

## **Episode 36: Charles Woods and Deb Young**

Pedagogue podcast

*Transcript*

Welcome to Pedagogue, a podcast about teachers talking writing. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this episode, I talk with Charles Woods and Deb Young about their teaching and research interests, digital rhetorical privacy and service learning, grad school, podcasting, and integrated communication pedagogy.

Charles Woods is a PhD candidate at Illinois State University. His dissertation examines digital rhetorical privacy by interrogating how genealogy databases are repurposed as a surveillance apparatus by law enforcement. In 2018, he established The Big Rhetorical Podcast to discuss current topics and scholarship to highlight the work of grad students and to promote upcoming conferences and publications relevant to rhetoric composition and technical communication.

Deb Dimond Young teaches first-year integrated communication and writing at the University of Northern Iowa and is currently working on a PhD in Rhetoric and Professional Communication at Iowa State University. Her research interests include composition pedagogy, service learning, and feminist rhetoric. Deb also has a nerdy interest in the pedagogical possibilities of fandom, podcasts, and an abiding love of really old cookbooks.

Charles and Deb, thanks so much for joining us.

*SW: Let's get started by talking about your teaching and research. What are you working on?*

CW: I identify as a rhetorician and a technical communicator. Specifically, working towards a methodology for establishing a statement of ethics for users on genealogy websites. I think that that's a fascinating intersection there. Forensics, digital identity, co-construction, ethics. The catalyst for that work are like... I got really into, well, I really into true crime. And then a few years ago, they used a genetic profile to identify the Golden State killer in California and this prolific serial offender. And so I really got invested in that case and invested in that book that came out, which was fascinating. And really, that propelled me to learning more about genetic databases like DTC genetics, direct-to-consumer genetics and the implications that they have not only on identity formation and co-construction, but on ethical interactions, community building. And it's a site that's really not been explored in this specific way. And that what I mean there is bringing together rhetorics of health and medicine and digital rhetoric.

Certainly, surveillance study scholars. Rhetoricians have looked at this phenomenon, but no one's looked at it specifically this way. And so one of the things that I've struggled with was actually situating my work in RHM, in the rhetorics of health and medicine. And then luckily, to the detriment of society, but for this individual researcher's benefit 23andme.com website or company sold their collection of genetic material to a Spanish pharmaceutical company for corporate drug development. And so in doing so, that specifically places this phenomenon within the rhetoric of health and medicine. And within that, the purview of surveillance and digital rhetorical ethics, specifically in looking at privacy policies and contending with rhetorical

principles like perhaps consent, agency, methods of data collection even, shared responsibility. That work needs to be done. And while I'm not doing new work, I am doing hybridized work and I mean, it's really exciting.

*SW: Deb, I know you're doing research on the way service-learning impacts teaching. Do you think you could expand and talk more about that work?*

DY: Sure. So I've got a number of different research interests that I've been focusing on. I am a rhet/comp person and specialist. That's what I really love. So one project that I'm just in the process of wrapping up took a look at the way that we teach audience using more traditional methods and also using service learning. So I had four courses taught by two different instructors. So we had two sections of control, which were taught in a more traditional manner and two sections taught using service learning. The control students did a very traditional narrative assignment where they interviewed somebody and wrote their stories. Tried to get their stories out of them and wrote those up in a narrative format. The service-learning students worked with a community organization, and they did some work with that organization. They got to know the issues that were surrounding that organization. And then they interviewed either a client, a volunteer, or a staff person and wrote their stories with the goal of being able to use that for promotional purposes for the organization.

This was something that the organization had asked for that they really needed as a service to them. And so those students then wrote the stories of a client, a volunteer or a staff person. And what we found in going through this were a couple of different things. This was a mixed method study. So the quantitative side of things, we did some analysis of the student writing and we found that the service-learning students did statistically significantly better in terms of making their writing relevant for their audience and also in having a clarity of purpose in their writing. And on the qualitative side of things, we really wanted to see the impact of service learning on process because it was really, really important for us to try to understand whether or not service learning made an impact and how students were thinking about audience and thinking about implementing on that concept into their writing.

And what we found with three things that were really interesting. One is a concept of writing as a test versus writing as a product. What we found was the students that were in the control classes really thought of writing as a test. You've taught me how to do the thing. I'm demonstrating that I can do the thing through my writing. Whereas the students who were in the service-learning classes saw their writing as something that actually had a purpose in the world. Something that could go out and do something, achieve a goal of some sort. So a product that could exist on its own outside of the classroom. And making the difference between that was really fascinating to hear students talk about how motivating it was to have their writing actually have a purpose in the world, to be able to go out and do something with it.

Another thing that we found was we really found that students need to understand the entire rhetorical triangle. It's a triangle for a reason, right? We're not just talking about audience as a thing unto itself. The service-learning students did a much better job of putting the concept of audience and the impact of audience into a conversation with the purpose and context. They were able to talk about how they knew that they were writing this piece to promote the organization.

They knew the organization needed this. And because of that, they made certain choices in language, in tone, in style, in structure. But they were talking about it within the context of the entire triangle, not just audience. And the final thing that we found that was really fascinating is that students really think about audience during revision, and this fits very much with the scholarship. Some of the service-learning students used their work in audience to help design and frame the questions that they asked during their interview.

But most students... Actually, all the students across the board, all of them, whether they were in the control classes, or the service-learning students dropped the concept of audience during their first draft. It was an info dump or as students described word vomit. They were just getting things on a page, but then the service-learning students really did some very genuine revision work because they were tying it back to their audience. That was where they were really getting into revision as we want them to, as we define revision. As teachers generally, they were revisioning what they were doing. Whereas the control students were doing what we see a lot of. They're fixing the commas, they're editing.

*SW: Charles, I'd like to know more about how you manage your different commitments and responsibilities as a grad student and teacher and podcaster.*

CW: I think it's important for me to be up front and acknowledge that I could not do any of the things that I'm doing without my wife, my partner who has taken on a financial, physical, and emotional responsibility in this experience of graduate school for me. She's a nurse. She works the night shift because she gets paid more. She was promoted to a charge position because it gets paid more, it carries more responsibilities. She has a second job working at another hospital over in Champaign at the University of Illinois part-time. So the work that I am able to do and manage is only because of the work that she does. The work that I do manage... I just imagine that it's not unlike the ways that other people manage their things. I talk to a ton of graduate students, and this is a question that we always talk about.

How do you balance your different commitments as a grad student in the classroom? And I feel like I came into graduate school... I quit a job teaching at University of Alabama Birmingham to go back to school for the PhD, so I had experience in the classroom. So I'm not going to pretend that at times like my role as a teacher, I've been able to push that to the back burner, if you will. I'm not having to develop new pedagogical inclinations. I'm just building on the foundation that I already had and honing my skills as a result. That's a major part of my graduate student experience that graduate students without that experience have had to work towards. Now, in terms of the work that I'm doing towards my specialization exam that I just finished, that comprehensive exam and the work that I did for all of my comprehensive exams, I don't really know. I don't want to be cliché and say like, "Oh, I just woke up at 6:00 AM and read until 10:00 PM." But Shane, that's exactly what I did.

I'm pretty regimented in work. And I work best in the morning, so I'll get up and I will work until midday. Essentially when I was growing up, I felt like The Price Is Right came on at like 10:00 AM. It's like Price Is Right time. Get up at 6:30 or 7:00 or earlier sometimes, I guess. And then I'll work straight through until Price Is Right time. And then I'll meander around a bit and get back to it at lunch. I'm only afforded to have that schedule because my wife works night shift. So

I can take care of things throughout the day. I don't have to stay up till all hours of the night, even though I do watching the West Wing on Netflix, I'm still up till 2:00 AM doing that, but I don't have to. So really when it comes down to the things that I do to balance my different commitments, it comes down to the I'm afforded things that not all graduate students are afforded.

I will say that this third year, I have reduced my commitments 100% almost. I reduced my commitments, but I'm only able to do that because of the work I did during my first two years of coursework to serve on smaller departmental committees and then made up of graduate students in my first year. And then my second year, I served on a committee that was comprised of graduate students and faculty. And then now, this year, because it's not 100%. I'm on a committee that's college wide, not university wise, but college wide. So I'm working my way up. So that's one way I've thought about taking on commitments for service to the department and the university. I've got mentors that are attuned to those things that are saying, "Don't do this committee or forego that conference. Or things that, again, not all graduates get support in any way at all, first of all, let alone targeted support."

*SW: Deb, you have a lot going on, too. You're a grad student and an adjunct and I'm sure others listening are in similar positions. Do you mind sharing some advice or strategies for managing work and labor for those in a similar position as you or maybe those interested in adjuncting at another university while going to grad school?*

DY: I followed a slightly different path in my life. Grad school and teaching is at least a second career, you could probably count it third. I did my undergrad in public relations, came out and worked in nonprofit management for a number of years, had my family, raised them. And then went back to grad school and got my master's in literature and started teaching as an adjunct at the university where I got my master's. And so I've taught there for gosh, five or six years. And I decided that I really wanted to get my PhD, not so much for the idea that I was going to go out and move into another university. I'm fairly placebound based on my family, but I really wanted to branch into research and do some of those things that you can do in a PhD program. And I wanted to open up other opportunities, perhaps even within my own university.

So I decided to go back and get my PhD. Now, to do that, I'm actually working on my PhD at a school that's an hour and a half away from where I live and from where I teach. So I do not TA at my PhD university because an hour and a half commute is just a little more than I want to do on a daily basis. And so that has become a challenge for me in part because it's a lot harder for me to form a community with my PhD program and my PhD cohort simply because I'm not there every day. I'm not down the hall in my office. I'm not a part of those day-to-day conversations that I would be if I were TA-ing at that university. I'm not as active in the student organizations and things like that because again, I'm not driving down there every day.

And so that has probably been the biggest challenge is trying to find ways to develop relationships with people when I'm just not in the day-to-day mix. And that is both in terms of professors and in terms of fellow students and colleagues in that way. That said, I love my job and I love where I teach. And so to give that up in order to commit completely to my PhD university would have been really difficult as well. Because as an adjunct, our university actually

teaches or treats adjuncts pretty well and so I have benefits and I'm on a pay scale that to walk away from would be pretty tough. There are some challenges that I definitely face in terms of that split identity there, that split loyalty, if you would. That said, I find that it is really, really beneficial to me as well to have a foot in two different universities.

And so the way that things are done is very, very different. The way that things are taught is very, very different. And it's really fascinating to see those differences and to see the pros and cons of each of them because both of them have benefits and drawbacks within the way things are done. And so I feel like I get to spy a little bit in another world and try to pull the best of both into what I'm doing. And try to avoid the pitfalls of both because I get to see them both. So that is a huge advantage for me between those two things. In terms of advice, a couple of things. First of all, try to find a school in proximity. If you're going to teach at one school and take classes at another one, do think about how much you're willing to travel and how much time you can commit to that.

I have the advantage and that my children now are now both in high school and can drive themselves places. So when I am not there, the other people in my family have ways to get themselves places. I could not do what I'm doing if my kids were in elementary school. I mean, there's just no way. I have a very, very patient and helpful spouse who is also willing to support the amount of time that I spend not in our community because I'm driving back and forth all the time. The logistics of grad school absolutely are challenging to juggle if that is your sole focus. The logistics of grad school and employment are just doubly so. So be very, very honest in terms of how much you can commit and what you can do that way. The other thing is identify your priority, particularly long-term.

If your goal is to leave the institution that you're working in and go out and seek tenure track employment elsewhere, then your priority should probably be your PhD program. Not that you want to let your teaching slide completely, but... So know which side of your life is going to get you to your longer-term goals better and make sure that you're prioritizing your time as best as you can to focus on that longer-term goal.

*SW: Charles, you host The Big Rhetorical Podcast. What does podcasting afford composition studies and teaching writing and how would you suggest others go about teaching podcasts?*

CW: I think approaching teaching podcasting in the way that podcasting podcasts, the identification of podcaster can impact students is very similar to the way that podcasts can impact the discipline and the field. The reason that I chose to include within The Big Rhetorical Podcast, the Emerging Scholars series, I'm filling a gap that we didn't have amplification of graduate student voices. In that way, in filling that gap, podcasts devoted to the field, the work that you're doing, the work that I'm doing, bridges conversations happening in academia and conversations happening in the public sphere. I can sit here with the most unoriginal thought ever. Hey, academia has trouble translating into the public sphere. Podcasts as a medium, as a genre allow us to make that move into new publics, into this undiscovered country, if you will. That's how podcasts work in the field. That's also how podcasts work in the classroom.

Students are engaging with new technologies. They have all of the knowledge in the world. That's not true, but they have almost all of the knowledge in the world at their fingertips, literally at their fingertips. So by engaging with podcasts in the classroom, we're able to bridge gaps between new and emergent technologies, develop technological literacies. Also consider things like multimodality, which I think is an extremely compelling lens to look at podcasts. Because perhaps a basic understanding of multimodality might say this podcast is only oral, so it's a sonic mode. I'm sorry, I'm pushing back against that and I'm saying, no, podcasts are inherently multimodal. It's not just the sound that you're hearing, it's the social media posts that we're creating. It's the platform that we're choosing to host our podcast. Whether it's something like Stitcher or I'm on Anchor, I'm not sure where you're at, to be honest.

Shane, all of those things together create this multimodal experience for our listeners. So when we have students engaging and working with and contending with these same multimodal principles or genre conventions, however you want to look at it, they're developing literacies that are applicable and transferable across the disciplines and really across the spectrum of potential careers. It's not to say that a nurse... My wife's a nurse, again, so it's not to say that a nurse is going to graduate with her Bachelor's of Nursing degree and be like, "I need to start a healthcare podcast." That's not what I'm saying. But I am saying that that nurse who may go into graduate school and may go into administration and may go into outreach and may go into community work, then the skills that they learn, the literacies that they develop through working with podcasts are going to be beneficial for them.

*SW: Deb, you teach a course that combines composition and communication, both the text and oral interpersonal communication. So, it has this duality and hybridity that's innovative in terms of curriculum and design. I want to hear more about this integrated communication pedagogy and how the written and spoken elements of composition intersect in this course, and potentially, even the benefits or the advantages of this kind of work to teaching writing specifically.*

DY: So the course that I teach is called Cornerstone and it is a first year seminar course for incoming first-year students, obviously. And it combines our college writing and research, which is our first-year composition course with oral communication. And one of the things that's very unique about it is it's taught across a year-long format. So I actually have these students for both semesters. And I think that that's really key because we're not trying to smooch two semesters worth of content into a single semester course. But what that lets us do is create this integrated communication course where writing and speaking speak to each other. And I think that that's really fascinating to be able to look at because it allows us to really identify where writing and speaking converge and where they diverge. So where do these key rhetorical concepts that are taught in both classes? Where do they inform each other and where do they go in different directions?

So for example, when we're talking about audience, it's very easy to point out the difference between an audience for your writing, pulling in Ede and Lunsford and all of that good stuff, Audience Invoked and Audience Addressed for your writing. But at the same time, also talk about how audience when you're speaking is a physical group of people. And how do you think about that differently for your writing as opposed to for your speaking. And how did those concepts inform each other and how are they similar as well. And so I think that that's really

important that we're able to come together and come apart again based on where we need to be. Because in any job that you're at, it's not like you sit down and you write and then you go and talk, right? The world that we're in now is very collaborative and you need to be able to combine your ability to speak and argue verbally and have that discussion with the ability to write and to pull the ideas of others together in a written format as well.

And so it's really helpful to me to be able to see how that process works together. Key to this is that we are teaching oral communication, not public speaking. And so we are doing interpersonal communication and group dynamics and all of that in addition to your traditional standup public speaking style of course. And so we're able to really get into the woods on collaborative writing because collaborative writing isn't just writing, it is group dynamics work. And so because we're teaching group dynamics, we can talk about why collaborative writing is so frustrating, why it's so hard to do that. It's not the writing necessarily, it's the group dynamics portions as well that informed that writing. And so we can talk about the skills that you need to merge styles and merge voices and establishing a quality group in collaborative brainstorming process and revision process and all of that that is writing focused.

But we can also talk about how the person who's driving you crazy because they talk too much at meetings is impacting your ability to write as well. And so that is really, really fascinating. When I start to teach... I taught composition first just as a standalone course. And when I started teaching Cornerstone, I found that my writing teaching got better because of my better understanding of how to teach the oral communication part of it. For example, a very common revision or peer feedback process is to read your writing aloud and to get feedback from somebody. That's listening practice, right? That's something that we teach in oral communication. And so to be able to merge those concepts into the way that we teach writing is really interesting. When we can talk about, "Okay. What are you listening for when you're listening to someone read their writing?" You're not listening for commas. That's the whole reason to have people read aloud so that you're looking for those bigger picture ideas, but we can really focus on the listening skills that are important.

One thing that I think would be really helpful for composition teachers to maybe think about in terms of oral communication is thinking about the ways that oral communication impacts writing.

*SW: Thank you, Charles and Deb, and thank you, Pedagogue listeners and followers. Until next time.*