

# **INSIDE TEACHING AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY: AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

*You can access this guide plus all of the presentation slides and resources by visiting the MSU Graduate School Website at <https://grad.msu.edu/tap/orientations>*

Participate in a conversation on Twitter using **#iteachmsu**

## **2018 INTERNATIONAL TA ORIENTATION**

August 17, 2018 – D-101 Wells Hall (5:00pm-8:30pm)

August 18, 2018 – B-119 Wells Hall  
(breakfast at 8:00am, Orientation 8:45am-5:00pm)

## WELCOME FROM THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Welcome to Michigan State University (MSU) and East Lansing, Michigan, United States!

We are thrilled you have chosen to attend MSU as a graduate student, and will play an important role in educating undergraduate students at the university.

We have a lot planned over the next few days but the full agenda is really meant to provide you with opportunities to meet other TAs and undergraduate students, learn about the undergraduate student culture at MSU, and practice your teaching to build your confidence for the first day of class.

We are thrilled you are here and encourage you to contact us at any time throughout the year with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Madeline Shellgren  
Program Director, The Graduate School  
Graduate Student, Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures  
[shellgre@msu.edu](mailto:shellgre@msu.edu)

Melissa McDaniels, PhD  
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We created this handbook to support you through the International Teaching Assistant Orientation and as a companion to the online resources.

Visit the MSU Graduate School Website at <https://grad.msu.edu/tap/orientations> to access these resources. See the portion of this website specifically dedicated to international teaching assistants.

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## **INTERNATIONAL TA ORIENTATION AGENDA**

### **Friday, August 17, 2018**

5:00 pm – 5:30 pm	Registration (Outside D-101 Wells Hall)
5:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Dinner Reception and Welcome from the Graduate School and the Graduate Employees Union (The Hub, D-101 Wells Hall)
6:00 pm – 6:30 pm	Building Professional Learning Communities (The Hub, D-101 Wells Hall)
6:30 pm - 7:30 pm	Real Talk: Undergraduate Perspectives on Student and Classroom Culture (The Hub, D-101 Wells Hall)
7:30 pm – 7:45 pm	BREAK
7:45 pm – 8:30 pm	Student – Teaching Assistant Scenarios (The Hub, D-101 Wells Hall)
8:30 pm	EVALUATIONS

### **Saturday, August 18, 2018**

8:00 am – 8:45 am	Registration and Light Breakfast (Outside B-119 Wells Hall)
8:45 am – 9:00 am	Day 2 Welcome (B-119 Wells Hall)
9:00 am – 9:45 am	Managing Your Transition to East Lansing and your GTA Role (B-119 Wells Hall)
9:45 am – 10:00 am	BREAK ( <i>coffee, tea, and water provided outside (B-119 Wells Hall)</i> )
10:00 am – 10:50 am	Real Talk: The Graduate Teaching Assistant Perspective (B-119 Wells Hall)
10:50 am – 11:00 am	BREAK and TRANSITION TO BREAKOUT ROOMS
11:00 am – 12:30 pm	Teaching Planning and Practice Session 1: Connecting with Your Students from the First Day of Class ( <i>Breakout Rooms</i> )
12:30 pm – 1:15pm	LUNCH (outside B-119 Wells Hall)
1:15 pm – 2:45 pm	Student – Teaching Assistant Role Plays ( <i>Breakout Rooms</i> )
2:45 pm – 3:00 pm	BREAK ( <i>coffee, tea, and water provided outside B-119 Wells Hall</i> )
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm	Teaching Planning & Practice Session 2: Teaching Concepts to Novices ( <i>Breakouts</i> )
4:30 pm – 5:00 pm	CLOSING / QUESTIONS / EVALUATIONS (B-119 Wells Hall)

## BUILDING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Friday: 6:00 pm – 6:30 pm | The Hub for Innovation in Learning & Technology (D-101 Wells Hall)

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

*As a GTA, part of your job will be to cultivate a professional learning community in your classroom.*

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Meet other GTAs and start to build a professional learning community.
- Practice introducing yourself in professional contexts.
- Think about strategies available to build learning communities in your classroom.

### Share Your Names & Contact Information Here!


*Notes:*

Notes area for recording session details.

# REAL TALK: UNDERGRADUATE PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT AND CLASSROOM CULTURE

Friday: 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm | The Hub for Innovation in Learning & Technology (D-101 Wells Hall)

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Become acquainted with undergraduate students and culture at MSU.
- Identify (and get answered) questions about teaching undergraduates at MSU and/or adjusting to MSU and East Lansing.

What are four or five important things that you learned in your conversations with undergraduates?

What surprised you?

How will what you learned be useful in your GTA role?

## STUDENT – TEACHING ASSISTANT SCENARIOS (SESSION 1)

Friday: 7:45 pm – 8:30 pm | The Hub for Innovation in Learning & Technology (D-101 Wells Hall)

As a GTA, you have power and authority over your students. You might not feel entirely comfortable yet dealing with scenarios you may encounter in your GTA role. The following cases are designed to help you experience an array of common scenarios. You will have a chance to collaboratively brainstorm solutions and strategies with graduate and undergraduate colleagues.

### Learning Outcomes:

- Identify strategies for successful interactions with students
- Become familiar with important resources and policies at MSU

### **CASE STUDY #1:** Two students suspected of cheating.

You suspect two students in your section have been copying each other's homework assignments. You have no proof just a suspicion. Since the assignments are graded and the students have been warned about cheating you decide to confront them. You are careful not to accuse them, but the similarities between their work are striking. You realize it might be a coincidence, but if it's purposeful, you feel responsible for stopping it. How should you discuss this touchy subject with them?

### Case Study #1 – Discussion Questions

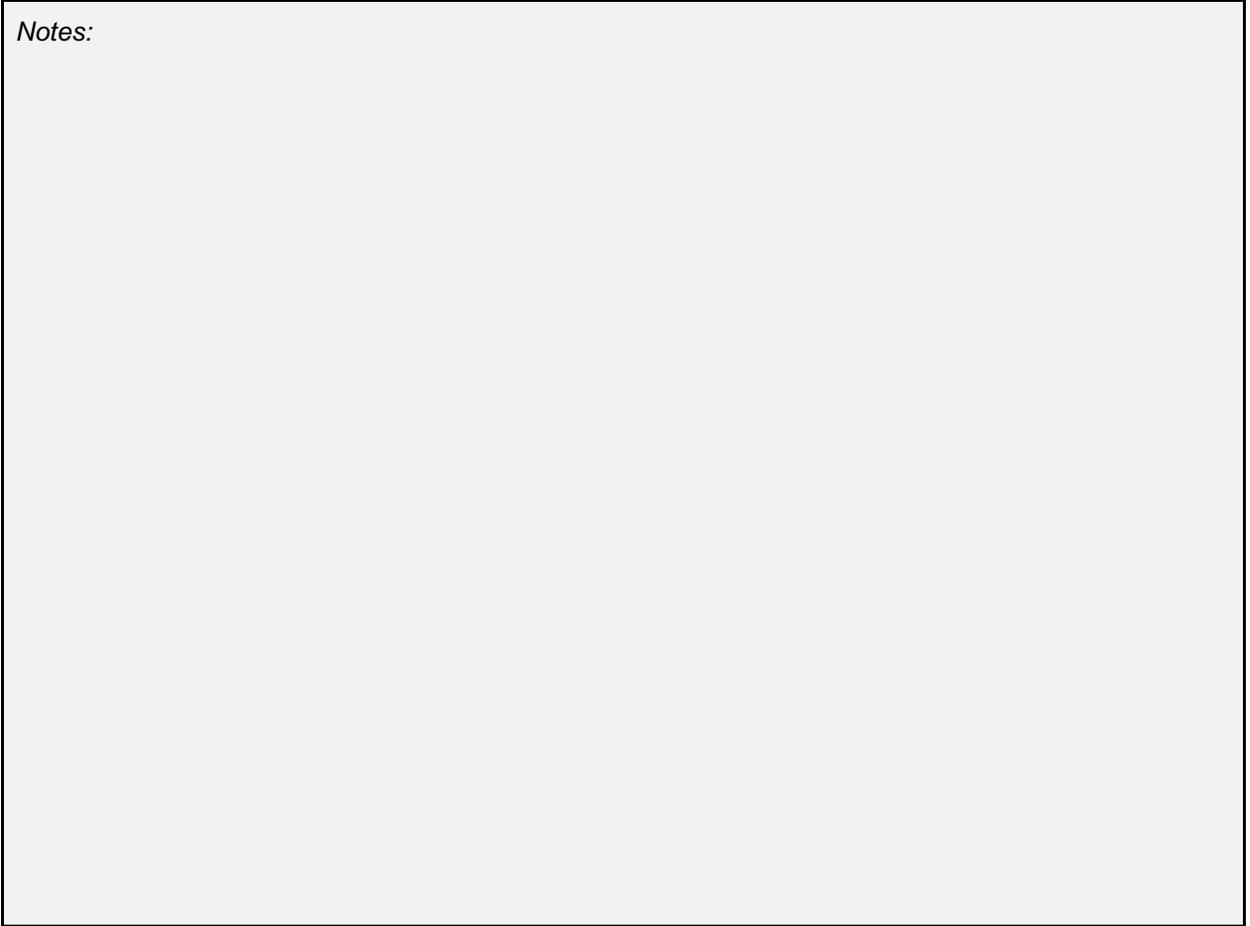
What are the issues you see in this case?

What might be another reason for similarities in the work that are not related to academic misconduct?

What are your options for handling the situation?

What resources exist on campus to help you determine what to do?

Notes:



## STUDENT – TEACHING ASSISTANT SCENARIOS (SESSION 1)

*(continued)*

Friday: 7:45 pm – 8:30 pm | The Hub for Innovation in Learning & Technology (D-101 Wells Hall)

### **CASE STUDY #2:** Accommodations request.

You notice that a student has not been performing well on quizzes and exams all semester and you have already reached the half-way point in the course. You have been providing video summaries each week, but they haven't seemed to help. You are especially worried that this student will do poorly in the course and that they might even fail. You have tried to talk with them about their progress, but they did not seem to want to engage in conversation with you. Finally, you call them to your office hours to talk with them. In this meeting, you find out that the student requires closed-captioning on video content, but did not submit a VISA form to you. What do you do?

### **Case Study #2 – Discussion Questions**

What are the issues you see in this case?

What are some possible reasons that would account for why this student didn't bring this up with you earlier?

What are your options for handling the situation?

What resources exist on campus to help you determine what to do?

*Notes:*

## STUDENT – TEACHING ASSISTANT SCENARIOS (SESSION 1)

*(continued)*

Friday: 7:45 pm – 8:30 pm | The Hub for Innovation in Learning & Technology (D-101 Wells Hall)

**CASE STUDY #3:** A student asks GTA to hang out outside of class.

A student has been coming regularly to your office hours to get help with their problem sets. You think they are rather attractive. One day they suggest that you both hang out casually outside of class. What do you say?

### Case Study #3 – Discussion Questions

What are the issues you see in this case?

What are some possibilities for why the student is making this suggestion?

What are your options for handling the situation?

What resources exist on campus to help you determine what to do?

*Notes:*

## **MANAGING YOUR TRANSITION TO EAST LANSING AND YOUR TEACHING ROLES AT MSU**

Saturday: 9:00 am – 9:45 am|B-119 Wells Hall|

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Identify components of cultural adjustment and strategies for coping.
- Start to identify the nature of classroom culture in the United States.
- Start to get questions answered about the TA role, undergraduate students, and life in East Lansing.
- Become acquainted with both undergraduate and graduate students at MSU.

**WHAT CAN I LEARN FROM THE STORIES OF THE CULTURAL TRANSITIONS OF OTHERS?**

**BRAINSTORM QUESTIONS YOU HAVE**

**NOTES:**

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for notes. The interior of the box is a light gray color, providing a subtle background for any text that might be written.

# REAL TALK: THE GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT PERSPECTIVE

Saturday: 10:00 am – 10:50 am | B-119 Wells Hall

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Become acquainted with graduate TAs and their perspectives on teaching at MSU.
- Identify (and get answered) some of your biggest questions about being a graduate student, teaching at MSU, the GTA role, and/or adjusting to MSU and East Lansing.

What are four or five important things that you learned in your conversations with graduate teaching assistants?

What surprised you?

How will what you learned be useful in your GTA role and in other domains of your life?

*Notes:*

# TEACHING PLANNING AND PRACTICE (SESSION I): CONNECTING WITH YOUR STUDENTS FROM THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Saturday: 11:00 am – 12:30 am | Breakout Rooms

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Foster a positive learning community in your classroom.
- Develop strategies to build connections with and get to know your students.

## Introducing Yourself on the First Day of Class

One of the best ways to start your semester as a teaching assistant is to introduce yourself to students in a clear, enthusiastic way. It is up to you to decide how to introduce yourself on the first day of class. There is not one “right” way to do this; however, if done well, it can set a positive tone for your relationship with students.

In this session, you will both PLAN for how you might introduce yourself on the first day of class and PRACTICE delivering that short introduction. In addition to sharing your name and how you pronounce it, you could cover a wide range of different things you think students might find interesting about you. You might include answers to questions like these in your introduction:

- How do you want to be addressed by students?
- What is your native language?
- What graduate program are you in?
- Why do you like your field?
- What experience do you have teaching? Other work experience?
- What do you hope to do when you complete your degree?
- What do you like to do outside of academics?
- Many others!

This is your opportunity to let your students learn something about you as a person.

Smith, J., Meyers, C.M., Burkhalter, A.J. (1992). *Communicate: Strategies for International Teaching Assistants*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

## Part A - Planning

**BRAINSTORM** (use this space to brainstorm ideas for how you might introduce yourself on Day 1)

**FEEDBACK** (use this space to document the feedback you received)

**REVISE and FINALIZE** (use this space to outline your final plan)

**Exercise #1 – Part B - Practice**

**WHAT WENT WELL?**

**WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?**

**WHAT FEEDBACK DID I GET FROM MY COLLEAGUES?**

## STUDENT – TEACHING ASSISTANT ROLE PLAYS

Saturday: 1:15 pm – 2:45 pm | Breakout Rooms

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Practice responding to different student scenarios.
- Become acquainted with undergraduate students in the U.S. and learn about general norms for GTA-undergraduate interaction.
- Practice conversing informally and formally with undergraduate students.

As MSU teaching staff, GTAs have power and authority over their students. You might not feel entirely comfortable yet dealing with certain scenarios you may encounter within your role as a GTA. The following case studies are designed to help you experience an array of common scenarios. Each case study affords an opportunity to gain a variety of strategies to work through different situations that you may encounter in your new role. You will have a chance to collaboratively brainstorm solutions and strategies with both graduate colleagues and undergraduate students to help prepare you for your valued role as a GTA!

**ROLE PLAY #1:** Student who received a "2.0" needs a "3.0".

**Student:** You have received a "2.0" in a course and you needed a "3.0" to keep from going on academic probation (which means you will lose financial support and have to withdraw from the university). This is a crisis for you and you are desperate. You feel deeply and sincerely that it is unfair that one class should prevent you from continuing in school. You are visibly upset as you approach your GTA. You plan to plead with the GTA to give you a "3.0," stressing the issue of fairness and emphasizing that the GTA's decision is your last chance to continue your education.

**TA:** You are aware that everyone has a strong personal need to stay in school. You also know that the student did "2.0" work and by objective standards deserves no higher grade. Yet, you also feel the student's desperation, sympathize and need to respond on the spot. How should you respond?

*Notes:*

**ROLE PLAY #2:** Student misunderstands assignment; wants higher grade.

**Student:** You have received a low grade on the midterm and you have come in to complain to your GTA. You feel that the assignment was not clear and as a result you studied for the wrong things and got a low grade. Moreover, you worked very hard. You feel you always do better work than on this exam. You want the GTA to compensate you by raising your grade.

**TA:** You are sympathetic to the student but feel the grade you gave is justified. You feel it is the student's responsibility to ask if something seems unclear, and you want to convey this feeling without appearing defensive.

*Notes:*

**ROLE PLAY #3:** Student not doing coursework.

**Student:** The TA has called you into his office and you suspect it's because you haven't handed in any homework since the start of class. For you the class has low priority. You don't intend to turn in any homework for it and you would prefer to avoid discussing that with the GTA. If the GTA insists on talking about it, you plan to say you are too busy trying to catch up in other classes that are more important to your major and that you have very heavy social responsibilities as an officer in your fraternity.

**TA:** You notice the student has not been turning in any homework and call him/her to your office hours to confront him. Homework is an important part of the class, which is regularly collected and graded. You feel it is your duty to the students to make sure they don't jeopardize their progress by failing to turn it in. You are especially worried that this student will do poorly and you are concerned about how you should confront him. What do you say to him?

*Notes:*

**ROLE PLAY #4:** Student wants help making up missed work.

**Student:** You signed up for the course knowing you would be out of town for the first week because of an extended vacation. When you come back, you ask the TA for help catching up. You feel it is the TA's duty to help you make up the work you missed, so you have an equal chance with everyone else to do well in class.

**TA:** When the student asks for your help, you do not feel it is appropriate to give him your lecture notes, or that the notes will be sufficient to help the student catch up. You also can't afford to spend hours personally tutoring him yourself so he can catch up. You think he will be at a semester-long disadvantage in class because of starting late. However, you feel he should be responsible for the consequences of knowingly missing the first week. How should you respond to his request for help?

*Notes:*

## TEACHING PLANNING AND PRACTICE (SESSION 2): TEACHING CONCEPTS TO NOVICES

Saturday: 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm | Breakout Rooms

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Upon completing this session, GTAs will be able to:*

- Develop strategies to engage learners and enhance student understanding of concepts.
- Engage students by using active learning strategies in your classroom.

### Teaching Practice #2 – Teaching Complex Concepts to Novices

Why is your ability to explain concepts to beginners so important? You will have many classroom experiences when you introduce a “term” or “concept” to students for the first time (where you think you have given a precise definition) and you may find that: students don’t grasp the meaning; students don’t understand how it fits or connects to the ‘real world’ or other concepts in your field; or students confuse the term with another term. You will also have classroom experiences where you use a term that students have previously been exposed to but forgot or didn’t understand the meaning.

In this session your main task is to PLAN – design an activity in which you define a term from your field of study.

Your activity should be 4-5 minutes in length. Cover all of the following points:

- What is the term and why is it important?
- What is a formal definition for the term you have chosen?
- What examples, analogies, or diagrams can you use to make your definition clearer and more relevant to your listeners?
- How can you conclude your explanation and let your audience know you have finished?

Be prepared to think about how you will know if your audience understood your explanation, and/or be comfortable asking questions.

Created in part from ...

Smith, J., Meyers, C.M., Burkhalter, A.J. (1992). *Communicate: Strategies for International Teaching Assistants*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

**The concept from my field for which I will design an activity to teach novices is:**

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## PLANNING

**BRAINSTORM** (use this space to brainstorm ideas for activities you could use to define a term or idea for your students)

**FEEDBACK** (use this space to document the feedback you received)

**REVISE and FINALIZE** (use this space to outline your final plan)

**PRACTICE (OPTIONAL)**

**WHAT WENT WELL?**

**WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?**

**WHAT FEEDBACK DID I GET FROM MY COLLEAGUES?**

# RESOURCE TABLE TAKEAWAYS: WHAT THE GEU CAN DO FOR YOU

Resource Table outside of B-115 Wells Hall | Graduate Employees Union Representatives

**The Graduate Employees Union is here to support your work-life as a GTA here at MSU. Visit their table to find out more. Consider asking them about:**

Health Insurance Employee Rights Professional Development Health & Safety	Wages Tuition Waivers Appointments Special Conferences
NOTES:	

## RESOURCE TABLE TAKEAWAYS: WHAT COGS CAN DO FOR YOU

Resource Table outside of B-115 Wells Hall | Council of Graduate Students Representatives

The Council of Graduate Students is an authorized student government on campus representing our graduate/professional students at various levels across Michigan State University. Our mission is to improve and advance graduate education in order to ensure the vitality of intellectual discovery.

Visit their table to find out more. Consider asking them about:

Committees Coffee Hours	Resources on Grad Student Life Funding Support
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*Notes:*

# RESOURCE TABLE TAKEAWAYS: WHAT THE WRITING CENTER CAN DO FOR YOU

Resource Table outside of B-115 Wells Hall | Writing Center Representatives

**The Writing Center provides one-on-one and group writing consultations, various writing-specific workshops, as well as writing groups for graduate students and faculty. Visit their table to find out more. Consider asking them about:**

Writing Center Hours Writing Center Workshops Visits to Classrooms	Consultations Writing Groups Resources About Writing





# #iteachmsu COMMONS

You teach MSU. We, the Academic Advancement Network, The Graduate School, and The Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology, believe that a wide educator community (faculty, TAs, ULAs, instructional designers, academic advisors, et al.) makes learning happen across MSU. But, on such a large campus, it can be difficult to fully recognize and leverage this community's teaching and learning innovations. To address this challenge, the #iteachmsu Commons provides an educator-driven space for sharing teaching resources, connecting across educator networks, and growing teaching practice.

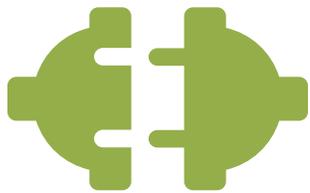
#iteachmsu Commons content may be discipline-specific or transdisciplinary, but will always be anchored in teaching competency areas. You will find blog posts, curated playlists, educator learning module pathways, and a campus-wide teaching and learning events calendar. We cultivate this commons across spaces. And through your engagement, we will continue to nurture a culture of teaching and learning across MSU and beyond.



## Share

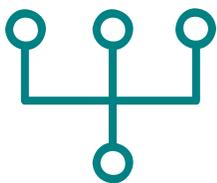
The #iteachmsu commons website is getting ready for a limited release this fall! Are you interested in trying out the new site and providing us with some feedback? Do you have talents or skills that could help the #iteachmsu commons' content, design, outreach, or research teams as they move from limited release to full site launch? If you answered "yes" to either of the questions above, please share your interest via this google

form: <https://goo.gl/forms/8uX1z4PgfRZ4lOiw2>



## Connect

Did you know that the #iteachmsu commons is not only related to online activity? There are multiple ways you can connect with the commons and engage with MSU's Educator Learning Community in person! Keep an eye out for #iteachmsu events (talks, workshops, toolkit tailgates, etc.) throughout the year to continue your educator development journey and build community! You can also join the advisory group by contacting Erik Skogsberg at [skogsbe2@msu.edu](mailto:skogsbe2@msu.edu).



## Grow

We chose #iteachmsu because it is a powerful statement of your important work: "I teach MSU classes and students." We hope #iteachmsu will allow people to join the conversation, brand our presence at MSU and in higher education, promote events, and encourage interaction and engagement. Each time you tweet or post using this hashtag you're affirming your individual and our collective work promoting teaching excellence at MSU and beyond! Grow the community and recognition of MSU educators by utilizing the hashtag #iteachmsu!

# How to Engage with #iteachmsu

**Pictures:** A picture can be easy to share and captures a reader's attention. It is also often worth more than 140 characters on Twitter! You can take pictures at Inside Teaching or class events. It would also be neat to snap a shot of yourself on the first day of class. In addition, the work you do in teaching, like arranging your classroom and assessments would be valuable. Examples:

#iteachmsu and I'm excited to start the semester!

Getting my classroom set up for the day. #iteachmsu

**Questions:** Asking questions to a network of people passionate about teaching is very practical. Crowdfund your challenges, requests for resources, and how-tos in teaching and learning! Part of being in a network is helping each other. Examples:

Anyone have ideas for more efficient feedback? #iteachmsu

Wanting to try out class discussion. Any ideas? #iteachmsu

**Ideas/Resources:** What new methods are you trying out! What do you think would be helpful for your teaching colleagues? Share that with our network! Example:

Just tried out [teaching method] and it worked! Details here: [link]

#iteachmsu

**Celebrations:** What are you excited about! Did you have a great day of teaching and just want to celebrate with a larger network who is just as passionate about teaching as you are? We'd love to celebrate with you!

Example:

Love being a teacher! #iteachmsu

**We're excited for you to share with us! But please remember to not share pics or details related to specific students.**

# #iteachmsu

## SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

We're so excited to kick off this semester of educating with you! How excited are we? So excited that we're challenging you to share, connect, and grow by utilizing #iteachmsu over the next 12 days! At the end of this 12-day challenge, a user will be chosen at random for a prize! The more times you share with #iteachmsu, the more times you are entered!

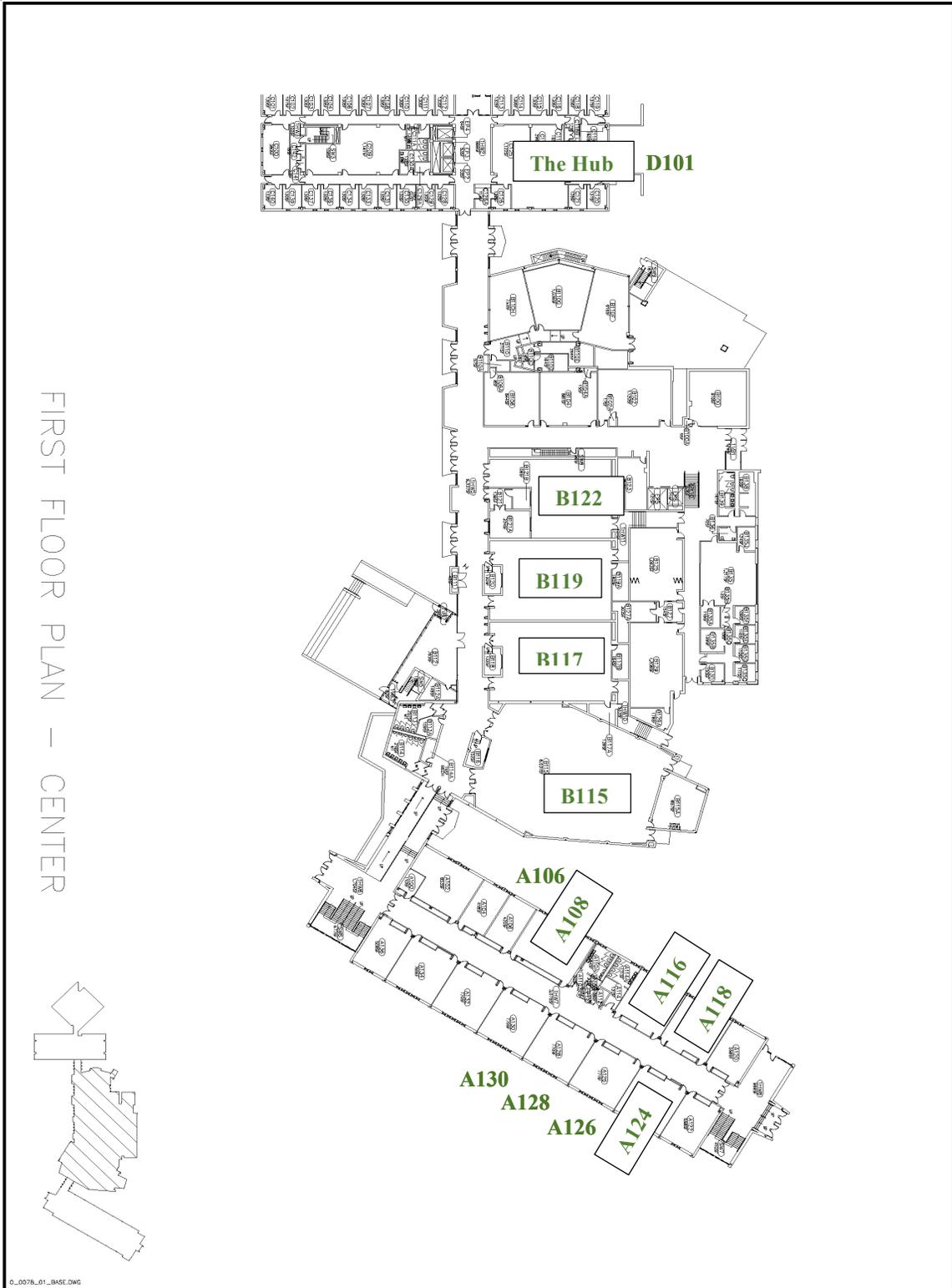
The previous page shared the multiple ways you can engage with #iteachmsu. Use any or all of these engagement methods to post your educator moments, examples, or ideas related to the following prompts:

- developing disciplinary teaching strategies
- creating effective learning environments
- incorporating technology in your teaching
- understanding the university context
- assessing student learning
- putting new educator ideas into practice
- starting a conversation with a new #iteachmsu connection
- tagging colleagues, friends, and peers to tell them about #iteachmsu
- asking a question to the #iteachmsu commons community

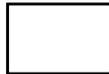


# MAP OF WELLS HALL

Last Update Date: 2/22/2016 Filename: 0\_0078\_01\_BASP.dwg



<p>APPROVED BY: SJF          DATE: 02-18-16          SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"</p>			<p><b>WELLS HALL</b>          FIRST FLOOR PLAN - CENTER</p>	<p><b>MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY</b>          Infrastructure Planning and Facilities</p>
<p>LAST REVISED ON: 02-04-16          LAST REVISED BY: ASK</p>				
<p>PROJECT: 4          02-16</p>	<p>BUILDING NO: 78</p>			





## 2018 INTERNATIONAL TA ORIENTATION – EVALUATION

Friday, August 17, 2018 & Saturday, August 18, 2018

**How would you rate the overall quality of ITA Orientation?**

1 - Poor      2 - Below Average      3 - Average      4 - Good      5 – Excellent

**Please indicate below what group number you were in (circle one):**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

**Please rate the usefulness of the following sessions from Day 2 of ITA Orientation?**

*Please use this scale:    1 (not useful)      2 (somewhat useful)      3 (very useful)*

Friday Evening, August 17, 2018

Building Professional Learning Communities	1	2	3
Real Talk: The Graduate Teaching Assistant Perspective	1	2	3
Student – Teaching Assistant Scenarios	1	2	3

Saturday, August 18, 2018

Managing Your Transition to East Lansing & the GTA Role	1	2	3
Real Talk: The Graduate Teaching Assistant Perspective	1	2	3
Teaching Planning & Practice: First Day of Class Introductions	1	2	3
Student – Teaching Assistant Role Plays	1	2	3
Teaching Planning & Practice: Teaching Complex Concepts	1	2	3

**Please tell us how prepared you feel to do the following things:**

*Please use this scale:    1 (not prepared)    2 (somewhat prepared)    3 (prepared)*

Introduce myself in an engaging manner on the first day of class	1	2	3
Build a learning community in my classroom	1	2	3
Explain concepts to novices	1	2	3
Manage my own cultural adjustment	1	2	3
Use resources available through the Graduate Employees Union	1	2	3
Use resources available through the Writing Center	1	2	3
Use resources available through the Council of Graduate Students	1	2	3
Identify resources to improve your teaching	1	2	3
Identify resources to help students learn	1	2	3
Contact people you met at ITA Orientation for friendship and support during the academic year.	1	2	3

**If you marked “not prepared” or “not useful”, please tell us how we can do better next year:**

**What questions do you still have?**