MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension



How Hosting a Foreign Exchange Student Taught Me to be a Better Educator

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Disclaimer

- This is not a presentation to convince you to host an exchange student
- These are lessons gained from
  - Navigating the school district
  - Living with a non-native English speaker
  - Living with a teenager



Background: Choosing a Student

- Host through an organization
- Each organization posts abbreviated student profiles
    - Host family letter
- Some countries fund exchange years for scholarship students

Dear American Family,

I am really excited to write this letter to you. I don't know anything about you but I'm very curios to get to know you. For me is really interesting to meet people from different countries and especially from USA, where people with different cultures live together. My name is Ustinia and I have a multicultural family. I know two languages as a native languages: Estonian and Russian. I love and respect both of this cultures and I would be glad to share that knowledge with you.

We are really close with my family and we just love to spend time together. We like to play board games, walk in nature, play soccer, watch movies and sport games and especially we love traveling together. But of course living together is not only about the fun and spending free time together. Its also about responsibilities.

As an older sister I usually help my brother to do his homework and help my parents with cleaning the house and doing the dishes. But despite we all have a lot work and hobbies we try to do even a house chores together and make it interesting and funny.

All in our family have work and hobbies. I have a lot of hobbies. I play piano (classical music the most of the time but I love to try new things like jazz), dancing, swimming, volunteering, learning different languages, singing in choir, participating in Youth political life (to improve teenagers life) and reading.

I am a very friendly and connective person, so its easy for me to make new friends. I have a lot of friends but there are three of them who are the closest to me. We do a lot of activities together. We walk, chat and cook together. We love to create, organise and participate in different culture and sport events, volunteering at different local festivals and municipal events.

Until the 8th grade I lived in my hometown. It is small but really famous town in Europe history. The history of our town is more than 750 years. But now I moved to another city of our country for studying. I am a pianist and due to I won a lot of competitions of whole country and international ones I was invited to continue my studying in the best musical school located in a big city. So now I am studying and living by myself. Despite of the distance I have really close relationship with my parents and friends and thanks to FaceTime and Messengers we communicate a lot.

I didn't made a final choice of my future work because I have quite wide range of interests. Now I am quite interested to be the bioengineer or doctor. But due to I have really high level at piano playing I also consider to be a musician. But I am sure what I will have two educations.

All my friends and my family emphasise that I am friendly, communicative and responsible person. I am calm person at home because I understand that home is a place there all inhabitants want to rest and be comfortable. For me is quite important my health and it means healthy food, physical active and good sleep.

In my exchanging year I want to find out how Americans live, how they spend their time, American history and traditions. I want to try American sports like cheerleading and playing basketball. I really want to see Americans high level of patriotism. From my side I am ready to share knowledge of Estonian and Russian culture and traditions.

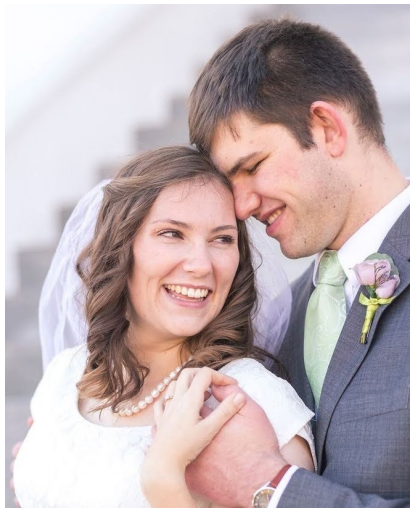
Background: Timeline

July 20, 2025

Decided to host

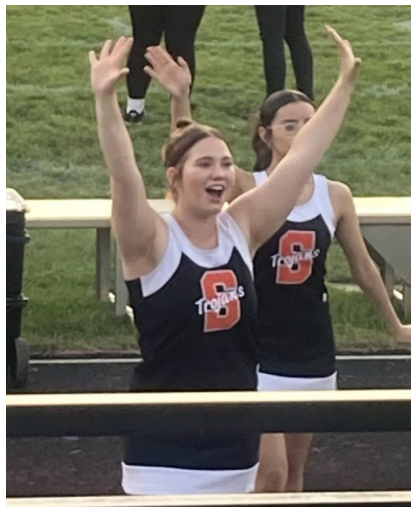


December 2018



August 5, 2025







June 8, 2026



1. Navigating the School System

- How I tried to find answers
  - School website
  - Main office
  - Athletic department
  - Calling coaches
- How I actually found answers
  - One helpful coach



Educator Parallels

- Highly specialized roles and areas of expertise
- Juggling many different responsibilities
  - Marketing events
  - Writing articles
  - Programming
  - Reporting



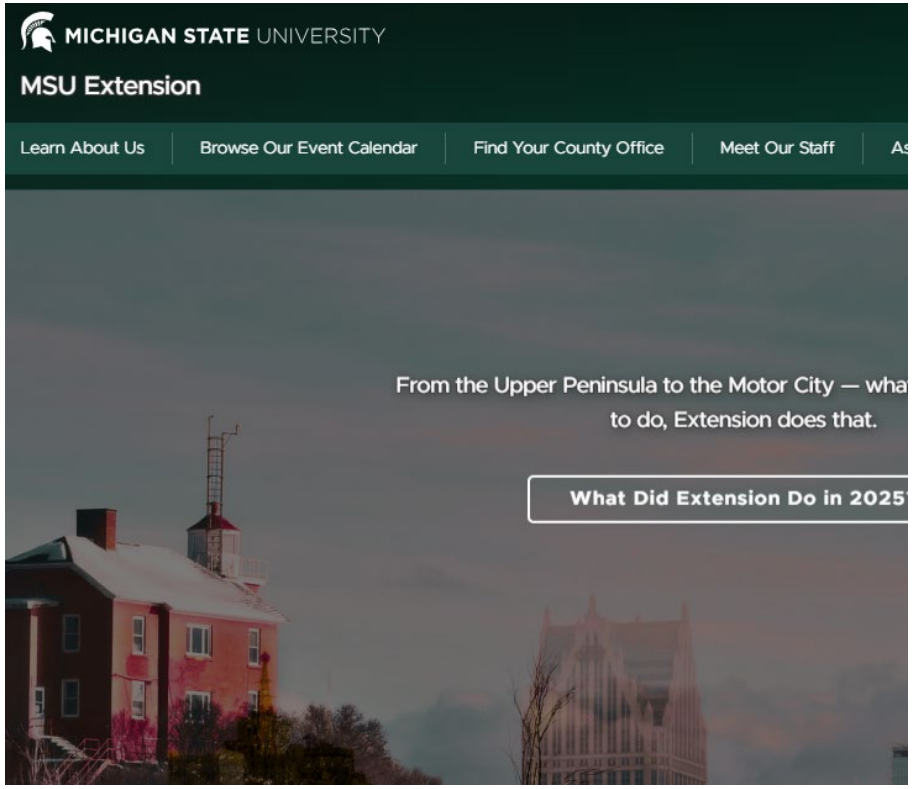
Why do people come to MSU Extension?

- The school district I lived in was my only option
- MSU Extension is NOT the only option for information
  - **Why do people choose *us*?**
  - **How do we keep them coming back?**



Discuss

- **Why might people come to MSU Extension for information?**
- **How do we keep them coming back?**



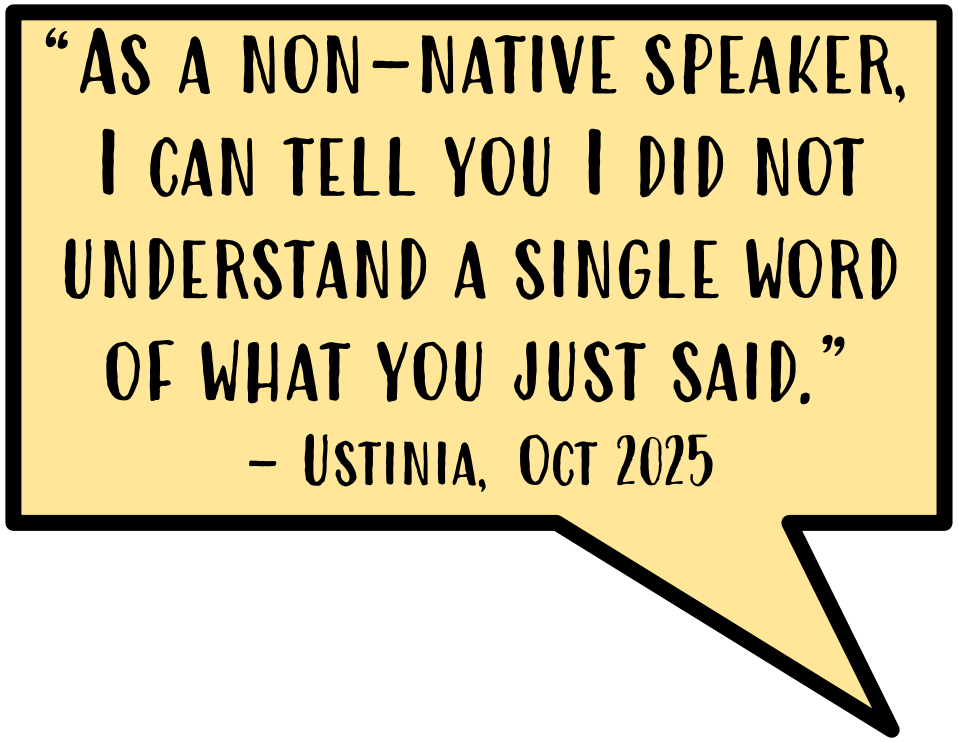
My Takeaways from Navigating the School System

- Educator = Customer Service
- Clear, concise statement of purpose
- Warm hand-off when needed
- A bad experience leaves a bad taste



2. Teaching to Your Audience

- Operating in a different language
  - Exhausting
  - Context is a lifesaver
  - Subtitles, pictures VERY helpful
- Often, our areas of expertise are like a different language



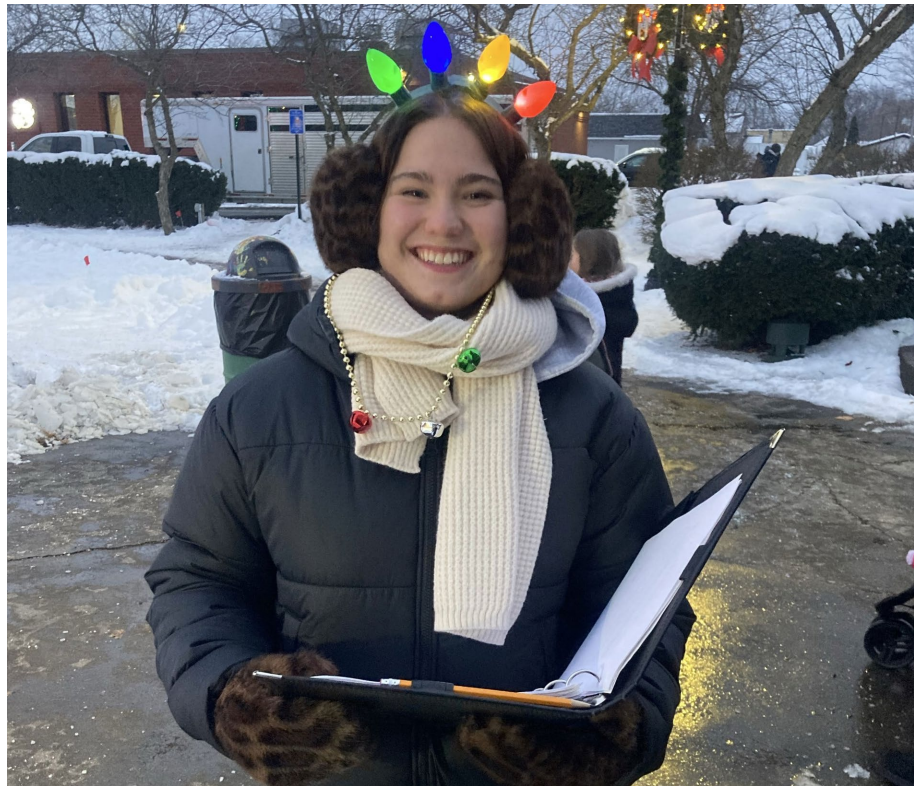
Activity– What do these mean?

- Ai = Active ingredient
- CEC **= Cation Exchange Capacity**
- ATP = Adenosine Tri-Phosphate
- SOM = Soil Organic Matter
- LED = Light Emitting Diode
- AA = Avoid Acronyms!



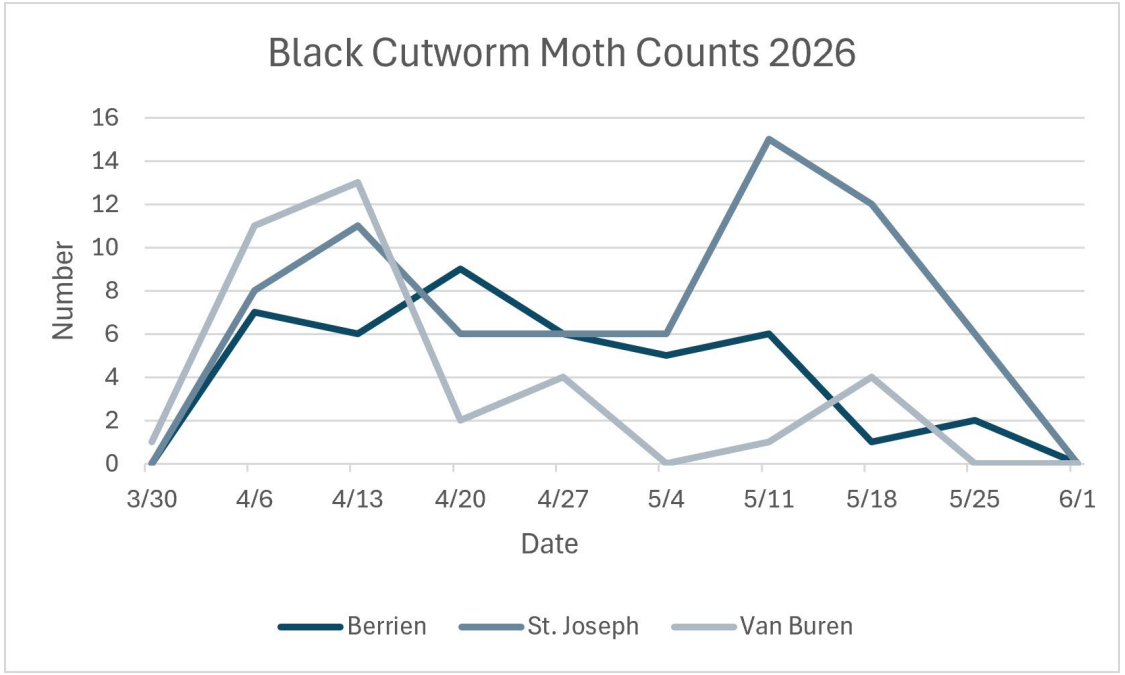
Tips for Teaching to Your Audience

- Avoid acronyms
- Know the needs of your audience
- Simplify (within reason)
- Repeat key points
- Check for understanding
    - Poll, quiz, activity, application, etc.



And for the love of everything…

- Explain your graphs and/or tables!
- Charty Party Game
- “So you can see from the graph that…”
- “Here on the left we have… Here on the bottom we have…”



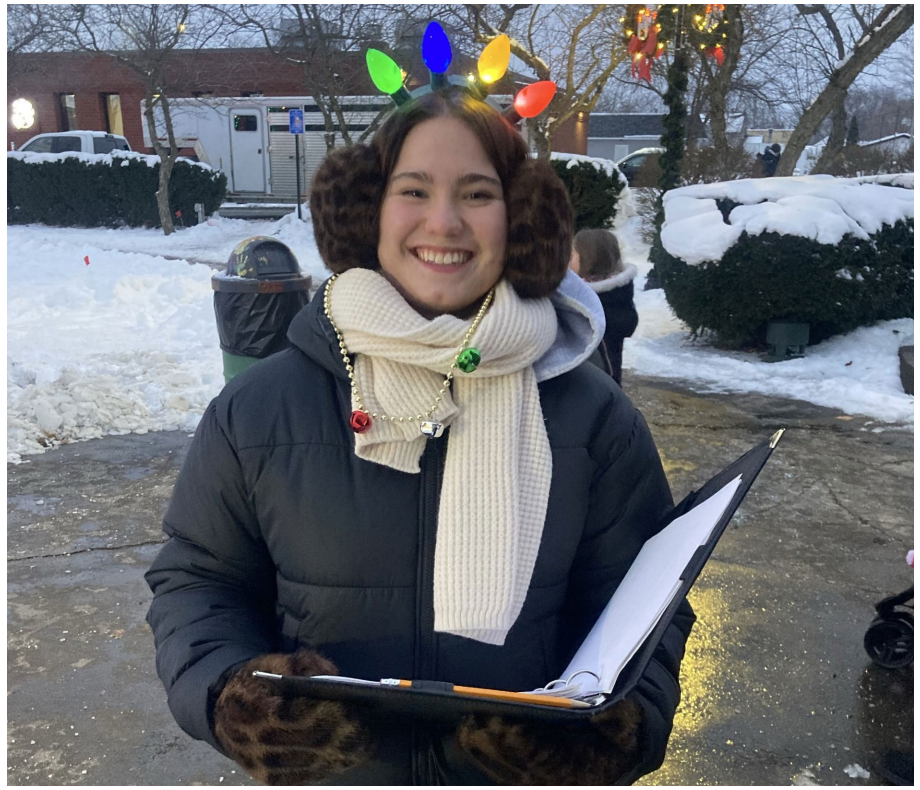
Discuss

- How can we know the needs of our audience?



My Takeaways from Life with a Non-Native Speaker

- Educator = Communicator
- Repeat key points
- Build in mental breaks
- Be clear and concise



3. Engaging Your Audience

- Econ 101: supply and demand
- Attention is an expensive commodity!
- Learning goes both ways
- **What do we hope to accomplish by teaching someone something?**



Tips for Engaging Your Audience

- Attach a positive emotion
- Use multiple methods and approaches to teaching material
  - Stories
  - Games
- Include graphics and pictures on slides



Discuss

- **What do *you* do to engage your audience?**

- Not all of these will be applicable to all audiences, but you should be able to take at least one new idea away from this discussion.



My Takeaways from Life with a Teenager

- "Just because this is my passion does not mean it is theirs."
  - Keep it clear
  - Keep it moving
  - Keep it fun
  - Keep it practical



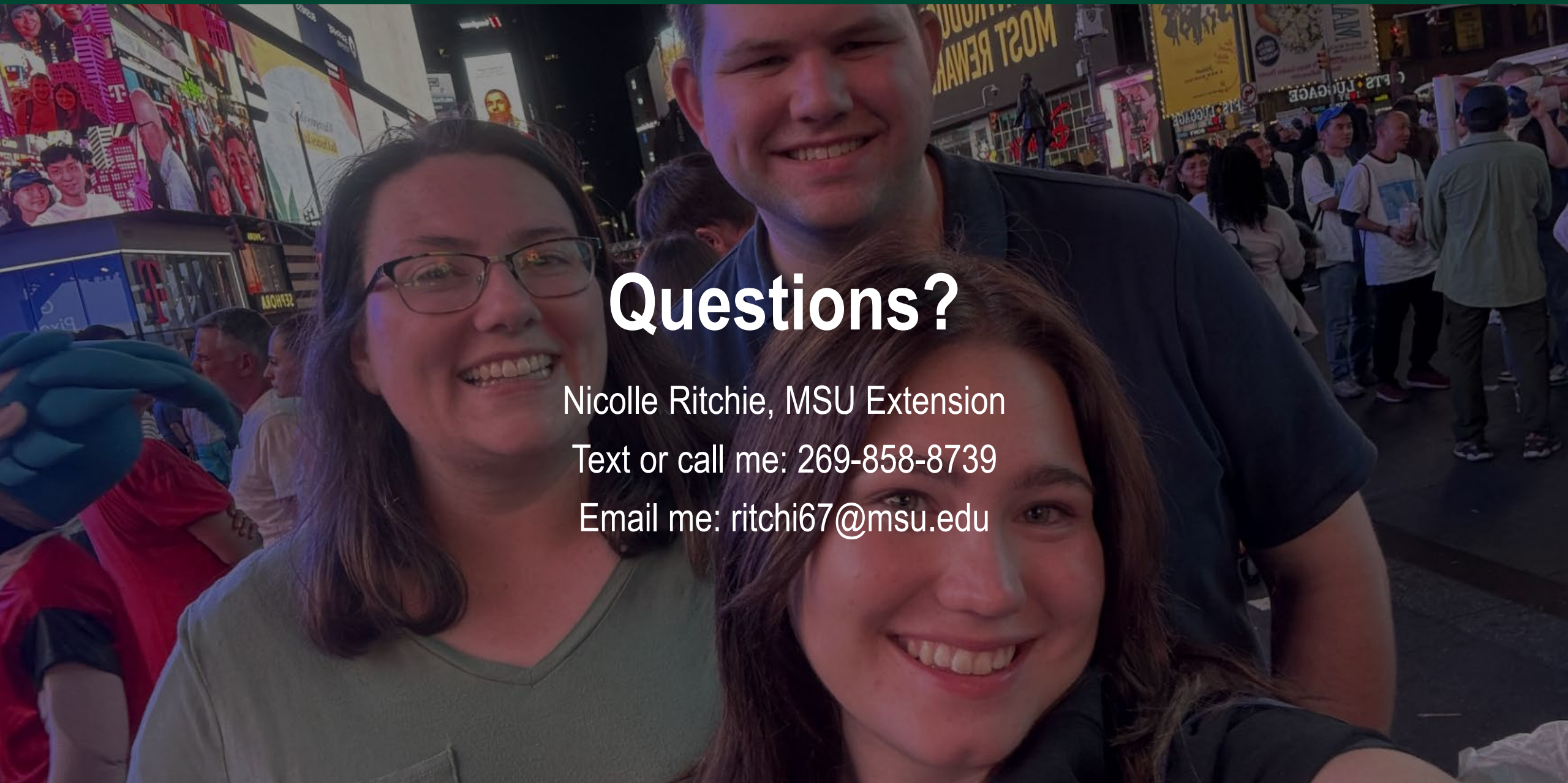
Summary and Action Items

- Make navigating Extension a smoother experience
- Evaluate the language you teach in
- Make learning fun
- **What is one thing you take away from today?**



Epilogue





Questions?

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