**Episode 6: Dr. Adam Strantz**

**Nupoor Ranade:** Hi there. Welcome to the *On the job with the Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative Podcast*.

**Wil Flores:** Today, we your hosts, myself Wil Flores, and...

**NR:** Me, Nupoor Ranade.

**WF:** ... are talking with Dr. Adam Strantz about what insights he has about navigating the end of student life, transitioning to the job market and eventually a job.

[piano music plays]

**NR:** So here is Adam. Welcome to our podcast!

**Adam Strantz:** Thanks for having me.

**NR:** Can you please introduce yourself for our audiences?

**AS:** Sure. I'm Dr. Adam Strantz. I am a assistant professor at Miami University in Ohio, and I am a joint appointment in the English Department and the Department of Emerging Technology in Business and Design, which sounds kind of fancy, but eh.

**WF:** It sounds fancy to me!

**AS:** I think it was done by committee so... [laughter]

**WF:** Well, it's great to have you here. Thank you so much for joining us. we just have a couple of questions and if it's okay with you, we can get started.

[a light piano jingle plays]

So our first question is about the transition from being a graduate student to a tenure-track faculty member, as well as a grad class instructor. So you can approach that question however you want. You can say teaching a grad course was like this. Or being a tenure-track faculty is like this. Whichever is easier for you.

**AS:** Sure. So first thing I actually spent, three years as a visiting assistant professor, before I moved on to the tenure track. So it took a little bit longer. and it was at the same institution at Miami before moving and applying for another job that was tenure track. So, it's a good reminder to folks that, you know, a lot of us will have different paths to tenure track. And that is not the be all end all of anything. One of the things though that was great about moving onto the tenure track was I could finally teach a graduate course. And that was a pretty great. You know, I think it's important for those of us who can do that-- and especially those of us who remember, you know, very recent graduate school and things like that-- it's very good I think to take stuff we learned and apply it, pay it forward, to the next generation of grad students definitely keeping in mind things like worklife balance. I don't recall hearing that term a lot, a lot in graduate school until a bit later on. So trying to, you know, be mindful of that stuff, pushing, graduate students to think about the future, what they want to do after graduate school. You know, I think it was a really important thing to take into the class. and let them, you know, have students be more aware that they have voices and concerns that you should be open to.

I had a great graduate experience, I'm not crapping on that or anything, but I think we're a little more aware now that, we should be more aware that folks are coming from lots of different circumstances, and stuff that we had to deal with in grad school, we don't necessarily have to teach the exact same way. I think that's quite important to bring in the stuff, things like reading level, amount of reading and, expectations and stuff like that, so.

**WF:** That's really interesting that you brought up the idea of like taking your experiences as a graduate student and like remembering kind of critically about like what you actually were experiencing versus just like, here's what I was reading. Here's what I was writing. But like, here's what I was doing and feeling and experiencing as a graduate student and thinking about in terms of like, what am I doing after graduate school, getting a job? Am I going to industry? I think that's really smart. Could you talk to us a little bit about how you've actually applied that in the classroom?

**AS:** Sure. So one of the nice things with the class I was able to teach was professional technical writing. So teaching the graduate, one of that, you know, it was a great opportunity to bring in all these different professional orgs. We have like ATTW, SIGDOC, CPTSC and stuff like that. And have students try to think about how, you know, these organizations can be great ways for them to network, and get further on in their, you know, education, by working with these organizations. So, you know, getting folks who... I think most of the ones in their hadn't actually done any professional technical writing outside of like classes. I always like to tell students, I was technically a medical writer for like a year. I was bad at it. And then also, I worked for Moody's for a little while, which was one of the companies that helped collapse the economy back in 2008. So I wasn't really involved with that, but yeah. So those experiences. Are good for the, you know, to share some background there, but you know, a lot of it comes down to the practicalities of teaching and stuff like that, but also getting them to think of, yeah, well, you know, there's all these professional orgs, especially SIGDOC that brings in, you know, lots of industry folks and it's like, you know, we think of academic conferences often as a place to just go and present our work and hang out with people or something. But it's like, no, you can network with like industry folks here. And that's especially great if you're thinking, you know, possibly going the alternative outside of, you know, trying to get, an academic job after, after graduate school. So, you know, and some of them, you know, they haven't really thought about those possibilities, so it's just nice sometimes to say, you know, there's these other options for you out there. You know, it's stuff to at least look into if you're interested in, you know, you don't necessarily have to make that decision immediately, but it helps some folks, I think, to definitely just be like, "Oh, you know, I hadn't really thought about that."

A lot of times grad schools just presented as a very linear path. And it's good to know that there are some other options. And, you know, I like the point to myself too, as someone who, you know, I didn't get a tenure-track job right out of graduate school. And there are probably folks who are maybe disappointed in me for that, but it's like, you know, you gotta, you gotta go with what's best for you and what works for you, you know, as a person. So you don't have to always just aspire to one sort of thing.

**NR:** So you've done these different kinds of jobs or handled these different kind of professional positions in the past. And have they helped you in any way applying to a tenure-track position or how have all the skills like come together or been useful to you?

**AS:** Yeah, I think it definitely helps. When you're teaching professional technical writing to have some of that experience, knowing that work outside of the classroom and stuff like that. You know, there's all sorts of different, things like the department I'm part of Emerging Technology and stuff, you know, we have a lot of folks who came from industry, so they don't have PhDs, you know, and then there's folks like us who do have PhDs and we might do more research on them, but they might be doing more teaching or they're doing like, you know, their own types of research that's more industry-focused while you know, a lot of my, a lot of my research also focuses on pedagogy. So it's like we have all these different skills that we're bringing and, and I think it's, you know, I think it's good to for students, especially to think like, okay, how can those apply outside of, you know, just a narrow sort of experience. I would include that kind of stuff on your CV and be able to talk about it when you're talking about your interests or things like that, you know, medical rhetoric's a big growing area. And I'm like, I have done some medical writing many years ago and I'm like, you know, I was rubbish at it so I definitely know, I, you know, I'm not interested in going in that sort of area. But for some people it's, you know, being able to connect the dots to the, that kind of work is super important. And it can show that., you know, you're aware that your multiple experiences and things you can bring into the classroom or your research and, and really help to, you know, develop yourself that way.

The IT work from Moody's I think was more, more formative and not really wanting to live the rest of my life in a cubicle. So I think that was, that was helpful development-wise. cause I did that before going back to grad school. So yeah.

**NR:** Could you also comment on this unique position that you hold? Because I think we're talking a lot about that without you really describing or elaborating on what the, what the title really means. So if I want to know about what the job is going to be, I'll look at other people who have held the same position and ask them what the job feels like, but in your case, it's, it's specific and it's very unique. So how did you prepare for that? Or how has your first year been in that position?

**AS:** Yeah, sure. Yeah, so it's a joint department, so it's like 50/50. I'm literally in both the English Department and the Emerging Technology and Business and Design. It seems to be a growing area of interest for kind of-- universities talk a lot about cross-disciplinarity right? They want to show that they're building connections across the university. And this is one of those, I think they're becoming a bit more commonplace where you're going to see these experiments with getting new faculty that are literally split between departments like this that have some overlap because then both sides contribute to like, you know, paying for it and stuff like that when there's less and less jobs. So it's, it's interesting, right? Cause it's, it's nice to, have kind of two whole communities that I'm a part of, two completely different departments. But it is also a bit more nerve-racking in some ways. Like when I was applying for the job , and I was, you know, getting interviewed by people, you had, you know, hardcore technology programmer folks there who wanted to know if my programmer chops were, were adequate. And then you had like, some literature folks who are like, you know, tell me about your theory and stuff like that. And then you had technical professional writing folks who were like, you know, tell me about your research methods. So, yeah. I definitely, I think I blocked a lot of those, those days out of my mind interview-wise, but it was a little intimidating. But I'd say for folks who are looking and seeing similar jobs, the benefits are pretty, you know, interesting. Right. if you find ones that have a good fit for you, and it could be something like a professional technical writing split between like the business college and like English or something, right? It's really cool to look for those kinds of positions. If you see them, you know, it can be a little intimidating when you're applying and being interviewed. but the benefits are kind of cool. You know, like I mentioned, you get a couple of different communities that you can be a part of. Everyone's very supportive of research that really intersects across the two. So you don't really feel like you're pulled in different directions. They want you to be able to articulate the overlap and where you see that. So it can be challenging in certain ways, but I think we're going to see more of these types of positions in the future. So I would encourage our professional, technical, rhet-comp folks, to look into them, you know, you'll see some new media jobs like that and just be aware that they are, they have their own challenges, but they're also really cool. And I think there are a way that we're going to see more of in the future. So we're quite primed. In this discipline anyways, right, for that kind of, cross-disciplinary work. So, you know, look out for those ones. Cause we can often be the best folks for the job, which is cool.

**NR:** So moving on to the next question, how do you maintain worklife balance with these different roles that you're playing?

[laughter]

**WF:** That's an easy answer!

**AS:** Yeah, not, well!

**NR:** Do you have a longer answer for us?

**AS:** Okay. Well, I can say, yeah, personally, my partner is also here at Miami on the tenure track. And we have a three-year-old who is also currently no longer in preschool because of, you know, the stuff happening in the world. But I can definitely say, I was never someone who was great at keeping a schedule. I was always very, I felt very intimidated by folks who would post every day, like, you know, getting my writing hour done and stuff like that. Cause I could never really work that way. So I want other folks like that to know that it's not impossible to finish your dissertation and do all this kind of stuff even if you might be more of a working-in-spurts kind of person. I definitely do. my best work at like kind of chunks of time that I can find, to fit in. Often, like, Derek from CDQ will, you know, email me something like, you know, later in the day and I'll be like, whoop getting it done at like 10 o'clock at night or something. And you know, it's not because I am like," Oh my God, I got to get this done" or anything, but it's like, yeah, sometimes my head space is quite empty at that time and I can get some work done. So I think for folks, you know, that can be difficult, but if you do work in that kind of, mentality, I like to think of it as managing headspace. You know, I can work for like three hours into the wee hours of the morning sometimes because that's when I feel like I can get some work done. And it's not quite on a good schedule, but it'll be something where I'm like, I have a couple of things to do and if I can knock them off my list, you know, I, I feel very accomplished then and I've got more room for some other stuff. So, you know, for other people that probably sounds horrifying, you know, but I think, you know, whatever sort of circumstances that help you, Work and do that kind of stuff, you know, stick to your plan. You know, I know folks who don't like to work in the evenings or don't want to work on the weekends and that's go for it, you know? But sometimes I'll be like, "Oh, I've got three hours. I could totally go churn out something." And I like to do that because that'll give me three hours some other times. So, if you don't have the best daily writing habits or anything like that. And you feel like you're behind as such, I can say that you can still succeed, with your own sort of schedule. So for those of my fellow, strange time workers out there. You can also survive. So that's my best advice.

**NR:** That really sounds promising because for the past couple of days, every morning I tried to write, but it seems like I can only write after nine, 9:30 PM. And that's been crazy. I've never been that person. I've never been that person and suddenly for my diss, it's that's the only time which is working. yeah.

**AS:** Yeah, I've also tried--I've seen those things online where people be like, yeah, getting my one hour of writing or I just finished writing my 1,000 words for the day. And I've tried doing that, but it's not a workflow that would just works for me. I'm also the same where I just need a chunk of time where I can sit down and just write stuff out. So I was just wondering, is that something that kind of developed in grad school? Like you realize this is what's working for me and it was just something that was able to carry through your work as a visiting assistant professor and now into this tenure-track position?

I'd say, having a partner who was also, we were the same year. So it was one of those things, right, where it was like, we'd often be flipping times when we could work on stuff or, you know, we'd find like one time that we both weren't teaching and we could go to like a coffee shop and work together. So I think it really developed in that kind of. you know, I don't know what my schedule's like this week there's meetings and all this kind of stuff. So you'd end up just kind of going like, well, here's a chunk and you just like, when you hit it, you're like, all right, I'm going to work that time. She has now a much better schedule that works for her. So it's one of those other ones, right, where it's like, since she has a schedule out, mine will be a bit more haphazard, but again, I can kind of, fit in times for that. It's something where I will kind of obsessively like make notes or something when I think of an idea, and then I've got a whole bunch of like, kind of random junk that when I do have time to work, it's all laid out for me. So, and again, that can be, I think for some people they'd be like, "Oh, that sounds like terrible worklife balance." You know, I think it, it, for me, it helps. Cause like I said, I can like kind of put something down and say, "All right, now I don't have to remember that right now." And it frees up me to focus on something else. So, it definitely came from grad school in particular circumstances, but, you know, with the, with the dissertation and stuff, right. It's like, it's one of those things where you're going to find those times to work and you're like, all right going to get some done and you know, it's not always going to be perfect, but it's the, it doesn't need to be perfect. Right?

**WF:** Right. I just, I defended my dissertation prospectus this past Friday and--

**AS:** Congrats!

**WF:** The one thing that has stood out to me--oh, thank you! The one thing that's stood out to me is the statement, a good diss is a done diss. So, yeah, I feel like that's very at the forefront of what's being said right now.

**AS:** I, and, and, you know, it's like, even if you want to turn it into a book later, it's never going to be book ready as is, I mean, I'm sure there's some, you know, geniuses out there where it did, but, but for most of us, it's definitely going to be another bit of work. So it's like, you know, just it's, it's all about reaching what you need to do there and having something where your committee and the people who are, who are judging it, say like, you know what, this is good. And you know, you get that affirmation. Also once you defend the prospectus, it's fair to take a little time away from it. You don't have to continue.

**WF:** That's what I'm doing!

**AS:** Yeah, definitely. You don't have to hit the ground running the next day.

**WF:** Hopefully my committee won't hear me saying that I'm not taking some time to like, not do anything cause this episode won't be out for a while, so I should be safe.

**AS:** This one guy told me it was fine [laughter].

**WF:** Yeah! So I guess the last question that we have for you is, based off of your experiences, I guess, with that whole unique process that you had, what advice do you have for those who are about to go into the job market or who are on the job market already? Just based off of anything that you experienced.

**AS:** Sure. so the first thing I'd say would be, much, like I kind of mentioned earlier, you know, don't be afraid of some of those alternative positions, visiting postdocs and things like that, you know. In a perfect world, right, there's every tenure-track job for folks to get and, and go from there. But you know, you gotta do what's best for you, your family, your partner, you know, whatever circumstances you have. So, you know, again, you might disappoint some people, if you don't take a tenure-track job that you could have gotten because it would have split up you and your partner, you know? You know that those are your choices those are your decisions, you know, it's definitely, you can succeed in a lot of different ways than academia. You know, nobody necessarily wants to go on the market thinking that they'll have to go on the next year or two, you know, but lots of people end up doing that even from good positions. So it's definitely, you know, it's not one size fits all. Again, look for those kinds of alternative positions. They will often show up on the like rhet-comp job wikia thing or whatever that I know we're not all supposed to read or anything and, but it exists. And there's also like the new media one and stuff. It's like, look for those kinds of jobs cause they might not come out from like MLA or anything like that. And you'd be on the lookout for those, cause again we're often super well-positioned for those types of jobs. Like the one I ultimately ended up taking but they might not come through the regular channels. So you gotta be aware, aware of them, and be on the lookout for them. Because again, we're super well-positioned for those often, and they can be really cool and challenging in their own ways. I'd say the other one. Yeah, yeah. Again, you know, take part and, all those organizations--ATTW, CPTSC-- cause those could be opportunities for alternate--alternate's not the right way to--outside academic jobs, that, you know, might be where you end up finding yourself happiest, meeting with industry folks and doing that kind of networking is super important in academia and outside of it. So I would definitely recommend folks go for those. You know, I mean, we're talking to the SIGDOC's recent SRC winner here [Nupoor]. So, you know, it's could be great ways to get a lot of, you know, connections and working with and seeing people, you know, who are super important, big names in the field. And making those kinds of connections can be super important just as much as like publishing and stuff is right. So, be on the lookout for those and the opportunities. I know right now we're right--every conference was canceled, so it does not necessarily help currently, but, you know, that's good stuff to be on the lookout for getting folks to, to remember those places. It can be super awkward and intimidating if you're an introvert to go and talk to people that you know or that you don't know. But it can be a great way to make those kinds of connections. You know, even those of us who are professors, right? We don't know-- or even, even the big names-- it's like, we're all just strange people. So don't be afraid to talk to anyone, you know, if they make it awkward, it's cause it's just awkward for everyone, you know, it's not because of you. So, but those connections can be super great to make and lead you to opportunities. You wouldn't know about both in and outside of academia. So folks who are getting ready to go on the market or will be in the next year, you know, Try those, try those out and now maybe apply to some conferences or just go to some that you haven't before see who you can meet.

**NR:** So we actually had planned to ask you a question because you're interested in visual rhetoric and that sort of stuff. So the question is about designing CVs or resumes if you're applying for other jobs. Do you have any insights for that?

**WF:** Yeah, especially because you've talked a lot about. Trying to broaden your horizons in terms of what you can apply to. So we'd be really interested in knowing, like, how you thought about like CV design and what to incorporate as you've mentioned earlier.

**AS:** Yeah. I mean, I could say distinctly my CV, I have like the super boring basic one and then one that's like wild and weird with like kind of design. Just trying to kind of be a little bit more out there. I was kind of inspired by like looking at like graphic designer resumes. If you Google those, you'll see a lot of, kind of interesting ones. And I teach my visual rhetoric students how to make infographic CVs and resumes. So it's like, I think finding those, what kinds of, very disparate kinds of ones, and then knowing who actually wants to see the difference ones is kind of, the biggest thing challenge there. Cause most of the places still just want text. But they often will let you submit like PDF materials as well. And I think that's where you can kind of sneak in the bit of design there. Make sure, you know, the readability is, is most important, right? So, you know, and have textual options for anything that you make like a cool graphic for it. Like I had a little chart on there, but I still had the text alongside it. Cause you know, you don't want to make something inaccessible or non-screen reader friendly if somebody is, you know, using that. So it's another one of those ones where you've got to have the kind of very basic just texts, one, with easy signposting and headers and stuff. And then if you want one, that's a little bit more like unique and memorable, you know, definitely you can have it on your website, you know, your portfolio. But it's also one to slip in when you submit to places that you think might like it. Although now if I think back, I'm trying to remember how many I sent it to, if I actually got interviews from any of those. Yeah. I don't know if that's a good case study, but yeah. I definitely think it's fun to incorporate some of that, you know, make it a little bit more memorable, have the text one as well, because you know, at that point someone's just probably looking for like easy information. I still know a lot of places where they'll print out your stuff and like give it to everyone. So, yeah, yeah! Right? So you don't want something where someone's like, you know, trying to make it look pretty, you know, it's gotta be printed to black and white or something and just really awful looking. So, you know, easy signposting switch up where your order of stuff. So it's always like education, publications, you know, conferences kind of stuff. But like, you know, a techie job right after that, I'll toss in my technical proficiencies and maybe even my work history, if that's relevant for like a professional writing, technical writing job, a professor job. Cause I know they're going to be looking for that before. Like, you know, some of the later stuff, you know, maybe even before pedagogy. So, you know, don't be afraid to just pick and choose and move stuff around. depending on the type of job you're looking at.

**WF:** Yeah, this has been super helpful. Thank you so much for your time.

**AS:** Thanks for having me.

**WF:** Yeah! Do you have any other notes or points that you'd like to share?

**AS:** Not, not so much. I mean, I think you guys work in here in the you know, the Digital Collaborative, you know, the work you guys are doing is super cool and visible and all that kind of stuff. So this is another one of those opportunities where I'm like, you know, folks look at, you know, watching this or listening to this on the podcast and stuff. It's like, you know, when they do those calls you guys, you know, if you like this stuff apply for it because these are great opportunities for folks to meet and do cool work. That's very visible and important for the field.

**WF:** Yeah, thank you! Well, we appreciate your time. Thank you so much. Did you want to leave any information about how to contact you, an email or Twitter or LinkedIn?

**AS:** Sure. you can reach me at @AdamStrantz on Twitter. Just my name. You can go to adamstrantz dot com? I don't know. I'm pretty boring with all of this stuff. My email's strandtaw (S-T-R-A-N-D-T-A-W) @miamioh.edu. That one's a little different, but I tried to make it pretty easy. I'm the only Adam Strantz so far, so I can hopefully be found.

**WF:** Second one has a lot to live up to then!

**AS:** I will Highlander!

**WF:** Yeah, Highlander, there can only be one! [laughter]

**AS:** That's how it stays yes!

**WF:** So we'll link everything that you just mentioned. And again, thank you for your time. We really appreciate it.

**AS:** Thank you both. Happy to help!

[light piano music plays and then fades away]