Transcript for "Where the Writing Is: An Interview with Ashley J. Holmes"
Transcribed by Eric Detweiler

[*Rhetoricity* theme plays]

Eric Detweiler [D]: Hello hello, Rhetoricity listeners! This is Eric Detweiler, here to bring you another episode. Emphasize on the "here" because this installment is a particularly place-based one.

How exactly? Or maybe I should say where exactly? Well, this episode features an interview with Ashley Joyce Holmes, whose research focuses on place-based learning, high-impact practices, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Dr. Holmes is Associate Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning at Oregon State University, where she leads the Center for Teaching and Learning in supporting effective, innovative, and scholarly teaching that engages students in meaningful learning experiences. She also has published books, articles, and chapters in writing studies. One of her books is 2023's *Learning on Location*, which was the focus of Dr. Holmes' keynote at last year's Peck Research on Writing Symposium, an annual event hosted here at my home institution of Middle Tennessee State University. We sat down for this interview during her visit for that symposium. In adding to *Learning on Location*, we discuss her coedited edited collection *Learning from the Mess*, a 2022 *Composition Forum* article "Multiple Forms of Representation: Using Maps to Triangulate Students' Tacit Writing Knowledge," and a host of Dr. Holmes' other solo and collaborative projects.

So let me locate you in my office, on the third story of a sturdy if dilapidated classroom building in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, back in February 2024, for an interview with Ashley Joyce Holmes.

[Chad Crouch's "Space" plays]

D: I'm sitting here talking with Ashley Holmes, our keynote speaker for the Peck Symposium this year. Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview.

Ashley J. Holmes [H]: Thanks for the invitation.

D: So I wanted to start by just asking you a little bit about the background for your recent book, which is called *Learning on Location*, and I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit about where this project came from, both in terms of sort of what prompted it and also what the process of writing it looked like.

H: Sure. So *Learning on Location* is kind of a culmination of many years of being interested in public writing and in community-based writing, service-learning pedagogies, and kind of over time that developing into an interest in place, space, and location, and particularly experiential learning and the value of that kind of located

learning. And so I'd say it kind of comes out of my interest in getting students out of classroom spaces into different locations across campus or in different neighborhoods or communities. And so it really began from my own pedagogy and my own teaching and what I value as important to how we teach writing and rhetoric as situated, as responsive to real-world public issues, often local issues. And then it kind of came out of some things I was doing in my classroom related to that. For instance, I started really broadly with what I was calling a "writing on location" assignment that was very open-ended, that just told students to, on their own time as a homework assignment, go somewhere, bring a mobile device and write while you were there, and we used it kind of as a brainstorming, invention kind of activity. Like, what kind of rhetorical activity is happening around you? What do you see? What does it make you think of? What kind of questions do you have? And then we would bring that back to class and use it as a way to turn that into topics that they could—or issues they could research and write about, often local public kinds of writing contexts. I teach at Georgia State University, which is in downtown Atlanta, so it started really broadly that way, and then I started doing things like, I taught a visual rhetoric class where we did a street-art walking tour. We would start on campus and then just kind of branch out from there. And this local muralist would take us and walk us through kind of the sides of buildings in an area that has a lot of murals, and we would talk about that, the way murals and visuals communicate messages and the rhetorical impact of that. So it was that—the writing on location—and then I taught a civic writing class for several years where students, we would walk to the state capitol building, which is about three blocks from our campus, and observe legislative sessions, and students would track state-level bills through the legislative process and then write about them, and to an audience who could affect change. So it was this kind of clustering of assignments that I was doing in my own classroom and beginning to see the impact and value of locating student experience and how that brought deeper levels of engagement, it opened opportunities for kind of critical reflection that was really related to their experiences and places and spaces. And so *Learning on Location* started from my own classroom and then beginning to talk to colleagues about similar kinds of things that they did in their classes. And so kind of the first piece of the book was a study that ends up becoming one of the chapters of the book that focuses on writing on location, where I took that one assignment I did with my students and then asked colleagues with an IRB-approved study to replicate that in their classes for different kinds of assignments that they were teaching in rhetoric classes and writing classes. And so the assignment description was the same, but students—what came out of that looked very different. And so I collected about maybe like 125, 150 of these write-on-location assignments students would submit to their teacher and to me, the writing that they did in place, and sometimes it was accompanied with photos. And then I did a follow-up survey with them about what was the impact of writing at a certain site. How did that impact your thinking about the issue? And so from that, I broadened. It was like my classroom, and then my colleagues' classrooms, and it really began as a project about writing on location, and then as it became more of a book, I was thinking about practices that really wove across those classes that I mentioned. So the book is organized around

three practices for learning on location, which broadens it a little more. One is writing on location, one is walking or diverse kinds of movement on location, and one is engaging the civic on location, and they really kind of build on one another. Writing provides this foundation in the walking chapter, which also talks about kind of mapping practices and countermapping. Students are also writing in those examples as well. And then same thing with engaging the civic—there's some walking and transit between places, there's some writing on location, but with that kind of civic, political, community focus. And so when it broadened beyond my classroom and my colleagues' classrooms and across these three sets of practices, I began to ask these questions of other teachers and program administrators at other schools. Like, what does this kind of place-based experiential learning and writing and movement, embodiment—what does this look like at different schools and in different contexts. And so I did interviews with about 20 instructors across the US and a few in Canada and just asked them about, you know, the kinds of experiential place-based assignments that they have students work through. And it was really folks across the curriculum. So I interviewed a scientist at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, and she was talking about teaching students how to set camera traps on campus to capture video footage of wildlife and animals on campus, and then bringing that footage. So they would actually go out and place the cameras together, and that was—she talked a lot about how that experience together of placing the cameras was really central to their disciplinary-based learning about how scientists work, and how you need to tweak camera angles, and when your camera falls because a deer hits it, and the ways in which she would assign them to watch the footage and then write about that as part of some of their reporting for the science class. So the book became this kind of cross-disciplinary way of thinking about movement and places and how the power of place can really result in some deeper engagement for students and student learning.

D: Yeah, that's really neat. I'm curious here with some of the earlier stuff you talked about with book, like the street-art tours or just that sort of invention activity you were doing with students: was there any kind of moments or iterations of that activity, or, I don't know, works of street art that made something click for you—that made it feel like, "Oh, there's really something here. I need to write about this or dig into this more"? Like, any individual kind of moments or instances that really stand out to you?

H: Yeah. Let me give an example from the civic writing class and having students at the state legislature. So part of the experience—and it's funny because I interviewed some faculty in political science and in criminal justice at Georgia State, and we all had similar experience in teaching students by taking them to the state legislature, which a big part of the experience is going through security, lining up going through the gates. So the state legislature, the capitol building in Georgia has recently had a fence around it, and Georgia State University is a majority-minority institution, a lot of first-generation college students, a lot of Pell-eligible students, and we graduate more African-American students than any other university in the US. And so a really diverse socioeconomically, in terms of race and ethnicity student body. And so this experience of bringing students

to the state capitol—first of all, most of them had never stepped foot there and it was two blocks from campus, two or three blocks. And I would forge ahead through that experience, like, "All right, let's go through security and let's go down this hallway. And you have access to your state representatives, and you go to their offices. This is your right as a citizen." And what I learned through reading about their writing that they did on location—so we would observe the state legislature, and then we would kind of have a debrief, and then I would send them out into the halls and they would find the offices of their representatives, and then I would ask them to find a spot to do some writing on location, whether that's on their phone or whether that was in a notebook. And then we would kind of reconvene, walk back to campus, and then do some debriefing about that. And so what I found through the reflections is that students were having totally different experiences of the space. We were all together in the same place at the same time, but some students felt welcomed, that they were belonging and that it was an exciting experience, and some students—and many of these were students of color— felt excluded, felt out of place, felt like they were, you know, there were some questions around whether or not they should be there. In fact, one student, an African-American male, approached a desk to go meet with his representative, as I told them they should, and was kind of questioned: "Do you have an appointment?" and "You can't just come in here," despite what I had told them. And so to get back to the question you asked, that experience has caused me and continues to cause me to kind of reflect on how we can do this place-based experiential work in a way that is really mindful of the diverse ways that students experience place and space, and to leverage that diversity of experience to serve as a site for critical reflection, for kind of place consciousness to help students work through that as a group. Because when one student is experiencing one thing and communicating one thing, and then their classmate is experiencing something entirely different, that's a moment where as writing and rhetoric scholars we can say, "Hey, let's talk through what might be happening here, and how might this be reflective of some larger issues that we're seeing across society, and how might we communicate across difference? How might we build rhetorical empathy?" And so that experience was one of several that that helped me see we needed to do more work around experiential learning, the power of place but also being mindful of how student experience is read through a different kind of lens. And so part of my goal in this was coming out of those assignments using it as a site for kind of exploring that a little more.

D: Really neat. Thank you for that. Yeah.

H: Yeah.

D: Well, I wanted to ask next kind of about the methods that underpin the book. You've talked a little bit already about the IRB-approved study that you did, some of the interviews and things that were involved there. The book itself draws extensively on interviews and case studies, and I know methodology has also just been a focal point of some of the other collaborative work that you've been doing recently as well. With all

that in mind, I was just curious what methods and methodologies are at work in your recent research, and are there any kind of big methodological questions you've been wrestling with along the way as you think about sort of what you're picking and choosing and how you're implementing things there?

H: Yeah. So let me start with *Learning on Location* and talk a little bit about the methods for that book, and then I'd love to talk a little more about the discourse-based interview and some of the visual methods that came out of the Elon University seminar.

D: Sounds great.

H: So for *Learning on Location*, yes, it very much started as kind of collecting samples of student writing, as I mentioned, from my own classroom and from colleagues' classrooms. That part of the study was interested in not only location but also mobile devices and what kinds of access students had to mobile devices and writing. At that time—which, you know, with the delays of publication it's been several years now—but at the time there was still a lot of focus on access to the technology itself and how do we make access more equitable, and I had a really small data set, but even still what I was finding is that, you know, students had smartphones, they had phones in their pockets, right? Or a tablet or a laptop. So they had access to the technology, at least based on the context that I was looking at. But the access to wireless signals, which was kind of central to—you know, I asked them to try to publish on location, so to not just write in place but also to kind of submit that writing or to publish on a blog. It kind of depended on the class and the assignment, but to kind of follow through with that writing process by publishing on site. And so what I learned from that and through the survey data was just that there was real different levels of access to being able to have that kind of signal. And so access to WiFi and to internet, I think, still varies greatly and is maybe the more pressing concern these days. But so it began in part from those surveys, from that collection of student writing, and then it did move into kind of case studies through interviews of different schools and courses. And like I said, it was important to me to kind of get a representative kind of range of disciplines. I also have kind of a foot in the writing across the curriculum world, and so the audience for *Learning on Location* is really a broadly conceived higher-ed audience, not just a writing studies and rhetoric audience. So because of that, I wanted different kinds of classes and different kinds of disciplines, and then different kinds of institutions. So there's some large state research institutions, and then there's some liberal arts colleges and kind of what they're able to do. Like at Allegheny they have "EX courses," I think they're called, and they're marked as experiential learning, so there's a whole like program and support for doing that kind of work, and then in other places it was not always attached to a class. It was more like a project. At Boise State, they have the Shared Stories Lab, and I talked to the folks who run that program and that lab, and so it has some connections to courses, but the actual project is its own kind of thing. And so it was a range of manifestations of what this looks like, and that was part of the kind of of interview, case study model was like, what does this look like in different kinds of

institutions and in different kinds of disciplines? What that did is it allowed the book to become more than just my class or more than just an English or writing studies focus, even though there's a heavy thread weaving through. I mean, I think those of us in writing and rhetoric see the power of those concepts to undergird considerations of teaching and learning. And so those were the methods for *Learning on Location*. You also asked about the piece we did on the discourse-based interview, which came out of a collaborative cross-institutional international research project affiliated with the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. They did a research seminar on Writing Beyond the University, and I had amazing—still have amazing—co-researchers: Kathleen Blake Yancey, Alexis Hart, Ide O'Sullivan, Yogesh Sinha, and Anna Knutson started our on our team as well. And so for that project, we came together and asked some questions about kind of the spheres in which students write, spheres of writing for students. And to your question about methods, for that piece we started with a survey, and each of us went back to our six institutions and distributed the survey. I think we got about 240, 250 responses across the set of six institutions spanning three continents. Ide O'Sullivan at University of Limerick in Ireland and Yogesh Sinha at the time was at Sohar University in Oman, and then the remaining four folks were in the US. So from that research we did the survey, and then we asked a small subset, a few from each institution, to participate in a follow-up interview. Ad this is what the piece focuses on from *Composition Forum*, which is students shared in advance artifacts or sample texts from the spheres that they had identified, that they write in. These are things like their course-based sphere, which would be like the writing they did for their classes; or their work-based sphere, writing they did for workplace; internship sphere; civic or community writing. We had six spheres plus "other." So they shared the texts with us in advance, and then in the interview we started by having them map those spheres, and we encouraged them to kind of do some round spheres, to label them, and then we prompted them to, if they wanted to, show relationships between and among them. So while our study was interested in spheres of writing, it was also particularly interested in recursivity—what we were calling "recursivity": the relationship students perceive or don't perceive between and among these spheres. And so students began by drawing maps, and our original plan was to give them markers and to have them do in advance maybe do some color-coding. And then 2020 happened.

D: Oof.

H: I know. And so we did all of our interviews online—and this was, like, early days. We actually did the interviews in April of 2020. So yeah, it ended up working great, though. Like, we turned the camera off and muted mics and asked students to come and use their own materials to draw. And then they sent us a picture of their map, whatever they drew. And so it started with a map, and then we asked them a series of follow-up questions about the spheres, about the kind of writing that they did in those spheres, and then we gave them a chance to remap at the end, a chance to revisit what they drew at the beginning of the interview and say, "Is there anything you would change or anything you would represent differently? Would you add any arrows? Would you add a

sphere that, you know, came up?" And so some of them would make those changes and snap another picture to send to us, and we would do kind of a comparison of the maps. Some would say, "I don't have any changes to make." I think we had one or two who redrew their maps entirely. And so what we argue in this piece is that the interviews as discourse-based interviews really serve to elicit students' reflection on their spheres and resulted in them having kind of deeper and better understandings of the recursivity among their maps. And we actually pulled a series of quotes where they're saying—and this is at the end the second mapping practice—"Well, based on what we just talked about, I actually think I need to add this sphere. I need to add an arrow. I didn't previously see a connection between my school writing and the writing I do for my job at this printing company, but now that we talked about it I actually do see that relationship. I'm going to do a double-headed arrow." And so we talk about the ways that the interview elicits that, but the mapping practices as kind of a visual method opens students up in different ways to describe and visually represent their spheres of writing. So that piece talks about that method and that process. It also has tons of the student maps, and some of the comparisons and how they changed, and some of the interesting kind of visual strategies students had for representing their different spheres. So yeah. That was a cool piece that came out of that project.

D: Yeah. I mean, I think you've hinted at what I want to ask you next through some of what you've said there. I mean, I feel like so much of what happens as you're experimenting and using new methods and methodologies, even if they're really well honed, is you're sort of iteratively reworking them, sort of realizing things like, "Oh, that didn't work at all. I've got to do that different next time. I've got to do that better next time." The other sort of methodological question I wanted to ask you focuses on an edited collection that you're currently helping co-edit called *Learning from the Mess*—so the "mess" there was kind of what was flashing through my mind—the subtitle is *Methodological Practice in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*. So I'm not sure how much this will kind of echo things that we've already talked about here, but could you share a little more about what you're hoping to accomplish with that collection and maybe sort of of what's going on with sort of like the messiness of method and methodology that you and your co-editor are hoping to sort of capture there?

H: Yeah. Thanks so much for this question. I'm so excited about this piece. It's a co-edited collection with Elise Verzosa Hurley and it's going to be in the Perspectives on Writing series with the WAC Clearinghouse and set to come out later this year. So we're really excited about that. And the concept for the collection, like you said, *Learning from the Mess* is the title, and it's trying to do a few different things. It's pushing back against kind of traditional ways of doing research in rhetoric and writing, things that, you know, present research as a tidy and neat process that may actually in the tidying up result in kind of exclusionary or reductive ways of representing the realities of research. And Elise and I came to this concept for the collection based on our experience teaching research methods and methodologies in our graduate seminars for several years. We found that we were kind of clustering toward these pieces that we

love to teach as kind of model methods. Like, "Look at this piece. It's such a great example of how to do good methodological work and how to write about your methods," because in fact there are limited numbers of good pieces that actually talk deeply about their methods and how they did what they did, right? And so when you find those, you're like, "Yes!" But even when you find those, they're represented in a way that is not messy at all, is very tidy, is very linear, progressive: "First I did this, and then I did this"—and in fact I'm reflecting on my interview right now and my process sounded quite tidy, didn't it? There were lots of messes along the way. And so this is what we—and there are real pressures to represent ourselves as researchers in this kind of tidy, linear, progressive way that makes the experience of, you know, new researchers to the field feel like, "Whoa. I keep getting it wrong. I keep messing it up." And that can be kind of disorienting. And so part of our interest in the collection was looking at and asking, where's the mess in the research? Where's the untold story of the research? We get the polished, tidy version and the publication. What's the story behind that where things went wrong, or you deviated protocol from your IRB, or who knows, all the many ways? But that process of beginning to ask those questions resulted in us really feeling like our field needs to do more work to really revisit and reflect on what we're doing with methods and methodologies. Part of what we found in this great collection of authors that we brought together in the collection is, you know, when we invited them to tell us about the untold stories behind their research, it resulted in these stories about resistance, about kind of critical questioning over time, and I think a unique feature of the collection—something our reviewers praised us for, so I hope folks will agree and find this helpful—is that each of the chapters has a paired reading or set of readings that were a previous publication by that author. So for instance, we have chapters by Aja Martinez, Crystal VanKooten, April O'Brien, many many others—too many to name here—but each of them picks a piece that they've written previously or like a series of pieces, and then the contribution to *Learning from the Mess* is kind of like a reflecting, a revisiting, rethinking of that piece. And as they tell the untold story of, you know, where's the mess, locating the mess. And so that results in, for instance, Sarah Riddick has a piece where she revisits "Deliberative Drifting," a piece she published in *Computers and Composition* in 2019, and she really offers a nuanced kind of updated and extended conception of deliberative drifting, and something that it took her time to see certain components that she represented one way in 2019, and then over time there were things she needed to kind of write out differently or flesh out differently about the concept and theory of deliberative drifting. So that's a really cool piece. Another one in the collection: Crystal VanKooten revisits a data set that she had collected and published on, and she analyzes the data from a new methodological perspective and a new theoretical lens, particularly looking at the role of race in the data set—something that she had not looked at previously at all, and then realizes the risks of a kind of color-blindness that we can have as researchers when we say, "Oh, but my study wasn't about race and writing." Yet when she went back to this data set and looked at it from that angle, she was finding really important things that needed to be studied, researched, and written about. So that's a really cool piece. And so the collection really aims to argue that there's a lot to be learned by embracing the

mess of research, and really that we're at a critical moment in rhetoric and writing studies to embrace messiness, embrace disruptive methods, and that we see this collection as kind of almost—it's like an intervention. Like, really it models in the work that our contributors are doing, they are pushing back against traditional approaches to how we do what we do in the field, and it's a really powerful set of pieces. So I'm excited for it to come out soon.

D: Nice. Well, I feel like I would be remiss if I didn't at least give you a moment to say: is there a mess from your own research that feels worth sharing in this moment, or do we just want to move on?

H: That is a really good question. I don't have a prepared answer for that. Maybe—I always tell a story, but it's really more from grad school, of a messy—

D: [sarcastically] A mess in grad school?

H: Oh I know, right? Yeah. And it was an IRB mess, and I feel like everyone is so scared of IRB, and sometimes rightly so. And I was actually collaborating with another grad student, and we were doing research in Ed White's writing program administration class at University of Arizona, and our assignment was to interview some WPAs. And so we did, and we got some really cool results from that. Let's see if I can remember who I collaborated with. I think it was Rachel Wendler Shah, Jenna Vinson, and Cruz Medina. I think. They'll let me know if I'm wrong. And so we did all these interviews with WPAs and we got some really cool results, and we thought we were doing the right ethical thing by drawing up a little statement that said, you know, "We're going to interview you. Are you okay with that? We might publish this one day, we're not sure." And they would sign it for us, and we're like, "Oh, we got consent," right? But we never actually pursued IRB approval. We kind of did our own version of a consent. And so then we got ready to try to publish this, and we went and we're like, "All right, we're going to do, like, retroactive IRB," which actually I tell students is quite rare and doesn't really exist. It can be tricky to actually pull off. And so we went to IRB and we revealed everything. We said, "Look, we even got these signatures, consent forms." And they were like, "This form states an intent to publish at the outset of the study, and therefore you should have obtained IRB approval before collecting that data, and you cannot use this data anymore." And so that was one of those really difficult lessons as a grad student, and a lot of messiness behind that. But I learned a lot, and now I do IRB quite differently, and I share that story every time I teach research methods. In fact, next week I'm going to speak at a colleagues' class about IRB, and I always tell that story. So yeah. You know, we have roots that are winding that we navigate. You know, the pandemic resulting in change to protocol and moving to online interviews when that's not at all what we were expecting. But then those new constraints can sometimes result in some new and exciting opportunities. And like, for the writing beyond the university research, we actually realized that were we to ask students to do those maps in front of us while sitting quietly in a room, that might have actually been really

awkward. It might have been a power dynamic that would have made it a more stilted engagement, and that by having them in their own space and us in ours—and we turned cameras off and mics off and we said, "We're just going to check back in in 10 minutes," we think, we anticipate that it actually resulted in maybe a better method. And so, you know, these happy accidents—maybe sometimes they're happy, sometimes they're a nightmare, and there's a range of them in the book—but yes, that's a few things that come to mind when I think about messiness in my own research.

D: Well, thank you for that. I appreciate that, and hopefully you'll still be able to use that story in the future. You can just hit play on this episode if you need.

H: Perfect. Glad to have it captured.

D: Yeah. I had one other question kind of focused on terminology, and it's a term that's already come up quite a bit in what we've talked about so far, which is "spheres." And I thought that was really interesting reading through some of the pieces that you've published recently that use that notion of sort of "spheres of writing" as a way to frame sort of the arenas of life in which students are doing different sorts of written, rhetorical activity. Of course rhetoric and writing scholars might immediately think of the notion of, like, the "public sphere" as one of those spheres, but there are a lot of other terms folks have used to name those sorts of places, that kind of activity—situations, ecologies, et cetera. So I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit about that use of the concept of spheres and what you see that sort of providing for your work and why you found it productive.

H: Sure. So I want to make sure I give credit for the concept. One of the wonderful things about collaborative research is that when you look back, you can't really disentangle whose ideas are whose, but this concept of spheres of writing came out of this collaborative group's work from the research seminar, and so I don't want to claim it as my own. But our group, our concept of spheres was that they're similar to contexts of writing, and that they're circumstances and occasions for writing, but that spheres are not really timebound or textbound in the way that maybe contexts are. Similar to a rhetorical situation, there are kind of authors and audiences and exigences, but spheres are not really bound to a single instance or even recurring instances. And so we found that this concept was broad enough to host a diversity of rhetorical situations and actions that can happen around writing. And our research team—I mean, we each bring kind of a different lens to the work, and my prior work on publics certainly informed a piece of that. I was beginning to work on *Learning on Location*, my book project, when this group was also doing collaborative research, so sites and locations and materiality were some things that came up a lot, but our research team came up with these lists of spheres that we thought would allow students, who were our research participants for the study, to kind of capture the range of places, usages, rhetorical situations that they have around the writing that they're doing. So let me name the ones that we asked students about. So there's what we call "self-motivated," which kind of connects with

some scholarship that Paula Rosinski done on self-sponsored writing. We kind of played around with our terms there and landed on "self-motivated," which was really that students were choosing to do that writing for their own reasons and purposes not some kind of external prompting or some external purpose. And so students talked a lot about in that sphere of writing journal writing, personal journaling, poetry, social media writing, and posts like that. And so we had the self-motivated sphere, we had civic and community and political, and that represented a lot of public writing. We had one student participant talk about writing a series of letters to her mayor on an issue related to the cost of rent, and so she was kind of drawing on personal experience but it was in this public way. So there was the self-motivated sphere, the civic and community sphere, we had work-based, and internship. I fought really hard to separate those. Our team kind of went around and around about that, and this is where collaborative research and multi-site research really helps challenge. We can't even see the ways we have blinders, right? So some of our co-research team, the students that they were going to survey and interview mostly had internships, and at Georgia State, many of our students are employed full or part-time as a way to pay for school. And so I didn't want to lose that. I wanted—you know, their writing. Even students with internships may have jobs where they work. So we separated out "work-based" and "internship" spheres of writing, and then "co-curricular" and "course-based," in part because our students—we were targeting students in year three or later of undergraduate study, so we were particularly interested in the relationships between and among spheres, what we were calling recursivity. And so we needed these, you know. These became kind of the main spheres that we mapped out for students—not literally. We asked them to do the mapping, but we described them and then they kind of located whether they wrote in those or not. The two most common, by the way, for instance, were course-based—unsurprisingly, they are students—and self-motivated. Those were the two highest-reported spheres of writing. And so our team was really interested in—and this is where I think spheres offer a helpful lens—in thinking about those recursivities that writers, whether they're student writers or any writer, would perceive between and among their kind of spheres they move from, move through and between. And so in my own work on location—I mean, to me it makes good sense to locate these spheres. We didn't always talk about it that way in our collaborative research, but the kinds of writing that happen there is prompted in part by those contexts that are sometimes specially located, impacted by the materials of writing that are available, the purposes and audiences of that. So for us, it became just a little bit of a broader concept than some of the other, you know, "rhetorical situation" or "context," which also continued to be helpful rhetorical terms. But "sphere" worked well for the study and this group. I think it offers something for others as well.

D: Nice. Thank you for that.

H: Yeah.

D: We've kind of—with these last few questions, maybe, I should say I have been sort of dancing around *Learning on Location* a little bit, but I wanted, as we get to the tail end of this interview, to dig back more directly into it with some of the contextual methodological and conceptual background now in place. I will say I think you've done an excellent job of setting up that context for the book here. Maybe the big thing is, like, what are you really hoping teachers and scholars will take away from that book? What's the thing you're really hoping to accomplish in terms of what people can do with it now that it's out in the world?

H: Yeah, so what I hope comes out of *Learning on Location* is an attention and mindfulness—it's almost obvious, but that schools and students' experiences in schools are located, and that we have an opportunity as educators to leverage location to draw on and draw attention to place as a central role rather than something functioning in the background of education. And so I mean, again, I think as rhetoricians, we're often mindful of speaking of rhetorical situations and the situatedness of communication, and so I think rhetoricians are maybe particularly primed for this argument, but in targeting a broader higher-ed teaching and learning audience, my goal for this book is to remind educators that we have such an opportunity to connect the disciplinary-based learning that we want students to learn to real-world issues, to the communities and neighborhoods around our university and our college, and so the framework in *Learning on Location* has three components. There's student experience, which is the experiential learning part of it, and the embodiment and the diversity of ways that students experience place in space. There's critical reflection and practice, which is really that component where we interrogate places and spaces and we ask critical questions of places and spaces. And then the last one is partnership and stewardship, which is thinking about how we can be stewards of the lands that our institutions are housed on, how we can partner with communities and publics around our institution. So *Learning on Location* is really meant to prompt teachers and administrators in higher education to think about how we can locate learning as a way to bring that meaningful experience back. And in the book—I wrote most of the book during the COVID-19 pandemic and so it started in in one place the research and early writing for the book began in one place, but then as I was finishing writing the book, it was the moment when we were just beginning to come back into classrooms, and I think we're still contending with public narratives that are questioning the value of higher education: is it worth it? And I think connecting learning to real-world issues and connecting those and situating them into two places and communities is one of the ways that we can help communicate for students and other stakeholders the value of what we're doing in higher education and how can we, as we think about getting students back into the classroom and back into an engaged learning space, you know, leveraging location and seeing the power of place I think is one way to do that work. And so that's part of what I argue in the book and hope for the book.

D: Gotcha. Thank you for that. Sounds like a great thing to hope for, and I will hope for it myself as well.

H: Yes.

D: So that brings us to sort of the final component of these interviews, which is that I always give a chance for the interviewee to ask a question for the next guest without knowing who that person's going to be. So your question comes from Christina Cedillo, and it's this: if you had to choose one article or book that most influenced your trajectory, what would it be?

H: Well thanks Christina for the question. You know, it's always hard to choose just one. There's so many pieces. But when I think about a piece that I continue to come back to over the years, I would call out Ellen Cushman's "Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change," back from 1996. And the reason Cushman's piece I think factors really prominently when I think back about my trajectory—that piece really kind of blew open the doors for me in terms of what we can and should be doing as scholars in rhetoric and composition, and as researchers. What responsibilities we have to publics and communities beyond the academy. And so I'm first-generation college student, and right when I started graduate school, I felt I had a lot of questions about whether I was doing the right thing, and I began in classes in literary studies before I kind of found my way to rhetoric and composition, and it felt sometimes like, "what are we doing just sitting in this room talking for hours about, I don't know, a poem?" And you might see my rhetoric and composition snark coming through here. Of course there's value and importance in that work, but I wasn't sure if it was the right thing for me, and when I found Ellen Cushman's piece, it coincided with a moment when I was a lecturer for a few years between my master's and my PhD. I was lecturer at Elon University, and I began doing a lot of work around service learning there. And so I was already in kind of interested community, and I was interested in research that does important and meaningful work, but I hadn't quite wrapped my mind around how to do that. And so Cushman's piece just really challenged me, and it turned upside-down my concept of what a researcher can and should be: that a researcher can be a participant in the work that is happening, kind of participant-action research. That we don't need to be distanced in our research. And one of the things I appreciate about that piece is how she really explores the relationships between institutions of higher ed and the communities surrounding them, which as you just heard me talk about with *Learning on Location* continues to be something I remain interested in. She has a part of that article where she talks about the approach at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, RPI, and how it's this kind of grand staircase that was given by the city of Troy to RPI many years ago, decades ago, and she includes in the article a picture of it in kind of its glory and heyday, and then she pairs that with a more contemporary picture with the slabs of granite are all broken and there's graffiti. And so this this staircase that was this kind of spatial manifestation of the relationship between the town of Troy and the gown of RPI, the university, is now in disrepair, and she uses that as a way to kind of meditate and reflect on, what does this say about the relationship between the places we work, teach, and do our research and the kind of ivory tower that we can make for ourselves.

And then the surrounding community and how can we repair some of those relationships by making our work and our research meaningful by being agents of social change in our communities and making sure that the research we do has kind of reciprocal value for those publics and not just the privileged folks who enter the classroom doors. And so I love that piece. I revisit it often, I teach it often. I think there's lots of things that have been updated not only in Cushman's work but in how we think about community-engaged work and scholarship. But it's an oldie-but-goody for me.

D: Thank you for that.

H: Yeah. It's a great touchpoint

D: Well, finally, what do you want your question to be for the next guest who's on this podcast?

H: So my question is what is a place or location that has had a significant impact on you as a researcher?

D: A place-based question! Perfect.

H: It has to be.

D: Yeah. Well, Ashley Holmes, thank you so much for being a guest on the podcast, and I appreciate your time today.

H: Thanks, Eric. I appreciate it.

[drumbeat from *Rhetorcity* theme fades in]

D: Thanks so much for listening to this episode of Rhetoricity! Special thanks to my guest, Dr. Ashley Joyce Holmes. I'll be back soon to bring you another episode featuring Dr. Kendall Gerdes, whose book *Sensitive Rhetorics* was the winner of the 2025 CCCC Outstanding Book Award. Till then, you can find out more about this podcast at rhetoricity.libsyn.com, more about my work at rheteric.org, and you can find me on Bluesky at ericdet.bsky.social. Till next time, listener, place yourself and brace yourself.

[*Rhetoricity* theme plays]