

[Home](#) -> [Campus](#)advertisement
advertisement[E-mail a friend \(disabled\)](#) [Share on Facebook](#) [Printer-friendly](#) [Comment](#)

MSA looks to improve TA English proficiency

MSA suggests expanding conversation hours to improve relations.

By Lindsay Toler, Reporter

Posted Oct. 6, 2006

The Missouri Students Association will outline suggestions for increasing the English proficiency of international teaching assistants.

"We have an issue with undergraduate students in what seem to be reasonably high levels having difficulty understanding or communicating with teaching assistants," said Jim Kelley, MSA Academic Affairs chairman. "When we talk to our constituents, that seems to be a general feedback item."

Kelley met with MU staff members on Wednesday to brainstorm solutions for the language barrier, such as the use of visual aids and comprehensive student surveying.

"We don't get enough meaningful feedback," said Liz Tummons, International Teaching Assistant Program coordinator, referring to student assessments of TAs taken after the semester. "We need specific and positive feedback that can be used to guide us."

Assessments in the future might ask students to specify whether their international teaching assistant had problems with grammar, coherency or pronunciation. MSA will recommend collecting feedback from students earlier in the semester so that the necessary departments can address any problems before the end of term.

Language proficiency is not the only cause for miscommunication between international teaching assistants and their students.

"The classroom culture is very different," Tummons said. "Western classrooms are much more interactive. It's much more laid back here."

Efforts to orient international teaching assistants to the American classroom might include broadening conversation hours into social opportunities where students and international teaching assistants can communicate with each other.

"Let's not even call it a conversation hour because that puts suppression on it," said George Justice, assistant dean and associate professor of English. "Let's have a party."

Socials would introduce international teaching assistants, some of whom come from cultures where teachers and students never interact outside the classroom, to their students who might have never interacted with a foreigner.

"When you have a conversation with someone, you learn who they are and what they stand for," Kelley said. "You really find that you have a lot of common ground."

In order for an international student to be hired by MU as a teaching assistant, he or she must pass either the language assessment exam, called SPEAK, or an oral presentation test. Both tests score international teaching assistants from zero to four, four being the highest. According to the MU ITAP Web site, a score of one confines international teaching assistants

to interacting on an individual basis with students, while a score of four qualifies an international student to lecture independently.

"I like to say they're the people with the charming accents," Tummons said of students who score a four on the exam.

MSA and MU staff agreed that international teaching assistants bring invaluable resources to the classroom.

"It's very difficult for students to get an international perspective here in Columbia, Missouri," Kelley said. "We're about as Midwest and isolated as you can possibly be."

APARTMENTS, DUPLEXES & HOUSES FOR LEASE
Close to Campus ~ Close to Shopping ~ Close to Perfect!
www.ColumbiaMoRentals.com ~ 573-446-6552 ~ Broker Owned



Comments

Username:

Password: ([Forgotten your password?](#))

Comment:

Fin.

Contents of this site are © Copyright 1955-2007 The Maneater. All rights reserved.

[Advertise with us](#) | [About us](#) | [Contact us](#)