**Transcript for “Episode 9: Allison Hutchison”**

**Wil Flores:** Hi there! Welcome to *On the Job with the Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative* podcast!

**Nupoor Ranade:** Today we your hosts, Nupoor Ranade, and...

**WF:** And me, Wil Flores.

**NR:** Talk with Dr. Allison Hutchison about what insights she has about navigating student life and transitioning into the job market, and eventually a job.

[piano music plays}

**WF:** So here's Allison! Welcome! Thank you for joining us. We really appreciate you taking the time to meet with us. Could you introduce yourself to our audience? Give them a little background about yourself.

**Allison Hutchison:** Sure. Thank you so much, Nupoor and Wil for having me today. As Wil has said, I'm Allison Hutchison. I am a Senior Lecturer in the Engineering Communications Program at Cornell University. I got my doctorate in rhetoric and writing from Virginia Tech, where I basically focused my dissertation on the intersection of writing centers and technical writing. So I was looking at a feasibility study of offering online writing support to the students specifically that were enrolled in the technical writing service course because Virginia Tech to my knowledge does not yet have an extensive online tutoring program for its writing center. So in other words, students in the online section of the course, in many parts of the year, especially the winter and the summer, didn't have any online writing support, essentially, other than of course their instructor. So that kind of comes out of my background of having been a professional writing center tutor at a community college, an adjunct instructor at two community colleges and one online university. And then before that, my background of basically working in administrative business communication type roles. So somehow that managed to all come together in my doctoral work.

**WF:** That's awesome.

**NR:** Yeah!

**AH:** It was fun! [laughter]

**NR:** So we have a list of questions for you and it would be great if you could answer most, if not all of them. How has the transition from a grad student to an instructor or to a lecturer position at Cornell? How has that been for you and how did you prepare for moving into this big roll of a bigger responsibility?

**AH:** Hmm. You know, I don't know if there's a specific way that I prepared for that. I think some of it is—my transition I felt like was really smooth into the program that I went into because the position that I took is with it's a very small program. There's only three of us. So that partially helps the transition a lot, but also the people that I'm working with are people that I just see eye to eye with. And we, we seem to have a shared experience and a shared understanding of what it means to work with engineers and teach communication. And part of that is because I was fortunate enough when I was at Virginia Tech to do two years of my assistantship in the Engineering Communications Program in the Material Science and Engineering Department. And so when I was at Cornell, the associate dean, when I was on my campus visit, is the material science professor. So we kind of just like hit it off, and everybody's sort of, you know, understood where I was coming from. And I talked about some of my material science students’ projects in my talk. And so they were asking questions about, you know, how are we supporting the students with their communication activities. And I was giving, you know, in my slides, I had some pictures of students giving their, their poster presentations. And I had kind of, sort of stayed involved a little bit. Even after my assistant shift ended, I would go to the poster presentations that the material science students were giving because, I just, I had an interest in it and I wanted to be there and I wanted to see what they had to say and their poster, presentations and designs, I thought, were always so interesting and fun. And we had started doing, kind of a more like general audience for the posters. So they were coming up with these really cool designs that were more like metaphors and examples for material science. So like one of the posters that I used in my slides was from *Stranger Things*, those students had come up with like parallels, you know, between material science and *Stranger Things*. And it was just like adorable and smart and like, how can you not talk about that? So I think in that way, it's, it's made my transition really great. And that's because I have great coworkers. I still do think there are times when. I feel like, and maybe this is partially just owed to the fact that like I was so intimidated by going on an interview at Cornell, that there are times when I feel like, “Oh, I need to. I need to exert my expertise. I need to, you know, show people that I know when I'm talking about.” And I tweeted the other day, you know, [laughter] I sent this email to some professors, to some colleagues, that we have in biomedical and environmental engineering. And I included a citation. Like a weirdo. [laughter]. Like a total weirdo! [laughter].

**WF:** Please see the works cited entry in this email!

[laughter]

**AH:** I'm still figuring it out guys. It's a, it's a funny transition, but I mean, I think part of it was because like I’m working with people who, you know, I'm not an engineer, my background is not engineering. So some of it is we were working on, some curricular development for a particular course. And so what we like to do is we like to talk to, the content professor or the engineering professor about what types of communication activities they're trying to integrate into their courses so that we can help them, you know, we develop the communication component. So I was saying in this email basically, "Oh, you know I think it’s really great”—this professor had, I think, three poster presentations lined up for the semester—and I said, “Oh, this is really great because there's actually research that shows. That verbal communication is the most common form of communication in the engineering workplace!” Citation.

**WF:** Well, I mean, now he knows!

**NR:** Yeah. You know your facts if you didn't know before!

**AH:** Yup! [laughter] So, yeah, so it's a fun, it's a fun thing, it's a fun transition.

**WF:** Earlier you had talked about. your experience with the writing center. And this is kind of related just because I have a, a fairly extensive background with writing center work. But I typically work with a lot of like science graduate students. And sometimes I feel like I have to do some of that kind of performative ethos-building to like get them to take me seriously when I say something. Is that something that kind of came about during your graduate studies as well, that you felt like had to translate into, “Okay, now I'm a faculty. Like I have to show, show even more.”

**AH:** Yeah. It's funny because I've been thinking about that a lot lately with peer review. And peer review and writing center work is so adjacent but also, so not the same. And one of the things that I, before I cleared out my office and moved out of, you know, Virginia Tech, I took a picture of my whiteboard with all these notes that I had been writing down from my dissertation. And I wrote something very broad and very vague, but also something that I've been trying to wrap my head around, which was, something that was basically like train engineering students as writing center consultants, something along those lines. And because we work with, we work with engineers, engineering students so much on developing their identity and their expertise as engineers and also working with them on okay, you are, this particular engineering major. Right? But you might work with a lot of different engineers in your career and also just different people from all kinds of backgrounds with all kinds of expertise. So really that writing center approach of asking questions, right, about why are you doing this? And what's, I mean, essentially it's, you're asking them questions that are an rhetorical analysis of what they're doing. I mean, the way I think of rhetoric is rhetoric teaches us to ask why, why did you do this? What is the purpose? What is the intent right behind what you're doing?

And so with engineering, I found when I was first working in material science, that, yeah, it was a lot of that ethos building and that I had to learn a lot about material science, and I am by no means an expert in material science, but I found that learning at least some of the basic concepts and some of the basic tenets of the discipline helped me to help the students more. And when I first started in The Engineering Communications Program as a grad student, as my assistantship, I immediately thought of it as this is an engineering writing center. This is, this is what this is. This is what the model is. I'm here to help the students to come up with, you know, we, we worked a lot with this critical review of materials paper, and it was in the sophomore class for the material science students. And getting that understanding of basically the four different content areas that they were writing about helped me to ask more targeted questions, to help understand what they were doing. So with writing centers, you know, with, with, with that training and with that background, you find all kinds of scholarship that says, you know, actually, lack of expertise is great. Lack of expertise is important. And I think that's true. And then I think there's also a truth in knowing a little bit about the discipline so that, you know, I did a job talk for one of my, for one of my interviews, basically sort of focusing on that idea because it was a very STEM focused, you know, technological institution. So I wanted to make it clear that. You know, this is not just any writing center, right? This is a very particular writing center at a very particular type of institution.

**NR:** That's awesome!

**WF:** Yeah. I love that. Like you said, the bridging between the two of tech comm and writing center together, that's fascinating to me, like on the side, I might go and read your dissertation or something.

**AH:** Oh god, well, my chapter, my, my lit review chapter is like the longest thing ever. And it's probably the most boring thing ever. I was trying to bring together, you know tech, comm and writing centers. But yeah, I mean, I think there's, there's a great point of view from tech comm about usability and designing for user access and like so many things that is so appropriate to writing center work. And also just to the way that you train tutors, the way that you get students to interact with the writing center, there's so much that, that those two fields have to offer each other.

**NR:** Could you tell us more about your job? What's the workload like? How do you spend your time? What do you do?

**AH:** So I'm, I'm still figuring it out because it's my second semester. And, and as we're all dealing with right now, we're switching to a different mode, at least for us, because during the semester, all of our classes are offered face to face. But I have been teaching online. I actually started my higher ed teaching career teaching online at an online university. So this isn't necessarily a change for me. It's just a change in terms of what we do in our program. So my teaching load is 2-2 so it's pretty fantastic. That is usually about six credits for per semester. We're on, you know, the, the two-semester system. And it can be a variety of things. We offer basically two main ways of engineering students getting their communication credit in order to graduate. So those can be our three-credit courses. We have two different courses, one, I taught two sections last semester of organizational communication for engineers. So we do a lot of team-based projects, and we do as much as possible real projects for real clients. So last semester, both sections of my classes we were working with, we had two clients, one was a local construction company, and another was a startup company in an incubator that's on campus, and they are developing—they use SERS. Let me see if I can remember this, surfaced enhanced Raman spectroscopy, in order to create different types of tests. They’re developing a rapid lyme disease, which is pretty freaking awesome. So they were thinking of other ways that they could use this technology and other applications. So things like, detecting counterfeit art maybe, or detecting counterfeit pharmaceuticals. So my students were working in teams to do some market research analysis for both of those clients. And then our other class is just a more general engineering communications class. We do the same thing, team-based projects, and we try to work with local clients. So this semester, our partnership is with the students with disability services and the ADA on campus. So, this is a project that my colleague Tracy Nathans-Kelly has been doing for multiple semesters now, where the students come up with a design project that addresses some kind of campus accessibility project. So with our move to online, we're looking this semester at, you know, is there something like that with disability and online access or is there something about, you know, I've seen a couple of articles about college students in the transition, it was just a bad, quick transition for everybody. So how does that put, people with disabilities at a disadvantage? You know things like that. So those are our two main three-credit courses, and then we also have what we call communication intensive partnerships. So these are one-credit communication add-ons to existing engineering courses. So like for example, this semester I'm working with a 4,000 level computer-aided engineering class. The students are doing, they're creating computer models of basically biological processes. So they write a big giant research report and then they also gave a presentation, and we support that. So it kind of depends upon the semester what, what we're offering. So some of that depends upon what, what classes the engineering professors are teaching, if that makes sense. So what I might teach every semester varies a little bit, but I'm, I'm sure that after a year or two, I'm going to kinda, you know, get the hang of that.

**WF:** So can I ask, were you teaching as, while you were doing your graduate studies?

**AH:** Yes.

**WF:** Okay. So was that also like a 2-2- or a 1-1 or? Basically, I just want, I'm interested in, like, how did the experiences as a graduate student and teaching transition into this particular focus, especially as you've talked about teaching kind of similar stuff, and approaching it similarly, just like transitioning that to a faculty position as opposed to a graduate student.

**AH:** Hmm.

**WF:** I guess the better question is if you have kind of a, not an expertise, but I guess like a familiarity with a particular teaching approach to something, does it translate well when you're in a faculty position in a completely different institution?

**AH:** Oh, okay. I was going to say as far as like teaching load, probably somewhat similar. Cause our assistantships were generally about 20 hours a week. So that might be two courses, or it might be like, for example, my last year I was teaching in the professional and technical writing programs. So I was teaching one. class. So I taught science writing and I taught professional writing another semester. And then my other ten hours was in the digital studio, which was our pilot project basically that I was running out of my dissertation. So I don't know if that gives you a sense of teaching loads, so to speak, but that's kinda what I was doing while I was, you know, researching, writing my dissertation, all of that good stuff.

So, yeah. It's, the model is somewhat similar that Virginia Tech uses where I was. When I was in Engineering Communications at Virginia Tech, I was working with the engineering professor. So they were, delivering the subject content of the course, and then I was supporting the writing and communication component, if that makes sense. So it is pretty similar to what we do here at Cornell. I don't know if that gets at your question or not, though.

**WF:** No yeah, just basically like how hard was it taking the experience as a graduate student and just applying it into the faculty position? Cause I know for sure some people out there listening, the listeners, I guess that’s what the noun is called. They'll have, they'll find themselves in similar positions while though they’ll be just kind of taking the same approach. Maybe being in the same situation and then just transitioning to the faculty position. So I was wondering if there were any kind of bumps in the road or anything like that, but if it was like a smooth transition, that's awesome.

**AH:** I think so. I mean, I still think there's the question of like we were talking about before of expertise. And so there's still, you know, times when I'm thinking as a rhetorician, as a tech comm person, I'm thinking of how to present information to engineers, right? And something that has worked for me so far with my students. And I don't know if this is particular to the institution because it's like, you've already mentioned, Wil, it's something that can be institutional institutionally contextually bound. Right? Like if I was still at Virginia Tech an R1, public research institution, much like NC State, you know, maybe that maybe that would be a little different. I certainly didn't take the same approach when I was teaching courses at Virginia Tech. And part of the reason for that was because half of the students enrolled in my science writing course, for example, were PTW majors. And then the other half were STEM majors. So, and in my professional writing class, I had, it was the same, pretty similar situation. So now it's like, I don't have these two audiences, you know, to contend with. It's more like, okay, they're all engineers, they're different types of engineers, but they're all engineers. Right? So some of what I've done is I've actually started giving my students, even though they're undergrads, I've been giving them some research articles to read for class. Not that I didn't do that in, in PTW, but I've been giving them research articles to help frame some of the assignments that we're doing.

So for example, the beginning of the semester, I started out my engineering communications class with a couple of readings on surveys of engineering alumni and the types of communication that they do in the workplace. And then we do a project about engineering communication in the workplace where they look at job ads. They, I think Nupoor, I sent you the, the, the assignment description. They look at a couple of different job ads. They extract what kinds of communication, responsibilities and skills are in those ads. They go on to write a memo about their own communication skills and abilities as evidenced through their resumes. And then from there, they go on to interview some of our engineering alumni and they collectively wrote reports and did a poster presentation in small teams. So I think some of that approach, like this research-based approach seems to build an ethos with my class. And then I also, like we have conversations in class when we had face-to-face class meetings, we would discuss things about like the methodology of these surveys and they would ask questions like, “Well, why did they ask this question and not this question? Did they word the survey this way? And why did they present the data this way? And why is this table like this?” And so, and we get into discussions about IMRAD and IMRAD format, like, look at how this article is set up, right? Like one of the articles that we read the results and discussion sections were combined, and that was different from the first article that we read. So some of the students were like, “I think this is, this article was more confusing than this article.” And I was like, “Okay, why?” And one of the students was like, “I think, because they combined those two sections,” and I was like, “Okay, alright!” You know, we can, we can look at this, we can analyze this. Right. So I think they're learning, you know, secretly learning by proxy some rhetorical analysis skills. [laugher]

**WF:** Right, yeah. Yeah, and even getting like preparation for, if they continue on do research and publish, like having that experience as an undergraduate is so valuable.

**AH:** I hope so. I mean, if even if they don’t, I mean, look like a lot of our students, you know, a lot of undergrads are not interested in graduate work, and I totally do not blame them. So they're engineers and they might go into workplaces where they may or may not be writing formal reports depending upon the type of job that they go into, but their analysis skills, their ability to understand and interpret research, and to exert their own engineering expertise and to analyze that information. And also to communicate that information to other people who are not necessarily engineers, all of those are extremely valuable skills.

**WF:** Your position sounds like the dream job. For, for me coming from writing center stuff.

**AH:** It's freaking cool so far, guys, I have to admit, like, I feel like. The kairos of this job ad, like was just, it was perfect. I mean, I had two, I had at least two campus visits that I was really, really excited about, and this was one of them. And so then to get the job offer. Like, I do not mean this in a way that is, like I try not to say this from a place of hubris or something, but it just like, it felt right when I got the offer, you know what I mean? Like, it just felt like, I wasn't surprised. I guess when I, when I got the job offer, I was like, it just felt right.

**WF:** No, yeah. I mean, one of the bigger things that we've been getting from some of these interviews is to trust your instinct and trust—instincts, cause you have more than one—to know when something is right. And so this sounds like one of those instances. When it's right, it's right. So we're going to pivot just a little bit. You talked a little bit about, applying for other jobs as well. In addition to this one, a lot of what we've heard from folks is that the job market can feel like in a full-time position. And we just had some questions about how you manage that, particularly around worklife balance. So as a graduate student, what was that experience like? And how did you manage it? And did some of those experiences kind of manifest in the way you manage your work now as a lecturer?

**AH:** Well, I will start by saying that I was very focused in my job search and very intentional about where I applied. I know that there's a lot of advice out there to sort of copiously apply to jobs. And that was not my strategy. So I might've had a more, possibly more manageable workload because I think I applied to about, I'd have to look back at my spreadsheet, but probably around 50 jobs. Whereas I had, you know, people in my program and just other graduate students that I knew that were applying for 80 and upwards of a hundred jobs. And I just didn't feel qualified for 80 to a hundred of those jobs. There were a lot of job ads that I looked at and read and said, I'm not your girl that I, this doesn't apply to me. Right. And I also had a lot of very focused conversations with my advisor about which jobs I applied to. So we would meet usually like during my whole last semester and during the dissertation phase and especially like, you know, toward wrapping things up, we were meeting probably every week. And so, you know, jobs were coming out on whatever MLA or—I didn't find MLA’s Job List very useful personally. I found more stuff I felt like on HigherEdJobs and, what's that I, Cornell and some of the other Ivy’s use Academic Jobs Online, is that it? Does that sound familiar? Academic Jobs Online. I know they're, I think Arizona state uses it too. But anyway, just a suggestion to people that are looking, because I know my position, my position was not posted on, on Jim Ridolfo's Rhet Map. It wasn't posted on it might've been an on HigherEdJobs. I don't remember. So just knowing to kind of look in some different places is one suggestion that I have because my, my job is kind of a little bit of a niche job. So if you're into that kind of thing, that might be useful. But yeah, so we have very, focused conversations, my advisor and I, and if I saw something that I wasn't quite sure about, I would ask for his opinion, And you would tell me very candidly whether or not he thought I was qualified for it. I remember there was one that I was really interested in, and it was in a great location and an area that I've lived in before I really wanted to apply to this job. He knew people on the search committee and I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah. And he was like “Nuh uh!” So not that he would have stopped me from applying to it, right, but he was basically saying. You know, they're looking for somebody more on like the techie side of tech com and you are not necessarily on that spectrum. So I was like, “Okay, fair.” You know, there's, there's lots of jobs that I, I qualify for that other people out there on the job market don't necessarily qualify for. So that was one thing, very, very targeted, very focused job search. What else? I mean, and, and part of that, like I said, helped with my workload, because, you know, as everyone will tell you, targeting your job materials is super important. And once I kind of, you know, started applying to like, let's say like, five different kinds of jobs, right? Like I'm a writing center person. I'm a tech comm person. I was applying to tenure-track jobs, non-tenure track jobs, but you know, how like a genre or emerges of like these different types of job ads once I sort of got down, like, okay, here's my content. And here's how I vary it. Right. So like, I, I coded my resume, my CV in Latex and I had it in Overleaf. So like I could very easily and very quickly switch out sections of my CV, right. To tailor it to different things. Right. And I, and I did the same thing for my cover letter. So like there were different paragraphs that I could switch in and out paragraphs that I could tailor to that particular institution. Like everybody tells you, you know, you're going to spend time on that institution's website and trying to get a sense of, you know, what types of things people do and what types of things they value there and, you know, highlight those things in your cover letter as much as possible. And you're going to best that you can, and you know, you're gonna screw some of it up. There was a position that I applied to. I was really stoked about and that I really thought would be great and would put us near one of my husband's relatives has, you know, we could live near my brother-in-law. And I had like a total misfire in the cover letter because I basically pitched my wagon, so to speak, to another to some researchers in an adjacent department to the one that I was inter trying to interview with, and I didn't know it, but there were department politics going on, right, where like this department doesn't like this department and they're trying to differentiate themselves from one another. And I was like, “Hey, this is great!” [laughter] You know? And I wrote, I was like, cause I had cited one of these researcher’s articles in my dissertation, I was like, this is freaking awesome. Like I'm so excited about this job. I didn’t know. There's just things you don't know, you know? And then the person that I, I know one of the people that got the job and they were like, “Oh no, no, we don't interact with that department at all.” And I was like, “Ooh.”

**WF:** Oh that’s why, yeah!

**AH:** That would have been helpful to know, but also like it's, I kind of feel like it's one of those things where, you know, I'm like this in real life, but I'm also like this in my job materials. I'm unapologetically who I am. Right. So that really wouldn't have been a good fit anyway. Right, cause if I was pitching my posts to the wrong wagon, then it wouldn’t have worked out. Right. Like if I was interested in the research that was going on somewhere else and that department is being distance, so it's fine. It, I did myself a favor, I guess is maybe what I'm trying to say. So yeah. I mean, I think it was. It was good advice that I got at the Computers and Writing Graduate Research Network, I think the summer before I went on the job market, and Dr. Chen Chen basically said, you should find different days to work on certain things. And don't try to work on your dissertation as the same day that you work on your teaching prep for your classes, you know, if you're teaching while you're dissertating, and don't work on your job materials on the same day. Basically come up with some kind of schedule where you separate out your time, because basically the, the knee-jerk of trying to wrap your head around these three very different types of intellectual work and intellectual activity is very stressful and very draining. So I definitely took that advice. And one piece of advice that I wish I had heeded was spending more time on my preparation materials over the summer before going into, you know, my last fall and spring. I, I did that, but I don't think I did enough of it because. I ended up in the early parts of the semester, doing more development work on my website and on my cover letters. And I wish I had just done more of that over the summer, instead of writing, you know, an 80-page lit review chapter.

[laughter]

**WF:** There's that lit review chapter we're getting more and more development. There’s 80 pages now!

**AH:** I’m trying to talk you out of reading my dissertation, Wil!

**WF:** Maybe a slight skimming of that section, then.

**AH:** A light skimming! You just read the headings!

**WF:** I have a very specific question and only, because, and only because I'm a very big like project management and just like production nerd, but you mentioned Latex and Overleaf. Can I ask why you specifically use that?

**AH:** I wanted to, I think it was a rhetorical choice because I wanted to identify myself as a tech comm person on the job market. And also, I just liked the way that it made my materials look. I thought my materials look sharp, and I was proud of them. So I was happy with that. Also, I think just going into, I mean, not that I knew I was going to go into STEM communication work, but like, probably might happen—

**WF:** An inkling!

**AH:** So yeah, just kind of familiarizing myself with that stuff. Like, I actually had a student this semester who came up to me after class and said, “I found your website, and can you tell me what you did and how you did it and do do do do?” And I was like, “Oh, maybe this is, this is something that they're not being taught.” Like maybe we need to add. So I was like, I was going back over my, you know, the whole, the workplace communication, you know, interviewing alumni, this whole project that I have them at the beginning of the semester. And we do, you know, a little bit of resume work. And I was like, maybe I need to add this. Like, recoding their resumes using LaTeX, like maybe we need to do this. I mean, I had to, like, my advisor is Carlos Evia. Like he, I like, you know, talking about making my website and I was like, I think I'll just set up a Google Site. And Carlos was like, “Noooo!” [laughter] I was like, “But why?” and he was like, “Noooo!” So, I actually took it was actually okay. It wasn't my favoritest thing that happened in grad school, but I had to, for reasons, our tech comm pedagogy class wasn't offered when I was in coursework. So I ended up having to take an undergrad class a 4,000-level class with Carlos on developing online content. And I had to get a GitHub and I had to make, you know, a website and it ended up being like the best thing ever. So I'm really glad that that happened that way. I was still sad that I didn't get to take the tech comm pedagogy course because like tech comm and pedagogy, like writing centers, it's like my thing so like that was the class, but I was like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah!” And then they didn't offer it. And I was like, “Man!”

**WF:** Well, it sounds like you got a good thing out of it though. So that's great. I've always wanted to delve into GitHub, but I'm just so scared.

**AH:** It's really not like, I am not like some coding maven, like it's not the most difficult thing in the world. And like, you can do it. I promise.

**WF:** Okay, well I can do it, so can you, listener!

**NR:** I'm writing my dissertation in GitHub!

**AH:** Are you? You’re writing it in GitHub?

**NR:** In GitHub! But then it's more complicated than that because I'm not writing in markdown, I'm writing in LaTeX cause NC State offers their template for our dissertation only in LaTeX, or they offer it also in a Microsoft Word, but that does not fit well again. So I had to use GitHub as my backend, my cloud and version control system and visual studio code for later coding and writing all the content. It took me a long time to set up and listening to you, I think it's a good decision that I've made because I wasn't feeling that for the last one. I was like, this is wrong. Why am I spending so much time just setting the system up? But yeah, it looks like, you know, I'm sure I'll be you more satisfied towards the end and listening to your experience makes me feel that it's, it's a lot comforting.

**AH:** I think very smart decision. I wanted to do my dissertation in LaTeX, and Carlos wanted me to do it in LaTeX, and we just, like you said, it takes a long time to set up and we just didn't quite get it off the ground fast enough. So we just ended up using Google Docs and that was really easy because I could share everything with him. So, yeah.

**NR:** Yeah. My advisor plays a big role in this. My advisor is Dr. Jason Swarts, and he said that I'm willing to run the extra extra mile for you, but if you can get this working, it'll be awesome. And I'm like, yeah. So yeah.

**AH:** It's a smart, it's a smart decision.

**NR:** Thank you. We have this one question you already gave a lot of advice for the job market. There was one question that we could get at more is about your worklife balance. So you, you seem to tell us that, you know, it's not too much of a load, like some other places do have like 3-3 load. So teaching is comparatively less, although the preparation might be more and more time consuming because, especially the context, the field, and just getting understanding, meeting the students where they are at and like suddenly switching assignments because you realize that they don't know something. And, those kinds of, I think proactive decisions need more work. So when you're invested in all of those choices, how do you find time? How do you manage your projects? How do you manage scheduling or accountability for yourself? Could you give us some tips about that?

**AH:** I really want to get better at it, if I'm being honest. One of the things that I started doing in my dissertation process was just keeping a white board in my office. And just for me, writing a, writing a to-do list is really useful. And also thinking through my dissertation visually and conceptually was really helpful for me. So I had a Gantt chart, you know, with all my sections and all of the tasks and you know, all of those things. And I pinned it up behind my, behind my monitor in my office and you know, everything

**WF:** like that, on campus.

**AH:** And that was helpful. But honestly, like, that part wasn't hard for me because I was excited about my dissertation project. So it wasn't like, “Oh, I have this because I'm going to forget to do my survey or I'm going to forget to, you know, code my interviews or something like that.” It was more just like a, “Yup. I'm on track kind of thing.” Right. So in my office I have a white board. I like to write the assignments that I need to grade up on my whiteboard. Now I'm working at home and I don't have a white board. So I'm actually thinking about some of my student teams this semester are using Kanban Flow for their, we have them create a task schedule, basically. So I'm actually thinking about doing that. I think that might be useful because I tend to, I mentioned peer review before and sort of taking this research approach with my students, of, you know, this is why we're doing this and that here's the research that shows why we're doing this. And so I've been kind of on this rabbit hole lately of peer review. Cause I'm like, how do we, how do we actually know as, as the field of rhetoric and writing studies or rhetoric and composition, however you position yourself. How do we actually know what practices are good and are right.

And I might be shooting myself in the foot by saying this, but I just feel like a lot of that comes out of practice and not necessarily out of scholarship. Cause I've been looking for scholarships to kind of back up like, okay, in my mind, why

**WF:** do we do, peer review

**AH:** that isn't anonymous, for example. Right? Like there was this tweet that went viral a little while ago. I don't know if you guys saw it about the first-year writing student that got some really horrible racist and misogynistic comments on her essay. She was a Native American student. And I think she was writing about, I think the essay had something to do with like history of the United States or something like that. And she got like some really wrong feedback. So I was like, okay, I want to really make sure that when I do peer reviews, when I do workshops in my classes, that I'm approaching this from the right perspective that I'm giving my students a tool that they will see as valuable and also a tool that is not just, “Oh, this is something that we do in the classroom because my writing instructor told me to,” but this is actually something that as practicing engineers, you should be looking at each other's communication. You should be getting feedback. You should be giving feedback, right? Like this is not just something that exists in the university, right? Like this exists outside of the university. So like we, as, as an engineering expert, you exert your expertise. You give someone else feedback from that perspective, right? And they know who you are, and that's part of what builds your identity as an engineer. You would never, I don't know, write a note and like put it on your coworker's desk and not tell them the report really needs some help, you know? Right. You would never do that. I think the, the anonymous peer review things, some people might approach it that way because they think that it mocks peer review in journals and that's sort of true. but why would you do that with students? Number one and number two, they're not going to be, I shouldn't say they're not more than likely. A lot of undergrads are not going to become academics. So why would you apply a practice that's used in academia to helping them become who they are be in their lives? Right.

So like, I've kind of been going down this rabbit hole lately of like, where is our scholarship? And not, not only that, like, I'm not talking about our theory, like where is our research that shows those studies on peer review and how it's done and what kinds of feedback we give and how we give it, you know what I'm saying? And I'm not saying this research doesn't exist. That's not all what I'm trying to say. It's just like, how do we know these things? Right? How do we know what we know to kind of put it in terms of like the writing about writing type of stuff? Right. So I don't know. I, I really like trying to strike this balance where I'm giving my students good information and good instruction. But not going too far down the rabbit hole, like knowing when to stop myself. Right. Or knowing that like, if this is something that really peaks my interest, kind of putting a pin in it and saying, “Hey, maybe this is a research project that I need to do. Maybe I need to do some kind of research on engineering and workshop feedback or something like that.” So I'm kind of trying to just use my first year to like pay attention to those things, if that makes sense, about what sorts of research projects I want to develop, because there's at least two that I have circulating and I still need to get just because I want to, for myself, I want to try to get some kind of manuscript out of my dissertation just, just a journal manuscript, but just something, you know, so I'm trying to like balance that. And it was, it was happening when we had classes, cause I was teaching classes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and then I had Tuesday and Thursday where I could work from home. Now we all work from home forever until the end of time. I don't know what I'm doing. I was going to do all this grading, right? Because our classes were canceled for two weeks, and I was like, I'm going to get all this grading done. Yeah. Go me. And I was like, or I'm going to spend two days reading articles about like giving students lab review peer feedback. So I don't know. I don't know if I'm the best model for that right now. [laughter]

**NR:** Yeah. Yeah.

**WF:** Yeah, I think we're all just trying to make do with the circumstances and find some normalcy and the abnormal over here. But I think this has been helpful. I mean, I've learned a lot, just even down to like the nitty gritty, like choosing a particular word processing thing over another for a specific reason like that, like that in and of itself is a great lesson to me. So I'm sure our listeners will really appreciate that.

**AH:** It feels sort of, I don't know, like weird or first scenario or something to talk about the job market amid these circumstances. So, and I don't want to, you know, burst anybody's bubble cause I'm, I'm sure there's still a lot of great jobs out there and hopefully searches are still being completed and hopefully we have an economy to salvage. I don't know.

**WF:** And then after this climate change, so if there's a future.

**AH:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. I mean so many things about how our country operates are really brought to the forefront in a crisis like this.

**WF:** And on that note!

[laughter]

**WF:** Dr. Hutchison. Thank you so much for your time. We, this was a great talk. I love this. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

**AH:** I hope it was helpful.

**NR:** Yeah, this is great. This is great. Thank you for being with us.

**WF:** Yeah. did you have any social media or a website that you wanted to plug for our listeners if they wanted to check out your work or learn more about you?

**AH:** Sure I'm on Twitter. I am @allisonhutchiso, and my website is just Alison Hutchison at, or sorry, alisonhutchison.github.io. And I have a couple of links to, an article that I have. I also have some forthcoming stuff, two book chapters. I don't know when they'll be published, but I need to update my website. So I have some, sort of adjacent work in labor practices in the writing studies field, specifically focused on graduate students. So keep an eye out for that!

**WF:** We'll have links to everything in the show notes. And again, thank you so much for your time.

**NR:** Thanks a lot.

**AH:** Good luck on the job market.

**NR:** Thank you, we’ll need it!

**WF:** Hopefully there is a job market.

**NR:** Yeah!