

Adam Henze, B.A. English, Literature, 2006

By Sarah K. Miller

Communication Professor & Assistant Director of Forensics, Indiana University

“There was no way I was going to be a teacher. I wasn’t a great student and I didn’t get along with many teachers.”



Adam Henze graduated with his bachelor’s degree from WKU in 2006. He received his Master of Arts degree from University of Indianapolis and is currently working towards his PhD from Indiana University (IU), specializing in literacy, culture, and language education. Henze is currently an associate instructor in the IU English department, teaching writing and composition for international undergraduate students. Previously, he was an associate instructor and the assistant director of forensics for two and a half years. Aside from his education, he has been actively teaching outside of IU as well. “Since my time at WKU, I have become a touring teaching artist specializing in spoken word pedagogy, writing, performance, and communication. In fact, I am currently writing this from a guest room in Leeds, England, where I have spent a week at Appleton Academy facilitating literacy workshops for students and teacher training seminars for educators (my specialty is in helping educators introduce new literacies and youth culture into their classroom).”

Henze has been very active in debate and poetry slams, which led to his eventual teaching. “When I was on my high school speech and debate team, I became really invested in the writing and performances of artists from the poetry slam community,” Henze said. “I decided to compete in the interpretation categories such as poetry and prose interpretation.” Henze came to WKU to join the forensics team, which granted him a full scholarship. “After my four years of eligibility there, my friends and I got together and made our own poetry slam in Bowling Green.” Henze, along with another WKU alumnus, helped start a non-profit organization based upon performance that slowly became more educational. Before graduation, Henze said he had no intention of teaching. “There was no way I was going to be a teacher. I wasn’t a great student, and I didn’t get along with many teachers. I had some that went the extra mile for me like my speech coaches.” Eventually, those instructors who went

above and beyond, as well as his involvement with debate and teaching performances, were what changed his mind. "In 2007, I was invited to perform poetry for a classroom in Indiana and it turned out that I really liked it! We had a workshop for kids to write about what they loved like X-box, tractor pulls, all their different loves in poetry. I slept like a baby that night." He continues his passion as the director of a poetry slam summer camp at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota. Additionally, Henze has worked for a non-profit called V.O.I.C.E.S. that "specializes in facilitating writing and performance workshops for schools in Indiana."

Henze reflects, "English and literacy are my life. I really liked some of my poetry classes. I took one with Professor Hunley and he was great. I took some with Professor Mary Ellen Miller and she was fantastic too. I liked them because they didn't pull any punches when critiquing my writing, which I really liked." His skills were also aided by his involvement with the WKU Forensics Team who he says, "helped me most to prepare for my life ahead. I would love to see the English department solidify a stronger bond with the forensics team." While here, Henze was involved with hosting events such as poetry slams, open mics, and showcases on campus.

Henze's advice for students relates to critical thinking about using communication skills. "Connect with the community and think pragmatically about what doors your degree can open for you. My degree was helpful because I became a teacher—I wonder what doors would have opened had I not chosen that path."

For English majors considering graduate school, Henze offers this advice: "My friends told me two things I didn't believe at first but later found out to be true. First, you are pretty much on your own in graduate school. I thought people like my adviser would be constantly checking in on me but that isn't always the case. Second, I thought everyone opting to attend graduate school would be going for the same reasons that I am. Some go because they're nerds like me and love to learn and research. Some just want a job. Some are trying to figure out things about themselves. I don't think I can say whether anyone else is attending grad school for the wrong reasons, but I feel pretty confident that I am attending graduate school for the right ones."

