

# Bringing American and International Teaching Assistants together to Enhance the TA Training Experience

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## INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING SYMPOSIUM

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ORLANDO, FL

### The context: Florida State University

- A public research university in Tallahassee, FL. Member of the State University System of Florida.
- Classified as a Research I University by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
- Ranked as the 33rd best public university in the US by US News and World Report
- 41,000+ students; 9,000+ graduate students; 1,800+ teaching assistants, 440+ international teaching assistants

### Participating Graduate School Programs

#### Program for Instructional Excellence (PIE) Associate

PIE Associate Program provides assistantships for experienced graduate TAs to support TA training in their departments and campus-wide workshops.

#### International TA Program (ITAP)

The ITA Program offers courses for international TAs whose first language is not English so they can improve communication skills.

### The project: Two Panels

#### Panel 1: Understanding the “American Classroom”

Panelists: PIE Associates (3-4)

- International TAs will prepare questions on teaching, classroom management, conflict solution, etc.
- Questions are sent to panelists in advance so they can discuss with other PIE Associates.

#### Panel 2: Understanding Education in other Countries

Panelists: International TAs (3-4)

- PIE Associates will prepare questions about high school and higher education as well as teaching and learning expectations in other countries.
- International TAs discuss the questions in their class in preparation for the panel.



### The Benefits

Both groups are empowered and have an opportunity to grow as graduate students and teachers.

- Enhanced communication skills and experience in panel presentations.
- Building networks with fellow TAs in their fields and other fields.

For American TAs:

- An opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices.
- An increased understanding of other cultures, which is important given the growing number of international undergraduate students.

For International TAs:

- An increased understanding of the “American Classroom”
- An opportunity to receive advice from more experienced TAs.
- An opportunity to communicate in English in a meaningful way.

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### Sample Panel 1 Questions:

1. How do you handle students who
  - a. Are distracted in class?
  - b. Are not motivated to learn the subject?
  - c. Copy the homework from classmates?
2. How do you address different learning styles in the classroom?
3. What was the most difficult and/or embarrassing situation you faced as a TA? How did you overcome it?

### Sample Panel 2 Questions:

1. What is the average high school and college graduation rate in your country? What types of jobs are available for students who don't graduate high school and college?
2. What are some differences you see in university life here versus in your country?
3. How do American universities compare to those in your country?
4. What is the relationship professors have with their students? How does it compare?

### Future Plans:

- Continue organizing the panels in the Fall and Spring semesters.
- Divide Panel 2 into a mini-series of workshop.
- Add a campus-wide workshop in which participants submit their questions for experienced TAs.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How might this activity work at your institutions?
2. What other groups at the university would benefit from participating in an activity with a similar format?
3. How might this activity work in other settings?

### **Panel 1 Testimonials:**

"It's good to hear and learn from these experienced TAs. Their working experience/method is interesting and helpful"

*Electrical Eng. TA from China*

"Every TA has difficulties. However, they are learning and developing from that experience."

*Education TA from South Korea*

"I learned how to address embarrassing situations and how to keep students interested in class"

*Biology TA from Brazil*

### **Panel 2 Testimonials:**

"I introduced a lot of stuff about education in China. I liked writing on the board. It made me feel like a teacher" *Statistics TA from China.*

"I think cultural exchanges like this could be leveraged in different contexts (diversity initiatives, cultural sensitivity training, best teaching practices, etc.) and should be a part of TA or departmental training. I think many people presume that international students need to "just acclimate to U.S. culture," but I think it is also valuable for Americans to learn about different cultures so we can be more supportive and understanding of culture shock that people coming to the U.S. from other countries might experience." *Biology TA from the U.S.*