

158. Adam Cook: Let Adam Cook

Gavin Kelly 00:18

Hey everybody. You're listening to Beyond 1894. This is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode also joins us from the Office of University Communications. We didn't have to go too far to get this guest on the show. He is a coworker of mine. He's also my friend. Adam Cook joins us today. He's a graphic designer in the university communications office. Adam, thank you for being here.

Adam Cook 00:44

Happy to be here, Gavin, and also happy to have you saying you're my friend on record.

Gavin Kelly 00:48

Yeah, well, you know, now that people know it's out there, it's public knowledge. Look, so you you're in university communications. You've been here for a couple years now, right?

Adam Cook 00:57

Third year.

Gavin Kelly 00:58

Your transition was one from student in the graphic design program here at Tech to student worker in our office, and then a full-time role right after graduation. So obviously, you showed some flashes of talent if we thought it was worth keeping you around.

Adam Cook 01:12

I guess so.

Gavin Kelly 01:14

But we're gonna let's you know let's chart your journey and let's let's take things back to the to the very start. So you're Shreveport native, yes, yes. Okay, so talk to me about, you know, for a lot of Shreveport folks, Shreveport Bozier folks, Louisiana Tech is a sensible choice. But talk to me about why Louisiana Tech was the choice for you, and why like pursuing a graphic design degree was something you knew you wanted to do. Like, at what point in your in your life where you like oh this is the the discipline that I want to study. Talk to me about that.

Adam Cook 01:46

Well, I I came to tech mostly. I didn't tour a lot of other universities and everything else. I toured mostly just in the state. The design departments weren't like super lively. Sure, it seemed like super like with a

Gavin Kelly 02:02

yeah, and I

Adam Cook 02:02

also this was my dad went here and my grandpa went here. So a little

Gavin Kelly 02:08

bit of legacy legacy

Adam Cook 02:09

helps. I've always drawn and I've always been into art, and I feel like the sensible pipeline that a lot of artists or people with creative interests fall into is like, well, I want to make a living making art, and for some reason that always filters in the graphic design because it's like a corporate version or like a more like organized version of art, and so I think that's how I kind of fell into this.

Gavin Kelly 02:36

Did you? So what about the graphic design program here? Because you know you went on tour, you probably met some faculty at some point or someone you know that gave you a good idea. But about what the program here would be like, so what was it about the program at Tech that was that you were like, yeah, this is the graphic design program for me?

Adam Cook 02:52

The facility really won me over. I really liked the like dedicated screen printing room and like the letter press was really cool to see, and yeah, the faculty like Tom Futrell did our like welcome stuff because I came with a group, and he's a very charismatic individual. Right. So I think that his like fervor and like excitement for the program and the arts kind of like swayed my opinion towards tech.

Gavin Kelly 03:20

What was the early days of of studying and getting that graphic design degree like for you? Because because like you know any design major here or anywhere, you know it's you're you're turning a mostly subjective discipline into something objective where there are grades and there are demands and any design program here is going to have studios, and like you know, it's a very demanding thing. So, so talk me about like the early days of of like kind of honing in on the things you like, or maybe even also don't like about graphic design.

Adam Cook 03:54

I well, for graphic design, you have to start out with a lot of the fundamental classes that like studio also has to take, and like architecture and interior have to take. And I, I have a minor in studio, but I don't think that the open endedness of like studio focused art is exactly like where I excel. I enjoy like the more like prompt and like project driven aspect of graphic design, and I think I started to like realize that's what I enjoyed doing more in my like sophomore year. Once we started to get into those design classes, where you were actually like making projects and not just working on fundamentals of like typography and like how elements interact with each other,

Gavin Kelly 04:41

did you kind of settle into a personal design philosophy at any point? Like, I mean, obviously, like any other artist, there's things you do and don't like working on, and there's things you would love to work

on. All that we'll get into later too. Some of the things you've done here in your work for us, but like. Like what? How did you kind of hone your own personal tastes over your your time as an undergraduate?

Adam Cook 05:06

I copied. I like to. I see inspiration online, and I follow tutorials, and I make stuff I like. And I feel like developing a personal style or taste is mostly just imitating and taking away what you like from other artists, and I feel like that's especially like the case now that like social media and like Pinterest and Behance and and like Instagram and everything makes it easy to find so many different types of artists and like so many different types of style, and so I think it's more of a collection of just like art that I really liked and like bits from media and stuff that I enjoy. I have like so many art books. I tend to waste a good chunk of my money on just buying art books.

Gavin Kelly 05:50

Yeah, because I mean, like you, you, you have to. I would imagine, kind of find the balance between, and we're going to talk about this later too. Like taking your own personal tastes and ideas about what good art is and what good graphic design looks like, and coupling it with while you're in school, you know the the demands of the rubric of your work, and then later on when you're in a professional setting, the demands of a client or you know the nature of a project. But we'll talk about that in a little bit. I actually don't know if I know this story as well as we know each other. How did it come about that you ended up with a student worker position in UC?

Adam Cook 06:29

I started. I don't remember exactly what led me to here. I remember interviewing to be a student worker here because I worked in athletics for short stint as a student worker doing like the like game graphics and stuff, like they have a whole team of people that do that. But I remember coming up to the 12th floor and I interviewed in Tom Soto's first of like four offices that he's had on that floor, and that was kind of scary

Gavin Kelly 07:01

because you were what? Were you a junior?

Adam Cook 07:03

Yeah, I was at the start of my junior year, I think. I'm pretty sure, but I had a couple design jobs, like small gigs around town. I worked with physical therapy and balance centers, and then I went to athletics, and I also did some freelance for like Hall of Hoops basketball services as a camp, so I had like freelance experience. None of which I, looking back now, I think is particularly good looking. Not that I was at the time pretty much in school. Not that I was making work. I was like, "Oh, this is so bad. They're gonna just eat this up. I was like, "Wow, this is great. And looking back, I don't know what I was Doing

Gavin Kelly 07:40

well. Obviously, the UC student worker job worked out, and things work out as they're supposed to. So it's it's good that that that happened. Talk to me about kind of the first. I mean, I was around, so I kind of know. But talk to me about the first kind of projects you were working on as a student worker, and and

kind of how like your responsibilities grew in your time, even just as a student worker. Like before the full time thing happened, you know, like the projects you were taking on became a little bit more involved and a little bit more lengthy in terms of like the process of the project. So, talking about what what that was like,

Adam Cook 08:14

I started off mostly just following templates and doing like very simple, like one page or like social media posts, and I think as I grew in the position as a student worker, I got more like front and back kind of stuff, fold areas, and all that, and I was able to like push my like personal preferences for how things should be organized a little bit more and more, which is rewarding to have that kind of my interests and my like opinions reciprocated and appreciated, which was nice as a student.

Gavin Kelly 08:48

Yeah, I mean, it also it shows you that it's kind of feedback in its own way of the work being good, but also that, like you kind of said just now, your the opinion that you have about your design philosophy and how things should look or could look is valued, right? So I think as a student worker, you don't necessarily always get that. I don't necessarily mean in an on-campus job, but you know, I'm sure a lot of your peers, a lot of your classmates had internships and and kind of odd gigs in college where you know they weren't given increased responsibility, or you know, kind of had to make their own way. So I'm glad that you you see the university communications office was able to kind of foster your your design abilities throughout the course of your student worker job. And you were with us through graduation, right?

Adam Cook 09:36

Yeah, I basically had a month off before I started full time.

Gavin Kelly 09:41

Yeah, we we knew pretty early on. Like we, I remember being in early discussions about keeping you around because you know we don't want to we don't want to waste time. We want we wanted you to have the job ready for you after you graduated. I think too. Thinking back to your time as a student, where. Because I at the time it was within your first I don't know if it was your first quarter when William was working here with us too but it was pretty early on our our our friend William Midkiff shout out if if you're listening and I know you are but I was supervising his internship at the time but he he was an interesting case, and I I'm gonna let you talk about what it was like to work alongside him because he came into graphic design late.

Adam Cook 10:26

Oh yeah, not even his major, I don't think. Right, he had a minor in design.

Gavin Kelly 10:31

Right, and he decided to start that like he was almost graduated already. Junior year, yeah, senior year. Yeah, so somebody who took up graphic design from a place of passion, which I'm not saying you didn't, but you know, someone who like it's a it's a a grave undertaking, or it can be. So to throw that into your your already busy mix of of studying and doing college, but working with Will and at the same

time working with you, because you know a lot of times I'd have a need for a graphic for social media or whatever, and you guys could both hammer that out pretty pretty quickly. But watching you both kind of come into your own in terms of graphic design was something I remember from. It seems so long ago now, but that's something I remember from that time. So talk to me about kind of being able to work alongside, because you and Will were friends also, and had some shared some classes together, because he was like catching up on his graphic design curriculum. So, talk to me about like working with someone who was your peer, your classmate, and then you both kind of like figuring out as you went, like kind of what your graphic design skill sets were.

Adam Cook 11:39

The thing about working with Will is like even now. I recently like revisited a project that he worked on as a student worker, and he like used designs in like Photoshop, and and he used InDesign in particular as like a starting point, which I think is like Photoshop, especially is like a common starting place for designers. What are you trying to people interested in design? I'm just saying.

Gavin Kelly 12:00

Just kidding.

Adam Cook 12:01

I I feel like I excel in Illustrator, so I was I commend anybody who can like make good like looking work in Photoshop. But Will particularly always did really well with social media graphics, which is good because he was your student worker.

Gavin Kelly 12:18

Right, right.

Adam Cook 12:19

I still struggle to find like a love for making graphics for social media because it's so like there and gone, you know.

Gavin Kelly 12:28

Yeah, yeah.

Adam Cook 12:30

And I think it's inspiring how much he developed in such a short period of time, and even still, like being in community, like we worked together over like a Discord call last night, like working on our own, like individual projects,

Gavin Kelly 12:42

yeah.

Adam Cook 12:42

He has such a drive to create stuff, and I think that's really inspiring.

Gavin Kelly 12:48

That's good. He's going to eat this up. Oh yeah, it's going

Adam Cook 12:50

to inflate his ego. Shout out,

Gavin Kelly 12:52

Will. We know you're listening. Yeah. So the working as a student worker in UC, kind of getting like we talked about, increased responsibility and being able to have a little bit more creative freedom with every project because you, like you said at the beginning, you were working with templates. You were kind of plugging in design information into something that was already established, and then by the end of by graduation time, and then you know the first right away with your full time job here, being able to put some of your own personal tastes and influence and design strategy into the work that you're creating, and that led very early on to murals. We we talked about you just mentioned that one thing you don't like about social media graphics and graphics kind of go up on websites and things like that is the nature of them to kind of just be a flash in the pan. And you're right about that; they come and they go. So it probably feels from a design standpoint. Look, I've made plenty of graphics for social media. Sometimes you spend way more time than you should on something really simple. You know, you put 5678, hours into something, and then it gets a few dozen likes, and it's gone in a day. So something like an on-campus mural, and now there are several. We'll talk about it. Has a little bit more permanence to it and allows you to establish sort of a design language which you have. So let's let's talk about. I kind of know where to start with this. I want to ask you several questions about it. When that first, let me let me start with this. When that first came to you, when someone when you were approached by, I'm guessing Tom and or Cami,

Adam Cook 14:26

I think both. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. About to do both. Yeah, they ganged up on you. Yeah.

Gavin Kelly 14:30

About you know we have a need to spruce up campus and and create this mural and you know we want to tap you to do it. What were your first thoughts when a project like that came into your lap?

Adam Cook 14:45

I was, I think, a little mortified that they would because I was still a student at the time that they would entrust like a big like graphic project like that with like not like staying power but like permanence to a degree like. To a student of all things, it. I think they also asked Will and I both to at least develop the one that's in the Wiley lobby, like side by side, or it's like we both present like concepts for it, and so I think that was fun too to like compare what we were both working on or like what we had in mind. It was yeah I I can't believe that they trusted us with it. I mean it's very like it's a it's a privilege to be trusted by people like at that like level. Like I'm not a professional. I'm not even working full time, and I was trusted to you know come up with a pretty permanent graphic.

Gavin Kelly 15:39

Well, Wiley Wiley Lobby needed it. I will say that you haven't created a mural thus far for an area that doesn't kind of need it. But so that Wiley Lobby was the help me with the timeline here. That was the first one, right?

Adam Cook 15:51

Yeah, the Wily Lobby and the one on the Tonk were developed like

Gavin Kelly 15:55

okay

Adam Cook 15:55

pretty much at the same time. I worked on the Wiley one first because it is the smaller and like simpler area to do because it's a flat wall versus like several windows.

Gavin Kelly 16:04

True, true. And then the the Tonk mural, and these are by the way, if you're listening and you haven't been on campus and you haven't seen photos of these murals, they're they're don't want you to get confused and think they were like hand painted, but they were hand designed, and they're vinyl murals that have been stuck to the surfaces that they're on, big stickers, yeah, big stickers. But the Wiley lobby had not been updated since, oh man, the early 2000s, like before I got here. Yeah, it's been a long time, and that mural now is down there, standing the test of time already. And and then again, the outside of the tonk, those glass windows and doors there, the outside of the bookstore followed quickly after, or was that kind of at the same time? It wasn't long after.

Adam Cook 16:49

Bookstore was December, like my year after I got full time. Okay,

Gavin Kelly 16:54

okay, and then that has since also been some vinyl murals inside some offices here on campus, sprucing up some spaces there. Most recently, the Lambright your largest mural to date, probably,

Adam Cook 17:10

probably the largest I'll do. Hey, never say never,

Gavin Kelly 17:13

man. The side of Wiley Tower could use a giant big white full side mural. Yeah, so the the if you're listening the Lambright Sports and Wellness Center on campus, right when you walk in next to kind of the check-in desk, there was until up to like two weeks ago a giant blank wall that has since been decorated with one of Adam's latest mural creations, and then also some of their areas in Lambright have received the same treatment. So going back to kind of this whole process, because these murals are cohesive in the sense that you've used a similar kind of design language across them all. They they all stand out as as their own thing, but I think on purpose, right? You've used kind of a a theme, a style that can kind of translate across them all and give campus sort of a an identity in that way. My question is, how did you kind of come up with that initially? Like, what is it like with the murals? Yes, but maybe

even broader as a designer to like realize your own personal tastes and the design language that you want to communicate, and your own ideas about a way the way something should look or could look, and then balancing that with, in the case of the murals in Louisiana Tech, it's like oh this is a university that's been around for 130 plus years. It's it has its own established idea already, so people have perceptions about the way things should look. So, balancing your tastes, your design intent, with what the client, or in this case, the end result of the murals, should or could look like. Like, what is that process like for you, and how did you decide on the way that these murals should look

Adam Cook 19:01

a big inspiration for the murals, and I think that helps it. Or at least I was like, this is why it fits into like a more like not corporate but like professional environment. The Carpenter Collective and like Tad Carpenters like interior murals, and like I can't think of the other people, and I was trying to keep them in my head for when you interviewed me this week, but him especially and their work, like inside of office spaces and like you know, like I said, more professional environments. I think the all of the murals kind of function with like a grid and like box system, and I think that constraint lends them like a more professional and structured feel, which helps them like you know they don't seem like too loud or too like like out of place. I guess yeah,

Gavin Kelly 19:48

because it it would be easy to kind of I mean it's graphic design. You're only limited by your own imagination in a way. So when it comes time for a project like this where. There's money and time and client opinions at stake, you know. You you kind of have to be honed in by all that. So I guess that's part of the balance too. But also, you know, there's obvious things you incorporate the tech logos and imagery and colors, but like the way you choose to present them is entirely up to you. I guess my next question too is once you establish the way something could or should look, at what point do you are you comfortable as the designer? Like it's one thing to hear a client be like, "Yeah, this looks great, which I'm sure it happens later on in most projects. I know how clients can be, but like at what point did you you get something like a mural project where again it has some permanence and some gravity to it, where you finish and you're like, I'm okay with my name being attached to this because I think it looks good and I think it's going to look good, in in its end result.

Adam Cook 20:51

I think that the graphic elements and those like university like icons and phrasing and like the tenets and like the line drawings, which I've slowly started to expand on, like line drawings of the buildings. Those like visual like keystones also definitely help them blend in like a lot. And you know, it's a matter of branding in general. Like they're on campus, they should have like some branding from the university. Yes, but like that helps them blend in. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly 21:20

I mean, you work in the marketing and communications office in our part of our job. Never

Adam Cook 21:24

distort our logos. Yeah, I know not to do that, even when I even when I put them on a big wall. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly 21:30

I mean, like, but you, even as a student worker, like, had the foresight to understand that. Yeah, I mean, it's important

Adam Cook 21:37

to.

Gavin Kelly 21:38

There's also like your murals are a testament to the idea that you can have a little fun with like a brand identity. You don't have to be. Yeah, we're

Adam Cook 21:47

a we're a college with a bunch of like young students, like young people. I think we should be allowed to you know have a little fun in our spaces,

Gavin Kelly 21:55

and also like if a you know member of our School of Design, a graduate of our College of Liberal Arts, like you, you know, can't put their education to use and make something that fits within the realm of what they're trying to do. Then, what does that say about the education you receive? So, I think it's good that you know you were able to, you know, take your graphic design experience as a student and turn it into something that is tangible and big here on campus, and like I said, just gets bigger. The Lambricht mural is pretty huge, so we'll see the next biggest one you get. Yep, I put it on record. Yeah, I think it's interesting. I don't think like obviously you and I we work in the same office. We we we talk a lot, but I don't think I've ever like actually gotten to sit down and talk to you about you know kind of your your design philosophy and and what your process has been like with these murals because I think I think too I have I've poked fun at you because I the first those first murals because you like you said you were a student worker and I remember putting them out and a few of your friends when I was around you both would be like why didn't Adam get credit on the Instagram posts about the murals and this and that, and so I think I've poked fun at you. Like, well, especially now that you're here full time, you kind of signed away your right to yeah to be a recognized artist. But I hope I'm putting a little bit of a spotlight on your work here now with this with this podcast because I think I mean it is deserved. But that's another thing too. I guess as you are building up a personal portfolio, a professional portfolio, and your work over the last two, three years now has been very tech centric because that's your job. You know how you kind of finding time to mix in personal design projects or something that you know creating. You know they joke like actors say like one for them, one for me, or whatever. Like I'm gonna, I'm gonna act in the big budget classic movie, and then but I'm gonna do a little indie film no one's heard of because I want to. Like, how do you balance? Oh, I've done 10 different brochures for you know Louisiana Tech over the last month, but I also need to make time to work on some things that I want to work on that may not be tech related.

Adam Cook 24:03

Well, the the one for you, one for me thing, I also kind of take into my work here a little, where I every once in a while will pick a project that I care like about, and I will just like push my personal opinion and file into a little much, and I'll get pushback, and you know, eventually we'll.

Gavin Kelly 24:22

It comes to a medium. Yeah, here's my here's my far out idea, and here's the client's like very square kind of basic idea, and then it's somewhere in the middle. We receive so

Adam Cook 24:32

many project requests. Sometimes it is just about you know sticking the brand, and some projects it's important to you know keep it in line with the clean style. But sometimes I'll I'll pick a project and try to push it into a little bit more like for me direction. Yeah, but also my I feel like I'll go home and I will still work. I worked for like three hours after work yesterday on like teaching myself Blender because I don't think my brain quite stops thinking. About more stuff to make, and I think it's kind of always been that I've always been making stuff. Even like when I was a kid,

Gavin Kelly 25:07

yeah,

Adam Cook 25:07

I would like cut up paper and like waste all the tape in my parents' house making like stupid little like nothing like drawings and stuff. I would laminate playing cards with tape and all that. My parents, I was a costly like Office Depot trip when I was a child.

Gavin Kelly 25:23

That's funny, but also like, I mean, just a testament to you know, kind of you're you're doing you're doing probably what you were meant to do. So

Adam Cook 25:30

I cannot imagine working in any other field. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly 25:33

hopefully you'll never have to, especially because you know we want things like these murals to last for a long time. So we would hate to like lose you and then have to have somebody else design a mural. My God, could you imagine they're gonna have their own ideas about it? I oh, somebody

Adam Cook 25:49

taking on the murals-that's not me. Yeah, exactly. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly 25:53

that's that's another thing too. Like even even with client work, if you do enough of it, and I keep saying client work, but like here in UC, the rest of the university is kind of our clients, right? Like we each of the individual colleges, departments on campus, student orgs, whatever. You know, they are more or less our clients. Not in the sense that like they necessarily pay us an hourly rate to do projects, but because that's who we serve. They come with

Adam Cook 26:18

us with their needs and wants for their colleges,

Gavin Kelly 26:21

so you know, at a certain point, you know, you do so much work for clients or for the university in general that you kind of start to feel like it's undeniable that your your designs have maybe infiltrated. It's not the word, but like have permeated throughout the university through the murals, through brochures, through graphics, through flyers, whatever. So, like, if and when the day comes that you know you have to put that chapter behind you, and again, I hope it's not for greener pastures or anything. But like, what part of you as an artist is going to like be able to separate the work from a personal level and a professional level. Do you know what I'm saying? Like you're gonna have to let like letting that go one day. Like what? How does that work for for an artist?

Adam Cook 27:11

It's hard to imagine letting it go at like 24. You know, of course. But I trust that what I've I what I've made in like the style that I've like, I'm still cultivating it, but I'm still like yeah yeah the style I'm making here or like that sounds so pretentious. No, but I get what you're saying. The style I think is fluid enough, and I think it allows, and that's part of the joy and fun of making it. I think it allows like enough room for people to interpret it or like put their own spin on it, and it still feel like tech and feel like the work, like the original work.

Gavin Kelly 27:49

Yeah, and like yeah, you you get you got to get into 3040, years here. It's fine. Yeah, I I can't imagine getting this much like trust anywhere else, especially at my age and like I mean you the first, you know, you do it once, and you prove that you can do it, and you can do it well, and that everybody's feedback on it is good. I mean, like Dr. Henderson signed off on that stuff, so you know that doesn't happen by accident. But like once you do it once and you get like like oh I can do this, and then that trust is kind of just inherent going forward, like people. That's just the nature of most work, though. Not just design. Like I think once you prove you're good at something and you can do it, you get a lot less micromanaging. That's not to say in the design realm you don't get a lot less client feedback because that's going to happen anyway. Yeah, a lot of and I'm you know a lot of times you design something and it looks a certain way, and then you and the client go back and forth about how it should look or could look or what changes they need to make. And you know, half the time it's that classic like vague feedback, like make it pop more or whatever. And people

Adam Cook 28:53

care about their projects, and I think that's that's what I try to remember when I get feedback, even if like feedback I disagree with and stuff. It's like people. This is important to them. It's important to me too. And it's you know coming to a middle ground where we got to both be proud of what we've made.

Gavin Kelly 29:09

Yeah, I say I say a lot to say that it kind of just ends up being pretty similar to its first iteration. It's just got you know some minor tweaks and changes to it. It's it's not very often that clients in the work that we do just completely tear apart what we've produced for them and and try to completely change the direction. So I think that that's

Adam Cook 29:28

what I really like about working here is that like everybody is very like reciprocative to like opinions and feedback. Nobody's like very like guarded and like strict about how they want stuff. It's very collaborative, and I, I know people that work like in the same field at other places, and they are a little bit more like constrained to following feedback, and like

Gavin Kelly 29:50

yeah,

Adam Cook 29:51

aren't able to collaborate as much like within their work environment. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly 29:55

because like you're in the graphic design industry, but you're also in higher education. And you work at a public university, so your job at other companies would look very different. Yeah. So I hope you enjoy what you do. It sounds like you do. I love it. Yeah. So we're we're running out of time, but I'm I'm I'm not going to let you go without asking you this question because I feel like every, especially school of design student or faculty member or staff member that I've had on in the last couple years, I've had to bring this up at some point. I think I've even brought this up with like English professors and history teachers and stuff. Let's talk about AI for a second. I know that like it's easy to anyone who's listening and has heard you talk up to this point, can probably guess that, like, as a graphic designer, you understand the value in human-made, handmade work, and and the need for that to be the prevalent language of design moving forward. But like, it's undeniable how we've you and I'll send ChatGPT flyers back and forth on Instagram when we see them because it's just, but it's like a thing we do nonstop because they're just they're everywhere and like I know as a designer it's painful, and I know like as a designer it's also been tumultuous for you over just the last three years, like considering the time you've been here at UC till now, to watch the way AI has quote unquote evolved, because I would argue three years ago it couldn't even generate legible text, and now right and now it came apart. Yeah, yeah. So the balance between not panicking about what it means for design as a profession, and worrying about how good how good AI could be in another 345, years, or whatever. Like, you can give me some general thoughts. I'm not even doing a good job of asking a question here, but like, how do you feel as a as a design professional when it comes to AI? Someone who might look to you to do freelance work as a client is now turning to ChatGPT or Google Gemini or whatever. And like, you know, talk just talk to me about kind of how you feel. Um, I guess that's my question.

Adam Cook 32:13

Yeah, I feel like at least businesses and brands using AI to like generate their flyers, like we said, we send them back and forth because they all kind of look the same and they're really easy to point out. I don't know how we ended up to a point where they all look the same. Yeah, but um, I feel like AI using it at least for a brand and using it to like market your brand and this isn't like a new take or anything. If you love your brand, and you like care about it. I think that like you should spend the time to you know present because graphic design is presenting yourself basically to new markets, and I feel like you should care more about your brand to like take a couple seconds, even in like Canva or something, to

like throw together a cruddy little flyer or something, even if it doesn't look the best or look the most polished. I think. Yeah, at least it was

Gavin Kelly 33:05

made by a person. Yeah, like

Adam Cook 33:07

I can tell that you cared enough to like sit down for like 40 minutes and just like churn out a flyer. I, I feel like if you, it comes down to a level of care, and I know it's easy to like prompt ChatGPT, but like it doesn't know your brand or care about your brand, it just outputs like a common denominator, which is how we can ID these flyers. So based on

Gavin Kelly 33:27

yeah, something that it's copied from from everywhere, and also like you know, for a lot of people, I I get it. Like I've you know I've seen these tools in action. You want to call them tools, and like I understand why it's tempting for somebody, not just time from a time perspective and an effort perspective, but from a money perspective. You know, people here because people just even know that AI exists and can is capable. If you want to use the word capable of creating, you know, artwork and design for them. The second they hear about a graphic designer charging a couple 100 bucks to design a logo and maybe a brand sheet for them, their immediate thought is, "Well, I can just not spend any of that money and not wait any time and just put all this into AI and have it spit it back out at me, so you know. Like I understand the thought process about saving time, money, and effort, but I also think too when AI churns out, you know, product in mass that all looks similar and is easy to spot. You know, like you can tell when ChatGPT did a flyer, like we're saying. Yeah, it cheapens it, and also like people are getting better at at spotting it. And I think like you know the court of public opinion is going to be undefeated as always. You know like is it doing more good for your business, your brand to save time, money, and effort, and put your work through artificial intelligence. Intelligence does that really save you when someone sees that work and their perception of your brand immediately crumbles because they can tell that you put stuff into ChatGPT to make a flower, you know what I mean, or like your menu at your restaurant or whatever. Oh

Adam Cook 35:13

gosh, the AI food is always like so scary, right? Weirdly sharp. It's AI. It's like

Gavin Kelly 35:20

an AI to hamburgers look, but you know, I bring this conversation up to say, like I kind of alluded to earlier, in another three, four years, maybe not even because it's kind of it's exponential the way it compounds. The burgers aren't going to look so weird and sharp, and the the

Adam Cook 35:35

the flyers will have more variation, and we won't they won't have that style that they have. They won't let LA

Gavin Kelly 35:39

look weirdly finger painted in a way, like they got kind of weird. They'll have a brushstroke text. Yeah, yeah, like it, like you know. That's why you know I'm not trying to be all doom and gloom for designers out there, and I think it's also our responsibility as an institution of higher learning that is teaching and cultivating generation after generation of designers to be able to prepare them for the future. You know, you you you don't want someone to come to Louisiana Tech and balk at the idea of getting a design degree because they're worried by the time they graduate there's not going to be any jobs because AI is going to be doing everybody's work. So, what are your thoughts on kind of like you know why the next? This is a heavy question, but why the next kind of generation of designers coming through tech? And I know you're not too far removed from graduation yourself, but like, you know, there there are seniors in high school now that are thinking about coming here next year to pursue art design degrees, whatever. That have got to be thinking about that in their mind. So, like, you know, what's your message to like your your kind of hope core message for like why humanity is kind of going to prevail and why this isn't like doomsday for for designers. The

Adam Cook 36:49

collaborative nature of design is always going to be important, and I don't think AI offers like a good like you can't really bounce feedback or like it won't always get your abstract idea right, or understand the emotion behind what you're trying to capture, and I feel like that's something that you can only get from collaborating with people. And I collaborated with plenty of people, and I learned a bunch of different processes, and was encouraged to learn them here. And I just don't think that scraping the internet for like data and like you know just points of interest. I don't think AI can really understand like what you can take away from collaborating with like different types of people.

Gavin Kelly 37:32

And that and that's that's one thing that the school of design here does well. You know, like you by the time you graduated, you knew probably most, if not all, people in your major.

Adam Cook 37:47

Oh yeah, people from

Gavin Kelly 37:48

other majors, like because you-it's

Adam Cook 37:50

a wonderfully like tight knit community in the School of Design. I, it's a very encouraging environment. Yeah, nobody was too like standoffish or anything. It encouraged me to learn and like explore different types of processes, which

Gavin Kelly 38:05

is yeah necessary. Which is necessary

Adam Cook 38:08

because AI can't do that, can't explore on a whim. It has to be told what to go look into

Gavin Kelly 38:15

for now.

Adam Cook 38:16

For now, and again,

Gavin Kelly 38:17

not to be all scary, but I mean, like I have my own thoughts about it too, you know, and I'm no designer, but I've I've done design work, and I, you know, a lot of my work is based on writing, and that's another area where AI is is taken over. You know, people people love to just let AI write their Facebook posts for them or something, and it's come on, you know, like it's it shows some

Adam Cook 38:44

expression. I

Gavin Kelly 38:45

think I think the some of the biggest dangers of AI are people who use it as a prop for any any instance where they're presented with an opportunity to think for themselves. You know, like I'm I'm not pointing any fingers at anybody in particular, but there are people out there who pull up ChatGPT or whatever in the middle of the day and go, "What should I get at the grocery store later? Yeah, and there's you know,

Adam Cook 39:08

there's something like fun about coming. Like even if I'm like bad at something, like I'm not a good writer and I don't fall back on ChatGPT to do anything besides grammar check occasionally. But like, there's something fun about like, I think it's satisfying to come to a conclusion or like come to like I finally like worded something right or like you know I try to teach myself to code something and I finally figure out how to get something to work. There, I find satisfaction in like beating the process basically, yeah, not like immediately jumping to the like, and and the idea that it's like flawless and perfect, I think is like

Gavin Kelly 39:46

yeah,

Adam Cook 39:46

kind of misleading and

Gavin Kelly 39:49

subjective, yeah,

Adam Cook 39:49

and super subjective because like I think that part of the nice thing about expressive things like design and like writing is kind of getting a taste of like a little bit of the person's like. Eccentricities and all that,

like the words that they choose to use, it's not like the most perfect, like quote unquote, like common denominator of how to word this sentence.

Gavin Kelly 40:08

Yeah, and but like again, it's personal preference and it's subjective. There are people out there who think those ChatGPT burger menus look good because they were otherwise they wouldn't proudly put them up in their restaurant or whatever, and so it's not really a battle per se, but like you know, we interact with people every day who don't see any contrast between using AI for something fully or using it using human for something fully. Like you know, it it like anything else, it's a divisive topic. So it's like that

Adam Cook 40:41

client work, you know. Like I really, I'm really against it. I don't think it belongs in creative like processes much at all. And then there's people that like want to use it completely. It's about kind of the middle ground that will eventually like fall into where it has its place in creative works.

Gavin Kelly 40:56

I just wanted to pick your brain a little bit. I think it's good, you know. I wouldn't ask these questions to designers and and faculty members, if I didn't think there was positive discussions to be had about it, but I think too there's been a common thread out of every student or faculty member, whether it be in design, you know, a more AI relevant field like that, or in English or history or whatever. I think there's been a comment thread in all our responses so far about like it's not it's not completely no AI wipe out AI never use AI for anything, and it's not use AI for everything. It's somewhere in the middle, and you kind of just said that too. So anyway, interesting. I appreciate your your your candid thoughts on that. I guess that's all I have for you before we before we let you go. I'll I'll kind of bring it back to a more lighthearted topic for you. I guess it's obvious to to use the murals as an as an example, but what have you found in the last three years working here for tech specifically, what have you found that has been your favorite thing to work on?

Adam Cook 42:07

My favorite, well, yeah, the murals are a really easy answer. Um, I like aside from the murals to work on, I enjoy working with you guys in university communications. Of course, I've made a lot of good friends there. Um, I love you all dearly. The I like working on the annual events a lot. Like I do time out for texts most of their pieces every year, and I revisit like some of the same admissions pieces. Admissions is probably like our most frequent collaborator, and I enjoy getting the chance to kind of revisit my work from like a couple months ago, or like you know a year ago, and kind of get to keep iterating and like change it, but still

Gavin Kelly 42:46

using it as a starting point for inspiration. And it's

Adam Cook 42:49

kind of a nice benchmark. Or I look at some of the first like legacy day or timeout for tech pieces I made when I was like still a student here, and I'm like, what was I thinking? This is kind of questionable decisions I was making.

Gavin Kelly 43:00

No, you've just changed a little. Yeah, I'm gonna

Adam Cook 43:03

look back on stuff I've made now and be like, "What was I? Yeah, like that stuff

Gavin Kelly 43:07

passed through, you know, the usual client check marks back then, and it was produced because it looked good and it was what it needed to be. And just because you think now that you can create something better, it doesn't take away from what you did at the time. I'm

Adam Cook 43:20

excited to see what time out for tech 10 years from now will look like, and I'll look back on what I like just finished up this week, and I'll be like, "What was I doing? We'll have

Gavin Kelly 43:28

a nice ChatGPT fire for everybody. Timeout for tech. The Adam bot will replace me. Correct. Agent, new AI agent, Adam Cook. Let let Adam cook. Brought to you by Anthropic. No. All right. Well, Adam, I appreciate you making time for us. I know this is kind of a last-minute thing I sprung on you, but ripped me

Adam Cook 43:47

out of my office.

Gavin Kelly 43:48

I do at some point want to have more members of University Communications on as we kind of go throughout these next couple years of the podcast. I think it's good to yeah to kind of put more of a spotlight on the work that our team does, but also one for you, one for me type deal. I like to talk to people that I haven't really associated with professionally here on campus and get to know them and talk talk to them about their story and the work they do. I love that part of this podcast, but also every once in a while, I like having on somebody that I've known for a while and can just kind of yeah, this is fun to have a chat with. Keep doing the good work. If you're listening and you're on and you've haven't been on campus in a while, you don't have to travel too far once you get on campus to see one of Adam's murals. I would argue they're pretty spread out. You know, you got Wiley Tower now in the quad, Lambright,

Adam Cook 44:37

Lambright's way out there now.

Gavin Kelly 44:39

Yeah, Kini, you got work in Keeney Hall, so if you're here on campus, you haven't been in a while, and you catch one Adam's murals, you'll know. You'll know it when you see it. Take a picture in front of it. But yeah, this has been beyond 1894. Adam, thanks. Keep doing the good work. Thank you. I'll say I can say I'll see you around because we're about to go back to the same office. But

Adam Cook 44:58

I'll help you carry some of this equipment back in.

Gavin Kelly 45:00

Thank you for your time. Thank you for your work, and thank you for your answer to my questions today. And go dogs.

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