching, demonstrating, and then

testing in a low stakes way. 2. Holding low stakes group discussions for people to engage with the subject and share ideas.” These student responses showcased that students are paying attention to how faculty teach. The responses also highlighted that students think they know what works for them as learners and are used to having teachers who engage the students in the learning process. Therefore, faculty could learn a lot about teaching from hearing students’ perspectives about learning because the students are aware of how teachers practice their craft.

While teaching can be complex and layered, there are rewards to the profession. There are times when a professor stretches the faculty in positive ways. Michelle said:

I love it. It's really stretching me in many ways...Being organized, uh, organizing my thoughts, organizing my time, and my materials. Being spontaneous to meet the needs of students, as they arise, and yet trying to stay on the train track that I laid down for the semester curriculum. Sometimes there are detours. Um, I love the challenges of that. It's fresh and new and sometimes overwhelming, and sometimes I want to just hide, but I'm not bored I'll tell you that. (Michelle laughs.)

Michelle has learned life lessons that support her teaching and ultimately the students. Shelly gets more specific about one challenge she tries to overcome and why teaching is worth it:

And so, then I do feel that I overdo it like I, I animate more, and I like work harder to, you know, compensate for the lack of energy that they have. I feel like I have to fill the room or with my own energy. And so sometimes that's just that's just tiring. You just you want them to just want to be there and I know they do,

but they don't like, overtly show it at that time. But once I get in there, we get going and you have a little spark, even if it's just a moment with each one, that there's something clicks for them, and it's worth it.

Being a professor has stretched the faculty's concepts of teaching. Some participants realized that teaching is more difficult than they knew when they had to learn to balance the various roles faculty have. Other faculty loved the stretch and challenge because it pushed them to be better professors and to strive to do better for the students.

Faculty recognized that being a professor stretches them as people, but it also stretches them professionally. They must be proficient in their fields while also wearing several hats to support learning. Faculty recognized that their conceptualization of teaching (care about the students, want student engagement, and humanize the learning experience) influenced their experiences in the classroom then informed their teaching practice (their lessons, assignment design, syllabi, class structure, and student interactions).

### ***Institutional Teaching Support***

When discussing support for faculty preparedness, four faculty discussed institutional support. Will shared how his institution has something called faculty learning communities for first- and second-year faculty which provided teaching strategies. Other faculty felt they were missing important knowledge about how to support students. Shelly mentioned not feeling she has enough knowledge to support students:

And I think as a, as an instructor, you're offering lots of possibilities of ways of learning, so I don't know that I do a really thorough job with this, but helping, I

feel like I should be better at helping students understand what type of learner they are, so that then the learning is not going to happen if I'm offering it in, in a particular way that that doesn't reach a certain student because they're not an auditory learner or they're not a visual learner, they're not a kinesthetic learner. So then something for them and maybe the learning then won't happen or won't happen as deeply for them. So I think understanding how, how one learns is gotta be a piece of, of how the learning's going to happen, if the learning is going to happen.

To combat this feeling, institutions are beginning to provide more support for teaching. April said there has been "more of an effort at the college to be more systematic about supporting teaching and learning." Will, Dave, Kelly, and Matt all shared how their institution has a Center for Teaching and Learning that supports faculty development, and they shared how they have participated in activities.

Faculty preparedness contributed to how faculty viewed teaching in terms of how they approached their teaching. For example, 11 participants felt that faculty preparedness came from a variety of places: their career experiences, their graduate school teaching opportunities, or their own educational experiences. Faculty shared that being a professor takes a specific skillset, and is a calling, and requires a time commitment. Some faculty felt their graduate school prepared them for their field and expertise more than it program prepared them for teaching. Faculty recognized that teaching is a reflective practice and they appreciated opportunities to reflect on their craft. Four faculty felt that being a teaching stretched them and shared the institutional resources available to them.

### **Learning Conceptualizations**

As Pratt (1992) states, teaching beliefs inform teaching practice, and teaching practice informs teaching beliefs. How faculty conceptualize teaching then informs their teaching practice. Nine participants shared their beliefs of how learning occurs in their classrooms and what they believe about their teaching practice. The participants were unable to dissociate learning and teaching because as they shared their beliefs about teaching, they also shared their beliefs about learning and vice versa. Because participants were unable to distance teaching and learning, the theme learning conceptualizations emerged. This theme had several ideas within it that could help faculty in the classroom: helping students unlearn; providing student support; and learning needs to be accessible.

#### ***Helping Students Unlearn***

Because learning is an integral part of the classroom and teaching, it is not surprising that how faculty view learning came to light as the data was collected. Six participants identified the need to help students have a new, positive learning experience because faculty recognized that students might not have had a good learning experience and/or that students might need help unlearning a concept, idea, or belief about learning. Sometimes learning experiences can negatively impact the students' desire to learn. Students may need help with unlearning the associations of that bad learning experience so they can be receptive to learning more. This is part of the learning process.

Michelle believes in helping the students unlearn what they have been conditioned to think their entire lives about themselves as learners or about how learning happens or even the motivation behind getting good grades. She said:

So, what I'm trying to do now is inspire students who have been raised from kindergarten to worry about grades and performance and accomplishment, these external things. To say okay yeah that's fine, don't, don't like not care, but don't make that everything. That's not your actual education. Your education is [to] uncover. Educare [the Latin word] is to uncover. Uncovering who you are in there, what motivates you and then like learning that stuff and, and growing it.

Michelle helps the student unlearn by providing opportunities for this in her course. According to her syllabus, the students have weekly lesson reflections where students “follow up each lesson with a Canvas report reflecting the tasks accomplished in the lesson, the take-aways, challenges, and successes.” Here, Michelle’s conceptualization of teaching translates into her practices of encouraging students to reflect on their learning.

Another perspective to unlearning is to help students learn or know about different perspectives or approaches to concepts, ideas, beliefs, or thoughts. For example, Matt said:

Most students take filmmaking for granted because they had been so immersed in the visual culture that they think they know what they’re doing, and they really don’t. They know nothing about how this stuff works behind the scenes and how hard it is to get it to a level that's actually at professional standards.

In this example, Matt shares an experience with his students and their assumptions about the discipline. He furthers his point by saying, “So that class sort of pushes them to rethink their own assumptions about digital storytelling, use of audio and then the more advanced production class.” When students assume they know about the topic they are about to learn, the faculty realize they need to help the students unlearn these



assumptions.

Sometimes faculty need to encourage learners who had terrible learning experiences and, therefore, are resistant to the topic or subject. Danielle said, “You have had a bad experience and just, it takes a while to want to learn again.” Therefore, faculty need to be aware that some students need help unlearning negative, harmful, or incorrect learning experiences to be more receptive to learning from the faculty. To help students unlearn, faculty must first know what information is incorrect. For example, Kelly said, “sometimes with where [the students are] at there is correcting misinformation. There is realignment with bringing them back and undoing some learning.” Kelly refers to those instances when students were taught or learned incorrect information or misunderstood the concepts that were taught. Mike says that teaching in college is more than just getting the students to learn a concept; it is about helping the students to apply but to also let go of past assumptions or application of the concept to allow for new learning to happen. For instance:

Because [students] had a very specific way of writing just sort of carved into them for so long that it becomes just this mechanical process...So I think part of my job is, you know, re-engaging them, showing them that writing can be so much more than this.

Mike explained that teaching is about helping students not get lost in the academic world. Michelle furthers this point by saying to students, “My job as your teacher is to help you figure out who you are, find yourself, uncover, get rid of all the junk that has been put on top of you.” Marie also mentions the impact faculty can have on helping students unlearn by “helping students in their awakening as people.” She explained that as faculty work

with students, the faculty should provide opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and shared that she encourages this within her courses and the assignments. Hannah believes that the best way to help students unlearn is to provide a safe environment; she said, “people learn best when they’re able to take risks and people won’t take risks unless they feel safe.” Hannah said she consciously does this in her classes by positively reinforcing when students contribute and by providing time and space for the students to share their ideas. Shelly believes that being a faculty member means to help students’ growth, and she said, “I think, I think my, my purpose as a professor is to like, provide a space that is safe and non-judgmental.” Shelly shared how she provides a safe environment by encouraging students to share their ideas, no matter the answer, and she said that she can connect their ideas to help them safely learn. To aid in the learning process, faculty need to be aware of students’ possible needs to unlearn the negative associations with learning and possible misinformation of what the students were taught.

### ***Providing Student Support***

Another layer to how faculty conceptualize learning is to provide student support, and six faculty shared specific examples of how they do this. Faculty want students to grow and learn and want to know how to set students up for this success. When thinking about how best to support students, April identified the importance of knowing what her purpose is for the class session and course. She recognizes that when she provides structure and guidance for the students, they will contribute and learn more. April said:

And I think things go better when I’m, when what I’ve asked the students do, to prepare is more closely tied to my purpose... And I can tell if I haven’t really

given them the preparation. It's more, it's more work to get them to follow what I'm, the point that I'm making. But I always try to have my couple of goals for like at the end of the class, they'll understand this vocabulary, they'll have thought about this equation of connections between forces, you know.

Here, April demonstrates how she conceptualizes teaching and then demonstrates these beliefs in her instructional practice in class.

Faculty want students to grow and learn, and they want students to learn and go out into the world with an understanding of themselves and others. One way to support student success is to be an advocate for the student and care about students. Matt said, "the more I care about the student then I actually call them out on their crappy work." Matt says that when he cares more for a student, then he is more honest with them to provide support to help them grow as learners. Mike believes that if he helps students and cares for them, then they will be more inclined to participate and engage. Mike said, "if they know that I care, then maybe that helps them care a little bit more." Some faculty are aware that students are balancing multiple courses and workloads, so priorities may be different than what the faculty, as academics, usually what the priority to be. When talking about students' workload and how to guide students to prioritize the work for his course, Mike said, "you have four paper requirements in my class, [and] you're also maybe taking four or five other classes that probably also have paper requirements." He conveyed that he recognized students had other courses and assignments, so they would need to plan accordingly. Another participant, Matt, recognized the challenges with student workload when said:

I learned when I was teaching at [previous institution where he was employed] as

an adjunct that most of their energy is on their science classes that they might be taking, might be taking a class on, on, you know, science fiction or Shakespeare and they're in a lab all night, but they have this deadline to let me know they need next time I'll give them that extra week or whatever they need. So, I've learned that we can be a little bit easier for students on deadlines if they're actually trying to do the work.

Matt deals with student workload by being flexible with deadlines.

Providing student support requires first recognizing that students are involved in additional courses or activities beyond the course faculty are teaching. Sometimes student support could mean providing context for a lesson and other times the support would mean recognizing the students are involved in multiple activities. In summary, providing student support is recognizing that the students are learners with various needs and demands that they have and that are placed on the students. How faculty provide student support influences their learning conceptualization because the awareness of the students' needs is then accounted for within the concept of learning.

### ***Learning Needs to Be Accessible***

One conceptualization of learning that four faculty identified is that learning needs to be accessible. Hal said, "my purpose is to make the theories of economics accessible and to make them understandable. And, and to make them justified, to justify the trouble of learning them." Hal believes that what he is teaching in his classes needs to be accessible to the students or they will not learn the concepts. Danielle shared her own learning experiences, saying that learning was not accessible to her as a student. She said, "my professor lost me on a course that I would have enjoyed and reveled in, and I always

remember it and never forget it, which is why my courses are always, my materials are always accessible.” When the learning was not accessible for Danielle, she was not as productive in her own learning process. As a result of her own experience, Danielle makes a concerted effort to make the learning accessible, achievable, and attainable for her students in order for them to be a part of the learning process to further their learning development. Under the “Student conduct” section of her syllabus, Danielle states, “Learning best occurs in a supportive and respectful atmosphere. Students are encouraged to make mistakes - any laughter will be with, not at, you. Rude, disruptive behavior is not expected and will not be tolerated.” Here, Danielle acknowledges that mistakes are a part of learning and that the learning that will occur in her classroom will be inclusive, loving, and supportive to all students. This is how Danielle says she works to make learning accessible to all students in her course.

One way to make sure learning is accessible is to help students. Mike shared that part of the job is working with students to help them adjust to college and the expectations. He said that with his students “I think a fair amount of my job is helping these people adjust to being a college student and the expectations that come with that.” Mike mentioned how he has helped students and how important this is in teaching college-age students. In his syllabus, Mike states:

My goal in our class is [to] create as much of a community as possible. We can accomplish this goal if we always keep the door open to conversation and communication. So, please never hesitate to reach out to me with any concerns, ideas, or comments.

In Eric’s syllabus, he communicates the importance of life lessons within the

expectations of the course. Regarding tardiness, his syllabus states: “Tardiness that is habitual will adversely affect your grade.... So, show up...eighty percent of success is just showing up (Woody Allen); the other twenty percent, however, requires you to do something thoughtful, productive, and worthwhile after you have arrived!” Both Mike’s and Eric’s syllabi provide examples of how faculty conceptualize teaching and then apply those beliefs to their teaching practices as stated in their syllabi.

Several students shared the importance of learning as being a balance between the concepts and personal growth. For example, one student stated, “To me learning is two factors, the growth of knowledge and the growth of self. Even with simple memorization of facts, a personality, thoughts and habits are being formed.” This student shared the realization that learning is about the concepts and about the person, thus reinforcing the need for learning to be accessible to students.

Learning conceptualizations for faculty are complex and layered, but faculty can support, encourage, and promote this process by recognizing the needs of the learners. Faculty are not only teaching their content; they might need to support the students with adjusting to college and life. By helping students adjust to college and life and making the learning accessible to them, faculty support the learning process in the classroom. Additionally, students need to know that learning is interactive, learning needs to be accessible, learning sometimes needs to be unlearned, and learning needs to have support. All these parts to the learning process help the students be engaged in the classroom as well as their learning. When faculty know these ways to support the students, the learning process will unfold in the classrooms.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss and analyze the data collected from the ATI survey, interviews, syllabi, and student questionnaires. General conclusions were drawn and explained in this section. There were 15 faculty participants from four different institutions who contributed to the data collection for the ATI responses, interviews, and course syllabi. There were 29 student responses from the student questionnaire that contributed to this section. The research questions for this study were: Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices?

The conceptualizations of faculty included: being there for the student; helping students uncover who they are as individuals; including the student in the learning process; providing safe and inclusive learning environments; teaching the students content and life skills; meeting the students where they are; sharing passion with the students; learning and growing with the students; and having a balance between content delivery, meeting the students' needs, and being an engaging professor. The practices that faculty shared in their interviews and included in their syllabi were class discussions, interactive learning assignments or projects, lectures, reflective writing assignments, and partner or group projects. The faculty conceptualized teaching in various ways and shared how they practiced their craft. The missing piece was getting to see faculty teach and demonstrate what they believed and shared as important parts of teaching. The focus of the following section will be conclusions and recommendations from the data.

## **Chapter V Conclusions and Recommendations**

This mixed research study used thematic analysis to explore two research questions: Given the context of a liberal arts institution, what are faculty members' conceptualizations of teaching? How does the faculty's conceptualization inform their teaching practices? The results from both the qualitative data and descriptive statistics provided insights into addressing the two research questions. In this chapter I share the key findings from the study, suggested recommendations, and future research.

### **Key Findings**

The study included 15 faculty participants who ranged in degree obtained, age, academic discipline, and years of teaching. The participants were from four different institutions that provide a liberal arts experience. Two of the institutions were private, and two were public.

The first data collection was the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI). The faculty responses to ATI yielded that 12 of the 15 participants identified as student-centered. While this study focused on individuals who teach at institutions that place emphasis in teaching (Lindholm, 2004; Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Hilton, 2014; Trautwein, 2018), I had assumed that the faculty might not recognize or identify that their main responsibility is to teach. The significance of the ATI findings could show that faculty who teach in higher education, specifically at a liberal arts institution, are aware of student-centered teaching. According to what the faculty shared during their interviews, student-centered teaching meant that faculty cared about the students, wanted student engagement, and humanized the learning experience. Therefore, I hypothesize beyond this data collection that while faculty may know what student-centered teaching



is and what it looks like in the classroom, they may not know how to implement or practice it.

From the interview data, four themes emerged: influences to teaching, student engagement, faculty preparedness, and learning conceptualizations. Each theme was addressed by faculty and had subthemes. Influences to teaching was mentioned by all 15 participants and had six subthemes. This theme is about how the faculty's conceptualization of teaching is established and what influences that participant has experienced. Student engagement appeared in 12 faculty interviews and had five subthemes. The faculty expressed that student engagement was the key to teaching and having a productive classroom. Faculty identified that student engagement was imperative in the classroom for better learning and more engagement in topics. However, there was insufficient data to know if faculty knew how to foster and support student engagement or even how to build it if student engagement was not evident. Faculty preparedness was mentioned by 11 participants and had five subthemes. Faculty shared a range of preparedness from feeling adequately prepared in their subject area to recognizing they did not have sufficient preparation for how to teach. Learning conceptualization appeared in nine participant interviews with three subthemes. Faculty participants were unable to dissociate learning and teaching because when they shared their beliefs about teaching, they simultaneously shared their beliefs about learning. Therefore, the learning conceptualizations theme emerged as faculty talked about their teaching while also discussing learning. Pratt (1992) stated that teaching conceptualizations come from actions, intentions, and beliefs. He also said that teaching is cyclical in that beliefs inform teaching and teaching informs beliefs. Therefore,

teaching beliefs provide the foundation for what informs professors of how to teach. These beliefs can be a messy construct (Pajares, 1992) as there are many influencing factors to belief construction; however, by identifying and recognizing various influences of beliefs, faculty can be more aware of what influences inform how they conceptualize teaching.

As shown throughout the data set and the literature, faculty's conceptualization of teaching informs what they believe about teaching, which, in turn, influences their teaching approach: how faculty conceptualize teaching impacts their teaching practice. There were two takeaways from this study: one that the faculty's teaching philosophy informs the way they teach, and two, that since faculty are not formally trained in how to teach, they heavily rely on their own education and learning experience.

### ***Teaching Philosophy Informs Teaching***

The first takeaway from this study is that teaching philosophy informs the way faculty teach and that without an explicitly stated teaching philosophy, faculty are missing the guidance and structure of how to strengthen their teaching. A teaching philosophy, in this context, does not necessarily mean a written philosophy that the faculty member crafted. Instead, I believe that when a faculty member can verbalize what they believe about teaching—which is their teaching philosophy—they will then be able to reflect on what they believe about teaching given time and space. This discourse about their teaching philosophy could help them be more aware of how they could then approach their teaching. For example, if a faculty member believes that learning is about reflective thinking, one might expect this value of reflective thinking to appear on the

course syllabi, show up the design of the course, and be encouraged to happen during classes.

Discourse surrounding teaching philosophy is foundational in Alsup's (2006) work. She argues that when preservice teachers (PST) participant in discourse surrounding their philosophy, that then informs their teaching practice. Alsup (2006) discusses how a professional teaching identity is not fully developed until an individual engages in discourse about their teaching. While one could argue that the interviews for this research engaged the participants in formulating their teaching philosophy, the participants were responding to questions about teaching and learning, but they were not explicitly engaging in discourse about their teaching philosophy to wrestle with the ideas and form their own teaching philosophies.

### ***Faculty Rely on Their Own Education and Learning Experience***

A second, key takeaway from this study is faculty heavily rely on their own education and learning experiences to inform their practice and beliefs, especially when they are not formally trained in how to teach. This resonates with the research of Trautwein (2018) and Pratt (1992). This reliance can be both positive and negative depending on how faculty learn how to teach from those who taught them.

The data from all 15 participants showed that faculty were heavily reliant on previous learning and education experiences, believed that teaching and learning are interdependent, and stated that teaching is complex and layered. How the faculty conceptualized their learning informed their lessons, assignment design, syllabi, class structure, and student interactions.

The educational and personal experiences that faculty draw on as a foundation for their teaching approach can be explained by several sources. Vygotsky (1986), for example, argues that one learns from their environment and experiences and is then shaped or molded by those experiences. Similarly, Pratt (1992) explicitly states that how faculty teach is influenced by what they experience throughout their lives, whether that is from their families, their disciplines, or their own educational experiences.

It is not bad that faculty are influenced to teach by their own educational and personal experiences; however, it is important for institutions to provide support to faculty by helping them develop their teaching styles and approaches and align them with the needs and expectations of today's students. Helping faculty learn additional teaching methods provides them more opportunities to grow and learn as educators but also encourages them to expand their conceptualizations of teaching.

### **Recommendations**

Because teaching philosophies inform the way faculty teach, higher education institutions need to provide opportunities for faculty to engage in discourse about their teaching beliefs. For this discourse to happen, I suggest two recommendations. One suggestion for improvement is to encourage faculty to engage in discourse about their teaching philosophy beyond their faculty onboarding. I suggest either semesterly meetings or check-ins with the faculty to encourage discourse about their teaching philosophy and beliefs, regardless of how many years they have been teaching. As noted from at least five participants, their teaching beliefs changed with their years of teaching. Additionally, faculty members should be encouraged to continue to engage with their

colleagues about teaching beliefs and practices to support the discourse surrounding teaching in higher education.

Faculty shared their beliefs about teaching and education and many of these beliefs appeared in their assignment design and syllabi, but four participants explicitly expressed that they had not formally thought about their teaching beliefs. However, a further exploration of this topic could involve observing faculty in their classes. In this present study, faculty could share what they believed about teaching, which can only happen by faculty being interviewed and sharing their teaching beliefs, but it was often unclear how they demonstrated this in their courses or if their self-report was accurate. Being able to observe each faculty member's instruction would have helped this study and would have shown how the participants' voiced beliefs about teaching were/were not apparent in their courses and instruction. However, this in-person observation simply was not possible during the global pandemic.

To support faculty who are learning new approaches to teaching, many institutions provide an onboarding opportunity for them to learn strategies and begin exploring their teaching approach. And since we cannot learn something once and be a master at it, in addition to having an onboarding or orientation-type program, faculty should be involved in a community where they regularly meet to discuss and learn teaching strategies. These meetings would happen for the first several semesters of their time at the institution. Then, as the faculty members becomes established in their teaching career, the institution should provide workshops and other professional development that continues to strengthen the faculty's teaching approaches and beliefs. Therefore, to strengthen their teaching philosophy, faculty need to engage in discourse

about their teaching throughout their entire teaching career and not only in the beginning. Lastly, during an interview one of the participants suggested thinking about having faculty explore and develop a teaching *and learning* philosophy instead of just a teaching philosophy. This participant recognized the symbiotic relationship of teaching and learning, and this relationship would be worth exploring when thinking about creating a teaching and learning philosophy.

The second recommendation to support faculty teaching conceptualization is to provide faculty members with ongoing syllabus development. Since teaching is a cyclical process and beliefs are constantly changing or being influenced by various factors, syllabus modifications are an important part of updating teaching practices. The data showed that faculty ATI responses were not consistent with their beliefs about syllabi. For example, one participant stated that the syllabus was found incongruent with her beliefs about teaching. One could argue that the syllabus is a contract of sorts and thus needs to be explicitly workshopped with faculty to best express their course content and reflect their teaching philosophy. Syllabi are not just documents to check boxes and be done, but rather are documents that lay the foundation for courses. The syllabus is an agreement between students and faculty and is not a place to demonstrate power, but it is an invitation to and explanation of the course.

Sometimes when faculty are first learning to teach or prepare for courses, they follow a template to complete the syllabus because they are trying to plan out their courses and assignments and need support in creating the structure and contents of the syllabus. While a syllabi template is helpful for beginning faculty members, there is an opportunity for institutions to engage with faculty more about their teaching style and approach within

this document. The syllabus is a document that needs to reflect teaching practice and philosophy to convey to the students the expectations for the course as well as the faculty member's expectations for the learning. From reading the participants' syllabi, I learned that there needs to be explicit training of the role a syllabus plays in a course that includes setting the foundation of the relationship between the faculty and the students regarding learning in the classroom. Therefore, training on how to revise syllabi—including workshops on ways to make the syllabi more inclusive of the learner and reflective of the faculty's beliefs about teaching—should be explored.

For instance, instead of using a syllabus boilerplate or template and inserting their information, faculty should be encouraged to use language that reflects them as individuals and insert themselves and their philosophy into the document. Perhaps these syllabi trainings and workshops would happen after faculty have been teaching for a few semesters as they learn what has or has not worked, what they believe about teaching, and what ways to include the learner into the document. This could include language changes that are more personal than institutional. For example, when speaking about office hours, instead of listing the words "office hours," faculty members could use the language "student hours," so the students feel more included or invited to the professor's office. Another example of making a syllabus reflective of the faculty's teaching beliefs is including a condensed version of the faculty's teaching philosophy on the syllabus to set the stage for the document and to communicate to the students what the faculty member's expectations and beliefs.

A third recommendation is to host a workshop where faculty learn more about creating lesson plans that reflect what they believe about teaching and learning. These

workshops could then encourage formal training of how to create lesson plans. Four participants mentioned the role the lesson plans have in their courses, and two expressed the desire to learn more about how lesson plans could help enhance their teaching. While less than half of the participants explicitly discussed lesson plans, I believe that the gaps in the data about lesson plans reinforces the need to explicitly teach faculty about the importance of lesson plans and structure for their classes to also reinforce their teaching beliefs, their learning beliefs, and their content. Lesson plans provide a guide for the faculty to know what they are teaching, why they are teaching the lesson, and how best to support the students as a way to keep them on track. Education training about lesson planning emphasizes the teaching and learning in addition to the content that needs to be covered. By providing the training sessions for faculty, I hypothesis that their teaching could be more effective and better support the needs of the learner.

All three of my recommendations: support for creating and enhancing teaching philosophy, syllabi development and revision, and lesson plan know-how, would better support faculty to be more prepared for the classroom and to best support students. These recommendations would provide faculty with more clarity about their teaching beliefs which would inform their teaching practice.

### **Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to learn how faculty conceptualize teaching. A part of teaching conceptualizations is beliefs. What faculty believe about teaching can best be learned by interviewing them. The data for this study was collected through interviews, an ATI survey, a student questionnaire, and course syllabi. Since I wanted to know more about faculty teaching beliefs, the data was appropriate as their teaching practices were



self-reported in the interviews and the syllabi. To further this study and learn about how faculty practice their beliefs, I recommend observing faculty in the classroom. Classroom observations are an important element of the teaching story; therefore, future researchers may want to consider this.

Another addition I would add to further my study is to ask faculty to share their lesson plans so I could get a sense of how they structure their courses and/or if faculty plan out their courses and classes. Looking at the lesson plans could also provide me with more of a sense about how faculty structure their classes and learn about the course focused objectives, the learning outcomes, and the class activities. In addition, reviewing the lesson plans could provide a sense of how faculty design their classes for the learner and what classroom management techniques are used.

### **Conclusion**

Faculty enter the higher education teaching profession of higher education without being required to have formal educational training or background. While institutions are providing resources and support for new faculty, there needs to be explicit training that begins when faculty are first hired and continues as they become more proficient in their craft because one thing that is known in the field of education is that teaching is a reflective and an evolving practice. The more you teach, the more you know and learn, so your practice will reflect that growth. What is needed to support and encourage faculty to better their craft is explicit support in identifying their beliefs in teaching by engaging in discourse about those beliefs and then applying those beliefs to their teaching practice. What faculty believe about teaching informs how they practice

their craft in their creation of their courses and syllabi and how they support student learning.

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Appendix 1

Approaches to Teaching Inventory

This inventory is designed to explore the way that academics go about teaching in a specific context or subject or course. This may mean that your responses to these items in one context may be different to the responses you might make on your teaching in other contexts or subjects. For this reason, I ask you to describe your context.

Please describe the subject/year of your response here:

For each item, please circle one of the numbers (1-5). The numbers stand for the following responses:

- 1 - this item was only rarely true for me in this subject.
- 2 - this item was sometimes true for me in this subject.
- 3 - this item was true for me about half the time in this subject.
- 4 - this item was frequently true for me in this subject.
- 5 - this item was almost always true for me in this subject.

Please answer each item. Do not spend a long time on each: your first reaction is probably the best one.

		O n l y r a r e l y				A l m o s t a l w a y s
1	I design my teaching in this subject with the assumption that most of the students have very little useful knowledge of the topics to be covered.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I feel it is important that this subject should be completely described in terms of specific objectives relating to what students have to know for formal assessment items.	1	2	3	4	5
3	In my interactions with students in this subject I try to develop a conversation with them about the topics we are studying.	1	2	3	4	5

4	I feel it is important to present a lot of facts to students so that they know what they have to learn for this subject.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I feel that the assessment in this subject should be an opportunity for students to reveal their changed conceptual understanding of the subject.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I set aside some teaching time so that the students can discuss, among themselves, the difficulties that they encounter studying this subject.	1	2	3	4	5
7	In this subject I concentrate on covering the information that might be available from a good textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I encourage students to restructure their existing knowledge in terms of the new way of thinking about the subject that they will develop.	1	2	3	4	5
9	In teaching sessions for this subject, I use difficult or undefined examples to provoke debate.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I structure this subject to help students to pass the formal assessment items.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I think an important reason for running teaching sessions in this subject is to give students a good set of notes.	1	2	3	4	5
12	In this subject, I only provide the students with the information they will need to pass the formal assessments.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I feel that I should know the answers to any questions that students may put to me during this subject.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I make available opportunities for students in this subject to discuss their changing understanding of the subject.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I feel that it is better for students in this subject to generate their own notes rather than always copy mine.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I feel a lot of teaching time in this subject should be used to question students' ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix 2

## Faculty Interview Protocol

Interview round (3 x 30 min)	Purpose of the interview	Questions (aim for 5-6 questions for 30 minutes session)
# 1	Background--the purpose of this interview is to get to know the participant and learn more about them, their institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tell me a little bit about you, your interests, and passions.</li> <li>● Tell me a little bit about where you work.</li> <li>● Tell me why you became a professor.</li> <li>● Why do you work in higher education?</li> <li>● How did you get into higher education?</li> <li>● Tell me about a teacher or professor that you found most memorable or was your favorite. Why?</li> </ul>
# 2	Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What does teaching in higher education mean to you?</li> <li>● Where do you get your resources for teaching?</li> <li>● What or who influences your teaching style?</li> <li>● What is your teaching style?</li> <li>● Have you faced struggles being an academic? If so, what struggles have you faced?</li> <li>● What does the word “teacher” mean to you?</li> <li>● Do you consider yourself a teacher? Tell me more.</li> <li>● What is the research environment/expectation in your field for scholarship? Since you began teaching, have you published more or less? Why?</li> </ul>
# 3	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What does it mean to be a learner?</li> <li>● How do you think learning happens in the classroom?</li> <li>● What do you believe is your main purpose as a professor?</li> <li>● What do you believe is your main role in the classroom?</li> <li>● Tell me about a positive experience that you have had with a student in the classroom.</li> <li>● Tell me about a negative experience that you have had with a student in the classroom.</li> <li>● What is the hardest part about working with college-aged students? What is the easiest part about working with college-aged students?</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3

## Student Questionnaire

The following questionnaire will be sent to students to learn about their perspectives of learning and education.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The answers to your questions are to help aid in Molly Broere's research for her dissertation. Please answer as honestly as you feel comfortable and know that any identifying information (your name, institution, a professor named, etc.) will be removed before the data when it is shared. When you answer the questions, use your perspectives about learning in a classroom or school setting.

- Clicking below indicates that I have read the description of the study and I agree to participate in the study.
  - I am 18 years or older.
1. Explain a memorable teacher. Why are they memorable?
  2. What does learning mean to you?
  3. How do you learn in school?
  4. What have teachers done that has helped you learn best?
  5. What have teachers done that has not helped you learn?
  6. Why have you continued to attend school after high school?
  7. What year are you in college?
  8. What is your major?

This will be sent electronically for anonymity. This means that there is no guarantee that the participants who complete this survey are current students since this will be sent out electronically, I will not be able to guarantee that only students will complete this questionnaire, but I will do my best to ensure that this questionnaire is shared with current college students.

## Appendix 4

Email requesting faculty participants in study:

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Molly Broere, and I am a current PhD candidate requesting your participation in conducting a study about faculty who teach at institutions that deliver a liberal arts experience in the United States.

The time commitment will include 3 interviews approximately 30 minutes each, a simple questionnaire, and a willingness to share your course syllabi. In addition, if you have your job description, have been a part of writing a job description, or have access to a faculty job description for your institution, then that information is also requested.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email ([mfbnq5@umsl.edu](mailto:mfbnq5@umsl.edu)) or by phone at 618-946-4002. For additional information or any questions, reach out to Molly Broere by email or phone.

Thank you for your time.

Your sincerely,  
Molly Broere, MEd  
PhD Candidate, University of Missouri St. Louis