

Composition at the "Harvard on the Hocking": Rhetoricizing Place and History

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This dissertation titled  
Composition at the "Harvard on the Hocking": Rhetoricizing Place and History

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## ABSTRACT

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Composition at the "Harvard on the Hocking": Rhetoricizing Place and History (377 pp.)

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In this study, I assemble and examine versions of composition history at one higher education institution, Ohio University (OU), focusing on the years 1825-1950. Primarily, I study texts housed in the OU archives, and I consider an eclectic array of source types, from students' letters to local history books to course catalogs and notes from meetings of OU administrators. But rather than attempt to give a full, complete history of composition at this site, I rely on a sophistic rhetorical tradition to surface and problematize rules that composition scholars abide by when we construct histories, and I center my study on sophistic principles that approximate the modern-day concepts of community, context, composition (variously defined), and communication (understood as oral and performance based). Emerging from this sophistic tradition, my results are tentative and potentially conflicting. I find that there is no single overarching narrative of composition history at OU. Instead, what my study shows are ways in which composition at OU has reflected the norms of the University and the Athens, Ohio, community; conformed to the commonplace attitudes and opinions of the local populace; assumed various forms for groups with varying degrees of power; and developed alongside and through an oral rhetoric used for public performances. I use this study to theorize an approach to composition historiography that takes into account the locatedness of writing and a sophistic understanding of textual meaning. Such a historiography would

continuously critique the historian's sources and interpretive tools and would join in a wider postmodern resistance to metanarratives.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 1: BEYOND GRAND NARRATIVES OF COMPOSITION HISTORY

This study examines composition's past at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, from roughly 1825 to 1950. It focuses on past OU catalogs and bulletins; official minutes of past meetings between university presidents and boards of trustees; letters from early OU students; official minutes of meetings among members of OU's early literary societies; late 1800s correspondences of the Athens County Pioneer Association; an 1870s diary from OU's first female graduate; an 1880s letter from a past president of Ohio State University about a published history of Athens, OH; a published late-1800s poem written by an alumnus about OU; early OU yearbooks; late 1800s to early 1900s regional literature written or collected by OU affiliates; early and mid-1900s master's theses about writing, rhetoric, literary societies, and/or social customs, as each pertained to OU; multiple OU histories, one of which was written by a past OU president; a 1910s scrapbook assembled by an OU student; a 1940s rhetoric (writing manual) written by three OU English Department faculty members; and a three-volume history of OU written by first-year OU students in 1949-1950. In 2009-2010, the time period when this research was conducted, the majority of these texts were held in the Robert E. and Jean R. Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.<sup>1</sup> The rest were available in Alden Library's general holdings.

I analyze these texts and textual fragments using sophistic ideas that approximate the modern-day concepts of community, context, composition, and communication. Ultimately constructing several tentative, local narratives of composition history, I trace

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this Center as the "OU archives."

forms that these four concepts took in the sources noted above. I pursue questions such as: according to our preserved texts, who spoke about each of the concepts directly? indirectly? in what sorts of documents? for what ends? And: Do these four concepts account for composition philosophies and practices evident from the fragmentary textual record we have?

Not a traditional history as much as a theoretical exercise in historiographical possibilities, this study builds on the legacy of sophistic rhetoric to expose and critique language/idea choices by which the historian creates narratives of composition history. Where the historian looks for sources, which kinds of sources the historian treats seriously, what degree of generalization the historian allows to enter his or her narrative—these and similar decisions give each historian a framework with which to add to the knowledge base about past composition beliefs and practices. My study, a local history of composition, keeps such decisions afloat, in play, as I, the composition historian in this case, self-consciously construct little narratives of composition history with which I problematize existing and often grander narratives of composition history.

Histories of composition have proliferated for quite some time. My goal is not just to offer another one, though I think the field of Rhetoric and Composition can benefit from heeding many more. I conceive of my goal more as an attempt to inject the largely modernist enterprise of writing composition histories (i.e., the enterprise of assembling sufficient evidence to reach sound conclusions about composition history) with a dose of sophistic, postmodern, and postmodern-sophistic (neosophistic) theorizing about the relationship of language, culture, place, and truth. For I think that as histories of

composition accumulate and as more local histories of composition appear, all of us who are invested in these historical endeavors risk accounting for composition history in limited ways if we model our histories after those of our disciplinary predecessors.

This reexamination of the rules that compositionists play by when we construct histories of composition is part of what I mean in my study's subtitle when I say "rhetoricizing [...] history." The other part of the subtitle, "rhetoricizing place," points to one of the primary foci by which we determine that a composition past in fact exists: we look to certain archives and to certain institutions and, less consciously perhaps, to certain regions to see who has retained and made accessible those records that we have come to prize: student papers, writing and rhetoric treatises, other writing by faculty in rhetoric and in composition. However, despite the prominent role that it plays in histories of composition that we write, the factor of place itself has been considered exceedingly little by composition historians as an object of scrutiny and as a way of seeing. My contention, one of the most fundamental assumptions running through my study, is that place matters, that it might matter more than any other single factor in shaping the histories of composition that we produce. With this assumption made plain, I will explain my study in the context of place and of existing histories of composition.

In his piece "The Rootless Professors," essayist Eric Zencey bemoans the rise of a professional class of academic professors who see their work as disparate from the immediate cultural and material conditions surrounding them. For Zencey, many professors have subscribed so ardently to "the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths" that in their ever-changing status as intellectuals trafficking in a world of

specialized knowledge, they have blinded themselves to the land on which their colleges or universities lie (15). The areas surrounding those venues where knowledge gets made and sanctioned by higher education institutions entail ecosystems aplenty, a point that Zencey and many scholars included in the 2007 collection *Placing the Academy: Essays on Landscape, Work, and Identity* explore; and the subfield of ecocomposition takes this as one of its starting points.

I sympathize with Zencey's lament, but I also want to extend it so that it takes into account not just natural areas but also cultural groups that live in, travel across, and otherwise use the land in and around college and university sites. Some of these groups, such as academics, frequently pride themselves on their own rootlessness, while other groups tie their identities to the land, to particular landscapes and corresponding climates, to physical markers that signal a nearness or farness from other groups, and to linguistic, political, gender, religious, and educational designations that mark them as one thing and not another, part of cultural group A as opposed to cultural group B. Sometimes the ways of one cultural group transcend the group to shape the meaning-making practices of others. Sometimes not. But always, uncovering the reasons for cultural influence and suppression provides insights into how power works. Much as Zencey challenges academics to "take root [...] to cultivate a sense of place" (19), I challenge academics and students alike to note where and how ideas and traditions that inform academic beliefs and practices emerge: from what groups? Groups with ties to which places?

In many ways this is a familiar challenge, one that forms the cornerstone of work in Cultural Studies, and one that many postmodern theorists would take as a given.

However, I find that in Rhetoric and Composition, particularly in the subfield of composition history, the challenge is relatively new. For Rhetoric and Composition, a field whose past has only recently come into view, a tenaciously modernist orientation has governed the histories that many of us hold dear, from Albert R. Kitzhaber's 1953 dissertation, *Rhetoric in the American Colleges, 1850-1900*, and onward. Those of us who teach composition, who seek to deepen the knowledge base regarding composition issues and who harbor professional identities that are somehow connected to composition, have grasped hold of a history of composition pedagogy and practice that appears straightforward, clear, and relatively complete. This history is told by Albert Kitzhaber; reaffirmed by James A. Berlin in his two 1980s books, *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (1984) and *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987); supported by John C. Brereton in *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* (1995); and calcified by Robert J. Connors in *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997). Along the way, it has been endorsed by many more composition theorists and instructors. In a nutshell, that history goes something like this:

A not so long time ago (the late nineteenth century), in a land not so far away (New England), there lived a university president (Charles W. Eliot, of Harvard) who felt that his students did not write well. We must remember that this was after the time of rhetoric's glorious reign, at a time when handbooks (e.g., William McGuffey's), foreign (namely German) influences, and a larger obsession with practicality, good taste, and social mobility had swept the academic landscape. Toward the end of the century, poor

rhetoric weakened and weakened, growing so indistinct and nebulous that it could scarcely be called a field at all, leaving only the practical business of writing in its place. Now, to give the death blow to rhetoric and hail the rise of composition, the university president plotted what to do. He decided to organize a group of followers, led by the mighty Adams Sherman Hill, to make the university students better writers, writers whose “grammatical purity” (Hill 1) would defeat any “barbarisms” and “violations of good use” (Hill 25).

If I may abandon my storybook tone above, the rest of the tale unfolds as follows: Eliot, Hill, and their followers instituted a required essay exam for students who sought to enter this particular university and also established a required composition course to be taken in the students’ first year at the university; other required composition courses would follow. From here, the demise of rhetoric was complete, for college after college in America followed Eliot and Hill, replacing rhetoric, and its attention to speaking, persuasion, audience analysis, and contextual matters, with a form of composition that prized mere grammar and correctness. If there were noteworthy alternatives to this Harvard model of composition, then they existed either at the University of Michigan under Fred Newton Scott or at places like Yale University where tradition retained the study of stylistics. Thus, primarily from Harvard emerged what Robert Connors famously calls current-traditional rhetoric, a reductive, prescriptive, idea-impoverished composition pedagogy and practice that late-twentieth-century scholars would swoop in to revamp.

Although this story of composition history has been supplemented by Susan Miller, who has valued alternative forms of historical compositions, chiefly

commonplace writing, and by other scholars of composition history who distinguish themselves by their local focus (see chapters two and five), I think Kitzhaber's historical narrative has not been re-seen in light of different geographic, evidentiary, as well as interpretive possibilities. The historical trajectory described by Kitzhaber, Berlin, and Connors, a trajectory fleshed out by Brereton, has provided current compositionists with a terministic screen that deserves study and critique *as* a screen. Brereton, for one, admits in his preface to *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* that before writing his book he made choices about which archives to visit, which textual holdings to scrutinize (xv-xvi), and he acknowledges that these choices led him to tell a partial story. However, despite this acknowledgment, he calls those texts that he selected for study—texts which come from Harvard, Michigan, and other familiar sites in Composition's history—"representative" texts (xvi). Hence Brereton's early nod to diversity in textual selection coexists with a historical approach that ultimately reaffirms a Kitzhaber- and Berlin-influenced history of composition. In Brereton's work, Kitzhaber's narrative remains because the same places and people—the same cultures—are given tacit or overt status as representative of composition in all places, around all people.

In this dissertation, I am to problematize the notion of historical representativeness in the subfield of composition history. I pose the questions: what happens to "the" history of composition if that history is examined from a new vantage point, from a site that makes scarcely an appearance in the dominant histories of composition? How might this different institutional and cultural location alter the screen

that we know so well? In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider these questions at greater length and discuss my connectedness to this project; then review what I take to be the dominant narrative of composition, a narrative that I call the “straightjacket of composition history”; and then situate my project in a move that I call a “corrective to the straightjacket.” Subsequent chapters will entail a fuller literature review, a detailed description of my project’s goals and theoretical underpinnings, and the results of my analysis itself.

Various institutional sites might make a case for representing different cultural groups in America, perhaps sites located in the Deep South—the Bible Belt or the Black Belt—to show how groups of people located therein dealt with composition, perhaps western sites in or near American Indian reservations to show how and why composition gained a foothold in these cultures, and so on. The possible sites outside prestigious northeastern institutions or large public Midwestern land-grant institutions are so numerous that it might seem impossible to settle on any one (or any three or four) from which to re-see composition history. Criteria for selecting one could include how rarely, if ever, the institutional or cultural site appears in frequently cited histories of composition; how far geographically the institution or culture is from Harvard or Michigan; or how different the institution’s mission or demographics were or are from the Harvard’s of America. I am selecting Ohio University, in Athens, Ohio, as the site from which I look again at composition history, and the criteria that I am using in this case are reasons that are personal, practical, and historical.



My personal connection to Ohio University (OU) gives me access to people and information that help me paint a detailed picture of past practices and attitudes toward composition on campus; however, my ties to OU are recent enough (4-5 years old) that I can examine the University's records while maintaining a distance from the merits or drawbacks that those with longstanding familial or economic connections to OU might associate with my findings. As a doctoral candidate at OU, I have access to OU's archival holdings as well as to its archivists and other historical safe guards. My familiarity with the OU English Department has given me an additional insider angle from which to understand how the University currently deals with composition. I have taught over fifteen classes here, most of them composition classes, and I have taught two pre-college classes at OU, classes that were also based in composition. Also, in the nearly five years that I have taught and studied here, I have gained a sense of OU's proximity to other institutions, cities, and regions. But just as important, my status at OU is ultimately transient, part of a five-year professionalization process, and thus part of a timeline that lets me both get to know OU and see it from the perspective of other regions and higher education institutions I have known. I would argue that my necessarily temporary affiliation with OU does not automatically align me with Zencey's "rootless professors" if, while I am here, I seek ways to make OU's connection to its social, political, economic, and physical surroundings salient in the work I do—if, that is, I foreground the significance of geographic and cultural locations in the historical (and other) work that I undertake.

An autobiographical note relevant to my relationship to OU is the fact that I have always either lived in or nearby (within thirty miles of) a college town or have been a student at a higher education institution, so I have brought to OU an institutional awareness influenced by various colleges and universities. Growing up in and around Athens, Georgia, home of the University of Georgia (UGA), subsequently attending UGA as a transient student and Berry College (a private liberal arts college) as a full-time student, then attending the University of Alabama (UA), in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as a master's student, I have developed a detailed understanding of what life in (some) college towns might look like. These experiences have kept me from aligning my intellectual and academic development with any single higher education institution, as might happen if my undergraduate, graduate, and nonacademic experiences had revolved around only OU and Athens, Ohio.

More broadly, my background at higher education institutions in the Deep South, as well as my partial family connections to southern culture and identity, have given me lifelong opportunities to think about myself and the norms established by my community and region compared to the norms established elsewhere—when *elsewhere* means standard and *my community* or *my region* means the exception, or in popular American culture, the grotesque, the backward, or the otherwise foolish. Standard English, standard practice, standard anything has long seemed to me a subject worth exploring.

Given my longstanding experiences around universities and my acquired sense of myself as a person othered many times over by larger cultural attitudes and norms, I have an interest in using institutional sites and non-“standard” cultural angles from which to

critique and re-see the history of composition. To my thinking, focusing on composition history from the perspective of OU can enrich existing historical perspectives in many ways. This focus offers a normal school perspective, a rural perspective, an Appalachian perspective, and an evolving perspective from an institution whose status has changed dramatically in its 206-year history. On the one hand, as the first public university in the Northwest Territory, a university whose unofficial and original name was American University, and a university that was once used by the Ohio Company of Associates to market the Northwest Territory to East Coast dwellers and to Europeans, OU has at times served as a lofty symbol of American educational institutions. On the other hand, not long after it opened, the university had to close its doors due to debt and political neglect. Such a drastic transformation interests me, for what does it mean to teach or study or practice composition at a university that, for many Americans, has signified both an academic center and a point deep in the academic margins? a university that to its founders marked the geographic center of newly acquired Ohio lands, but that since then has signified a location that is noteworthy mainly for its remoteness? Although occasional references to OU appear in the early twentieth-century *English Journal* and even a cursory look at the University's archives reveals that composition was in fact taught and practiced here, OU hardly receives mention in major histories of composition. Why? Why, that is, has the perspective of this relatively old, rural Appalachian university with a heavy normal school past been overlooked, and what might be gained from foregrounding composition history at this site? For anyone interested in representativeness, the case of OU offers a tantalizing angle from which to study the

effects of scholars' decisions to focus their composition histories this way or that, on archives in one locale as opposed to another. Moreover, many modern-day academics work in higher education institutions with normal school pasts, or in higher education institutions that are classified as rural or as Appalachian by the U.S. Census Bureau or the Appalachian Regional Commission. Thus, many academics might strengthen their connections to their institutions' pasts and present missions if they see ways to determine how their institution or region may have factored in to composition's historical development. Despite the fact that we rarely use the label "normal school" anymore in names of our higher education institutions, the pedagogical emphases of many modern colleges and universities bespeak a normal school past.

What, then, of the perspective of schools that are not rural or Appalachian and that don't have a normal school past? At a glance, my dissertation appears not to apply to these institutions except to contend that their stories, particularly the stories of composition history at Harvard or Michigan, are not everyone's stories. However, I think my project is valuable to people at various types of higher education institutions because OU's history provides a vivid example of how institutional status can change over time as a result of demographic shifts, local and state political systems, and successful or unsuccessful attempts by university leaders to garner increased funding. A history of composition at OU may show many ways that this university has signified, for different groups at different times; it reveals glimpses of what the University represented for its promoters and alumni, and why. One thing an OU focus does, therefore, is make vivid certain processes by which people alter the type of higher education institution they

attend or support (or ignore). OU's history is not that of the next college or university down the road, but it gives us a fairly dramatic example through which we can better understand the rhetoricity of institutional representation over time.

By understanding the "rhetoricity" of a place's representation, I mean to unpack who at a given institution is persuading whom, and how and why. I mean not to treat places as having natural, inevitable representations and meanings but to understand the place by examining signs of how some groups at or affiliated with that site have persuaded others (often others at that site) to think, believe, or act in a certain way. The social and educational landscape at OU has indeed been maintained and changed by the writings, speeches, and actions of specific people and groups—people and groups that have had specific ideas about what kind of institution OU should be, what kinds of learning and writing should occur therein, and what sort of good that writing should do.

In addressing what an OU-based history of composition offers to other scholars, including scholars who work at other institutional sites, I would go further. I would argue that my interest in geography and culture and my decision to focus on composition history at OU finds supportive ground in rhetorics that expose and seek alternatives to hegemonic power systems—in a critical rhetoric that seeks to name and clarify power relations that hitherto had been hidden, for example, power relations in the case of nineteenth-century clusters of influential Americans whose class, ethnicity, gender, and geographic location let them assert their pedagogies and enjoy the consequent extension and normalization of their education system. Furthermore, my focus on OU finds supportive ground in Third Sophistic rhetoric, which subverts and finds multiple (perhaps

endless) alternatives to dominant linguistic ways of constructing reality. My focus also finds support in recently emerging queer rhetorics that problematize the foundations on which identity (in the case of my study, institutional identity) gets crafted and understood within and across discourse communities. Generally, postmodern theorizing, which paved the way for the rhetorics above, has provided a space in which to undertake a composition history centered at an ever-changing, often-marginalized institutional site.

Postmodern rhetorical theory has informed my analytical orientation as well. One of the reasons that sites such as Harvard have attracted the attention of John C. Brereton and Robert Connors is not only that powerful men at Harvard instituted the required freshman composition course and the practice of having students write daily themes, but also that the Harvard archives provided these scholars with a wealth of information about the early days of formalized college-level composition. The raw material for telling “the” history (or story) of composition was there, awaiting those stewards of history who were able and willing to organize the materials into a complete-sounding narrative. An outcome of *Rhetoric and Composition*’s acceptance of this archival selection process is that other archives, those not favored by the early establishers of composition history, have only recently been seen as useful collections of clues about composition history. Until recently, smaller archival collections at other institutions, and especially in other regions, have been seen as either void of early composition evidence or as unreliable, perhaps incomplete. However, from a postmodern perspective, value judgments based on a text’s or body of texts’ completeness are easily exploded. Textual or archival completeness becomes impossible because no shared absolute meaning exists or can be

understood and agreed upon; the past can only be seen and re-seen from different vantage points and through the historian's selection and selective interpretation of textual remains.

In the eight-way *Rhetoric Review* discussion published as "The Politics of Historiography," historians whose works prioritize a Harvard and Michigan narrative of composition history and, maybe inadvertently, diminish alternative ways of understanding composition history, acknowledge that their histories are partial, products of the historical stories they have chosen to tell from the choices they made, the ideologies from which they worked. James Berlin, ever the social-epistemic rhetor, begins by asserting, "The historian of rhetoric must deny pretensions to objectivity," and adds that "[t]here are no definitive histories" (6). In the same article, both Richard Enos and Victor J. Vitanza push for new (multiple) ways of telling history, and all eight of the discussants, including the more modernist-leaning Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, and Nan Johnson, acknowledge some degree of rhetoricity in history writing.

The scope of my dissertation, then, is both limited and unwieldy if understood from a modernist perspective seeking completeness and certainty (or any approximation of these goals). By focusing primarily on composition history at one site, Ohio University, I diminish opportunities to check anomalies that I find from the dominant history of composition against practices and theories at higher education institutions other than OU. That is, I make it difficult to gain a nuanced sense of which OU-based findings are exceptions to the rules, complications to what counts as standard composition practice elsewhere. All I can do in this case is pit my findings against the findings of large-scale

histories of composition in order to determine what new historical knowledge can be proposed by an OU-based history of composition—or by OU-based *histories* of composition, for as I show with my findings, I believe that many OU-based historical narratives exist depending on which organizing concepts and source types one emphasizes. Additionally, the dates ensconcing my primary focus, 1825-1950, initially appear too ambitious to allow for careful analysis of textual remains signifying composition attitudes and approaches. So I want to foreground the fact that the traces of composition history I study at Ohio University are just that, traces, albeit traces that I think are telling (or to be more precise, have effects that many would find telling) if viewed from a postmodern angle. The OU archives and the OU library's (Alden Library's) general holdings contain signs of how composition was treated at this site, and these signs come from different perspectives, from students to faculty members to administrators. These traces of composition history comprise artifacts that exceed the boundaries of any one discipline as well. They take the form of rhetorics, student scrapbooks, University catalogs, secondary histories. My selection of a 125-year period from which these textual remains came echoes work done by Cheryl Glenn, Joy Ritchie, and Kate Ronald, who use "available means" to cobble together a tentative history of Western women's rhetoric, a history that is as compelling for its archival gaps as for its textual recovery. And my range of source types hearkens back to Susan Miller's book *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing*, as Miller must argue for a re-valuing of past everyday writing in order to add to the knowledge base on Virginia women's past literacy practices. These scholars, from Glenn



to Miller, fight against historiographical straightjackets provided by traditions of history telling that are grounded in one group's standards for rationality (of a single sort), ideology (the historian was to have none—impossibly), and disciplinary consistency. All of these scholars attempt to reframe the parameters by which historical texts have been seen or ignored, and thereby judged; and it is this general historiography, which pushes at a discipline's traditional ways of making sense of textual artifacts, that influences my dissertation.

### The Straightjacket of Composition History

The history of composition established by Kitzhaber in 1953 and thereafter reaffirmed by Berlin, Brereton, and Connors deserves a detailed review if it is to be revised in light of an extended local history. I select the historical books of these four writers (five books in all, given that I focus on two of Berlin's) due to the status that these books have had in the field of Rhetoric and Composition since they were written. As a group, they get cited routinely by researchers and theorists who delve into representations of past composition pedagogies and practices. As individuals, they each undertook a project that was sufficiently ambitious to cause a flurry of excitement in the field. Albert Kitzhaber's dissertation was the first large-scale history of composition in America. The two James Berlin books that I review made Berlin's name a commonplace in Rhetoric and Composition circles, launching his career as a scholar who would soon move toward rhetoric as the core of a productive composition agenda. John C. Brereton's book made primary texts at the Harvard archives readily accessible to Rhetoric and Composition

scholars around the country; due to this contribution, one had less need to reenact the physical journeys of the earliest composition historians. And Robert Connors' book gave a sweeping, colorful overview of nineteenth-century composition practices in America in a narrative of rhetoric-to-composition that has influenced the field's perception on the past relationship between rhetoric and composition. While there are more books that I might have selected, and indeed additional histories of composition will inform this dissertation, the five works I have chosen here comprise what I believe to be an emerging canon of histories of composition.

By singling out the work from these four writers for a critique, I do not mean to suggest that these writers have given us false or shoddy histories of composition. The influence of Eliot and Hill at Harvard and Scott and Buck at Michigan, all of which is well documented from Kitzhaber on, does indeed appear in curricula and textbooks in many other higher education institutions. At some institutions, these influences may have been as strong and unchallenged as the histories from Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors suggest. Moreover, to lay the blame for a normalizing grand narrative of composition history squarely on the shoulders of these four scholars is to ignore the larger processes by which rhetorics get naturalized into a society's ways of thinking and seeing. The prevalence of the Harvard, Michigan, or Yale models of composition in the current Rhetoric and Composition field's outlook on its composition heritage is largely an effect of disciplinary development, the carving out of an initial historical timeline that can only later be complicated, much in the way that Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg's

edited collection *The Rhetorical Tradition* proposes a relatively linear genealogy of rhetoric that other scholars might then revise.

While for explanatory purposes I examine specific research choices made by Kitzhaber through Connors, my criticism lies largely with the collective effect that their work has had on others, an effect that I think is most visible in the slowness with which composition historians in and since the 1990s have constructed alternative narrative paths for characterizing composition's development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To put the case simply, I might say that the historical work of Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors was too good—that it was so groundbreaking and illuminating that for years it convinced composition scholars to believe that the history of composition need not be researched further. Below, I argue that each writer in the Kitzhaber-Berlin-Brereton-Connors sequence built on his predecessors' contributions and accepted those contributions wholeheartedly enough to convey the appearance of a single dominant narrative of composition history.

For Kitzhaber, in *Rhetoric in the American Colleges, 1850-1900*, the late nineteenth century in America was a time of transition from British rhetorical theories and religious domination of colleges to practical, more professional uses of rhetoric. It was a move away from a focus on skills and drills and on mental faculties that supposedly corresponded to particular kinds of rhetoric, away from poetics and belles lettres, and toward mechanical elements of writing itself. According to Kitzhaber, the 1890s served as the heyday of the practical. Also, in the 1890s college enrollment shot up, and a particular kind of education, what we might call the professionalization of the

university, surfaced more clearly. Influenced by the Harvard Reports of the early 1890s, composition instructors at Harvard and elsewhere came to rely extensively on structure, classification, and rules. Daily themes and required written entrance exams became normalized. A longstanding emphasis on the forms of discourse—description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and (for some) persuasion—and the more recent attention to unity, coherence, and emphasis (113) led composition instructors to value abstract academic exercises and surface features of language over the generative nature of a context-specific language, with the unfortunate result being a great reduction in the place of rhetoric in American schools.

Throughout this process, Kitzhaber notes examples of institutions that fit this rhetoric-to-composition transition. When discussing early PhDs in America, his examples are PhD recipients at Yale, Harvard, and Michigan (16). He also discusses the influences of leaders at six “important universities”: Cornell, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Michigan, and Johns Hopkins (17). I do not wish to say that these universities were unimportant, but I want to highlight the fact that Kitzhaber uses universities within this small selection from which to exemplify different educational philosophies: Princeton and Yale heading down a traditional path, the others changing more readily to a German-influenced research model (17). From this, Kitzhaber presents binaries from which to compare and contrast composition programs across universities, as in the section he calls “Two Poles: Yale and Michigan,” then “Yale: A Conservative College” (20) and “Michigan: A Progressive University” (26). In the Yale section, he mentions the influence of Yale by noting the large number of Yale men who had gone on to become presidents at

universities that were “among the most important of their time: Princeton, Columbia, Dartmouth, Amherst, Rutgers, Trinity, Hamilton, and the Universities of California, Chicago, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, to name only a few” (25-26). With few exceptions, his selection, taken from the *Report for the Commissioner for Education for 1902* (Kitzhaber 232), features private northeastern colleges or large public Midwestern universities. Where the South, Appalachia, the Southwest, or the West (barring the University of California) enters into this picture is unclear; the same can be said for normal schools. To end the chapter that primarily compares Yale to Michigan, Kitzhaber says, “Until the late 1870s Michigan was almost unchallenged as the only real university in the United States” (30). What remains for me are questions that modern-day scholars might take up: challenged by whom? By people in which places? For Kitzhaber, as perhaps for many people in the early 1950s when he was writing, the status of the University of Michigan just *was*.

In his next chapter, Harvard receives even more attention. Kitzhaber explains his choice by asserting Harvard’s representativeness: “The fortunes of English studies at Harvard in the third quarter of the nineteenth century are fairly typical of what happened at other schools then or a little later” (32). He adds that Harvard was also one of the “foremost leaders (and certainly the one best publicized) in educational reform” (32-33). And: “In the admission of English and other modern languages and literatures, as well as the sciences, *Harvard helped to establish the pattern that nearly all other colleges would be following by the end of the century*. From 1875 to 1900, *the most influential English program in America was Harvard’s*” (33, my emphasis). This stress on Harvard’s nearly

absolute dominance of composition trends in higher education is reiterated, as when he notes, “the Harvard English faculty, which in the [1880s] and [1890s] was the largest and most distinguished in the country, trained a great many college English teachers, who then went forth to spread the Harvard gospel” (204). Whether the Harvard English faculty consisted of the most English professors in the country and whether this department trained many future teachers are matters of numbers and can be verified; fuzzier is the matter of who counts what as “distinguished,” and why. For Kitzhaber, the chain of influence is almost entirely one-way: from Harvard to other institutions, many of which he did not name. And in large part, the pattern of emphasis repeats. When previously unnamed institutional sites of learning do get named, their purpose appears to be their relationship, strong or weak, to a composition model from one of the few “important” universities whose programs and leaders he describes.

In his middle and later chapters, Kitzhaber focuses on individuals like Hugh Blair and George Campbell whose books influenced the direction of rhetorical instruction in American colleges and universities. In terms of successors to Blair and Campbell (among others), he focuses on what he calls “The Big Four”: Adams Sherman Hill, John Franklin Genung, Barrett Wendell, and Fred Newton Scott (59). The institutions where these figures spent the bulk of their academic lives were Harvard, Amherst, and Michigan. Not the only place where Kitzhaber singles out influential individuals, this technique lets him attach names to broad theoretical and pedagogical developments in America—Hill, for example, was doing this while Scott was doing that. In many cases, with the name comes the institutional site, and Kitzhaber’s earlier selection of “important” or representative

universities drives his organization and prioritization of research. At Michigan, for instance, Scott's "wide conception of rhetoric, together with [his] curiosity about 'blooms and charms' [or literary writing], made his graduate program in rhetoric at Michigan a center of original thought" (94). Kitzhaber did not specify which figures and institutions were at the *margins* of original thought, but today's scholars might read this into his book's silences.

Equally telling is Kitzhaber's insistence that a single, unifying tradition of composition exists and must be known by current instructors:

The tradition of rhetoric is now some 2,400 years old—one of the longest traditions still represented in the modern curriculum. Teachers of composition today fail to recognize that they and their work are a part of that tradition. If a teacher is to have any perspective on his subject, he must know *the* tradition that lies behind it, know the place of himself and his times *in that tradition*, and, *through this knowledge*, be able to put a *proper value* on new developments in his subject as they appear. (226, my emphasis)

As helpful as Kitzhaber's work has been to give current instructors and theorists an idea of forces and figures who shaped composition pedagogies and practices in America, others' acceptance of this tradition's shaping forces has threatened to disallow possibilities for alternative versions of composition history. If, today, we let ourselves think about *the* history of composition as opposed to histories of composition, we are

already complicit in the organizational and regional straightjacket that Kitzhaber's book has helped tailor.

It is perhaps surprising that in the 1980s James Berlin, a scholar who was more attuned to the constructed nature of language and reality, organized his histories in a way that accords with Kitzhaber's research choices. In *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*, Berlin categorizes and explains philosophical implications underlying past composition pedagogies. Centering his categorization scheme on noetic fields, or a "closed system defining what can, and cannot, be known" (2), he explores categories that he calls classical, psychological-epistemic, and romantic, at least two of these categories corresponding neatly to the figures and institutions brought up by Kitzhaber. That is, for Berlin, the psychological-epistemic comes to stand for composition influenced heavily by Scottish Common Sense Realism, with its focus on induction and science. This approach elevated reason and exposition, but it also descended into current-traditional rhetoric under figures like Adams Sherman Hill and Barrett Wendell (the Harvard model of composition). On the opposite side was the romantic approach, which Berlin associates with Fred Newton Scott, Joseph V. Denney (Scott's frequent collaborator), and Gertrude Buck (Scott's student), as well as with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the early John Dewey. This approach emphasized audience, public or social dimensions of rhetoric, and a holistic (total person) view of rhetoric's effects. Hence, for Berlin, romantic rhetoric comes to reflect the Michigan model of composition—a point to which he devotes at least one entire chapter, called "An Alternative Voice: Fred Newton Scott." What this voice is presented as contrasting was



current-traditional rhetoric a la Harvard and Amherst, as was the case for Kitzhaber. That leaves the traditional Yale-led model of composition, which approximates Berlin's category of classical rhetoric—emphasizing Aristotle and Cicero, deduction, a belletristic legacy, and rhetoric as a container rather than a thing contained.

Kitzhaber's influence on Berlin is direct as well, surfacing in more than Berlin's choice of terms. For one thing, in his opening chapter Berlin notes his indebtedness to Kitzhaber's dissertation, calling it a "groundbreaking" study that, along with Warren Guthrie's article "The Development of Rhetorical Theory in America, 1635-1850," provide "intelligent and accurate introductions to nineteenth-century rhetoric, deserving more attention from English teachers than they have received" (3).<sup>2</sup> I would emphasize Berlin's esteem of Kitzhaber's dissertation based on the latter's "accuracy." This appreciation reappears in Berlin's chapter on current-traditional rhetoric, as here Berlin admits that he relies "on the survey of materials offered by Kitzhaber's extraordinary dissertation," immediately adding, "although the conclusions reached are my own, based on an examination of the same materials" (64). Also, when Berlin quotes Kitzhaber, as on the bulk of page 31, he does so without qualifying or problematizing Kitzhaber's views; consequently, Kitzhaber appears an uncontested authority on the subject of composition history. Aside from Berlin's unconventional association of Emerson with a social, democratic form of rhetoric, just how far (or how little) he deviates from Kitzhaber is a question worth bearing in mind considering that Berlin illustrates the rhetorics in his classification scheme largely by referencing the work of scholar-teachers at Harvard or at

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<sup>2</sup> Berlin, writing *Writing Instruction* in the early 1980s, was among the forces that brought Kitzhaber's work into view for the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

Michigan; he just neglects to provide each figure's institutional affiliation. Thus, he paints a picture of a knowledge-generating rhetoric's demise much in the way that Kitzhaber did before him.

In addition to the Kitzhaber influences, two more aspects of *Writing Instruction* warrant mentioning in regard to Berlin's use of place and history. The first is that Berlin covers "American Colleges" generally, as his book's title indicates, so he does not talk explicitly about regional or local contexts that constrain or otherwise shape the rhetorical developments he traces. Rather, his book is peppered with clauses such as, "The college in America was intended for [...]" and "Americans came to value [...]" (18). He refrains from particularizing; there was what happened "in America" and, by negation, what did not. A second aspect of *Writing Instruction* that I believe is worth mentioning is that Berlin's categorization scheme shapes the way in which he traces influences on writing pedagogies. He says, "The nineteenth century displays three *distinct* rhetorical systems that *must* be considered, although only two remain in force at the end of the century" (3, my emphasis). To classify the noetic fields on which he bases his book, he has to defend the parameters of these fields, using descriptors like "distinct" to make a case for each one's separateness from the next. The resulting picture thus reads as a more positivist history than do the words of the later Berlin of "The Politics of Historiography."

Granted that in *Writing Instruction* Berlin makes points that correspond to his later, more overtly epistemic stance, as when he notes that "Language determines the shapes that truth can assume. It does not simply correspond to the 'real world.' It creates the 'real world' by organizing experience, by determining what will be perceived and not

perceived, by indicating what has meaning and what is meaningless” (90), and early in his book he acknowledges his preference for epistemic rhetoric (12). However, his book’s general organization around three noetic fields makes him seem to me fairly confident about the answer that he seeks, as if the way(s) composition was taught in the nineteenth century can and must be accounted for by one or some of his explanations, each with strong ties to one specific institution and one corresponding set of leaders.

In his later book, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1945*, Berlin categorizes some more, this time zeroing in on what he calls objective theories of rhetoric, subjectivist theories of rhetoric, and (his favorite) transactional theories of rhetoric. At times in this work, he seems to move toward a less certain history, such as when arguing that “the term *rhetoric* refers to a diverse discipline that historically has included a variety of incompatible systems,” so he pluralizes *rhetoric* to make it rhetorics (3). For Berlin, these rhetorics compete at any given time, a point he also made in *Writing Instruction*, though helpfully he adds in *Rhetoric and Reality* that “the exclusion of all other rhetorics is never completely achieved” (5). This emphasis on multiple rhetorics (not just three) in any given period, even when one rhetoric seems to hold the most cache, is a step beyond his earlier and comparatively more restrictive position toward past writing pedagogies. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, he also says, bluntly, “I do not claim to be definitive” (18), and his references to Kenneth Burke’s terministic screens (17-18) help demonstrate his awareness of this history’s interestedness. This prolonged early gesture toward a rhetorical history is worth mentioning because here, in a

work that succeeds *Writing Instruction*, he elaborates on how his social positioning informs his history.

But ultimately, and as was the case in *Writing Instruction*, I think Berlin falls short of these claims of partiality due to his reliance on the Kitzhaber-influenced narrative of composition history, and due to his extension of that narrative into the twentieth century, for example, by illustrating composition history via references to current-traditional rhetoric at Harvard in the early 1900s, thereby illustrating “[t]he fall from grace of the college rhetoric course” (*Rhetoric* 24). I believe Berlin makes the mistake of treating the Kitzhaber narrative as a narrative that is beyond questioning, a story of composition history that is complete and accurate enough not to warrant sustained skepticism. Evidence of this persist throughout much of *Rhetoric and Reality*, most visible in how firmly Berlin covers the same or similar historical ground as he did in *Writing Instruction* and certainly as Kitzhaber did in *Rhetoric in American Colleges*. It appears when Berlin discusses “THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT,” a generic descriptor, at “THE NEW American university” by immediately and repeatedly drawing attention to the example of composition at Harvard, for him (and many others) the “prototype” of composition throughout much of the twentieth century (20, *Rhetoric*, his emphasis). It is also apparent in his section called “The Major Schools,” in which he notes the 1900s-1920s pedagogies used at Harvard first and foremost (35)—then the composition pedagogies favored at Columbia (an institution that Kitzhaber too mentions, usually as a follower of the Harvard or Yale models of composition) and those favored at large public land-grant universities, two of the three he mentions being Midwestern (Illinois and

Wisconsin). The “principal rival” of this current-traditional pedagogy was, again, Yale, Princeton, and Williams’ preferred approach—with Yale mentioned first (35). Then, “the third major approach” (35) he calls “primarily a Midwestern phenomenon, [adding that] it was found in the West and the Southwest as well” (36). He attributes this third approach to Fred Newton Scott at Michigan, Joseph V. Denney at Ohio State, and Gertrude Buck at Vassar. Telling for me is the fact that he names and dwells on the Midwestern influences on “the third major approach” to composition pedagogy, an epistemic view of rhetoric. However, he does not name or dwell on those influences that he says come from “the West and the Southwest as well.” Perhaps needless to say, pedagogies preferred in the South, in Appalachia, and at normal schools across several regions receive no mention in this section, and later sections such as “Current-Traditional Rhetoric” (36-43), “The Rhetoric of Liberal Culture” (43-46), and “A Transactional Rhetoric for a Democracy” (46-51) follow much the same pattern. Even though Berlin also references composition history at colleges and universities other than those mentioned by Kitzhaber, most notably in the section on “Social Rhetoric” (81-90) and in chapter five, “The Communications Emphasis, 1940-1960,” Berlin’s general selection of institutional examples shows the influence of Kitzhaber’s narrative: the history of composition at Harvard, Yale, and Michigan as the dominant vantage points from which to understand composition throughout America.

In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin keeps the national focus he used in his previous book, but when exceptions occur, they head the way of the established Kitzhaber narrative either directly or indirectly, the latter by reaffirming a sense that composition

was taught and discussed almost exclusively at two kinds of higher education institutions: private ones in the Northeast and large (usually land-grant) public ones in the Midwest (*Rhetoric* 55-56). He specifies that one of his primary categories of rhetoric, subjective rhetoric, predominated in “aristocratic and elitist rhetoric that appeared in certain Eastern colleges during the first two decades of [the twentieth century]” (*Rhetoric* 11). He notes that answers to surveys about rhetoric sent by the MLA to various colleges and universities were returned almost exclusively by schools from “the North” (54). And so on.

An anomaly in the regional specificity of much of *Rhetoric and Reality* surfaces in the 1926 H. Robinson Shipherd survey and the Warner Taylor surveys of 1927 and 1928, both of which Berlin discusses in chapter four. (Incidentally, one of Warner Taylor’s surveys serves as Brereton’s concluding chapter in his history. Taylor’s explicit attention to composition across geographic and cultural regions constitutes an anomaly in Brereton’s book, too.) Unlike the focus found elsewhere in *Rhetoric and Reality*, these surveys compared freshman composition course requirements at schools across numerous regions—though the first survey’s origination from Shipherd, a Harvard PhD alumnus, and the subsequent surveys origination from Taylor, a University of Wisconsin professor, deserve mention, too. Taken together, the surveys offer a fuller picture of how composition was taught and handled in the early twentieth century, albeit a picture placed into a book that, in most chapters, leans heavily on established notions of representative schools to tell the story of composition’s history in America.

Given the narrative paths pursued by Kitzhaber and Berlin, John C. Brereton's depiction of composition history in *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* (1995) would be redundant if not for his goal of elaborating on those narratives. Following his introduction, he moves from a chapter called "The First Composition Program: Harvard," complete with excerpts from primary sources by people like Adams Sherman Hill and Barrett Wendell, to a chapter called "The New Writing Curriculum, 1895-1915," which features excerpts from people such as John Franklin Genung and Fred Newton Scott. After this is "The Attack on the Harvard Program, 1890-1917," that attack led by people such as Gertrude Buck. And then, using familiar names for support, come chapters on textbooks and essay writing. Much of Brereton's project lends support to the earlier narratives of composition history in America, but as I have noted above, he acknowledges that he made choices about which kinds of historical texts to prioritize: texts from and about first-year composition from the "public record," or printed as opposed to manuscript sources, available in Harvard's Pusey Library, whose facilities he calls "superb," and from libraries at Wellesley, the University of Minnesota, the New York Theological Seminary (xv), the University of Michigan, the cities of Boston and New York, the University of Wisconsin, Boston University, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and at Boston (xx). He specifies that mostly he is indebted to Harvard's Pusey and Widener Libraries (xx). He recognizes that, like any choices, his encourage him to "ignore" other kinds of texts, to tell one kind of history as opposed to another (xv). Ground that he does cover in composition history includes "postsecondary writing [...] done by immigrants in settlement houses, by men and

women in Bible colleges and normal schools, and at historically black institutions” (xvi). He continues, “It is clear that many of these groups took goals and methods from white, mainstream universities, but we are learning that some students and some teachers asserted themselves in new and important ways” (xvi). Those documents that he focuses on instead comprise “the major texts of the time,” that is, “the ones most fully discussed by the profession at large”—these, again, he calls the “representative texts from the era” (xvi). They are texts that allow him to elaborate on the fall of the rhetoric curriculum and (first and foremost at Harvard) the rise of a narrow, freshman-year-focused composition class. His choices lead him back to familiar historiographical terrain, back to adding to a history that has been treated—problematically, I think—as a national history.

One point I am trying to foreground in this dissertation is the degree to which the pre-1950 composition “profession” itself had ties to particular cultures and places, especially but not exclusively at Harvard and Michigan. So when Brereton comments that “Black or Latino or Native American concerns seem invisible in the professional literature of writing instruction between 1875 and 1925” (21), I say it is little wonder given the choices Brereton and influential composition historians before him made about which textual holdings to visit and analyze. Likewise, when Brereton relates that “most black colleges seem to have taught writing in strict accord with the standards of white America” (21), I have to note that unlike, say, Deany M. Chermie, Brereton did not study available archived texts at historically black institutions in order to reach this straightforward conclusion. And when Brereton finally shares the fact that NCTE “fostered a *Midwestern*, egalitarian attitude toward education rather than the *Eastern*



elitist approach” (24, my emphasis), I have to wonder why he has not emphasized the profession’s regional strongholds all along.

Explicit attention to normal schools is similarly stunted in Brereton’s book, limited to a one-page document to the 1897 *Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric*, written by Charles Francis Adams, Edwin Lawrence Godkin, George R. Nutter (126). In the appendix to their report, which analyzed 1,300 student themes at Harvard and Radcliffe, Adams, Godkin, and Nutter observed the dearth of composition instruction at a Massachusetts normal school (referred to only as “the Normal School”). They recommend that normal schools embrace more systematic instruction in composition and give more attention to grammar, and that these schools focus less on assessment practices that consider ideas apart from writing. An implication of this recommendation is that normal schools of that time gave no sustained attention to writing.

More subtly, Brereton overlooks the role of normal schools in contributing to composition pedagogies and practices when he argues that “the real damage [to composition circa 1900] occurred in the relegation of composition to pedagogy. Once it was determined that composition work was to be considered pedagogical, not the product of research or a province of the aesthetic imagination, writing instruction’s place at the bottom was sealed” (22). From this perspective, which may have applied to those institutions that followed the German-led shift toward research and specialized graduate education, aligning pedagogy and composition meant to deprive composition of any respectable scholarly status. As my project will show, the case may not have been so

simple around 1900 at a university that had a heavy normal school influence—a university such as OU.

The fifth history I would like to discuss in some detail is Robert J. Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997). Connors' history is perhaps the broadest in scope of any I review in this chapter, entailing a look at rhetoric and composition from 1780 to the early 1900s, from rhetoric as an almost exclusively oral phenomenon to a "composition-rhetoric" (a term he appropriates from Fred Newton Scott and Joseph V. Denney) that gradually centralized the role of writing in rhetorical theory and practice. One of the notorious outcomes of this shift was the mandatory freshman composition requirement, with its accompanying prescriptions. To tell this ambitious story of composition-rhetoric, Connors examines effects of women on composition-rhetoric, changes in textbooks as rhetoric gave way to composition, the place of grammar in an increasingly writing-oriented field, the (by the late nineteenth century) tumbling status of composition-rhetoric, changes in accepted categories of discourse, the role of style in the rise and fall of composition-rhetoric, and kinds of assignments preferred from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. It is a comprehensive endeavor, one that I find admirable even though I fault its possibly unintended effect of downplaying opportunities for tracing other histories of composition.

As I move from text to text, a question that I keep posing, in one form or another, is: how does the history writer account for variety in his/her work? Is variety of institutions, regions, student demographics, and so on apparent in the examples that early composition historians offer? in the sites that they select for close study? Is such variety

a point that the writer mentions? a point that the writer's attends to throughout his or her study? Let us see in the case of Connors' choices.

In terms of place, Connors acknowledges that rhetoric "evolved differently in different settings: schools, colleges, Lyceums, literary societies, Chautauquas" (5).

However, as he proceeds, he does not spend much time exploring rhetorical traditions in more specific categories, for example, in normal schools versus research universities. In his defense, he mentions a general variety of school types in early nineteenth-century America:

[...] the institutional bases of Early American composition-rhetoric were so varied, and were becoming more so. [...] [T]here were many kinds of colleges, from burgeoning proto-universities like Harvard and Yale to tiny frontier seminaries hardly distinguishable from high schools. Rhetorical theories were fighting for preeminence during this time, and training could be very different from college to college. (9)

Yet despite this early acknowledgment, he does not give any indication that he has traveled to and studied the records available at sites that once resembled the "tiny frontier seminaries" he mentions. His primary focus remains the Harvard model of composition as the model of how "the" history of composition went. He acknowledges differences "from college to college," but in practice fleshes out the dominant narrative of composition history.

A closer look at Connors' treatment of geographical and cultural diversity offers a better sense of why including references to composition history at a variety of sites is, in

itself, insufficient to alter the traditional parameters controlling composition history writing. Like Brereton, Connors remarks on the NCTE's Midwestern ties which persisted until the 1930s; in his words, the NCTE was "a shrunken in-group of mostly midwestern [sic] teachers" (101). But Connors takes no time to dwell on the significance of this two-decades-long regional devotion. In other words, he does not reflect on power relations that pertain to the placement of academic centers. For him, these matters do not distract from the larger narrative he supports about composition-rhetoric's key developments. On a similar note, I appreciate his willingness to dip into secondary histories of colleges and universities outside the Northeast and (large land-grant schools in) the Midwest, for example, when noting incidents of antagonism reported to have occurred at the Universities of Virginia and Georgia (47) and when observing ways that coeducation evolved at Ohio's Oberlin and Hillsdale Colleges (57). These shifts in institutional and regional focus are more than Kitzhaber or Brereton did. Yet such ventures into texts about less visible regions do not last and, more to the point, don't interfere with Connors' attention to the composition developments named by each of his chapters. References to non-private northeastern schools and non-large public Midwestern schools serve as colorful examples only, not as spaces affording opportunities to re-see the development of composition. His traditional historiography remains intact.

More fundamentally, Connors' expressed purpose and his rationale for his research and analytical choices point to notions of knowability and consensus that reflect the positivist history-writing paradigm adopted, perhaps unconsciously, by Kitzhaber. In this paradigm, history is an ascertainable and agreed-upon story that may be discovered

by the historian sufficiently diligent to sift through enough records, enough (ostensibly unfiltered) windows on past Truth. According to Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric* is

a narrative based on found and on sought archival materials, ordered chronologically on the basis of discrete themes, and interrogated—where they are interrogated—from a limited set of consistent questions based in personal observation of things as they are in the present. I want mostly to tell a story, to identify and pin down as much based in textual evidence as possible, so that further discussion from a theoretical base can then proceed from shareable data.

(22)

Among the unproblematized components of this explanation is the fact that which archived materials, or even which archives, are sought will reflect the historian's purposes and biases. For example, if undertaking research on the history of composition in eighteenth-century America, a historian might justify visiting archives at Harvard and at the College of William and Mary, two of the oldest higher education institutions in America, and studying belletristic treatises; learn a great amount during those visits; and publish his or her findings. But subsequent reflections and conversations might show this historian that he or she would not have had to visit these two sites. Other institutions might have been farther away but equally compelling, might have archived different kinds of texts, and might have made their texts available in other ways. Too, if the historian let the archived sources at Harvard and at William and Mary speak for composition practices at other colonial-era colleges and universities, then he or she would

be giving Harvard's and William and Mary's textual collections an ontological privilege over collections found elsewhere.

Additionally, Connors' personal observation of "things as they are in the present" is limited by many identity markers, not to mention cultural constraints, that color how we see ourselves, the societies we live in, the disciplines we align ourselves with, and so on. Wanting "to identify and pin down" implies an established and shared system through which interpretive answers are reached. Finally, "shareable data" may indeed exist, but common understandings about what a set of data shows are trickier to come by.

Through all this, Connors expresses his hope that his story does not "get lost in the ideology" (21). He leaves it to his "partner in crime, the reader," to add criticism to what he treats as a piece of largely disinterested scholarship (22). Additionally, I read Connors as suggesting that there is the rational reader who gets it, gets him, and, implicitly, the irrational reader who does not. Explaining that his history is "based on an essentially rationalist and even empirical kind of traditional textual historical research" (21), he might have desired to escape from a growing theoretical sophistication that was affecting Rhetoric and Composition in the 1990s. But I think that an effect his book had was to encourage scholars to avoid looking for ways that meaning and power operate differently for differently constituted individuals. I find his history positivist in spirit, regardless of his linking of his book with postmodern thought (Connors 22). From my perspective, Connors's book reaffirms the historiographical straightjacket of Kitzhaber, Berlin, and Brereton because Connors' position reduces interpretation to a matter of finding "the" truth out there for those careful and patient enough or of missing that truth

through ideological devotions, which only warp that “rational” process he knows so well. Possibility, difference—these become for him bases to touch on in one’s introduction, but hardly subjects with which to ground a history.

Let me clarify that I do not see positivism as inherently bad. For researchers who study live subjects and who must therefore interact with those subjects in a systematic manner, a positivist view on research is necessary.<sup>3</sup> In such cases, the researcher’s sense of truth will emerge in part based on what his or her subject say, write, or otherwise share. But for historians of composition to treat printed texts, or *some* printed texts, as if the texts contain the “real” story of how composition played out is to perpetuate the argument that some writers, often those whose work is well known and who can be shown to have had great influence, write from more objective vantage points than others do, and the argument that some readers, particularly those who reason as Connors does, are closer to truth than others are. To my thinking, such a perspective denies the historian opportunities to scrutinize his or her own assumptions about how language and perspective affect “truth” and “reality.”

The history-writing tendencies of Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, Connors, and others (such as John Michael Wozniak and David R. Russell) allowed them to bring the unknown composition past into the realm of the known. This task was no small feat for a field that until the late twentieth century had no large-scale perspective on how composition had been perceived and handled since its entry into the American higher education scene. But with their historical narratives now common knowledge within the

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<sup>3</sup> In my coda, I myself describe research that could be called positivist, this as an alternative to my earlier textual research.

field, I fear that continued journeys down their historiographical path will likely result in either affirmation of their work or in supplements that simply say more about the story of composition's past that they helped establish. Alternative framings of composition's history find no easy connection to this tradition, so another tradition must be sought.

### A Corrective to the Straightjacket

In no sense can I argue that what I find about composition history at OU is generalizable to all colleges and universities, even to nearby colleges and universities. The opposite, in fact, is what I wish to suggest: factors of geographical and political locatedness restrict any attempts to generalize about the history of composition. Particularity must be elevated to generalization, no matter how well-meant previous composition historians have seemed in their goal of disseminating a common disciplinary history. Much as the idea of a single, generalizable writing process has been complicated since at least the 1980s, the idea of a common disciplinary history deserves a healthy dose of scrutiny for signs of difference and contradiction within the many perspectives that this history contains.

Traces of composition history at other institutional sites have begun to emerge, often giving us clues regarding influences that I believe suggest a cultural and geographic power play. One example is in a recent archival study of composition practices at Xavier University in New Orleans, titled "Sifting through Fifty Years of Change: Writing Program Administration at an Historically Black University," by Deany M. Cheramie. Here Cheramie relates influences on the writing program at Xavier from the 1920s to



1970s. One theme that emerges from the work is that outside consultants played a central role in modifying curricula at Xavier. These “evaluators’ comments [...] allowed [Xavier] administrators to argue for change using *external* and professionally developed standards” (158, my emphasis). In its first year of a three-year review phase, reviewers came from other historically Black colleges or universities in the Deep South; however, the final two years brought a reviewer from Appalachian State University, a predominantly white university located in a white-dominated part of the Upper South, and a reviewer from Pennsylvania State University. These later reviewers, whose concerns involved organization, audience, and formal grammar instruction, were “more specialized in their areas,” Cheramie notes, and the Appalachian State reviewer “went into much greater detail in evaluating the composition program than her predecessors” (159). Even when Xavier faculty members took leaves of absence, they traveled to “universities in the East and North to work on graduate degrees” (151). These nods to geographical and cultural positioning are subtle, buried in Cheramie’s study, but their presence indicates that significant cultural and regional factors may have played into the composition practices and philosophies evident at this higher education institution. The issue of who influenced whom and why may concern individuals less than it concerns institutions and regional cultures. This issue may hinge on matters such as who, by virtue of geographic nearness and social and cultural similarity, had ready access to one group’s standards for good practice in writing program administration.

Other recent examples of composition history at institutional sites far removed from private northeastern colleges or universities and large public land grants surface in

the 2007 collection *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, edited by Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon. The authors featured in this anthology express many of the same concerns that I do about dominant histories. For example, in an essay about Composition history at Butler University in Indiana, Heidemarie Z. Weidner says, “Albert R. Kitzhaber’s groundbreaking dissertation about rhetoric in American colleges was based on evidence from large institutions—Harvard, Yale, and Michigan. Butler University compellingly shows that the nation did not always follow Harvard and that composition historians must research a variety of institutions to compose a broader picture of writing instruction in the nineteenth century” (58-59). According to Weidner, a tradition of female professors of rhetoric and intense faculty involvement with students kept the small Butler University from merely mimicking composition developments at Harvard. Studies of composition history at differently located institutions follow suit with this resistance of the composition history largely agreed upon by Kitzhaber, Berlin, Connors, and Brereton. Another study argues that composition instructors at Illinois State Normal University, now Illinois State University, did not make education easily accessible, democratic, or personable, as the non-elitist “normal school” label might insinuate<sup>4</sup>; rather, it encouraged an environment in which newly created teachers entered a professional class that set them apart from their own students (Lindblom, Banks, and Quay 112-113). Other studies in the *Local Histories* collection present alternative normal school or small-school perspectives, even perspectives from junior colleges and from

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<sup>4</sup> While the phrase *normal school* might to some readers sound like a gesture to democratic learning environments, the etymology of *normal* in this context reveals roots that come from French teacher-training schools that instilled teaching norms in students

Lincoln University, America's first historically Black university. As might be expected, the results show that composition history is a messier, more complex issue when it is viewed in the context of institutional sites serving different students and communities and fulfilling different missions.

In some ways, my focus does not differ from the historical additions and revisions provided by the contributors to *Local Histories*. But two factors distinguish my use of OU as the site of my study: (1) my argument that OU was not just another normal school or another Appalachian university, but that its continuously fluctuating status in Ohio, Appalachia, and America as a whole makes it a prime candidate for study as a context-rich site where both "normal"/standard and exceptional/non-standard composition practices took place; and (2) my theoretical orientation to archived texts. Concerning the latter, I head not toward closure but toward multiplicity, even toward conflicting voices and interpretations. I aspire for possibility rather than closure given the wealth of contextual features undergirding compositions written at OU. My theoretical approach stems from neosophism, or the revival of sophism that emerged in the wake of mid- to late-twentieth-century postmodern thinking that exposed connections between discourse and power. Although I will unpack this approach more fully in chapter two, I wish to note here that it provides a twist to traditional archival research in Rhetoric and Composition. Like Cheryl Glenn, Kate Ronald, and Joy Ritchie's feminist histories before me, my project treats gaps between texts and time periods not as flaws inherent to the subject under examination, points at which narratives of composition history end.

Like many of the contributors to Donahue and Moon's *Local Histories*, I am saying that it is time to add to and otherwise revise the American composition history offered by Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors, among others. I am just saying so a little differently from Donahue, Moon, and their book's contributors, for I am proposing an extended study of composition history from a single site, and I am undertaking my historical project from a decidedly postmodern angle.

In the next chapter, I will offer a theoretical overview of my project, drawing from postmodern thinking about language, representation, and power, and more specifically from neosophistic rhetoric, which in Rhetoric and Composition has provided alternatives to positivist-leaning studies. I will connect this theoretical focus to a review of the literature on composition history outside of the Kitzhaber-to-Connors centerpiece on which I am basing much of my critique. Then I will outline the foci that guide my particular history and proceed to share and interpret my findings.

An overarching goal of my research is to make a case for opening up history-making not simply to say that this can be done or to demonstrate yet another way in which it can be done, but to argue that it *should* be done. I want to argue for the need for compositionists to see the history of composition from different perspectives and in different theoretical ways so that we keep in mind the locatedness of composition in the past as well as the present (post-process theory already addresses the latter), and so that we become neither the "rootless professors" that Zencey bemoans nor the rhetoric and composition equivalent of E.D. Hirsch-inspired common culture proponents.

## CHAPTER TWO: TOWARD OU-BASED HISTORIES OF COMPOSITION

Before I explain the details of my analytic approach to historical texts at OU, I want to acknowledge multiple textual spaces in which place, as a driving concept, has been studied and textual spaces in which composition history (beyond the “straightjacket”) has received careful attention. Doing this means taking an interdisciplinary tour of Composition and non-Composition works that are associated with theory, with empirical research, and with creative writing. My work occupies similar ideological space as the areas and works that I review here, but I view no one of the writers or works below as my immediate predecessor. The group with the most immediate influence on my work is comprised of those Rhetoric and Composition scholars who rehabilitate sophistic rhetorical traditions, but even this group stays a step away from me because these scholars tend not to look explicitly at histories of *composition* in America.

Generally, I would like my readers to conceive of my project as lying within the territory known as Rhetoric and Composition but near intersections with an array of other fields. In the rest of this chapter, I want to give credit to theorists who throughout the twentieth century have charted intellectual terrain where later work, such as my own, might thrive, theorists whose work takes a reflexive, analytic turn in an effort to expose the constructedness of language-based conventions and norms that we adopt, often uncritically. I will move from Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty as exemplifiers of postmodern thinking about language to the concept of critical rhetoric, to feminist historians of rhetoric, to neosophistic historians of rhetoric, to language scholars and

cultural geographers who are developing frameworks for better understanding place, to historians who have recently composed local histories of composition, to, finally, a description of my project, the roots of which lie not just in my own thinking but in various movements that have preceded me. Scholars from the above-mentioned groups have extended postmodern thinking about the roles of multiple perspectives and anti-foundational rhetoric in knowledge creation, often but certainly not always within or into Rhetoric and Composition. I think most of them pave the way for work on historiography and geographic location to affect our notions of what histories of composition are or might be.

Within Rhetoric and Composition, my project builds on contributions of feminists and neosophistics to historiography; that is, it uses tenets that members of these groups have adopted to guide their own research choices. But historiography aside, my project also builds on ideas from Nedra Reynolds, Jonathon Mauk, and other scholars who study geographic and cultural positioning; I might say my project brings these scholars' ideas to composition historiography. In general, I think that what Cheryl Glenn and Andrea Lunsford have done for gender and histories of rhetoric, and what Susan Jarratt and Victor Vitanza have done for sophistic thought and histories of rhetoric, I hope to do for geography and histories of composition. The scholars just named have each used an angle of vision from which to re-see histories of skillful language use and skillful language users. I undertake a similar journey, albeit by focusing primarily on written texts affiliated with a particular American higher education institution, Ohio University, and at a (more or less) particular time, 1825-1950. I would argue that this focus places my

project more in the realm of Composition than in Rhetoric because scholars of composition study the production of written texts, as Susan Miller has demonstrated in *Assuming the Positions* and *Textual Carnivals*.

However, a focus on composition does not mean that rhetoric has vanished altogether from the picture, and in the case of my project, rhetoric never makes a full exit. Compositions produced by past students and administrators were frequently performed, after all, and therefore served as just one part of complex rhetorical occasions. Also, even when compositions were composed by students to fulfill course objectives, the work reflected an instructor's, administrator's, or institution's (or a greater tradition's) preferred ways of handling three of the canons of classical rhetoric: invention, arrangement, and style. This emphasis on composition in a local context warrants consideration of compositions as *doxastic*, by which I mean written discourse that reflects a community's wisdom and ways, and which gains esteem within the community by virtue of how well it conforms to the community's wisdom.

#### Some Postmodern Effects on Rhetoric

In this brief review of postmodernism and rhetoric, I do not try to account for every variety of thinking that some school of thinkers would label postmodern. Rather, I wish to provide a few understandings of what postmodernism means for Composition and Rhetoric, and by extension, for my project in particular. I intend to do this partly by turning to a few common ways of conceptualizing the postmodern and partly by turning to certain compositionists' takes on postmodernism as it pertains to rhetoric, for by

calling my historical study a product of postmodern thinking, I want to account for some of the textual spaces that surround the questions and concerns that evolved into my dissertation.

A review of postmodernism in all its variegated wonder overflows the boundaries of my project, in effect becoming its own series of projects, a string of attempts to articulate and explain postmodernism's many sources and forms as well as its theoretical differences from other -isms, chiefly its linguistic and historical precursor, modernism. For Richard Rorty, the term *postmodernism*, or "post-modernism," as he calls it, "has been ruined by overuse" ("Is It Desirable" 13). So instead he adopts the term *pragmatism*, by which he means a Nietzsche- and William James-influenced approach to truth and knowledge, an approach that checks our awareness of truth and knowledge by emphasizing linguistic limits on knowledge and meaning (13-14). In his "Spinoza Lecture 1," Rorty argues that this theoretical stance leads us toward greater tolerance rather than toward goals of achieving single notions of truth.<sup>5</sup> I do not share Rorty's willingness to give up the term *postmodernism* (or *post-modernism*) because I do not share his inclination to think about disciplines and mediums as separate, largely unconnected matters. For instance, I am leery of Rorty's refusal to acknowledge links between philosophy, painting, and architecture; he attempts to keep "post-modernism" tied only to high theorists such as Derrida and Foucault, an attempt whose futility he acknowledges (13). However, those of us more comfortable assuming the identity of rhetor as opposed to philosopher appear more willing to keep *postmodernism* as an

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<sup>5</sup> In "Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism," Rorty characterizes pragmatism as, among other things, an applied form of anti-essentialism and as thought bounded only by conversational constraints.



umbrella term for an attitude toward truth, reason, and knowledge that transcends disciplines, even as we express our discomfort with the term.

Consider compositionist Lester Faigley's comment that there is not "any satisfactory definition of postmodernism" (3), and that "postmodern theory and theories of postmodernity are not especially valuable for classificatory purposes, even though there is a great rush to attach to various cultural objects and phenomena the label of postmodern. [...] The term *postmodern* has been spread so widely that it can be applied to nearly anything" (21). So far, Faigley seems to side with Rorty. But after making this claim, Faigley affirms Frederic Jameson's stance that we cannot avoid the label *postmodern* even as we disagree on the term's meaning. So whether I write from a background in history, painting, architecture, or literary theory, I could use the term to point to a general disposition toward ideas that have been treated as universals, but I would also have to account for my discipline's preferred means of aligning itself with this theoretical movement. If I did this carelessly, then I would risk espousing oversimplified definitions of postmodernism, definitions that reduce the implications of postmodern thinking to a tamer, more palatable idea or series of ideas. For instance, I could say, and be "correct," that postmodernism is a theoretical turn that gained prominence on the heels of modernism. I could look at it on a historical timeline and say that many scholars place the most visible shift from modernism to postmodernism in or near the 1950s-60s. I could add, too, that the labels *modernism* and *postmodernism* operate differently from discipline to discipline. But these accountings of postmodernism pigeonhole it on a linear (read Western) timeline, falsely suggesting that this placement explains it. It also fails to

unpack some of postmodernism's contributions and challenges to thinking about language, representation, and power, contributions and challenges that scholars in different disciplines have appropriated at their own paces and for their own uses.

A more thorough, if far from ideal, way I could attempt a sketch of postmodernism is by looking for its philosophical seeds (or at least its philosophical ancestors), using the notion of an ideological genealogy to trace the forms it has taken for different thinkers. This too attempts to place it on a timeline, but I would argue that it does so in a less definitive way than in the period sketch mentioned above. And unlike the period-sketch view of postmodernism, this option encourages us to think in terms of kinships of ideas, webs of thought that cover similar ground about how language and knowledge operate. Continental philosophers in particular have reexamined systems of knowledge from the perspective of the politics of language, suggesting that ideas are owned rather than innocent, put to the ends of groups with particular goals rather than held and used by everyone equally.

To take two examples, Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, denaturalize economic, religious, or familial systems, in effect exposing connections between the establishment and maintenance of these systems and their regulatory effects on language (for Foucault) and on values (for Nietzsche). This strategy of *denaturalizing* systems that channel power in calculated ways will surface later, in modern-day American scholars' work on rhetoric: Raymie McKerrow's critical rhetoric, Cheryl Glenn's feminist history of rhetoric, and Victor Vitanza's paralogical rhetoric. Foucault's emphasis on language and power has made his

work especially amenable to later scholars, many of whom are associated with postmodernism in different disciplines. In his *History*, he exposes some inner workings of a “subtle network of discourses, special knowledges, pleasure, and powers” (72).

Examining who benefits and why from norms such as religious confession, professional practices such as psychoanalysis, and family systems geared toward higher or lower levels of procreation, he alerts us to purposes of seemingly fixed components of Western societies, revealing the constructed underside of what often passes for the natural state of things. Emphasizing the importance of naming, he reminds us that ideas of sexuality are framed by discourse conventions, part of a “great surface network” that various power holders operate in many strategic ways (105). This turn toward language as a means of seeing the socially constructed makeup of society gives late twentieth century scholars a tradition they can draw on, explicitly or implicitly, to study relationships between power and symbolic systems.

In Rhetoric and Composition of the late twentieth century, John Trimbur and Lester Faigley provide what I think is an illuminating framework for understanding postmodernism. Trimbur calls postmodernism “an attitude and mood in the air that has crept up on us, a structure of feeling that suffuses contemporary, traversing practices and forms of expression” (118). Lester Faigley comes close to calling it “an attitude and mood” as well, describing it in a subtly different way, as a “growing awareness of randomness, ambiguity, and chaos since the 1960s” (3). However, Faigley is quick to add that the term also describes “a general movement in philosophy and cultural criticism” stemming from figures like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia

Kristeva, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari (3).

Trimbur sees postmodernism as tied intimately to theory and to history, and given the latter connection, he argues that postmodernism, omnipresent and insightful as its characteristics have been, runs a risk of disempowering language users by accentuating the theme of the prison house of language. Faigley too relates doubts about the ability of postmodern theory to free the subject from his or her discursive confines; Faigley calls this the “impasse” of postmodern theory.

But what are postmodernism’s tenets for these scholars? For Trimbur, postmodernism engages in multiple subversions of utopian goals. He lists “its disbelief in metanarratives, its resistance to totalizing schema, its historicizing and localizing critical energies, its attention to dissensus and the incommensurability of discourses [...]” (118-119). To the question of what constitutes *postmodern theory*, Faigley gives additional details, citing Jane Flax’s explanation that it describes a philosophical tradition that questions legacies from the Enlightenment about a stable and unified sense of self, the idea of objective reason, a disinterested and truth-attaining notion of science, a notion of knowledge as neutral as opposed to political, a view of language as a clear window on truth, and so on (8). To this definition, he adds that the term *postmodernity* refers to a “more general cultural condition” that flourishes outside the academy and philosophical discussions (Faigley 9).

For Faigley, postmodern theory and the field of composition do not go hand in hand because the latter “has maintained a modernist tension between form and chaos, coherence and fragmentation, and determinancy and indeterminacy, consistently

privileging the former over the latter” (14). He gives Ihab Hassan’s listing of contrasting aspects of modernism and postmodernism (see Table 1):

Table 1: Ihab Hassan’s Binary Between Modernism and Postmodernism

<i>modernism</i>	<i>postmodernism</i>
romanticism	paraphysics
form (conjunctive, closed)	antiform (disjunctive, open)
purpose	play
design	chance
hierarchy	anarchy
mastery/logos	exhaustion/silence
art object/finished work	process/performance/happening

Throughout *Fragments of Rationality*, Faigley argues that composition textbooks, which constitute one of the field’s primary means of communicating with the public, lean toward modernism because, among other reasons, they refuse to relinquish the importance of the polished, “finished” product. He notes that more recent developments in composition, such as the possibilities of multiple subjectivities afforded by online writing environments, hold promise for a postmodern emphasis on play, performance, and antiform to enrich current writing and learning.

I see Hassan’s binary as useful for my project but also limited—useful in that it gives us a quick way of determining where theorists yet to be discussed fall on the

modernism-postmodernism issue (how postmodern are they?), limited because the binary situates postmodernism as a reactionary other to modernism, and thus as bound to reason, science, and so on for its meaning. Although I think there is some insight to be had by referring back to the binary, for instance, to see how many of the postmodern descriptors fit the kind of rhetoric that Victor Vitanza espouses, I would simply add that no rhetor's work should be summarized with the goal of placing him or her within this binary. To do so would reek of a modernist interpretation that seeks to master and control the unknown with static schemata.

Before I move on from Faigley and Trimbur, I wish to dwell longer on Trimbur's argument because he emphasizes postmodern thinking regarding places, or more specifically, cityscapes. This both illustrates his point vividly and aligns his interests closer to mine given my decision to look at composition history from the vantage point of place. Trimbur explains that postmodern cities are places of fragmented messages that aspire to no sense of overarching unity or meaning. Cities—or, more properly, city planners, builders, and citizens—mix and match semiotic codes as if to say, every tradition or form has been seen and done architecturally, so why aspire for the same old unifying effects? This sort of city is also characterized by its citizens' focus on privatized spheres of living, their physical and symbolic consumption of goods for individual gratification. In effect, the subject may feel powerless, confined and “created by the discursive apparatus of the state, the media, and the culture industry” (127). So to empower the subject, Trimbur argues for renewed attention to Cultural Studies, which he says treats consumers “as active interpreters of their own experience” (127).

As Trimbur proceeds through his cautionary approach to postmodernism, he relies on art critic Hal Foster to distinguish between two subcategories of postmodernism: a postmodernism of reaction and a postmodernism of resistance. The first one, focusing on reaction, looks at the direction modernism had been heading and goes the other way: backward, to the past for “stylistic revivification of representation” (122). It recycles past modes of expression for new purposes. However, the other form of postmodernism, focusing on resistance, finds parallels with many theorists I will discuss in later sections and finally informs my own work. This postmodernism of resistance adopts “a radical critique of representation and historical narrativity” (122). Trimbur sees critique alone as insufficient to free each subject from the dominance of representation, narrative, and stylistics, therefore fixing the subject as an effect or creation of some system of representation (e.g., photography, print text, computer technology). However, I think this emphasis on critique is a useful starting point because it encourages active awareness of how symbolic structures that surround us seek to fix our identities. To illustrate a postmodernism of resistance, Trimbur gives the example of artist Cindy Sherman, who took and arranged photographs of herself in a way that evokes clichés surrounding representations of women; the result was not mere “creative expression” but an attempt “to investigate the rhetoric of art” (123). I think that for histories of composition, a postmodernism of resistance would involve a critique of the norms that have guided past histories and a push for some way of seeing that underscores the rhetoricity of history writing. For my OU-based project in particular, a postmodernism of resistance would necessitate that I push back against dominant narratives of composition history, both in

terms of where they focus and in terms of how they interpret their data, and that I argue for another angle from which to conceive of composition's past.

I highlight the question of a postmodernism of resistance's political efficacy because I see similar concerns surfacing in other theoretical circles at about the same time, including those discussing critical rhetoric (largely in Communication Studies) and those discussing neosophistic rhetorical theory (in Rhetoric and Composition and in Communication Studies).

### Postmodernism and Critical Rhetoric

Foucault or Rorty or others variously associated with postmodern theorizing did not create a critical rhetoric; their contributions are, rather, indirect, coming from their appropriation by speech communication theorists such as Raymie E. McKerrow. McKerrow made the label *critical rhetoric* a commonplace in his essay of the same title. In this piece he argues that critical rhetoric works as a practice that exposes the rhetorical conditions on which power rests and which seeks alternatives to the normative ways of seeing. In McKerrow's words, critical rhetoric "seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society" ("Critical" 441). He describes several tenets of such a rhetoric's purpose and parameters: it is, again, a practice; it treats the discourse of power as material; it sees rhetoric as doxastic not epistemic; it emphasizes naming; it distinguishes between influence and causality; it values absence and presence equally in rhetorical acts; it treats rhetorical fragments as involved in acts of subversion; and it is a performance undertaken



at individual sites of engagement. The relevance of this rhetorical approach to my own project is, I hope, apparent: both emphasize *doxa*, both prefer to undertake work that may be called subversive, both examine power and knowledge at an individual site. Again, while my own project is not a holistic application of critical rhetoric to histories of composition, this project is nonetheless grounded in a disposition toward rhetoric that critical rhetoric has influenced.

What critical rhetoric “must do,” McKerrow concludes, “is provide an avenue—an orientation—toward a postmodern conception of the relationship between discourse and power” (“Critical” 459). Instead of assuming universally shared notions of reason, “a critical rhetoric celebrates its reliance on contingency, on *doxa* as the basis for knowledge, on nominalism as the ground of language meaning as doxastic, and critique viewed as performance” (459). This step moves us away from considerations of truth (or Truth) to considerations of “how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false” (Foucault qtd. in McKerrow, “Critical” 449), away, that is, from platonic ideas of inherent goodness and badness and toward signs of action from members of discourse communities. It leads us to ask questions such as, how do communities, with their various ways of assembling and agreeing upon systems of meaning, normalize an idea of what for them *counts as* true? More subtly, it encourages us to resist accepting normalized discourses as valid because of their place within a culture.

Barbara Biesecker takes an interest in how McKerrow connects Foucault not just to issues of power but to those of resistance. For Biesecker, we limit our understanding of

Foucault and of resistance when we insist on using labels like *power* and *resistance*, when we try to associate Foucault with both these concepts as they stand currently. As she explains, Foucault did little to unpack what resistance to power—from a single originating source outside a power structure—means or involves. She suggests that an alternative way of understanding Foucault on resistance is for us to think about resistance as coming not from a rhetor who, from an outside perspective, challenges a system, but from the totality of a system of power plus a rhetor. This sort of resistance to power structures treats possibilities for change in terms of intelligibility: “[...] those practices that we will call ‘resistant’ are [...] those practices that do not make sense within the available lines of intelligibility or discernment” (Biesecker 357). Such practices create references that “are gestures that defy translation, throw sense off track, and, thus, short-circuit the system through which sense is made” (357). Even though critical rhetors “are themselves called into motion by [practices of domination],” they surface and name new forms of sense making (361). They “trace new lines of making sense by taking hold of the sign whose reference has been destabilized” (361). Thus, for Biesecker, critical rhetors engage directly with systems of power through a critique of the grammar of domination (in my case, the dominant narrative of composition history), but these rhetors are not themselves the originators of resistance; possibilities for resistance are, rather, innate in systems of power.

Here I detect overlaps between Biesecker’s view of a critical rhetoric and feminist histories of rhetoric—in Biesecker charting out “available lines of intelligibility” much as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald chart out “available means” of uncovering histories of

rhetoric. I also sense overlaps with what Victor J. Vitanza would call Third Sophistic rhetoric: Biesecker calls the job of critical rhetors that of seeking “new forms of sense making” after first “destabilizing” old ones, and Vitanza in turn takes up some possibilities for a non-hierarchical historiography (*Negation*), a project that forces him to first destabilize modernist-leaning historiographies.

However, to conclude that developments from communication that build from Foucault’s conceptions of power and language come solely from the critical rhetoric of McKerrow and Biesecker is a falsity. Others communication scholars have covered similar terrain, albeit without adopting all the tenets of critical rhetoric, and these scholars are also indebted to Foucault for demonstrating ways that power is embedded in normalizing discourses. For example, Dennis K. Mumby and Cynthia Stohl look at organizational communication from a “radical perspective [...] rooted in recent developments in postmodernist approaches to organization theory” (314). That perspective entails looking at discourse as “the primary vehicle through which social relations are produced and reproduced” (315). They conceive of power, then as “instantiated in the routine discursive practices of everyday organizational life” (315). “Instantiated”—so not necessarily as a *result of* discourse but as evidenced within the discourse “of everyday organizational life,” a point that finds an affinity with Biesecker’s insistence that it is not the rhetor alone but the relationship between the rhetor and the system (discourse) of power itself that makes alternatives to normalizing rhetorics possible. This perspective allows Mumby and Stohl to examine examples of organizational power in which companies use discourse to control their employees’ on-

the-job identities and duties. Also, Helene A. Shugart applies critical rhetoric to the aesthetics of scholarly writing itself, asking whether conforming to a professional community's jargon and other stylistic features undermines the critical process.

This is not to say that critical rhetoric has escaped criticism, however. Even though Shugart praises critical rhetoric for alerting scholars to the need to examine power relations in their own and others' writing, Robert Hariman faults McKerrow's rendering of critical rhetoric for presenting the writer, in this case McKerrow, as a logical, detached entity that speaks to no particular group of listeners (Hariman 67-68). Hariman argues that we would do well first to examine ways in which we depend on modernist assumptions of discourse; at base, he expresses the theme of Lester Faigley's book *Fragments of Rationality*, which would appear a year later. But Faigley and, in a later essay, McKerrow remind us of the *unfixed* relationship between modernism and postmodernism, Faigley by noting Rhetoric and Composition's hypocrisy in preaching postmodern theoretical messages while adopting modernist practices (e.g., textbooks that situate writing in ways that assume rational, always understandable subjectivities), McKerrow by reasserting the claim that the seeming split between modernism and postmodernism is a "convenient fiction," that the two are not "mutually exclusive in some final sense. Rather they exist, to use Bernstein's (1992) term, in a 'constellation' of practices that may shade into one side of the dichotomy more than the other" (McKerrow, "Space" 273). Criticisms of critical rhetoric have enabled critical rhetors to articulate important points about our haste to put postmodernism and modernism into overly neat, separate boxes.

### Feminist Histories of Rhetoric

A prominent way that postmodern theorizing about language has infiltrated history writing in the Rhetoric and Composition field is via scholars who use gender as basis for a critique and revision of dominant narratives of rhetorical history. These scholars include Cheryl Glenn, Andrea Lunsford, Susan Jarratt, C. Jan Swearingen, Joy Ritchie, Kate Ronald, Catherine Hobbs, and Susan Miller, each of whom establishes new angles from which to see “the” canon of rhetorical or composition history. For Ritchie and Ronald, in their edited collection *Available Means: An Anthology of Women’s Rhetoric(s)*, establishing a new, more inclusive history of rhetoric involves looking for and revaluing the “available means”—textual fragments and gaps, as well as information obtained secondhand—by which historians can understand various contributions to rhetoric, not just those contributions that white Western men have documented. In her edited collection *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, Andrea Lunsford heads the same way by advocating “*listening*—and listening hard” to what may seem like silences coming from past women rhetoricians who have not been silent so much as dismissed by male power holders (6). Contributors to Lunsford’s collection such as Susan Jarratt, Rory Ong, and C. Jan Swearingen provide scholarly illustrations of what this principle looks like when applied to historical recovery projects that seek to surface the contributions of women of ancient Greece whose deeds are evident only secondhand, in writings by men. Cheryl Glenn, in *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, offers a more systematic defense of women’s histories of rhetoric, arguing that as scholars we need to broaden our very notions of

rhetoric and rhetoricians to account for women who have acted as rhetors or who have displayed or passed on rhetorical knowledge rather than just those (men) who have assumed or could have assumed the title of rhetor. In *Rereading the Sophists*, Susan Jarratt updates and revises our notions of early Greek sophists in an effort to apply their (possible or probable) interests to today's progressive educators and theorists.<sup>6</sup>

But the work of feminist historians entails histories of composition in addition to histories of rhetoric. For Susan Miller, in *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing*, the project at hand involves an expansion of the textual corpus typically valued by historians in order to better account for women's commonplace writing. Miller's subject matter, composition in nineteenth-century Virginia, lends her work to composition history first and foremost, as do the nineteenth-century writing-focused situations described by Hobbs and her contributors to the collection *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*. I will return to Miller's book as a link to neosophistic histories, but Hobbs' collection deserves notice here because although it centers on composition, it emulates Glenn's and others' attempts to recover women's histories by expanding the traditional scope of rhetorical (or composition) activity. In her book's introduction, Hobbs argues that past histories of composition reflect the experiences of men of select higher education institutions, and that efforts to recover traces of women's composition history must address multiple, specific sites from and in which women wrote. The scholars in her collection thus "imagine alternatives and

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<sup>6</sup> However, theoretically, Jarratt's work also falls into neosophistic rhetorical theory, as I shall show.

broader spheres of action” for women’s writing (Hobbs 26), considering writing and expression in churches, in normal schools, and in private spaces, among other venues.

Whether they focus primarily on rhetoric or on composition, these scholars break the rules that guided their predecessors in historical endeavors—see, for example, Bob Connors’ critique of Susan Jarratt in *Composition-Rhetoric* (Connors 330)—for Jarratt, like Glenn and the others named above, look for previously unaccounted for or devalued angles of vision, spaces from which to re-see and re-judge the development of rhetoric or composition; the resulting angles do not appear to have been part of early categorization schemes that governed rhetorical and composition history. In my view, they create historical narratives in a vein supported by a critical rhetorical outlook.

A closer look at a few of these scholars’ historiographies sheds light on what moving from a modern to a postmodern history of rhetoric or of composition involves. Cheryl Glenn in particular articulates some of the complexities involved in undertaking a history that is not based in abundant evidence that leads to a sense of irrefutable (or nearly irrefutable) closure—what I would call a modernist history—but on possible representations and textual accounts that are various distances from the subject under inspection—what I would call a postmodern history. One such complexity involves spelling out one’s purpose when writing a history, a purpose that is more rhetorically conscious than naïve avowals of truth telling. Citing Theresa Ebert, Glenn observes that a certain strand of postmodern thinking, “resistant postmodernism [...] reveals various angles of meaning, the results of various social and material struggles over power and knowledge” (5). Glenn notes that she used this approach only when she started writing

about Aspasia, for this was “when [she] began resisting the paternal narrative that assured [her that Aspasia] was either apocryphal or a glorified prostitute” (5). Here, in revisiting her motivation for studying Aspasia, Glenn asks an important historiographical question, one that has implications relevant for my own project: “How could I write a map of rhetorical history if I did not have ‘proof,’ if I had instead only an angle, if Aspasia provided only a fragmentary view rather than a panoramic vision of rhetoric?” (5). To answer, she decides that she must articulate what she wants her project to accomplish, her purpose, which in her case meant to counter patriarchal renderings of Aspasia. Her history was interested, she admits, and she suggests that no history escapes from such interestedness.

In place of truth telling, however sincerely the desire for it appears, is story telling. Glenn writes:

Those of us charting historical maps know that we cannot tell the “truth,” that no single map can ever tell the truth, that our traditional foundations are shaky, that maps are neither stable nor entirely coherent, and that the notion of capturing any “reality” rings of empiricism, positivism, and naïvete. Yet we cannot completely separate ourselves from writing or from reading these histories, these stories. (5)

Rather than give up because of our recognition of disjunctions between representations and realities (whether reality amounts to something external, something internal, or a dynamic place of both, as in Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality*), she wants us to engage purposefully in treating histories as story-making practices. Incorporating an



antifoundational stance in this instance, as she does when she calls “our traditional foundations” “shaky,” does not mean writing or reading without any bearings regarding what, as scholars, we should or should not do. Glenn and others suggest that we should see histories as multiple stories, variously told and illustrated, that achieve specific purposes, and we should not treat any one story as true beyond question. Mentioning Kenneth Burke’s terministic screens, Glenn argues that “it is too late to do otherwise, “ that “historiographic practices are now so firmly situated in the postmodern critique of rhetoric that we already take for granted that histories *do* (or *should do*) something, that they fulfill our needs at a particular time and place” (7). Having come this far in our theorizing about motivations and situatedness, we cannot sever the historian’s purpose from the history that he or she assembles from selected pieces of information.

When put into practice, this historiography involves reading “crookedly,” Glenn maintains:

We must look crookedly, a bit out of focus, into the various strands of meaning in a text in such a way as to make the categories, trends, and reliable identities of history a little less inevitable, less familiar. In short, we need to see what is familiar in a different way, in many different ways, as well as to see beyond the familiar to the unfamiliar, the unseen. (Hans Kellner cited in Glenn 7)

By dropping untenable aspirations of attaining truth in history writing, Glenn seems to be saying that we can use history writing to bring into sharp relief the rhetorical considerations that undergird the dominant stories that have been accepted as “the”

history of anything. We can establish a plane on which to begin rhetoricizing history. Perhaps a study of composition history such as that which I propose, a history grounded in archived textual remains at a university in a rural region, gives us one way to read history “crookedly, a bit out of focus”; however, such a history would also, by its situatedness at a previously unrecognized angle, “make the categories, the trends, and reliable identities of [in this case, composition] history a little less inevitable.” For Glenn, reading crookedly provides a way to see Aspasia beyond the patriarchal binary of “intellectual joke or harlot” so that Glenn can question why historians have permitted, even endorsed, detailed, three-dimensional depictions of Socrates but not of Aspasia, even though we have no text written directly by either of these rhetors (8). For me, reading crookedly offers a way to look at composition history in northern Appalachia as something more involved than either a copy of a Harvard or Michigan model of composition or an outright rejection of such models, so that I can question why composition historians have permitted some archived collections rather than others to illustrate “the” story of composition in America.

Reading “crookedly” also opens up a historiographical alliance between feminist historians of rhetoric (and of composition) and sophistic, neosophistic, and Third Sophistic historians of rhetoric (and of composition). As I see it, the alliance stems from decisions by these groups, particularly feminist historians, to prioritize what Richard Rorty calls rational reconstructions over historical reconstructions of history: writing histories on the basis of the historian’s current needs and perspectives rather than attempting wholeheartedly to jump into the skin of people from generations ago.

Neosophistic rhetorical theorists favor rational reconstruction over historical reconstruction as well, but ultimately engage in a more specific historiography, which I shall describe below. Of course, every historian engages in both rational and historical reconstruction to some extent; the two exist on a continuum (McComiskey 7). But what feminist historians and variously situated neosophistic rhetorical theorists do is favor of perspectival and socially and politically motivated bases for histories that read previously marginalized groups and angles of vision into historical narratives, perhaps even changing the narrative itself. Concerning Aspasia, for example, Susan Jarratt and Rory Ong write, “Our reconstruction of ‘Aspasia’ will no more accurately recapture the ‘real’ woman than do the figure in [a well-known fresco that depicts her] or the character in Plutarch’s and Plato’s texts, but rather reflect back to us a set of contemporary concerns. That Aspasia existed is of profound importance for the project of recovering women in the history of rhetoric” (10). From here, they examine references to and about Aspasia that “[were] said to have” indicated one thing or that “may have” shown something else (13), their use of helping and state-of-being verbs revealing that Jarratt and Ong are not after factually supported actuality because no such actuality exists in the records left to explain Aspasia. Concerning another female classical Greek rhetor, Diotima, C. Jan Swearingen follows a similar path, quoting Tivka Frymer-Kensky:

Part of the scholarly ferment in recent years has been the realization that the reader is always present in the reading of texts, and that the present is always part of the interpretation of the past. There is no such thing as a totally objective recovery of history, for something informs our choices of

questions to ask and our selection of data that seems significant to us. (qtd. in Swearingen 27)

Although like Jarratt and Ong in that Swearingen focuses on historiographies of classical Greek rhetoric, the principles of the historian's interestedness applies to other historical projects. Much as Swearingen acknowledges that "evidence from Greek antiquity is sporadic, the result of accidental archaeological discoveries, fragmentary papyrological remains, tortuous manuscript transmissions, layers of beliefs imported from later centuries into the interpretation of classical materials and texts, *and, finally silence*" (27, my emphasis), I would argue that evidence of composition history at OU is sporadic, bordering on miscellaneous, the apparent result of past archivists' and professors' decisions about which texts to retain in contexts of limited archival storage space, decisions which reflect past archival gatekeepers' "layers of beliefs" about which texts to value and preserve and which to treat as expendable.

But it is Susan Jarratt who, in *Rereading the Sophists*, makes what I think is the clearest case for rational reconstruction in histories of rhetoric, in fact doing the work of neosophistic rhetorical theory. She associates the classical Greek sophists with an array of modern-day concepts and movements that appeal to many progressive scholars in Rhetoric and Composition: possibility, argument (in place of essentialized notions of Truth), change, *nomos*, *kairos*, community, democracy (and thus critical pedagogy), public intellectuals, and recent waves of feminism. The sophists' seeming trickery and selfishness is a product of stories told by Plato and subsequent philosophers, she argues, and a story that can and should be retold in light of knowledge and attitudes that prevail

today. In effect, Jarratt uses modern-day labels, products of *nomos*, to reevaluate the longstanding negative tale told by the philosophers. For instance, in her fourth and final chapter, “Sophistic Pedagogy, Then and Now,” she alludes to contributions of twentieth-century critical educators such as Ira Shor and Henry Giroux and argues that the early sophists established a historical precedent for this line of socially and politically conscious work (85). Although she does not use the phrase *rational reconstruction*, her project illustrates it here and elsewhere.

In “Toward a Sophistic Historiography,” Jarratt heads the way of Glenn and others but with more overt attention to sophism. That is, she notes the roles of *kairos*, *nomos*, and knowledge gaps in history writing and argues that these elements help comprise the rhetoricity of knowledge and history. She says that historians need to move between and among both texts and disciplines (Jarratt, “Toward” 266-267); that we need to “disrupt” notions of “a stable historical narrative” (268) and thus “re-group and redefine” historical evidence (270); that we need to allow contradictions to exist (272); that we should embrace our political involvements (275); and that we should let multiplicity (from antithesis) and probability (from parataxis) govern our work (272). These are points that also comprise much of *Rereading the Sophists*. These points find sympathizers in not just feminist histories of rhetoric but, I think, in neosophistic views on history.

The next major move I wish to make, from feminist to sophistic histories, is one of emphasis, to a large extent, for both groups of scholars end up doing similar kinds of historiographical work: both actively seek out new grounds on which to base additions or

revisions to dominant, politically owned narratives of history. Many feminist retellings do so from the decided vantage point of gender, of historical silences and exclusions stemming from various societies' treatment of women. One consequence of this is that many feminist histories risk implying that a two-way narrative (male or female) provides us with a more just or otherwise satisfactory story of how rhetoric, or for that matter composition, has gone. To my thinking, neosophistic histories lay out and deconstruct narrative possibilities much more thoroughly, never endorsing too greatly or for too long any one (or two) versions of history or uses of historical evidence.

#### Neosophistics' Histories/Hysterics of Rhetoric and of Composition,

To scholars well acquainted with the Edward Schiappa-Victor J. Vitanza debate about the history of the sophists, it might seem odd that I begin a section on neosophism with Schiappa. But one thing Schiappa does admirably (and aggravatingly) is place carefully described boundaries around categories of theorists. He defines "*neo-sophistic rhetorical theory and criticism*" as "efforts to draw on sophistic thinking in order to contribute to *contemporary* theory and practice," and he places the work of Michael C. Leff and Susan Jarratt in this category (Schiappa 195). His italicized words accentuate the difference he sees between this work and the work of historical reconstructionists, who traffic in facts (which, for him, seem to have little rhetoricity) and historical evidence (some of which he treats as beyond dispute) in an effort to determine as thoroughly as possible how past peoples have perceived the world around them. I see no need for the italics, for a great divide between neosophistic rhetorical theory and historical

reconstruction even as I acknowledge said differences between them. For me, and certainly for Jarratt, Vitanza, and Bruce McComiskey, we cannot engage in one in a way that neatly banishes the other.

A point that warrants attention here is that often binaries pitting historical reconstruction against neosophistic rhetorical theory are presented alongside binaries pitting historical reconstruction against rational reconstruction. However, neosophistic rhetorical theory is not synonymous with rational reconstruction (though the two overlap). Rational reconstruction is largely a one-way street, the use of present-day understandings to make (new) sense of the past. Neosophistic rhetorical theory, on the other hand, is more specific, necessarily inspired by early sophistic teachings, and this theoretical approach also contains an extra step. In short, it “concerns the appropriation of certain sophistic doctrines insofar as they contribute solutions to contemporary problems” (McComiskey, “Neo-Sophistic Rhetorical,” 17; see also McComiskey, *Gorgias*). So neosophistic rhetorical theory 1) starts from the modern-day rhetor’s perspective; 2) allows the rhetor to take insights gained, or at least inspired by, early sophistic teachings (material from the past); and 3) encourages the rhetor to see how that information informs modern-day practices. It is not just the present making sense of the past (rational reconstruction), but the present using aspects of the past to understand the present anew. Jarratt, for instance, is neosophistic in orientation, for she writes from a feminist standpoint about the sophists, and in doing so, she applies sophistic tenets to the act of history writing itself. Also, Vitanza, aligning himself with postmodern theorists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, writes about the sophists and historiography in a manner inspired

by sophistic teachings about language and meaning; he does so to question the need for anything resembling hard evidence in modern-day scholars' depictions of the past. Once the distinction between rational reconstruction and neosophistic rhetorical theory is understood, we may use Schiappa's basic definition of neosophistic rhetorical theory and treat it as *one* alternative to historical reconstruction.

To elaborate on Schiappa's definition, specifically on his mention of "*contemporary* theory and practice," I would point out that neosophistic rhetoric utilizes sophistic emphases on *nomos*, *kairos*, and *doxa* in particular; exhibits ties to antifoundational rhetoric (see Bizzell, "Foundationalism"); bears in mind the slipperiness and socially constructed nature of language (Hassett 373); and, above all, refuses to settle on any definitive historical (or other) narrative that attempts to explain the story's loose ends in a manner acceptable to all. These rhetors, entailing Susan Jarratt and Victor J. Vitanza, unpack many of the linguistically bound ideological assumptions underlying work such as Cheryl Glenn's and Andrea Lunsford's. In a general sense, the neosophistic insistence on a discourse-based reality aligns with Kenneth Burke's vision of discourse as a (the?) determiner of perception (Hassett). More specifically, though, neosophistic rhetors make vivid what happens to language, history, and "reality" when ever-shifting social and political contexts are understood as the forces driving history writing. Its political angle is emphasized by Ken Lindblom, who describes neosophism in a way that Susan Jarratt, Michael Leff, and Sharon Crowley endorse: "All three [authors] describe the project of neosophism as one that consistently disrupts the seemingly coherent, generalizes the seemingly specialized, or politicizes the seemingly nonpolitical" (98).



This inclination to disrupt the normative is a political act, I agree. Like critical rhetoric, neosophistic rhetoric implies a recognition of rhetoric as socially constructed and as political (101). Notably, this political commitment is lacking in R.V. Young's depiction of Stanley Fish as a "contemporary sophist" (243), not a neosophist, and someone who "maintains that all of our knowledge and all our beliefs are produced by our interaction with the social circumstances of which we are a part, and which also produces us as participants in an endless game of rhetorical one-upmanship" (246). Take away the political commitment and we are left with mere play, an "endless" rhetorical "game," Young indicates.

Instead of dwelling on what Young or Hassett or Lindblom says *about* neosophism, I wish to give a fuller treatment to Victor J. Vitanza because I read him as a practicing neosophist in terms of content and style (not that the two are opposites), and he illustrates what neosophism can contribute to historiography. Even though he writes about historiography and the history of rhetoric rather than the history of composition, he illustrates a textual orientation that informs my historiographical choices and that bears hallmarks of postmodern theorizing on language. In *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*, he challenges historiographies that privilege forms of logic controlled by philosophy, that is, thinking prized by Plato and his successors. Specifically, Vitanza focuses on the question of the sophists—the question posed by Edward Schiappa in "Sophistic Rhetoric: Oasis or Mirage?" concerning how historians can know the sophists when today we have so few of the sophists' written records. For Vitanza, this historiographical question itself is problematic because it presupposes an

ontology by which scholars must attempt to pin down one correct answer. He faults Schiappa for following “the same divisive steps” as Plato and Aristotle, “weaving and throwing the same net, decid[ing] what would be acceptable (‘oasis’) or not acceptable (‘mirage’) for inclusion in *The Republic of The History of Rhetoric*” (124). Noteworthy here is Vitzanza’s capitalization of “the history of rhetoric” as well as his use of “inclusion” and “acceptable.” By highlighting the exclusionary effect of affirming any one history, “The” history of anything, and by framing this effect in terms of etiquette, or what a circle of scholars deems acceptable and by implication unacceptable, he encourages us to think about what is lost by attempts to achieve closure regarding any historical question or issue.

Rather than head down this road, Vitanza prefers to keep the question of the sophists open and to address, but not answer, the question through unwaveringly complicated ways. Citing Roland Barthes, Vitanza explains, “I am forever looking for an infinite play of differences without any exclusion” (66). In this space of non-closure, he—and we, his readers—can rhetoricize the subject at hand (e.g., history, the sophists) by analyzing how a rhetor’s (or a history writer’s) language and purpose create the subject, and he/we can refuse to adjust to the limited, fixed role that more modernist historians have shaped for this subject.

More broadly, however, Vitanza takes issue with any history of rhetoric that suggests a particular genealogy of ideas and practices because such histories necessarily exclude, saying no to any group of people not featured within its pages. As he explains, “the history [of rhetoric] has been a representation of how rhetors have attempted to

define, to obtain, and to keep power. And at the expense of Others” (326). More suitable for Vitanza is “to see, in rewriting histories of rhetoric, how to include what, heretofore, has been excluded or purged” (67). Here he advocates “non-homogenizable radical heterogeneities/multiplicities. Or advocating, evoking, provoking, a perpetual drifting toward a Third (forever already destabilizing) Sophistic” (338). Citing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983), Vitanza observes that it is repression that leads to notions of fixed subjectivity in the first place (124). Thus, instead of upholding intellectual traditions that privilege, say, a “Platonic-Aristotelian-Kantian search for commonalities, [he] search[es] for particularities so as to recall what has been excluded” (124). This strategy seems not just to seek one negated group or side, a strategy that John Muckelbauer treats as a shortcoming of much postmodern theorizing (*The Future*), but it multiplies the “sides” involved in any given historical representation. So the question of whom rhetoric excludes becomes an occasion for generating a long (endless?) list of excluded people, groups, and points of view. In hyperbolic fashion, Vitanza describes this “antidote” as “noise, noise, noise” (124), or, in other section of his book, as saying, “yes, yes, yes” (68). His is a “tactic of cacophony and epigraphy” (124), one that prioritizes tmesis and pastiche in an effort to say “yes” and “more” to decisions about which perspectives to include, whose epistemologies to value in histories of rhetoric.

Presumably, Vitanza would exclude no one, no possibility, concerning who counts (or might count) as a rhetor, a sophist, and so on, and I think this openness, while perhaps not productive in the sense of providing convenient answers and categories,

should influence histories of composition in addition to histories of rhetoric. Historians of composition may indeed make decisions about which archived texts to prize, even which archives to visit; we may put boundaries around what counts for us as a legitimate artifact of composition pedagogy. However, Vitanza reminds us to make those decisions, those boundaries, tentative and flexible. He reminds us and shows us what it might mean to rhetoricize the parameters or criteria we use to understand and judge texts—to see these parameters or criteria as constructs that give us *some* answers (answers that certain ones of us find comfortable or “appropriate” for whatever reason, answers that suit some of our purposes) at the expense of *many more possible* answers. Heretofore, we have not displayed this rhetorical consciousness throughout our history writing. As shown in the previous chapter, past histories of composition have paid lip service to its importance, but have more commonly fallen back on historiographies that prioritize closure over openness, (definite-seeming) answers over questions, exclusion over inclusion.

Vitanza’s preferred historiography is Third Sophistic, which, according to him, “radically differs from the previous two [sophistic periods]” (238) in that it “allows for the kinds of aesthetic-pagan-political ‘dispersal’ that I am after” (239). My reading of this approach makes it akin to neosophistic rhetoric in that Third Sophistic rhetoric disrupts or argues against the development of logic and philosophy from Aristotle to the present, and it finds other, endlessly new means of doing so—not just arguing from pathos instead of logos, for instance, but “dispersing” argumentative possibilities by developing and using methods not previously considered acceptable for argument, for example, using a metaphor instead of a rebuttal argument or relying on semantic play in place of inductive

or deductive reasoning. A recurring move that Vitanza makes throughout much of his book is to reference histories of rhetoric and “hysteries of rhetoric,” often while emphasizing the role of desire in rhetorical acts. He also emphasizes schisms, the pagus, and drifting, all as dynamic tropes and/or techniques for opening up ideas. And here and elsewhere, he emphasizes *dissoi paralogoi*, a phrase derived from the classical sophistic text *dissoi logoi* (opposing arguments), anonymously authored, and from Jean-Francois Lyotard’s concept of *paralogy*. For Vitzanza, the “para-” prefix attached to this logic “allows for and embraces infinite regress” in how histories get told (“Some Rudiments” 237). He sees this approach as enabling “liberation from the hierarchically arranged prevailing tragic truth” of other histories (ibid). Placing this Third Sophistic approach in a period across the nineteenth century, the twentieth century, and into the present, he lets it include “Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Helene Cixous, Guyatri Spivak, and others” (*Negation* 238). This ending “and others” I find especially significant because it leaves this list of representative Third Sophistic rhetors open to amendments.

When applied to history, Vitanza calls this approach “a view that is *poststructuralist* and *postmodern* in that it acknowledges an *incredulity toward covering-law models or grand (causal) narratives of history (writing)*” (*Negation* 238, my emphasis). Here Vitanza’s words resonate with me; I hear them paralleling my own attempt to complicate the “grand [...] narrative of history,” at least in regard to composition. My approach, too, is postmodern insofar as it recoils from any attempt to endorse a definitive-seeming narrative of composition history, instead favoring a

historiography that foregrounds individual and collective writers' possible purposes as well as their writings' effects. My approach embraces Vitanza's underlying dissatisfaction with modernist historiographies even if I do not go so far as to cry, "Noise, noise, noise," or use a "tactic of cacophony" as my rhetorical strategy of choice.

One point I would like to discuss further, because it may strike some as a weakness of my project's theoretical underpinnings, is that Vitanza's *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* pertains most directly to histories of rhetoric rather than to histories of composition. Skeptical readers of my project might argue that theoretical pieces that focus on histories of rhetoric should not be applied to different sorts of histories (e.g., of composition), and I would agree if one attempted to treat composition and rhetoric as mutually exclusive concepts, one of them discussed only after the other has been covered. However, again, I wish to conceive of rhetoric as ubiquitous in studies of composition, as the background of a context-specific application of knowledge about persuasion and communication. Occasionally in my project, I will include references to rhetoric, defined classically as the art of persuasion. More often, though, I will focus on composition, by which I mean a particular written application of rhetoric in an institutional context.

At this point, Vitanza might appear the lone practicing neosophist whose work has influenced the direction I seek to take my project, but I would argue that many other scholars, if understood in a certain light, fall into this category. As a whole, other scholars tend not to perform their neosophistic appreciation as Vitanza does, yet like Jarratt, they still wish to reclaim from the Greek sophists facets of rhetoric that may be socially and

politically useful for modern-day needs. One such scholar is John Poulakos, who, in his essay “Terms for Sophistical Rhetoric,” offers what I believe are the most helpful insights into sophistic histories (note: not histories of the sophists). Poulakos offers a brief history of sophistic rhetoric, but his framing of this history is what interests me, for his carefully explained focus and parameters give me a model for how to undertake a sophistic history. Admitting that to write a history of the sophists he must work with fragments rather than complete texts, he concentrates on just three key concepts—*kairos*, play, and possibility<sup>7</sup>—around which he sketches a picture of sophistic rhetoric. Those terms appear even in the few fragments of first sophistic texts that we have today, and the terms underlie that which distinguishes sophistic rhetoric from philosophy and from Aristotelian rhetoric. *Kairos*, play, and possibility also conflict, or “explode” one another, and through an analysis of their interactions Poulakos creates “a preliminary characterization of the rhetoric of the Sophists” (73).

Aside from Susan Jarratt, other scholars whom I will mention here do not necessarily fit the neosophistic label that Schiappa applies to Poulakos, yet they each indicate a commitment to viewing history writing as imbued with ideology, and they are therefore useful as to position as neosophistic allies. In this group I would place John Schilb, (the later) James Berlin, and Thomas Miller. For these scholars, histories are rhetorical, and social groups are intimately connected with textual artifacts. That is, these scholars treat archival texts as having emerged from writers with certain interests and affiliations at local, state, or national levels, so they see texts as always connected to

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<sup>7</sup> Poulakos uses the Greek terms for these concepts: *kairos*, *paignion* (play), and *dynaton* (possibility) (56).

political issues. Schilb, Thomas Miller, and Berlin in particular focus on the need for historians to foreground past ideological matrices that helped produce textual artifacts. In “The History of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of History,” first published in 1986 in Pre/Text, Schilb faults many in Rhetoric and Composition for remaining ignorant of the rhetoricity of histories. To remedy this, Schilb urges Rhetoric and Composition scholars who study history to scrutinize our methods and our assumptions about language, and in turn to concentrate more on sociopolitical aspects of history. Thomas Miller, too, focuses on the sociopolitical in “Reinventing Rhetorical Traditions,” arguing for histories of rhetoric that focus on social groups and contexts, or civic affairs, rather than on isolated individuals.<sup>8</sup> Among the kinds of histories that Miller would like to see more frequently are local histories, whose connections to civic engagement put him in mind of Paulo Freire’s work (Thomas Miller 37). He writes, insightfully, “The rhetorical tradition is a fiction that has outlasted its usefulness because we need to be using history to pursue deeper inquiries into the dialectical relationship of intellectual and social change” (37). Under Schilb and Thomas Miller, history becomes histories (a point that Berlin will articulate more fully), and intellectual discussions deserve attention only as they pertain to social and political conditions.

Berlin might seem a strange, even contradictory, choice of a scholar to present as an ally of neosophistic rhetoric because in the previous chapter I criticized his two books, *Writing Instruction in the Nineteen-Century American Colleges* and *Rhetoric and Reality*,

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<sup>8</sup> See Stephen Parks’ book *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (2000) for an example of a history that focuses on a large and ever-changing social and political group in Rhetoric and Composition, rather than on a few key individuals.



for perpetuating a dominant narrative of composition's past. But in his later writing, and occasionally in *Rhetoric and Reality*, he expresses his awareness that histories are not absolute—he says, for instance, “I do not claim to be definitive” (*Rhetoric* 18). So although I criticize Berlin for sticking by Kitzhaber's historical choices and thereby inching Kitzhaber's narrative toward master narrative status, I appreciate Berlin's sentiments, usually expressed in his other works, about the ideological saturation of rhetorical practices. Put simply, I think he commits the errors he warns us about, but I appreciate the warnings just the same. In his essay, “Revisionary History: The Dialectical Method,” he argues that all histories are interested, never neutral (147). More specifically, he argues that all histories posit that something exists, that something is good, and that something is possible (147). In other words, all histories involve an ontological basis, promote a system of morality, and, to echo John Poulakos' adoption of sophistic terms, argue for a certain degree of *dynaton* (possibility). Berlin defends partial histories, then, and goes (some of) the way of Vitanza by arguing for a “proliferation of positions” (148) that will combat a “tyranny” of feigned absoluteness regarding how history gets understood (150). For Berlin, the limited accuracy and reliability of historical documents does not mean that scholars of rhetoric and history should forego attempts to construct new meaning from historical documents. Rather, he posits that historians should make many, even conflicting, meanings from historical texts and discuss how and why those differing means arose (151).

To my thinking, Schilb, Thomas Miller, and Berlin help prepare me for Susan Jarratt's argument in “Towards a Sophistic Historiography.” What Jarratt does that

renders her a neosophist as opposed to a mere ally of neosophism is frame her historiography overtly and consistently with sophistic rhetoric as a way to speak to present-day concerns. To sidestep cause-effect organizational patterns and seemingly complete narratives of historical progress, she studies texts across modern-day disciplines, dwells on implications of knowledge gaps, and stresses ways that textual production and reception get bound up in social conventions that decide, at any given moment, which persuasive strategies a society finds convincing and which persuasive goals a society deems valuable (“Towards”). I want to reiterate that she urges scholars to tolerate contradictions across historical narratives, acknowledge their political interests, and prioritize probability and multiple narratives over a sense of historical certainty and singularity—even if one narrative has long been accepted as reliable (“Towards” 272).

In *Rereading the Sophists*, Jarratt revises past understandings of ancient Greek philosophers versus rhetoricians in defense of rhetorical notions that many would champion today (e.g., social activism). This work articulates more fully a theoretical framework that the later Berlin and others would appear to endorse, a framework from which I too might work. In sum, it would

- Allow and embrace insights gained from studying political involvements surrounding historical texts alongside political involvements of present-day rhetoricians/historians
- Look at and compare texts that may come from different academic disciplines
- Allow and study apparent historical inconsistencies rather than bringing closure to them

- Explore multiple possible narratives rather than adopt one unifying dominant narrative
- View text-based knowledge as rhetorical, not absolute, knowledge

Doubtlessly, there is more to a Jarratt-informed approach to sophistic historiography, but these themes appear most salient and most helpful to my project: a local history that relies on fragments of historical evidence and whose subject was and is ensconced by local and state politics.

Most of the scholars whose work I review above study rhetoric, and it is in the realm of rhetoric, acknowledged as such, where one finds most discussions about what and how terms like *sophism*, *neosophism*, and *Third Sophistic* mean. Because I am focusing on composition, I would like to recognize a historian of composition whose analytic approach aligns with my own: Susan Miller. In *Assuming the Positions*, she utilizes a historiography that I think most directly informs my work and that I consider compatible with Vitanza's move away from a tyrannical single notion of history, even though Miller refrains from stylistic play in the tradition of Vitanza's work (see also Vitanza's "Three Countertheses"). Key aspects of her approach include the following:

- It focuses on a set of archived texts located at one site (the Virginia Historical Society's commonplace book collection).
- It resists the impulse to rank or otherwise judge the worth of these texts (Miller 5).
- It acknowledges that these texts were informed by cultural traditions (5).
- It "attempts [...] to display the texts we do not see" (8) in an effort to reclaim personal writing from obscurity.

- It is interdisciplinary in terms of the kinds of texts it considers (8).
- It views these texts as “discursive practices, not regional history” (9).

Her attention to reclaiming kinds of writing that reflect traditions of past Virginia women and to foregrounding what past archivists have chosen to include and not include in special collections appeals to me because it reminds me of the extent to which current historians traffic in information that exists where and as it does because of past power differentials. Very helpfully, she reads into absences in records as well as into the locations and types of collections before her. She treats textual remains not as objective windows on the past that lie in this or that space without reason but as artifacts whose very condition, location, and even continued existence result from past and present rhetorical situations, situations in which ideas of normal, public, important, and masculine writing flourish(ed). Miller does not call herself a neosophist, and she does not link her work to characteristics associated with the classical sophists; yet her poststructural sensibilities render her work a far cry from modernist-leaning histories of composition.

One central difference between Miller’s historiography and mine is that she says her choices “should not foretell a fragmented description of miscellaneous artifacts” (9). I, however, acknowledge up front that my project entails an analysis of texts that may be called miscellaneous, sundry snippets of perspectives that past OU archivists and instructors have, for their multifarious reasons, deemed worthy of preserving. The texts I examine are united by my judgment of their relevance to how composition was taught or treated at OU, particularly from 1825-1950. By “taught or treated,” I mean any sign of

how past instructors and administrators conceived of or taught courses in writing, how past instructors or administrators themselves engaged in writing for campus-related purposes, and how past students tried to meet institutional expectations about writing. Far from having a full commonplace book collection (or the like) at my disposal, I resort to textual artifacts, great or small, complete or incomplete, preserved in OU's archives.

### Rhetorics of Place and Place-Based Education

While my historiography is informed by the groups mentioned above, most directly by feminist and neosophistic historians, my geographic focus is not—or not as greatly. Thus, I should acknowledge two transdisciplinary areas of scholarship that overlap with the areas already reviewed: that of rhetorics of place and that of place-based education, both of which I see as indebted to a long tradition of place-conscious writing. These two areas of scholarship encompass work that stems from multiple disciplines using multiple methods (for modernists) or using multiple orientations (for postmodernists) to analyze how place pertains to writing. They involve personal essays, empirical research, and overtly postmodern theoretical treatments of place and writing. Collectively, this body of work provides a general backdrop for my work in composition history: it does not affect my research choices directly, but it shows that my interest in place is not new to research and theorizing about writing or to rhetorics about, and rhetorics of, place.

These categories, rhetorics about place and rhetorics of place, are revisions of categories used by Thomas J. St. Antoine in an analysis of new urbanism. St. Antoine's

original categories are rhetorics about *space* and rhetorics of *space*. Why the revision? I find no trans-disciplinary consensus on what it means to say *place* instead of *space*, so in my project I lean toward *place* as a way of drawing attention to the presence of societal features (e.g., language, billboards, buildings, customs) that imbue any physical spot with meaning, much in the way that norms established or enacted in certain locations lead us to link the physicality of that area with certain ideas about appropriateness or inappropriateness. By references to *space*, then, I mean close analyses of areas in nature. My statement that I “lean toward” place over space is significant because it suggests that, like modernism and postmodernism, place and space exist on a continuum; natural areas do not disappear or prove insignificant if I analyze a brochure in which experts or public relations professionals discuss them. Likewise, consideration of the mountainous terrain surrounding the social community of Athens, Ohio, still matters even in the case of an analysis of symbolic systems (texts) about composition pertaining to a social institution (OU); each side, physical and social, affects the other.

St. Antoine deals with the same issue but by using what I think are more cumbersome phrasal distinctions. For him, rhetorics of *space* entail analyses of messages sent by the physicality of places themselves; however, he allows this category to apply to analyses of spaces existing in nature as well as to spaces constructed by humans.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, he treats rhetorics about *space* as analyses of messages created and sent by existing symbolic texts that seek to describe or otherwise represent physical places (130).

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<sup>9</sup> I realize that by this point, even spaces that exist in nature do so because of human preservation or restoration. Hence, today’s “natural” places are as much products of human intentions as highly developed cityscapes. When, above, I refer to “spaces existing in nature,” I mean spaces that humans have made to seem the province of nature.

For example, a semiotic reading of a house itself would fall under the category of rhetorics of space, while an analysis of real estate pamphlets for the same house would count as rhetoric about space. Similar to my argument above that, as I define them, space and place exist on a continuum, St. Antoine argues that attention should be given to each of his categories, to rhetorics of space and to rhetorics about space. Both of us appear to agree that despite the emphasis we take, we cannot neglect the physical or the social dimensions of any given area.

My place-related terminology explained, I wish to note some of the many, very differently configured contributions to scholarships on writing and place. Coming from an essayistic tradition, Kentuckian Wendell Berry has long used personal experiences to argue for better ways of conserving land for local and agricultural purposes. Putting “experience ahead of ‘proof,’” he claims in *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (1977) that “the ordinary visibility of the deterioration of rural life ought to take precedence over statistics and expert testimony” (160), a stance leading him to couch his arguments in detailed observations of land around his home, agricultural experiences he has had. These personal experiences he draws from as he reviews historical land-use trends in America, all to argue for a less exploitative approach to our relationship to nature. This tradition of personal place-based writing extends to Eric Zencey’s famous essay “The Rootless Professors,” in which Zencey critiques academics specifically for not connecting their thinking to changes in their surrounding communities and landscapes, as well as to the other essays in the 1996 collection *Rooted in the Land*. It appears again with respect to academics in the 2007 collection *Placing the Academy*:

*Essays on Landscape, Work, and Identity*, which features reflective pieces by academics arguing for a reconceptualization of academic work as thinking, writing, and action that potentially enriches and is in turn enriched by local environments. Repeatedly, such writers articulate losses and gains from envisioning a broader, more environmentally conscious scope for intellectual work.

The place-conscious essayistic tradition also extends to scholars with close ties to the composition class, either by virtue of their professional affiliations or by Rhetoric and Composition's appropriation of their work.<sup>10</sup> I would include Gloria Anzaldua and Mike Rose in this category, not to mention critical pedagogy scholars who use personal narratives to critique education systems (e.g., Peter McLaren in *Life in Schools*). In her often-taught book *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldua writes in English and Spanish to analyze complexities surrounding writing, culture, and identity for south Texans who have strong ethnic and linguistic ties to parts of Mexico and parts of the United States. Here she tells her story and allows the telling itself to be influenced overtly by local norms. In Mike Rose's extensive work on social factors on education, including his books *Lives on the Boundary* and *Possible Lives*, he weaves together his and other students' educational narratives to paint a picture of an American educational system that stands to benefit from attending to challenges and issues prevalent in different cities and areas. Drawing from his own Los Angeles upbringing in *Lives on the Boundary* and from

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<sup>10</sup> A "place-conscious essayistic tradition" might be said to encompass much of the Western essayistic tradition itself, including the creative work of Michel de Montaigne and Ralph Waldo Emerson, not to mention regionalist writing published in America after the Civil War. For my purposes, I wish to trace a scholarly, not just a creative, tradition, hence my lack of attention to the Western essayistic tradition in its broader sense.



observations on his travels to different parts of America in *Possible Lives*, he shows that place matters in education whether at the primary, secondary, or college level, that to speak of a school or a university is to think about access and achievement for non-generalizeable groups of students.

Figures like Rose and McLaren traverse the boundaries of education and Rhetoric and Composition. But a place-based emphasis thrives not just for those who fall back on an essayistic tradition or who identify as rhetors or compositionist, but also for those in education scholarship. This body of work has ties to college (and other) composition classes, National Writing Project sites, and other areas designated for writing. In a theoretical vein, primary and secondary education scholar Paul Theobald faults Enlightenment-era thinking from Rene Descartes and others for instilling in Western societies a preference for individual over communal thinking and action. Wondering what might be different if such thinking had been refuted by earlier notions of “individuals as beings dependant on many kinds of relations” (8), he supports the concept of *intradependence* to account for a more socially and environmentally aware educational experience. *Intradependence*, as he explains it, means “to exist by virtue of necessary relations *within a place*,” and for him this “place” includes nature (7, his emphasis). This contrasts with interdependence, which he sees as too readily excluding nature (7). The concept is one that compositionist Robert Brooke applies to his Nebraska National Writing Project Site (*Rural Voices*) and one that relates to many educational scholars who apply place-based concerns to sites across various regions (Gruenewald and Smith). In an applied vein, education scholarship that advances place-based initiatives is too vast to

detail here, entailing everything from David Sobel's *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years* to David J. Murrasse's *Beyond the Campus: How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships with Their Communities*. This is not to say that all place-based education scholarship rests on the exact same premises—David Hutchinson applies educational philosophies as varied as disciplinary initiation, inquiry learning, and global education to place-based pedagogies (28-29)—but to suggest that its scope is quite wide and necessitates a context-centered approach rather than memorization and application of a set of rules.

In descriptive empirical research that lends itself to place-based issues in college-level composition—work that echoes essayistic expressions of place-based concerns and also lends itself to theorizing about rhetoric and place—Shirley Brice Heath, Katherine Kelleher Sohn, and Nedra Reynolds have written landmark books in which they examine ways that the discourse of particular writers (rural in Heath's and Sohn's cases, urban in Reynolds') is affected by specific social and physical environments. Often categorized as scholars of literacy, Heath and Sohn each examine small groups of writers and uncover themes particular to each group's literacy practices. Heath, in *Ways with Words* (1983), uses an ethnographic approach, immersing herself in two small communities in the southern Piedmont region of the Carolinas and using thick description to capture the uses of literacy evidence in these communities' children and adults. Sohn, in *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia* (2006), uses a case study approach to analyze the literacy practices of three central Appalachian women who overcome significant obstacles to enroll at, attend, and graduate from college. Finally, Reynolds, in *Geographies of Writing*

(2004), characterizes her work on space and place in terms of literacy practices; however, her attention to connections between geography and discourse, between the material and the symbolic worlds, and her reliance on scholarship from cultural geography give her work a more postmodern cast than the work of Heath and Sohn (7). For her research, Reynolds joined and interviewed members of a cultural geography class at the University of Leeds (UK), using mental mapping to see how the students and others experienced different parts of Leeds.

For my project, Sohn's work is particularly valuable, despite what some (e.g., Nedra Reynolds, Edward Soja, and Jonathan Mauk) might call its under-theorized attitude toward the concept of *place*. Postmodern-leaning theorists might find grounds to criticize Sohn for treating space and place (without distinguishing between the two) as the provinces of the external world that is seen, touched, heard, smelt, and tasted. I think implicitly Sohn's narrative makes a case for more complex ways of experiencing a given place, a case for ways that acquiring and using academic discourse can alter the spaces that one inhabits, but she refrains from entering a theoretical discussion about this.

However, an aspect of discourse that Sohn does dwell on, and which proves relevant to my project, is the stigma surrounding the term *Appalachian*, a descriptor that currently applies to the southeastern Ohio region. Also helpful is the fact that Sohn describes reading and writing practices of women who live a few hours south of Athens, Ohio, in Preston County, Kentucky. Although she does not focus entirely on literacy practices that are sanctioned by a college or university and her study is neither historical nor textual, she makes the helpful descriptive move of grounding her work in a

discussion of Appalachia as a culture distinguished from many surrounding cultures by its mining- and extraction-based economy; its “harsh,” judgmental forms of organized religion, which she argues reflects the harshness of surrounding living conditions (57); its steep mountainous terrain full of hollows in which people have built their homes; and its values that prioritize family connections and a sense of modesty. She suggests that this sense of the region’s physical and social constitution is particular, characterized by difficulties of developing sustained educational (and other) institutions therein. This explanation of material and ideological particularity reminds me that no study, not even of literacy or, in my case, of archived texts, should be severed from the material world (see also Reynolds, “Composition’s Imagined”). Additionally, the fact that Sohn couples her description of Preston County, Kentucky, with the triumphant literacy narratives of the three Appalachian women she knew and studied reminds me of the lack of understanding and appreciation that ensue from (often non-Appalachian-identifying) academics and others who treat regional terms like *Appalachia* and *Appalachian* as synonyms for illiteracy, failure, or the like (see Sohn 1-2). To accept the common notion that Appalachian is antithetical to academic or intellectual work is to buy into larger cultural narratives that exaggerate and ridicule Appalachian beliefs and practices.<sup>11</sup>

While, as an identity, the concept of Appalachian has emerged over time, eventually to be

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<sup>11</sup> See Mike Rose’s *The Mind at Work* (2004) for a compelling argument on the politics of the term *intellectual*. Rose argues that many kinds of blue-collar work demand high levels of cognitive activity but get undervalued in American society. Regarding the perpetuation of widespread anti-Appalachian narratives, I speak from personal experience as someone sensitive to Appalachian references, but Sohn also explores this point.

defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission, it is a label and an identity by which some modern-day OU students define themselves (Shepley).

Regarding the perhaps different task of theorizing connections between place and writing, or more broadly, place and rhetoric, scholars across disciplines have complicated early, seemingly stable ideas about what and how *place* and *space* mean. I have already mentioned differences between my and St. Antoine's conceptions of place versus space. Edward Soja opts for the term *space*, framing it as "political and strategic [...] It is a product literally filled with ideologies" (qtd. in McKerrrow, "Space" 272). Raymie McKerrrow builds on this concept, adopting a version of postmodern theorizing that he calls "affirmative postmodernism," which fuses modern and postmodern notions of subjectivity and which examines time and space as they "function as disciplinary regimens within regimes of truth" ("Space" 274). Summarizing Edward Soja's concepts of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace, McKerrrow moves from a modernist to a postmodernist sense of space, while affirming that each is relevant. *Firstspace* refers to conceptions of space that stem from the observable world, *Secondspace* to symbolic or mental representations of space (e.g., see Nedra Reynolds' use of mental mapping in *Geographies*), and *Thirdspace* to intersections of "dominance, subordination, and resistance" (Soja qtd. in McKerrrow, "Space," 281). Thirdspace constitutes connections between real (i.e., material) and imagined spaces, where ideas about space can be reinvented as one opposes and desires alternatives to oppressive or otherwise limiting discourses.

In Rhetoric and Composition, scholars have also used postmodern conceptions of space such as Soja's; however, they have been quick to tie their applications to specific material situations. For instance, drawing from Foucault, Soja, and cultural geographers, Nedra Reynolds discusses "the politics of space in composition" ("Composition's Imagined" 227). Not distinguishing between space and place, she notes that "spaces and places are socially produced through discourse and [that] these constructed spaces can deny their connections to material reality or mask material conditions" (ibid). She gives the example of going online to "experience" other places and cultures as one way that some groups, in this case web designers, can mask factors of time and distance that separate various places and social groups (234). Reynolds urges scholars to focus locally on the politics of space, identifying specific material signs of inequality (248). In a pedagogical turn, Jonathon Mauk applies Soja's notion of Thirdspace to a community college setting, arguing for writing and research assignments that get students to rethink perceived boundaries between the college campus (for many students, a site of oppression and powerlessness) and off-campus life. In his words,

Students need to conceive the space outside of the campus, outside the classroom, as academic. And the academic space needs to be conceived as transportable and mutable—as something that is tied to being, rather than to exclusive material surroundings. In other words, what it means to be a student and what it means to be in an academic space need to converge—rather literally. (213-214)

The resulting assignments need not be a radical departure from existing assignments, Mauk explains, as long as the assignments mesh campus and off-campus life in new ways. For instance, an assignment could get students to interview coworkers or family members about some feature of a text, and the student could discuss these claims in larger academic contexts (Mauk 215). Whatever the assignment chosen, Mauk makes clear that a re-conceptualization of the social and physical intersections of campus and non-campus life is in order, hence his use of Thirdspace.

In my project, I explore rarely discussed intersections of geography and composition through a focus on signs of composition's past at one institutional site. I argue that my selection of this site, Ohio University, a point of reference that hardly appears in well-known composition histories, makes a point about representation and power. Also, using historical texts, I show strategic ways that people have used this site's geographic location to determine what kind of educational environment OU should support, what kind of composition practices it should nurture. Concepts such as intradependence and Thirdspace are relevant to this undertaking because they keep the idea of *place* rhetorically rich as opposed to singularly and a-contextually understood. But before I can give the particulars of my project, I situate cultural geography in relation to my project and acknowledge historians who have already used geography or other means to complicate the dominant narrative of composition.

### A Conspicuous Absence: Cultural Geographers

Little discussed in my review of influences on my work are cultural geographers, a point that may seem defiant to the point of foolish. After all, what scholar sets out to use geographic specificity as a lynchpin for new local histories of composition without mapping and remapping that geographic location? I have a few ways to respond to this question. First, I think that my postmodern leanings negate the need to draw a complete social or physical map of OU and Athens, OH, as the meaning attached to being at OU or in Athens, OH, shifts and flows depending on the rhetorical occasion at hand. Second, and more importantly, I do not yet think I am at the point where I could map the general terrain of composition's past across different locales. Although I am immensely interested in the idea of place, from physical, psychological, and social angles, I think that my historical project is one that raises possibilities (to how else we might understand composition history) rather than a project that attempts to pin down the complete untold story of composition history. If examining composition history at one institutional site, not yet comparing in a systematic way my findings from that site with findings from other sites, I have little to go on to reconstruct a picture of composition's past across locales. I conceive of such mapping as a valuable future tool to historians of composition, and I would be honored to take part in it. I simply think that we, as a field, are not yet at that point.

In terms of perceptions of space, I find enormous potential in applying the mental mapping, or cognitive mapping, of Peter Gould and Rodney White to histories of composition (see *Mental Maps*). As I have noted earlier, Nedra Reynolds, a



compositionist who studies place, has begun to make use of such research models, with insightful results. In terms of space conceived as social and political, I think cultural geographic works like *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/ Resistance* (Sharp et al.) could enrich any new conception of composition's past. And countless other works from cultural geographers follow suit in their use of postmodern thinking to complicate any single and immediately observable ways of understanding our surroundings.

I see cultural geography, then, as a field whose fruitful alliance with Rhetoric and Composition, specifically with the subfield of composition history, cannot yet be realized—not, at any rate, until those of us in Rhetoric and Composition move beyond complicating existing notions (narratives, maps) of where composition occurs and has occurred.

#### Other Histories of Composition That Resist Kitzhaber's Dominant Narrative

My history of composition is not the first to break from what I called the dominant narrative of composition, which follows almost exclusively the gradual demise of rhetoric and rise of prescriptive composition from the perspective of often-cited educators at Harvard, Yale, and Michigan. Although for purpose of comparison, I will return to the subject of other histories in a later chapter, I wish to note here where these new histories focus, what angles they take, and, briefly, with what results. Perhaps most consonant with my project, historiographically, is a work that might initially seem an unlikely candidate: Lucille M. Schultz's *The Young Composers: Composition's*

*Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools* (1999). I say unlikely because she focuses not on composition at any one site and not on composition at the college or university level alone, but on seeds of college composition's beginnings in textbooks that were geared toward younger children. However, citing Michel Foucault and contributors to *Rhetoric Review*'s 1988 "Octalog: The Politics of Historiography," she acknowledges the "danger" of seeing any past, including composition's past, in a monolithic way (4). The influence of thinkers and the development of ideas comes about in many ways, she shows, citing composition manuals that have not yet received careful attention by Bob Connors' devotees in Rhetoric and Composition. Her focus happens to be on American education at the primary and secondary levels, but her argument about which texts we prize, which lines of influence we pursue, resonates for those of us interested in re-seeing composition history from a local angle.

The most extensive collections of local histories of composition that I have located include Donahue and Moon's *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition* and *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, edited by Catherine Hobbs. Both explore composition history inductively, from specific sites to larger comment about composition or even rhetoric. The Hobbs collection, appearing in 1995, comes in the wake of a flurry of feminist and neosophistic scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition that sought to expose and challenge a legacy of patriarchal and otherwise cultural control over writing. The Donahue and Moon collection was published more recently, in 2007, a fact that I find significant because it indicates that scholars have been somewhat reluctant to take up geographic location alone as a legitimate angle of vision

by which to re-see composition history. Contributors to both collections focus on how a specific institutional (and cultural) site of composition might give us room to challenge or complicate dominant historical narratives of composition. When that site is a higher education institution, then the institution's status is usually important to note; for instance, as noted in the previous chapter, narratives from schools with strong normal school histories appear in abundance here.<sup>12</sup>

Other local histories deserving of mention is Margaret M. Strain's "Local Histories, Rhetorical Negotiations: The Development of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition" (2000) and some of the essays in *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration*, edited by Barbara L'Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo (2004). Here again the works are recent, appearing after several years of feminist and neosophistic work (and in communication studies, after a decade of critical rhetoric). The contributors to *Historical Studies* focus on the history of writing program administration at selected institutional sites. One that I find particularly useful is Cheramie's history of the writing program at the historically black Xavier University in New Orleans, detailed in the previous chapter. Culturally and geographically, this is a perspective that is underrepresented in established histories of composition, so the fact that Cheramie relates a decades-long struggle on the part of Xavier's writing program administrators to overcome financial restraints, resource issues, and faculty retention problems tells a

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<sup>12</sup> I say "schools with strong normal school histories" as opposed to the shorter phrase "normal schools" as a way of treating the normal school category in an inclusive way. This wording includes those institutions that, for some part of their existence, prioritized teaching first and foremost, although they may not have adopted a teaching-oriented mission all along. Such is the case for Ohio University.

different kind of story than the ones (to some degree, *one*) told by Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors.

Margaret M. Strain tells a less dramatic story but one that is equally relevant to my history because she too emphasizes the social and political aspects of departmental and disciplinary histories at two research universities, the University of Louisville (UL) and The Ohio State University (OSU). Studying spoken and written evidence concerning forces that helped bring about the PhD programs in the English departments at these institutions, she reviews political factors that encouraged the PhD program at UL to focus on rhetoric and composition as opposed to literature, and to bear the name of a PhD program *in* rhetoric and composition. She notes that whereas the English Department at OSU governed much of how it shaped its PhD program in rhetoric and composition, at UL the state of Kentucky intervened in the English Department's identity formation because the state government saw each of its public universities as having a distinct mission (Strain 61). Aspects of Kentucky state politics affecting curricula and departmental identity resemble some features of Ohio politics and different Ohio institutions' department formations. Also, questions Strain proposes such as how local histories can shed light on early connections between English and Speech Communication (69) find fertile ground in a local history at OU. Although I fault her for demonstrating the naïvete that Sharon Crowley associates with essentialist histories (chiefly, Strain appears to present her sources as truth givers rather than as rhetorically situated and ideologically suspect perspectives), the scope and implications of Strain's project are nonetheless relevant to a history of composition at OU.

While not a local history in the sense of studying composition or an allied subject at a single college or university site, Mariolini Rizzi Salvatori, in *Pedagogy: Disturbing History, 1819-1929*, discusses composition and the other work of English departments, tracing a “disturbing” trend in American higher education institutions: the tendency among many, including faculty in newly formed departments of English, to treat literature and theory apart from pedagogy. Resembling John C. Brereton in her organization, Salvatori excerpts nineteenth- and early twentieth-century treatises from education philosophers that illustrate popular and professional attitudes toward pedagogy. Most helpful to my project is that she focuses largely on the development of normal schools, which sprang up circa 1840, and of normal departments within already established universities, a trend that began circa 1880, as was the case at Ohio University, she notes (Gordy cited in Salvatori 210). Her selection of primary and secondary documents reveals the path of pedagogy’s decline, which overlaps with the dominant narrative of rhetoric’s decline in American colleges and universities of the late nineteenth century; but buried in the same documents are suggestions that pedagogical theories had much to offer to English departments, that *pedagogy* did not (have to) simply equal methods or the transmission of someone else’s knowledge.

### Filling a “Gap,” or Furthering a Tradition

Heretical though this comment may seem, I do not much care for the dictum that contributions to a field of knowledge should “fill a gap” in the knowledge base because the idea of a gap suggests the existence of an absence of knowledge between two or more

areas that are “known,” established, not in need of further scrutiny. It also suggests a longing for one to be the first study a subject or area, to stake one’s claim as “the” scholar who brought a topic to the attention of his or her fellow scholars. In my view, histories of composition don’t work this way. I would rather adopt the metaphor of a palimpsest, a redrawing of influences on composition’s past. Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors have drawn similar pictures of composition’s past, using many of the same archives and influential figures. Hobbs, Jarratt, Vitanza, and Susan Miller have drawn different pictures of composition’s history by looking at other sites of composition activity or using other approaches to organize and analyze their findings. Furthermore, Schultz and Salvatori have redrawn the lines yet again, by opening composition’s history to other types of schools. And Donahue, Moon, Cheramie, and others (including, on some level, Hobbs and Susan Miller) have created local histories of how composition was treated by faculty, students, and sometimes administrators in culturally specific situations. In terms of composition history, I am extending the tradition of local histories of composition, though instead of offering a glimpse of composition’s uniqueness in one situation, I am offering a detailed look.

My use of a geographically aware angle reflects traditions of research, theorizing, and writing that stem from figures in the humanities and in the social sciences, people who approach their subject through a methodology, a theoretical alignment, a personal and creative bent, or some combination thereof. Finally, my neosophistic approach follows theorists who have articulated complexities of communication practices in ways that call attention to difference, power, and situatedness, and who have long argued for

frameworks for making useful, if provisional, sense of texts—what I would call a central mission of postmodern rhetorical theory. My geographic angle is not new to this theorizing, as Reynolds and Mauk make clear. However, the combination of my 1) geographic angle 2) applied to composition history 3) at a single underrepresented site 4) for an extended period of time 5) where I interpret my data via neosophistic rhetorical theory is, I would argue, new, a point of intersection between historiography, neosophistic theorizing, and considerable scholarly work on place. I would not call the resulting contribution an attempt to fill a gap but an attempt to redraw lines and make new connections.

#### An OU-Based History of Composition: Project and Analysis

My project uses fragments of evidence amassed at one institutional site to pose a counter-history of composition in America, that is, a history that complicates existing narratives of composition history. The texts that I analyze include an array of material housed in the OU libraries, primarily in the OU archives, material that reveals perspectives from OU students, faculty, and administrators, as well as perspectives from other Athens-area educators. These sources range from OU catalogs and records of administrators' meetings to students' scrapbooks and yearbooks (see chapter one for a fuller summary of my primary sources).

What interests me, as I examine texts from different sectors within the University, texts sometimes separated by many years, is how the fragments of composition evidence kept by the University lend themselves to a nontraditional narrative, one of starts and

stops, of highly prized student texts and conspicuous absences, times of great institutional prestige and times of near-nonexistence. A linear sense of time that echoes a modernist sense of history is relevant to my project; indeed, much of the archived evidence is searchable by dated volumes and boxes. But organizing my data chronologically is not the only possible option before me. I bear in mind McKerrow's observation that attempts to split modernism from postmodernism leave us with a "convenient fiction" even as I esteem postmodern, specifically neosophistic, tenets.

For my project, then, I study a collection of texts in order to sketch (not fully delineate) a set of historical narratives of composition within the framework of how social groups in a limited geographic space interacted with each other and condoned an activity that they called composition.<sup>13</sup> Regarding my project as it exists alongside other histories of composition, I critique recent histories of composition on the basis of where, geographically and culturally, they have looked for signs of how composition has been taught and treated in institutional contexts. I see composition as an applied outgrowth of rhetoric that past many historians have treated as the province of certain kinds of institutions in selected regions.

In general terms, my project might be called a social history of composition, for in taking a sophistic view of rhetoric, in concentrating on how groups of people in a specific location seem to have taught and used writing, I am studying the norms (social "laws")

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<sup>13</sup> I say "a set of historical narratives of composition," not "a new historical narrative [singular] of composition," because ultimately my project surfaces multiple narratives of how composition may have been taught, whom it may have involved, and what work it might have done in Athens, Ohio. Those narratives vary depending on the time period and also on the group under inspection, whether that group is students, faculty, administrators, or non-University townspeople. I return to this point in chapter five.



that governed these groups' assessment of what counted as good writing, what counted as sufficient writing for a composition class, what constituted writing that was worth preserving and making public, and so on.

An important evidentiary gap in this archived material is a dearth of OU student papers before 1950. So instead of focusing only on past student papers, I keep my attention on evidence from the array of sources noted above. In the tradition of John Poulakos's histories of the sophists, his use of a few terms to "help explain common features or tendencies of the available sophistical texts" (56), I focus my analysis on a few key concepts of importance to early twenty-first-century Rhetoric and Composition scholars. Or, to explain my approach using Sharon Crowley's terms, I favor a constructionist history over an essentialist one: I treat history not as knowable in a single way but with an approach that "foregrounds difference, variety, and change" (Crowley 16).<sup>14</sup> A constructionist approach is thus subversive in a way that reminds us of critical rhetoric, for it "dislodge[s] narratives that privilege the natural or the unchanging" (Crowley 16). Crowley adds that constructionist histories of rhetoric will, among other things, challenge "the academic narrative that pictures composition studies as having arisen from the sterility of current-traditionalism into its recent glorious multiplicity" (17).

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<sup>14</sup> Crowley's terms, *constructionist* and *essentialist*, do not align neatly with Rorty's categories of rational reconstruction and historical reconstruction. Despite the pluralistic potential of constructionist histories, Crowley associates them with what Rorty would call historical reconstruction (not with Rorty's rational reconstruction, as we might expect). In so doing, she makes historical reconstruction into a more open, hypothesis-generating endeavor than Rorty intended. Here I favor the tenuous quality of Crowley's constructionist histories, yet I do so while privileging a historiography that begins and ends with the historian's (my) perspective on the past.

The terms I use to anchor my OU-based history of composition are a four Cs of my own design: composition, communication, context (kairos), and community (evoking *doxa* and *nomos*). In chapter three, I focus on community and context. *Community* is my modern-day blending of *nomos*, or the social conventions surrounding how texts get used or come to be seen, and *doxa*, or what members of a community agree to count as wisdom, insight, or common sense. By starting my analysis with the concept of community, I look at the largely missing core—past students’ compositions—from the angle of how the students’ immediately surrounding societies seemed to have viewed their writing, and by extension, their education. Dovetailing off this analysis is my focus on *context*, or kairos: surrounding circumstances—political, historic, economic—that contribute to a message’s fittingness for an occasion. By continuing my analysis with this term, I extend my focus on community to consider broader social and political forces that may have affected the writing experiences of OU students between 1825 and 1950. Whether or not students in their OU composition classes wrote at an *opportune* time for persuasion to occur—to take a strict definition of kairos—is not my objective because I realize much of the composing that students did for classes occurred despite broader changes sweeping the social, political, and educational landscape. By focusing on the concept of context, I examine how the writing that OU students engaged in, or might have engaged in, corresponded or conflicted with larger sociopolitical factors that shaped learning at OU. These two concepts, community and context, anchor this chapter. I believe this emphasis also forces us to adopt a sophistic-inspired view on language

because the resulting perspective must first and foremost take into account conventions and broader cultural factors that facilitated or hindered certain kinds of language use.

In chapter four, I focus on composition and communication. *Composition* does not find a neat corollary in sophistic terms; however, my use of the term leans on the sophistic concept of *dynaton*, roughly translated as possibility. Initially, I use the term *composition* to designate *any writing done by college or university affiliates that is somehow sanctioned or judged by members of the college or university community*. But beyond this general definition I examine the term primarily as others seemed to have used it; I open my interpretation to whatever varied uses the term has assumed for students, faculty, administrators, and others who had a hand in determining the kind of writing that occurred or that was normalized at OU. With this rather broad conception of composition, I have some freedoms that would be denied me if I kept *composition* tied to the writing classroom. For instance, it allows me to treat former OU president Charles Super's 1924 history of OU as a primary rather than a secondary source, because it is the product of a writing act by a member of the OU community; and I believe that written late-nineteenth-century appeals from OU administrators to persuade state legislators to enhance OU's funding are writing acts that are also worthy of study under the umbrella term *composition* (as well as communication). Other seemingly secondary or non-pedagogical sources follow suit. This broad view of composition also allows discrepancies in the term's uses. In this sense I embrace the sophistic principle of *dissoi logoi*, or different words, more broadly understood as conflicting perspectives. This pluralistic use of composition prioritizes the individual viewpoints of variously situated

language users, thereby privileging perspective over external, objective truth (if such truth exists at all).

My focus on composition, variously defined, is complemented in the second half of chapter four by a turn toward the oral, delivery-focused realm of rhetoric, which is implied in my focus on communication. By *communication*, I mean rhetoric in a form that involves either the coexistence of oral and written forms of persuasion or the presence of oral forms alone (though the latter possibility tends to fall outside the boundaries of my study, focused as I am on textual historical evidence). For example, ceremonial commencement addresses as well as persuasive speech writing and presenting fit this category. Much as the early sophists were lauded or decried for relying on what Plato's Socrates counted as extra-logical methods to persuade audiences, I keep in sight some extra-logical aspects of the composing of early OU-affiliated writers by foregrounding aspects of their writing that involved speech and public performances. In taking this route I suggest that the sophists' broad perspective on the forms that rhetoric might take gives us understanding that we might use today to discern roles that we give to rhetoric, composition, or composition and rhetoric.

Above—and below—I use the words *may* and *might* regularly. This is quite deliberate, as I wish to highlight the tentativeness of any interpretation of historical data. While I intend my history to disrupt a single, coherent-seeming narrative of composition history that we have received from Albert Kitzhaber, I do not seek to displace that narrative with another narrative that proclaims itself as the new dominant story of composition's past, the way the story “really” went. This approach is in line with my

liberal take on *composition* applied in chapter four: I allow and embrace multiple possibilities rather than pursuing one idea about “the” way that “all” students wrote or viewed writing.

This particular terministic screen is, again, comprised of four central concepts: community, context, composition, and communication.<sup>15</sup> These concepts are inspired by views toward language held by certain ones of the early Greek sophists, and the concepts sprang to my mind as appropriate for this project soon after I began perusing available archived texts at OU that speak to composition’s past at this geographic and cultural location. What I did not have was what a historian of composition often wants: a core of past student texts. Below, I illustrate one way that histories of composition can be assembled without relying heavily on texts that students produced for their composition classes, that is, without looking for a single decipherable, “knowable” center from which to draw conclusions.

After analyzing my evidence in chapters three and four, I use chapter five to explain what I think my OU-based histories do and what they offer the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Then I compare my work to some of the methods and conclusions of other composition historians, particularly those historians who see their foci as localized in some way. Overall, I argue that the particular angle that I adopt for my histories gives historians of composition more to consider as we continue to re-see institutionally

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<sup>15</sup> I realize all terms are unstable, that their meanings and uses change according to historical and other contexts (J. Carr, S. Carr, and Schultz 163). So I use current meanings of these terms as well as possible meanings of such terms in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Athens, Ohio.

sanctioned writing practices. A summary of significant findings about composition history from this OU-based geographic and cultural angle is as follows:

- *An isolated community during a time of drastic population shifts encouraged a communal focus:* Attention to the local community, both OU and Athens, OH, was arguably an ongoing feature of composition history here. Students wrote and debated about the community, preserving in writing aspects of their community life that they or their superiors deemed important. Composition faculty actively participated in the community, and administrators found themselves continuously defending the worth of the community. Of course, this communal focus did not apply to everyone, but a salient trend of community involvement is noticeable in available historical texts.
- *Historical and geographic contexts influenced institutional PR:* OU administrators, faculty, and students used writing (and rhetoric more broadly) to give OU a particular cultural cast. Through their writing, they attempted to show groups from outside southeastern Ohio what kind of town Athens was, what kinds of importance or unimportance it had during large-scale social, economic, and political changes that brought people westward and northward throughout the nineteenth century. OU leaders' powers of persuasion, as well as their framing and reframing of an institutional mission, were connected to the geographic and/or political (in)significance of OU and Athens, OH.
- *Close ties between composition and oral rhetoric (what I refer to as communication) persisted longer than at many colleges and universities:*

Although oral rhetoric did give way to composition here as at many colleges and universities, connections between oral and written communication at OU seemed stronger and more interwoven into the University's traditions than was the case for colleges and universities elsewhere.

- *A temporary normal school emphasis gave composition at OU multiple disciplinary venues for use:* From the 1880s-1930s, an emphasis on teacher training at OU, an institution whose history predated the formation of most normal schools, allowed the University to keep pedagogy and composition allied in multiple ways.

These findings suggest that to look at composition history at a specific site is to look at composition culturally, by which I mean with an eye to the practices and beliefs of a group of people who share a similar history, in this case early white (and some black) settlers in the lower Northwest Territory and succeeding waves of settlers who populated this area throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, a cultural focus entails a concern for local and state politics, demographic and economic changes, and communal beliefs (doxa) surrounding purposes of higher education institutions. This cultural emphasis differentiates my proposed history from histories of composition and gender, histories of composition and class, and histories of composition and race, although gender, class, and race are of course connected to culture. A cultural emphasis also supports a local history, for without detailed, context-specific grounding, *culture* can seem a broad and elusive subject.

I am aware of Stephen R. Yarbrough's argument that a reliance on the concept of *culture* (and with it, language) as a barrier between self and reality creates its own set of rhetorical impasses. Yarbrough extends this argument to the notion of rhetoric as a whole, arguing that we would do well to drop the label *rhetoric* for "discourse studies," a form of study that emphasizes the *effects of* discourse (32). *Culture* is, I agree, a staid term that often gets treated as an essence and ultimately means whatever one wants it to mean, though I appreciate Katharine Kelleher Sohn's vivid illustration of this concept in her study.<sup>16</sup> Also, I agree with Yarbrough that there is a risk in relying on *culture* too heavily because our long-conditioned belief in cultural differences, whether or not we can verify and agree on the nature of those differences, can act as a stalemate in persuasive exchanges, prompting us to think in terms of adapting to another's culture or, more commonly, bringing our (belief in a) culture onto others. At such times, *culture* acts as a term that limits what can and cannot be analyzed further. However, just as Lester Faigley and Frederic Jameson assert that we cannot *not* use the label *postmodernism* given how entrenched it is in theoretical discussions, I would argue that we cannot *not* use the concept of culture given how much scholars like Sohn and Shirley Brice Heath have given us in the way of detailed pictures of the literacy practice of particular marginalized groups. Thus, I feel open to analyzing what I take to be effects that fragments of discourse in OU's composition history have had, but I retain the concept of culture, fickle as it is.

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<sup>16</sup> In a section called "The Place of Appalachia," Sohn takes time to describe what for her marked Preston County, Kentucky, the scene of her naturalistic study, as different from other places. She covers the local economy, educational scene, religious beliefs, the physicality of the land, "mountain values" (60), and gender.



Finally, supplementing my textual focus is a coda containing results from personal interviews, or in one case a written correspondence, with four retired OU faculty and administrators who worked at OU after 1950 but whose words about composition in the recent past nevertheless provide cultural commentary.<sup>17</sup> I want to supplement my archival data with these additional perspectives for a few reasons, all of which I connect to Victor Vitanza's call for renouncing exclusive schemas by which we understand the past. To use his own words, he advocates *denegating* "that which gives us the conditions of exclusion" (*Negation* 13). In my case, perspectives from some retired OU faculty and administrators give me clues about themes and practices that these insiders believe have characterized composition at OU at various times *after 1950*. In other words, these perspectives give me an opportunity to resist the tyranny of any single timeline, however necessary an originating timeline might seem to a historian who must explain his or her project's method and scope to readers. Second, these perspectives add to the *kinds* of sources that I let inform my local history. Instead of legitimizing only one kind of source, a printed source from a certain date that is housed in one specific location, a brief turn to insights gleaned from live subjects lets me democratize the ways through which I can present a history of composition at OU. Third, the partly *unstructured* nature of my interviews with former faculty members and administrators (during interviews, I did not work from a pre-written script of questions) allowed my subjects to make connections across ideas and sources as they saw fit. So my use of quasi-structured interviews with living subjects privileged the subjects' ways of drawing inferences and raising points. By

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<sup>17</sup> I received OU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this non-text-based component of my study.

stretching my timeline, democratizing the source types that I allow to contribute, and privileging the perspectival nature of history telling, I think these non-print sources give us some much needed “noise” by which we can resist conceiving of composition history through a single method and some “noise” by which we can resist unifying conclusions about “the” history of composition, even at this one location.

I do not intend the ensuing chapters to provide evidence of OU’s composition history in a way that builds toward a cumulative, coherent picture: a neat, new narrative which contrasts wholly from past narratives of composition’s past. Rather, by organizing my textual fragments around a few concepts that I think speak to composition practices at this site—the concepts of community, context, composition, and communication—and by then offering an oral basis from which to pluralize these perspectives on composition history at OU, I present alternative versions of composition’s past while keeping open possibilities for seeing place and history as rhetorically saturated.

### CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT AT OU

In this and the next chapter, I wish to construct a terministic screen through which to view composition's history at OU. Many screens are possible, but a cursory look at OU's archived texts about the institution's past has shown me that a primarily social perspective on composition history at this location would give me more opportunities to raise possible narratives than a sustained textual perspective would.<sup>18</sup> If past students' writing existed in abundance at OU, then a more traditional approach might be warranted: a close textual analysis followed by a coding of the text's formal features followed by an attempt to say, somewhat conclusively, that details about the texts add up to a certain overarching meaning about "the" history of composition at OU. But due to the scarcity of preserved student texts at this location, I consider larger cultural and situational conditions that allowed students' composition experiences to develop in certain ways. I believe it is fair to say that part of my neosophistic historiography stems from the necessity of working with incomplete archived collections, not unlike how a lack of preserved texts encouraged Cheryl Glenn and others to look for atypical sources for traces of past women rhetoricians.<sup>19</sup> But another part of my historiography reflects my decision to elevate rhetorical concepts that, according John Poulakos, Susan Jarratt, and others, were central to the classical Greek sophists. Because, given what we have

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<sup>18</sup> I borrow these categories from Lester Faigley's "Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective." I add the adjectives *primarily* before "social" and *sustained* before "textual" because I do not see these categories as mutually exclusive. Even if I have access only to one or two student compositions, I might examine the compositions' formal features within a history that spends more time considering social and political factors that undergirded students' composition experiences.

<sup>19</sup> I do not mean to imply that other archives are ever *complete* even if their holdings are more extensive than those of OU.

surmised from available textual fragments, the sophists saw truth as bound up in language-based conventions complete with the fallibility of human judgment, I see a history of composition that is grounded in sophistic concerns—a sophistic history of composition—as useful to the project of analyzing an institution and surrounding community’s texts.

As mentioned in chapter two, I am choosing to analyze available texts that I think pertain somehow to composition history at OU by centering my focus on the concepts of *community*, *context*, *composition*, and *communication*. This chapter elevates the first two of these concepts.

### Community

By *community* I mean a blending of the concepts of *nomos*, or social customs or norms, and *doxa*, or communal wisdom or opinion. Both concepts frame rhetoric within the rules set and adhered to by members who identify as belonging to a certain group. The concepts remind us that ways that language that is used to effect change works or doesn’t work depending on how well the speakers follow the rules of discussion established by their peers. Extending *nomos* and *doxa* to writing, not just speaking, and more specifically to university-sanctioned or -affiliated writing, which I call composition, I examine what historical writing associated with OU suggests about the social customs and communal opinions of the OU and Athens, Ohio, communities.

By tracing signs of norms and communal perspectives in texts pertaining to Athens and OU, I hope to sidestep the trap of treating *community* in a nostalgic,

sentimental manner.<sup>20</sup> Although my sources point to many instances when issues affecting OU students spilled over into the business of the town of Athens, and vice versa, the shared struggles of OU and of Athens, OH, do not make them one community in the sense that they were a place of harmonious relations (though some texts from some time periods may convey such an image). Rather, the struggles OU and Athens shared, the issues they faced together allow me to call them a community insofar as the two groups dealt with many of the same challenges at the same time and in roughly the same place. Signs of discord between Athens and OU appear in old and recent sources alike. My argument, from examining the documents available to me, is that this relationship, however tumultuous or agreeable it may have been, had some bearing on the writing that OU students produced during their time at the University. Their writing was, I think, intimately bound up in social conventions of the corresponding time and place.

Let me begin chronologically even though I will soon abandon an attempt to proceed through OU's history year by year, choosing instead to trace recurring communal issues and concerns as they appear across texts of different time periods. I start around 1825 because many histories of OU point to this time period as the beginning of OU's first extensive phase of public relations since it began enrolling students in 1809. Below, I review findings from documents that speak to OU's history around this time, not so much to analyze the documents' textual features and create schemata by which to categorize different kinds of writing, but to surface possibilities about the norms that

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<sup>20</sup> I'm far from the first person to do so. For an example in rhetoric and composition, see Joseph Harris's careful explanation of *community* in his book *A Teaching Subject*.

governed OU students, norms that perhaps stifled students' writing selves in some situations but smiled upon other kinds of language use.

A summary in the *Minutes and Resolutions of the President and Trustees of the Ohio University, 1824-1835* reveals that at the Board's first meeting of 1825, the trustees began with a commendation to OU president Robert Wilson for his "judicious and inflexible administration of discipline" on the students (III).<sup>21</sup> In other words, among the first orders of business for OU of 1825 was to provide a judgment regarding the control of student behavior in this place and time. This attempt to squelch student discord is a sign of events to come between faculty and students and between faculty and townspeople. At the same meeting, the trustees enacted a resolution to remove expelled OU students from town (IV). Apparently, such students were causing mischief around Athens. Already, this decision points to a university issue that may be treated as a town issue as well: disorderly OU students using the surrounding town as a base of operations. But it is a subsequent point at the meeting that I think says the most about OU's situation vis-à-vis the town (and the public generally): "the Board notes that there were two things *essential* to the prosperity of literary institutions, namely sufficient funds to defray the necessary expenses and *the confidence of the public*" (IV, my emphasis). The first of these issues I will take up later, in my section on "context"; the second speaks to town and gown relations that warranted the University's attention, and according to this document, the trustees felt that the town and gown issue was one that warranted a more immediate response, that "what is principally needed is the confidence of their fellow

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<sup>21</sup> The author of this summary is unnamed. The summary appears at the beginning of a typed transcript of the *Minutes*.

citizens” (IV). To examine the history of composition at OU in 1825, is, according to evidence provided in this document, to jump into a heated debate between University officials and others (students and members of the public) who took issue with the University’s strict code of conduct and perhaps its other biases.

The Board’s concern about the perceptions others had of OU may have stemmed from a denominational monopoly that Presbyterian administrators and faculty had at the University at this time, as evidenced in the Minutes. However, at a spring 1832 meeting, the Board of Trustees shows the problem to be more complex. It lists several reasons that the trustees believe do *not* cause OU’s low enrollment, followed by several reasons that they believe *are* at issue. Not at fault, for them, are educational costs, the curriculum, the instructors, the “unhealthiness of the place,” or the students’ morals (XVI). In sum, the trustees maintain that OU itself is not to blame. Reasons that they believe do lie at the heart of the university’s enrollment problem pertain to the economic standing of people living in this region: “[...] the moderate circumstances of the surrounding population. It is generally composed of recent settlers of indigent circumstances and therefore without the mean[s] of giving their sons a collegiate education” (XVII). Also, the trustees blamed unfavorable rumors that had spread about certain OU professors, about discord among the professors and about the trustees’ interest in profiting from OU’s land. Perhaps expectedly, the trustees dismissed the rumors as groundless, but they also took the aggressive step of establishing a committee to defend OU in the newspapers. From this, OU of the early 1830s appears to have been an institution preparing for a public relations battle with the surrounding populace, an institution whose engagement with competing

ideas and ways formed a physical and ideological setting in which OU students would be expected to write.

From these official *Minutes* alone, we see that student learning at OU was occurring amid concerns about an enrollment problem that University officials blamed on the surrounding citizens rather than on the university officials' preferred methods for handling student conduct. Furthermore, we see no sign, in this official document, of dissensus among university officials. Whether a lack of disagreement was or was not the case is impossible to determine, so I wish to dwell on the fact that *in this document*, the official record of what transpired at the Board of Trustees' first meeting of 1825, we see an administrative body that wanted to appear united in its defense of OU's codes of conduct and dealings with its students. The communal wisdom seems to have been that compromise with college students and poor people of the surrounding area was not desirable; the university's ways were right, and a promotional effort would convince everyone else of the university officials' correctness.

Twentieth-century historians who were either students or staff members at OU have also shown that at times the norms of OU and those of non-university-affiliated Athens, OH, citizens have not always existed in harmony, and I believe these sources to be more frank and vivid in their coverage of student-faculty discord. In her 1938 master's thesis on student customs and traditions at OU, Irene Elizabeth Smith observes that OU was not built to serve surrounding townships, leaving the university "detached from the needs of the townships" and possibly exacerbating the town and gown tensions that characterized much of the 1830s and 40s (26). By the 1830s, OU administrators were still



struggling to decrease the University's debt and encourage the public that OU was devoted to educating serious and moral students. Then OU President William McGuffey, author of the famous *McGuffey Eclectic Readers*, experienced what may have been the most intense discord to date between university members and the townspeople (though members of one group were often members of the other as well). According to historian Betty Hollow, part of the discord concerned who could use the north end of what is now called the College Green, a plot of land which at present is beautifully landscaped but which in the early 1800s served unofficially as a holding area for the townspeople's animals, especially horses and pigs. Around the north end of this plot, McGuffey planted trees and put up a fence, thereby challenging the social customs that had developed around how this land would be used (Hollow 40) and somewhat forcibly reminding the townspeople of OU's control over the area. Hollow notes that Athens citizens reacted angrily, going as far as to threaten McGuffey. These tensions between the OU president and the Athens citizens were heightened by at least two factors: crises in the 1830s and 40s regarding student rebellions and severe punishments from administrators, each perhaps inciting the other; and a continuing depletion of financial support for OU, causing lower salaries for faculty members (Hollow 45). Around the time that McGuffey resigned from his presidency, in 1844, he had been humiliated "even to the point of [being attacked] in the street with mud-balls" (Hollow 45) and several students had been expelled for misbehaving or had resigned in protest. Serving as the finale in this scene of community strife, OU closed in 1845, not to reopen for three years.

Former OU history professor Thomas Hoover, apparently basing his account on the official minutes of OU presidents and boards of trustees, elaborates on what he finds there, noting a theme in the trustees' determination to force students to pledge to a certain moral code and to report any of their peers who violated that code (59-61).<sup>22</sup> This code consisted of students promising to be "quiet" and orderly" and to give their respect to faculty (Hoover 60-61). Hoover notes occasions of students willfully breaking windows and performing other such disturbances, but, leaning on the official record, he is unable to describe most of the specifics of students' infractions against the moral code. This leads him to create a narrative of OU administrators' increasingly intolerant responses to students' behavior problems, intolerance that included the eventual regularity of expulsion used against students. He does, however, admit that "rioting among students" increased in the 1820s and 30s (44).

Compare the twentieth-century view of student-faculty relations to the picture painted by the *Minutes and Resolutions of the President and Trustees of the Ohio University, 1824-1835*, in which the students' exact offenses are depicted as too egregious to be recorded in the official record. In place of particularity time is spent justifying OU's general determination to enforce its moral codes for student behavior:

In regard to upright and orderly conduct, I regret to say, that at no former period have our youth manifested dispositions so ungovernable. Two of the present Senior Class, since the Examination in August last, have been

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<sup>22</sup> Hoover's book, *The History of Ohio University*, was published posthumously in 1954. Because Hoover died in 1951, the research and writing of his book must have occurred around 1950 or earlier, thereby placing the book at the tail end my timeline. So I treat the book as both a secondary source *and* a primary source.

suspended by the Faculty, until their meeting of the Board. The immediate attention of the Board is demanded by this business; for if anything is done for the relief of the young Gentlemen, it should be done before the Degrees are conferred.

*The various ways in which disorderly conduct has been practiced need not be repeated.* Let it suffice to say that property of the Institution has been injure [sic] and the studies of quiet and orderly Students interrupted.  
(242, my emphasis)

This level of vagueness, a glass closet, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase for referring to a taboo subject indirectly, is commonly how the recorder of the minutes of past presidents and boards of trustees discusses student behavior and the University's response. Whatever OU students in fact did appears too horrid for words, and only its effects, in this case damaged property, can be acknowledged directly. And again, the emphasis is placed on the need for the University's retaliation, as if the rhetorical situation demanded one and only one kind of response.

Lest we see the OU trustees of this time period as a body of administrators who were physically removed from students' daily lives, let me highlight Thomas Hoover's account of the 1820s-era trustees as regular graders of students' compositions. Hoover writes,

Most onerous of the trustees' duties were the examinations of students to be conducted at the board's April and September meetings. The examinations in the prescribed classical subjects consumed many hours

and frequently filled the entire first day of the meeting [...]. A trustee committee at each meeting examined student compositions. Invariably from 1824 to 1835 this committee commented on the number of poor papers and the failure of the students to hand in compositions. [...] Several [papers] were found wanting in orthography and revealed hasty composition. (57-58)

Hoover adds, “As burdensome as this work was, it undoubtedly had a salutary effect on both students and professors, for outside examiners have always provided a stimulus to study” (58). From this account, we might view the OU trustees as university leaders who interacted fairly extensively with OU students, even to the point of grading students’ writing. The trustees may not have assessed compositions that the students wrote fortnightly, as was the case in 1825 (Hoover 56), but they did intervene to affect the grades that students received. Hoover views the trustees as “outside examiners.” I think their status was fuzzier, however, that they were outsiders in the sense of not serving as daily or weekly graders of students’ writing but insiders in the sense of their role in shaping student life.

This early nineteenth-century narrative of town and gown strife, whether it comes from OU administrators or from later historians or from other sources, encourages us to consider at least two communities rather than one: that of OU and that of Athens, Ohio, perhaps even that of OU students and that of OU administrators. The OU community, as led by the president and the board of trustees, wished to establish its solitary control over its lands. The townspeople, resentful of any visual reminder of the University’s

dominance, fought back however it could (e.g., by throwing mud balls at the president). Whatever persuasion that occurred here, from either party to the other, did so amid differently constituted power holders: a university with a legal right to its lands and the right for its educated leaders to institute the behavioral policy that it wished, and a surrounding community that was comprised of pioneer families, some of which did not like visible reminders of their difference, their separateness. Perhaps the mud-ball incident involving President McGuffey gives us an idea of why, in 1825, the Board of Trustees showed a united front in blaming OU's problems on the Athens County public: this public's means of fighting back might involve physical affronts, not ideological opposition framed in the more palatable form of written reports.

After OU reopened, new faculty had been brought in, and new students accepted, civility seemed to have increased between OU and Athens and between OU students and higher-ups. Conflicting accounts about relations between students and faculty suggest a lack of consensus about how far social relations within the University had evolved. Former OU president Charles William Super remarks in his 1920s history of OU that when he was president (1883-96 and 1899-1901), "most students" saw the faculty "as a body of oppressors who were always ready to cooperate in harassing their more or less helpless victims, and whose chief joy it was to take all joy out of life or at least the life of our young people" (68). This portrayal positions students as oppressed in much the way that they appear to have been in the 1830s and 40s. But other early twentieth-century sources tell a rosier story of mutual respect from both parties and of dual social and intellectual gatherings where student writing was shared. For instance, Smith, using

reports from selected OU alumni, presents a picture of students, professors, and also Athens townspeople as working together to sustain an extended community of learning:

Students of the 1890's reminisce pleasantly of happy times in the homes of Athens' townspeople, where most of the actual society of the school was experienced, either in the homes of professors or local students. The Athens City Hall was the scene of many joint school and community 'doings' at that time. Lecture and entertainment series were held there were financed both by the students and townspeople, and neither could have brought them alone. (47)

Smith argues that after this time, as OU continued to expand, it took a more exclusive hold of social activities for students. Which story is "right" here, that of OU President Super or of OU graduate student Smith, is not my concern as much as the fact that such different perspectives arose from differently situated OU affiliates who were writing about what for them counted as the near past.

In looking at Super's versus Smith's accounts, I have jumped ahead to the 1890s, but I find in these different perspectives telling insinuations about norms that may have born on OU-based writing. In Smith's account, "most of the actual society of the school" was occurring not within the boundaries of the school but in the homes of the townspeople, some of whom were also university professors, and public buildings such as the city hall served as venues for townspeople and students to mix. This characterization portrays the town as an extension of the university. Super's account, by contrast, revives the sense of strife between faculty and students that the 1825-era meetings between the

OU president and board of trustees discussed, and which, as Hollow notes, President McGuffey experienced in the 1830s and 40s. I find here at least two different possibilities for how we might view the town's ways vis-à-vis the university's ways. Perhaps students looked upon the power of their elders resentfully. Or, given the alumni on whom Smith bases her history, we could take a more benevolent view, seeing townspeople, some of whom were professors, as students' educators and friends even in off-campus settings.

A source that gives a detailed, extended look at relations between students and faculty in the late nineteenth century and that treats these relations as dynamic and complex, as opposed to wholly good or bad, is the diary of Margaret Boyd. Having received her degree in 1873, Boyd was the first female graduate of OU, and the diary she left us gives us what I think is one of the fullest firsthand accounts of student life that are now available. This is not to say it is a "full" account, however, for it is comprised of notes and observations and worries from only the second half of her final year at OU, many of which do not connect to one another and are not explained to improve others' ease of reading. But despite the fragmentary nature of her entries, on May 26, 1873, she offers a subtly eloquent defense of the worth of her words. At first she makes a simple comment: "Nothing of importance happened today." But then, as if having reflected further on what "nothing" and "importance" mean, she adds: "After writing the above I am not sure that it is true. These little unimportant acts of our lives that we pass by so thoughtlessly, how they tell on our lives. And they sometimes mean more than we think too." What exactly the "little unimportant acts of our lives" mean for her is not as important to me as the fact that she sees her words as having great meaning, more than

she is likely to recognize at a glance. Perhaps this entry tells us something about how we might read Boyd's diary if looking to illustrate past composition practices at OU. It tells us that seemingly trivial asides matter, add up to something informative even if they do not form a complete story.

In her diary, Boyd focuses more on her relations to her professors than on her connections to community events and figures that function outside the purview of the University. Of her professors, none appears with such regularity as Professor (and OU President) William Henry Scott, who taught her elocution and astronomy and who lectured occasionally during services at the school chapel. Boyd's entries suggest that this figure caused her considerable dread and anxiety at some times but considerable comfort at others, the former normally preceding the latter. If Boyd's words are to be believed or taken as somewhat common among students' attitudes, the entries suggest an in-class distance between students and faculty, but a distance that is ameliorated by norms that encouraged close ties between members of OU when they were out and about in the Athens community. In other words, her words suggest to me that professors and students used the surrounding town of Athens, OH, to interact more closely, thereby blending education with social occasions.

From her first entry, on January 1, 1873, Boyd mentions Professor Scott, saying that he and his wife came calling, and such a gesture gets repeated by other professors later in her final year at OU. This notice of a professor's presence at her residence leads us to wonder if Professor Scott and others made regular appearances among students outside of class. Given the familiarity that seems likely from professors who are well



acquainted with their students, it is puzzling to see so many negative comments about the same Professor Scott, including Boyd's remarks in a January 17 entry: "I am to be [on] essay next Saturday. I am getting so I fairly dread to write." Shortly after this: "Prof. Scott is so critical [...]." On February 3, she notes that Scott is not present to teach class. The entirety of her entry on this day is, "Raining and slippery today. I do not need to go this afternoon[.] Scott is away, [sic] I am so glad." Perhaps referring to a male-dominated classroom as much or more than Scott's individual presence, on February 8 she records her feelings after giving a speech in her elocution class: "I speak my oration this morning. O! how I felt. I could not keep from crying all the way home. O dear!" Although many factors are probably at play in Boyd's reactions to her elocution class and to Scott's absence from class, the power of Scott's criticism seems difficult to deny given her January 17 entry. In her early entries, he seems to be a regular figure in her life, though a figure that contributes somehow to her insecurity as a speaker.

However, this portrayal takes a turn in her February 19 entry when she shares a moment when Professor Scott gave her useful advice: "I told Prof. Scott that I was not doing as much in Astronomy as I would wish. I say too that I try hard to understand it. He says if I do my best that will be all that any one [sic] can ask of me. I say I suppose it is but that it is not much comfort to me. He says it is a hard study and I believe him." This advice is repeated days later by one of Boyd's friends, indicating to us that the advice may have been common or that Scott's opinions had influenced many students—the latter seems possible in light of Boyd's reaction to Scott's public lectures. For instance, just four days later she writes, about her church experience, "Scott lectured today. It was so

nice. A real lecture. It was about manners, our associates, books, secret thoughts, marriage &c. I think I never saw him so much in earnest. How he did speak of those who had evil thoughts [on?] lust. I could almost see some friends coming after them” (Boyd’s emphasis). Then, at church on Wednesday, February 26: “Prof. Scott talked so very nicely. Such a solemn, good meeting.” By June 10, she notes that the class party is being held at Professor Scott’s residence. She attends it and has “a nice time.” Between late February and early June are approbations of Professor Scott: his perceived manliness, his flexibility, and his attentiveness to her reading needs. In Boyd’s depiction of Scott, we glimpse a faculty member whose influence outside the classroom may have been as noticeable as his influence within.

I would call Boyd’s diary a composition only in the sense that it was judged by later members of the OU community, OU-affiliated historians and librarians who have promoted the work’s historical value by retaining it in the archives. But however we might categorize it, the work gives us a valuable look at how one OU student perceived a faculty member and university president. In and of itself, this tells us little about Boyd’s actual composition practices.<sup>23</sup> In conjunction with other sources, I think it gives us a more vivid idea of the effect that faculty had on students in the late 1800s, and it gives us an idea of where and in what sort of social situations students’ writing and reading might have occurred in addition to the classroom. I am suggesting that something like modern-day scholar Anne Ruggles Gere’s extracurriculum appears in sources about OU’s history

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<sup>23</sup> Her diary does, however, contain references to her composing process for speeches she delivers in her elocution class, taught by Professor Scott. I explore this subject in chapter four.

and positing that this was likely facilitated by the close, if conflicted, relationship that existed between OU and the town of Athens.

A later glimpse of the environment of the freshman composition course as reflected in a student's perspective comes from OU student Grosvenor S. McKee, who, in 1913-1914, touched on this subject in his scrapbook. Here, in a page titled "Professors I Have Met," McKee lists one Dr. E.W. Chubb" as one of his favorite professors. Although McKee mentions the general subject areas covered in the course (both "Eng. Comp." and the English poets Tennyson and Browning) as well as the grade he earned (B-), he also devotes space to recording aspects of Dr. Chubb that speak to the social environment in which McKee wrote and learned. As Dr. Chubb's main hobby, McKee writes, "Telling jokes and trying to surprise you." To the question of Dr. Chubb's favorite story, McKee writes, curiously, and perhaps with intended incongruity, "Jokes." Following this, McKee lists as the "Most Valuable Lesson" he learned, "Not to turn a joke on him [Dr. Chubb]." These final few sections on the page could suggest anxiety McKee had in his composition class; for example, maybe he once suffered embarrassment for having made a joke at Dr. Chubb's expense. But in the context of this scrapbook page, which is devoted to commemorating McKee's favorite professors, I read the comments as suggestive of an affable classroom community. This perspective is corroborated in 1949-1950 by a freshman student named Carol Tyler in *Ohio University in the 1920s*, who notes that Professor Chubb routinely had students visit his home to "read their own stories and poems." Whether at school or at home, these two sources hint, some composition students of Dr. Chubb could expect to work in an atmosphere that thrived on social, not

just intellectual, exchanges. To some extent, the same could be said of Boyd's Professor Scott.

Furthermore, in 1900, Professor Edwin W. Chubb of the OU English Department allowed his home to serve as the regular meeting place of a creative writing club that went by the name of the Columbiad Literary Society, which was formed in 1895 and lasted until 1901. I will return to the subject of literary societies in chapter four, but of note here is the fact that this particular literary society was not like most. Most literary societies at OU gave students practice delivering written orations and practice in oral debate, yet the Columbiads seem not to have focused on oral debate, or oral debate alongside writing, but rather on producing original creative work and on enhancing their appreciation of canonized literature. Given current theorizing about language and literature, theorizing that has been informed by twentieth-century developments in linguistics and by waves of literary canon expansions, the aims of the OU Columbiads circa 1900 will likely strike us as conservative: "[...] encourage purity of language, creative work, and the development of American literature" ("The Columbiad Declaration"). Here I want to note that the Society met at a professor's home, if not at Professor Chubb's house as was the case in its later years, then at that of Professor Boughton (*Columbiad* 84). Also, I want to stress that members of this society could include OU students as well as Athens residents (*Columbiad* 1), giving students and other Athenians opportunities to read and critique together and opportunities to write for one another. During at least one meeting, Professor Boughton read from his work as well (52). Ordinarily, members would read their original poetry or short stories or read from

the work of a canonized Anglo or Anglo-American author (Tennyson's work frequently receive mention in the Society's records). Some of the subjects they wrote about also reveal a possible interest in writing about the community, about the students' and townspeople's immediate surroundings. Below is a list of titles from original work that was read at their February 26, 1896, meeting:

- "An Arbor" (poem)
- "Cascade Glen" (poem)
- "An Idol" (poem)
- "To Alma Mater" (poem)
- "In Memoriam [&?'] [In?] Frieze" (poem)
- "To Dr. F. [Cacker?]" (poem)
- "The Pedagogue" (an installment in a story)
- "Beta Theta Pi" (poem: sonnet)
- "When Greek Meets Greek" (poem)
- "To John Greenleaf Whittier" (poem: sonnet). (52)

I choose original work from this meeting because at many other meetings the list of titles is missing or far shorter. It was not unusual to read lists of people who had read but to find no accompanying list of titles. Therefore, from the exceptionally extensive list of titles above, the reader can detect an interest in fraternity and sorority systems ("Beta Theta Pi" and "When Greek Meets Greek"); a general interest in one's school, college, or university ("To Alma Mater"); and an interest in teaching or teachers ("The Pedagogue" and perhaps "To Dr. F. [Cacker?]"). From the remaining topics, "An Arbor" and

“Cascade Glen” might or might not have reflected the wooded, hilly terrain surrounding Athens, Ohio.

Titles of original works read at the Columbiad Literary Society’s subsequent meetings are “A Search for Happiness” (story) (52), “The Symphony of Telephone Wires” (poem), “To a Battle of Ink” (poem), and “The City Adventure of A [sic] Sophomore” (story) (53). I mention these additional titles to show the breadth of topics covered, many of which may well have had little to do with Athens or OU (e.g., “A Search for Happiness”). But the intermingling of topics that pertain to college life (e.g., “The City Adventure of A Sophomore”) suggests that the local community found its way into some of the subjects that students and townspeople addressed in prose or verse. So here we have students and some faculty and townspeople writing for the same occasion in an off-campus venue and writing for one another. As the Society’s records indicate, their meetings followed a structure that mirrored that of OU’s other, more long-standing literary societies, yet I am supposing that the location of these societies rendered them more informal occasions for writing and reading than an on-campus location (especially a classroom) would likely afford.

If, from Scott to Chubb to Boughton, we see signs of professors who dealt with language and rhetoric who also encouraged students to interact with them and others at sites around town, perhaps at meetings such as those of the Columbiad Literary Society, then in this I see support for Irene Elizabeth Smith’s view of town and gown relations: a town that serves partly (largely?) as an extension of the learning that can be done in a university setting.

It could be that the genres in which these portrayals appear control the truth value of the portrayals' contents, and for that matter, that the genre of Super's history does much the same. A scrapbook commemorates as its purpose, and the decision to archive this one student's scrapbook could be a result of institutional PR, plain and simple. Notes from the Columbiad Literary Society come from the Society's *Secretary's Book*, which includes official documents and descriptions in a manner formalized by older societies, such as the Athenian Literary Society; as such, this source mentions only certain aspects of the Society's work, and the presence of at least one OU faculty member at Society meetings may have discouraged observations about intra-Society problems. Moreover, the positive volume *Ohio University in the 1920s* was written by students for class and thus overseen by a faculty member. Smith's generally positive thesis would also have been overseen by faculty members. Meanwhile, Super's history, offering a darker tale of student-faculty relations, appears in an authority member's telling of his institution's past, a telling that privileges the point of view of the powerful within the institution. It should perhaps come as no surprise that Super makes students appear to have used straw people to characterize the faculty. And Boyd's diary was a Christmas present from her sister, a present in which Boyd records her goal of improving a "great deal" in her writing, hence her steadfastness in relaying her growth in her learning and her relationships. None of these sources, let me emphasize, speaks to us from a vantage point that is free from the constraints of genre and of specific rhetorical situations. So the perspective offered by each source must be read with the source's situatedness in mind.

From these different perspectives, OU and Athens, OH, begin to look like a single community, a place where behavior patterns and ideas crisscrossed the University's borders to such an extent that to speak of students often meant to speak of town happenings and venues, and vice versa, a place where writing and lively social exchanges coexisted—as evidenced by Smith's thesis, Grosvenor McKee's scrapbook, and the OU students' writing about OU social life in the 1920s—and as a place whose own social and physical makeup directed the content of OU students' writing. Improved relations may have begun after the mid-1840s, as seen in Boyd's and McKee's writings, when OU administrators lessened their badgering of the townspeople about paying taxes on revalued OU land.<sup>24</sup>

By the 1900s, the Athens community may have been sought on a regular basis to provide the environment and inspiration for students' writing, and not just for those students who were members of certain literary societies. Mentioning one of OU's 1895 policies that presented students with general rather than detailed rules of conduct, rules that the students were to understand as the standards of the University *as well as* the town, Smith attributes the influence of the Athens community students to the small sizes of the town and the University: "[...] the school and the town were so small that public opinion was an effective means of social control in the [OU] students' activities" (111). According to Smith, "public opinion" worked hand-in-hand with University regulations

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<sup>24</sup> Despite a plethora of articulate pleas from OU faculty and administrators to state legislatures in Columbus, the state of Ohio did not allow land owned by OU to be reappraised throughout much of the nineteenth century. This situation contributed to OU's impoverishment and size through President McGuffey's day. See Super's and Hoover's histories for more information.



to shape student life, signaling the roles of context and community in affecting the University climate. She reiterates this point later in her thesis:

[...] Students were long dependent upon the community for most of their social diversion. The school was small and was in and of the community, and the homes were freely open to students. After East and West wings were withdrawn as dormitories all students, men and women lived in private homes in town until the women's dormitories came in about 1900. Frequent parties were held in the homes of friendly townspeople [...].  
(127)

Proceeding chronologically, she says, “Dr. Ellis, [OU] president for the first two decades after 1900, entertained students very frequently while the school was still comparatively small.” And: “The senior party in 1902 consisted of an ‘elegant’ eight-course dinner served to the class and its friends at the home of the president” (128). After she describes some social events held at public venues in Athens and surrounding towns, Smith says that these descriptions are “representative of the social life of the first few years of the [nineteenth] century, when, under a new and aggressive president, the college began to blossom into a university” (129). She argues that since this time, the University has become more independent of the town—partly out of necessity, for its enrollment grew to the point that it needed to structure more aspects of social life.

Of interest to me in Smith's account is that she recognizes so few distinctions between the relationship between OU students and university higher-ups and between OU students and Athens townspeople—or for that matter, between OU students and

people of Athens County. To be a student at OU around 1900 was, for Smith, to admit to norms for socializing that were approved of not only by OU's higher-ups but also by Athens citizens. If we take Smith's account in isolation from other sources, we would not have much of an idea about how these shared norms affected the writing that students did. But once we consider Smith's thesis alongside texts from the period, texts that discuss writing directly, we see the relevance of Smith's characterization of OU's students' social life in and around Athens.

Before I continue, I would like to note, again, that I am looking for certain connections between the ways of the Athens community and the writing that OU students did between 1825 and 1950. I think that with an abundance of sources, the researcher would nonetheless be hard-pressed to call his or her conclusions certain. I am arguing that even with a smattering of textual perspectives from which we can notice signs and trends in past OU students' lives, in where and under what circumstances they interacted, we can surface rich possibilities about how composition at OU and in Athens, OH, might have played out.

One text that OU has retained that focuses exclusively on composition is the 1943 textbook *College Composition: A Brief Course*, written by three OU English Department faculty members: J. Homer Caskey, Joseph B. Heidler, and Edith A. Wray. The three writers comprised half of the English Department's full professors in 1940 and in 1950 (*Bulletin*, 1940-41, 1950-51), a fact that may speak to the influence of their expressed approach to composition.<sup>25</sup> Caskey, Heidler, and Wray emphasized the importance of

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<sup>25</sup> In a personal interview, former OU English professor Harold Roland Swardson observed that when he joined the OU English Department in 1954, Joseph Heidler was one of the few professors there who had a

using one's community to provide the student writer with inspiration and writing topics. When explaining their philosophical orientation for the book, they note that "[the student] only has to open his eyes, for there is a world around him so full of interest and tragedy and comedy that he can see and hear enough to provide himself with more material than he could ever use" (4). Taken in isolation, this comment looks as if it could speak to a general liberal-humanistic devotion to Western literary works, whether "tragedy" or "comedy," that capture what the students sees when he "open[s] his eyes." However, Caskey, Heidler, and Wray reveal a more specific focus on the community—a community that looks a certain way and that values certain kinds of activities. This community is dominated by a college presence, and all in all, it is a community that appears conspicuously similar to Athens, Ohio. They encourage students to describe, in writing, topics such as the campus bulletin, talk of football-players," and the sight of students in raincoats hurrying to class in the springtime (4). Shortly after this, the writers present a hypothetical scenario of college themes that the composition instructor would likely assign. Examples include "My Landlady," "My First Walk under the Elms," "My Roommate," and "My First Meal at the Grill" (6). Midway through the book, the authors provide further opportunities for students to "conduct an investigation and analysis of [their] college surroundings" (41). Students are tempted by sample topics that include "a college room," "My Roommate," "Why I Chose --- University (or College)," and "Restaurants I Have Found" (41-42).

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Ph.D. (see coda). This fact may speak to the influence of Joseph Heidler as a faculty member and as a co-author of *College Composition*.

Briefly, I would like to pair my observations about this textbook to the OU catalog's description of a course called "Sophomore Exposition" taught by Heidler in 1950-51, in the hopes that such a pairing will expose commonalities from his textbook to his pedagogy. The catalog gives an unusually thorough description of the course:

#### 171. SOPHOMORE EXPOSITION

This course opens with a review of the principles underlying effective expository writing, followed throughout the semester by illustrations from many sources. Expository selections from current magazines and books are *chosen by the students* for reading and analysis in class. *Each student is provided with frequent opportunity to write in the field of his major interest*, and his productions are usually read and discussed in class. All papers are returned to the student with detailed corrections and suggestions. Individual conferences are scheduled as needed. (225, my emphasis)

What I see in this curiously detailed course description is an attempt to give students some control over their learning. I see another effort to let students connect course material to the lives they lead in their communities, whether in Athens or elsewhere. Such a gesture may or may not result in more students writing about the community of Athens; it may instead lead to writing and reading about a student's major, and as such, may remain in the abstract world of ideas. Despite the actual results that transpire from this course description, I see in it an invitation for students to turn their writing back to the tangible, visible world that they experience daily if they should desire this option.

I do not see any sign in Caskey, Heidler, and Wray's book that they intended it for OU students exclusively, so I cannot argue that the writing topics suggested in it reflect life in Athens, Ohio, and Athens, Ohio, alone. Rather, the authors claim to write for "the average student" (Caskey, Heidler, and Wray iii). But in an acknowledgments page, the authors thank the OU English Department for supporting them, and the writing topics that they include do, I think, reflect the cultural and geographic climate of Athens, Ohio.

Unlike in many parts of the American West and the Great Plains, students at OU would likely wear raincoats in the springtime and would likely walk under American elms (both writing topics featured in the book). Also, partly due to OU's remote location and the small size of Athens, Ohio, many OU students would likely live on campus or in new quarters in town, and thus deal with landladies and roommates (other suggested writing topics). And so on. If it were the case that the authors had Athens, Ohio, in mind as a standard college community, then their claim in their Preface, to write for "the average student," is worth a second look. Do they intend the "average" student to be an OU student? If so, and indeed they must have written about pedagogical experiences they gained in the Athens and OU community, do they imply that the "average" college experience equals the OU college experience?

With the archival evidence available at OU, I cannot answer this question with a yes or no. But I can note that if yes, if the three OU-affiliated writers of *College Composition: A Brief Course* took OU students as their basis for what they call "the average student," then their idea of the relationship of OU to American normalcy bears a remarkable affinity to the outlook of OU co-founder Manasseh Cutler nearly 150 years

earlier, who cast OU in terms that connote national representativeness and possibly something grander.

In the early papers he drew up for the institution that would become Ohio University, Cutler referred to OU as “American University” (Hoover 15, Super 110-11). Although Cutler was a Yale man and had traveled to the state of Ohio with men who had also received their educations from prestigious East Coast universities, his early attempt to call OU American University gives us clues about the purpose OU may have served to early white settlers: was the university meant to be quintessentially “American” in the eyes of its founders? If so, then was the university meant to serve as a model for other higher education institutions—by educating America’s most well-to-do citizens or by educating what would have counted to Cutler and his peers as America’s common, or “average,” citizens? In the following section, on context, I will return to the rhetoric of OU’s early and later status in the eyes of politicians and the public, but for now I want to dwell on implications in Cutler’s depiction of Ohio University. Cutler spent much of his life in the late 1700s and very early 1800s organizing the university that would be built in Athens County, Ohio. As he collaborated with Rufus Putnam and others on the university’s charter, he allowed the university’s name to become “American Western University,” signifying the university’s place as the first public higher education institution of the Northwest Territory as well as the first public higher education institution west of the Allegheny Mountains, which had long hindered westward expansion. More ambitiously, in the 1780s Cutler fought to make nearby Marietta, Ohio, America’s capital city at a time when seven cities were vying for this honor; of the

contenders, Marietta was the only one that was beyond a day's journey from the East Coast (Bowling). Cutler of course lost his bid for Marietta as the nation's capital, but his persistence in lobbying for southeastern Ohio's increased political and educational status tells us something about what he wished to accomplish through his development of OU, Athens, and Marietta.

If Cutler envisioned OU and its surrounding area as quintessentially American, then it says a good deal that some 150 years later at least three of OU's publishing faculty members promoted a related, if more implicit, notion in claiming that their textbook is intended for the "average" college student. Despite the turbulent times that OU experienced between Cutler's day and 1943—the financial turmoil of the 1830s and 40s that led to OU's temporary closure, its repeated denial of increased state funds throughout the late nineteenth century (Hoover)—OU, and with it the surrounding town of Athens, might still have served, for some lofty-minded educators, as a model college community with which to inspire student writing. This community, with the social and physical scenes it afforded, undergirds the inductive reasoning that the student reader of *College Composition* was to acquire.

An alternative perspective on the status of the OU and Athens community from Manasseh Cutler's time to that of the three before-mentioned OU faculty members is that Cutler envisioned OU and the surrounding area (by which I include Marietta, Ohio) not as standard in any way but as hosts of a potentially exemplary institution of higher learning, one that would attract more white settlers westward and put the Northwest Territory on the map for its educational promise. If named "American University," one

would hope the institution would receive generous support. Then, by the time that Caskey, Heidler, and Wray wrote *College Composition*, we might read a lost sense of grandeur into their comment that they intend their book for “the average student.” No longer a community in possession of “American University,” or even the subsequent name “American Western University,” and no longer a community adjacent to a potential capital of the United States, the OU and Athens, Ohio, of the 1940s serve as a backdrop for texts written for everyday students as opposed to those written for the nation’s most culturally privileged students.

Whatever its status for educators and community leaders—ideal or average or something else—the OU and Athens community figured into writing that was completed for a composition class and published in a three-volume work by a 1949-1950 honor’s section of freshman composition taught by Professor Paul Kendall, whom the OU catalog from 1950-51 lists as an associate professor in the English Department (223). These volumes’ titles alone indicate strong ties to the community: the first volume is *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History*, and the next two share the title *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*. Each is a local history that dwells on town and gown relations, and in each, the student writers mainly summarize and describe (rather than argue or challenge research about) aspects of OU, often as it pertains to Athens. In *Ohio University in the 1920s*, a student named Carol Tyler wrote about Dean Chubb’s house where the students “read their own stories and poems.” She also wrote about the English Club and the University’s literary societies. Other students wrote about the “Rural Club,” the “Mountaineers” (for West Virginian students who wished to study



their state's history), and the "Debating Club." This emphasis on student clubs suggests a possible theme: OU's (or its students') tendency to promote sub-communities for variously situated students. Student writing from the latter two volumes, meanwhile, focuses on the history of different departments and colleges within OU.

Were these student writers following the advice of Caskey, Heidler, and Wray's *College Composition* published just six years earlier? Yes's and no's are among the possible answers, although I cannot say either with assurance. For the moment, let me emphasize that regardless of my avoidance of direct lines of causation, I can notice trends from different sources in the same time periods, trends which show us recurring tendencies within a local *culture* and which reflect sophistic approaches to rhetoric. In this case, the recurring trend for OU students to write about the OU community's organization and prominent features points to a concern for learning and remembering a community's ways, its unique and its commonplace features. Whose concern this was, however, is a question I will entertain. Whether it belonged to OU students first and foremost cannot be seen from this example or, say, from Grosvenor McKee's 1910s scrapbook. Whether it belonged to the faculty first and foremost is a supposition that has more grounding, based on the book *College Composition* as well as on the probability that Professor Kendall, whose honors students completed the three-volume social history of OU, must have approved of individual students' choices of topics and given guidance to the students regarding the volumes as a whole. Professor Kendall was later lauded as "one of the country's foremost biographers" (Stone).

Then, too, there is the matter of who above Dr. Kendall lauded the students' published volumes. A quick answer to this was Ohio University President John C. Baker. Prefacing the second volume, *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*,<sup>26</sup> Baker writes in a passage dated August 1950,

This manuscript is a sequel to "Ohio University in the 1920's" prepared by the same group last fall [1949]. Many favorable comments were made about the first manuscript, and it is believed this second document will have even wider appeal. These studies are excellent examples of the latent ability in student groups *if their efforts are properly directed and stimulated*. Both Professor Kendall and his students deserve the *thanks of the University* for the tremendous amount of work they devoted to this project and the *scholarly and effective way* in which they presented the material. (my emphasis)

While I realize that it is fitting for a university president to praise his or her students' public contributions to the university, I find President Baker's comments interesting for their lack of clarity as to why the volume counts as "scholarly and effective" and what it means for students to be "properly directed and stimulated" in their composition classes. The only reason I can find for his praise is the first volume's wide appeal and this volume's hoped-for "wider appeal." In other words, the volumes reflected what members

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<sup>26</sup> The first volume in this series goes by its own title, *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History*. However, the next two volumes have the title *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*. Of the latter two volumes, the first is "volume I" and the second "volume II." In effect, volume one of *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* is volume *two* of the three-volume sequence.

of the university community wanted to hear. This particular string of histories of Ohio University was receiving nods of approval from many corners.

In the students' volumes, organized by topic, each short composition is associated with a particular student, as if the students worked individually, collaborating only in the sense of agreeing on what general portrait they wanted to create. Or whether concern for depicting the local community stemmed from OU administrators or from citizens located elsewhere in the culture gives us noteworthy possibilities, as I show in the "context" section. I suspect there is much to the claim that this concern permeated Athens County citizens of various standings. Consider again the subtitle of the OU composition students' first published volume: *A Social History*. Unlike its successors, which focused on OU's institutional developments, the first volume describes popular activities that filled many students' lives, activities that brought students outside of the classroom to work and play in other spheres around campus and town. I find it easy to believe that students would desire to write and do basic research on these topics, just as I find it easy to believe that some influential OU faculty members wanted to continue seeing writing spring from such sources.

In light of the nearby assistance and approval of Dr. Kendall and President Baker, I detect still more signs of these volumes' interestedness. Although I refrain from conducting a line-by-line analysis of large segments of the work, I think brief considerations of the text can provide the examples we need. Take student Kathryn Morris's introduction to volume I of *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* (the volume that Baker praised in his preface). Writing about the late 1830s and early 1840s,

the period that Charles Super and more recent historians have pointed to as one of the most turbulent times for OU socially and economically, Morris gives this rather dry summary: “In 1839, when William H. McGuffey became president, the future of the college was bright, but in 1843 the State Legislature refused to reappraise the University lands. The school went into debt.” What I see no mention of in this summary is the student-faculty discord alluded to in the Minutes of the past OU presidents and boards of trustees and discussed more explicitly the other histories. In Morris’s (or Kendall’s? or Baker’s?) account, OU ran into trouble because of that dastardly state legislature, which was up to its usual tricks by refusing to give OU its due. Stricken from the record—or from this record—are the incidents involving McGuffey facing overtly hostile townspeople and students, and the meetings among administrators whose chief concerns may well have entailed how best to punish students.

In this and other chapters, when support is needed the student writer calls on a few select administrators whose words appear designed to serve as reliable support for the student’s points. For example, the same Kathryn Morris noted above writes about the college’s social atmosphere in 1900,

The college was so small in 1900 that the faculty-student relationship was much closer than it is today. This feeling was very important because as Edwin Watts Chubb, Dean Emeritus of the College of Arts and Sciences, has said, “A great deal of the success of a university depends on the harmony between faculty members, between students, and between the faculty and students.”

This quotation from Dr. Chubb comes from a personal interview—not the only one Dr. Chubb gave to students whose work appeared in these volumes on OU’s history. Those of us today who are seeking to uncover the exact dynamic of student and faculty relations in and around 1900 cannot pin down an answer with any certainty. What we have to examine are records like that of the Columbiad Literary Society and that of Grosvenor McKee’s scrapbook—and this student-written history of OU—the first two sources recording Dr. Chubb’s use of his home to entertain students and invite them to participate in literary activities, the third coming partly from Dr. Chubb himself and reaffirming the former. Of all the faculty members selected to comment on student-faculty relations at OU in 1900, Dr. Chubb was chosen for this section of the students’ history of OU. Clearly Dr. Chubb was active as an educator and as a socialite, of sorts, outside the boundaries of the classroom, so perhaps he was picked to be interviewed due to this record of generosity toward students. But while Morris and other students whose work appears in these volumes rely on Dr. Chubb for their support, I notice an absence of other faculty voices. What I do not see in the records available to me are signs that Dr. Chubb’s enthusiasm was shared by the majority of the OU faculty. It might have been, but I simply cannot say one way or the other. What I can notice, however, is the tendency for students whose writings about OU history made it into the published three-volume work to present Dr. Chubb as a source of unquestionable truth. Whether or not the OU faculty took Dr. Chubb’s lead in pushing the boundaries of student learning into faculty members’ homes, the student writers of *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* would like me to *think* the faculty did. This I find significant.

As evidenced above, Kathryn Morris, quoting from an interview with Dr. Chubb, claims that the student-faculty relationship of 1900 was better than the student-faculty relationship of 1950, though she refrains from criticizing anything about the student-faculty relationship of 1950. Contrast this with student Janet Ayers' comment, in her chapter "Faculty and Students," from the same volume, that "the friendly relationship between Ohio University faculty and students, an outstanding characteristic of the university today [in 1950], is apparently much stronger than it was in 1900." Never calling the student-faculty relationship of 1900 *bad*, Ayers adds, "The natural friendliness in 1900 was a product of the smallness of the university, [whereas] the spirit which exists today has been deliberately fostered by faculty and students." Ayers bases her claims on articles from the students' comments in the *Post* and in the *Athena*, the student yearbook, as well as on comments from John C. Baker, an administrator whose direct involvement with OU came after that of Edwin Watts Chubb. The reader who puts Morris' and Ayers' words side by side would be tempted to ask: Which is it? Were faculty-student relations better in 1900 or in 1950? But I think a more productive question would be to ask: Why is it that a student who relies on one faculty source, who was acquainted with OU since 1900, makes a substantially different claim than does a student who relies on sources from her peers alongside a more recent faculty source?

In a chapter written by another student, Jean Davidson, the presence of a faculty member source weighs heavily on the text. Davidson writes about holidays that temporarily brought OU and Athens, Ohio, together. She spends a couple of pages discussing University Day, a holiday that was celebrated during President Alston Ellis's

heyday, and she gives a colorful description of President Ellis leading a parade around town in an effort to “impress the community of Athens with the importance of the University in its midst.” The passage concludes with this judgment whose origin is I think tellingly ambiguous: “Certainly this parade did not suggest the scholarly achievement befitting a university. Its death with the change of university presidents was no doubt a relief to all concerned.” After this information is a footnote in which Davidson explains that her information came from Clinton C. Mackinnon, Professor of English. But how much of it came from Professor Mackinnon is unclear. In Davidson’s final two sentences in the section I hear a comment about scholarly standards that seems to me to reflect the concerns of a senior faculty member more than a student, yet, again, I cannot pinpoint how much of this text came from the OU student whose name is attached to it. All I can do here is raise questions about the multiple influences the text may have endured.

Likewise, the student named Virginia Lee Carew relies extensively on her interview with Dean Chubb, so when she describes President Ellis in the following manner, I have to wonder which faculty members’ interests are being heeded:

President Ellis’ hard headed business character does not sort at all well with the rest of his personality. He was fond of every kind of show and loved to put a haze of romantic color about himself.

He was known for his love of diamonds, of which he wore quite a few; and would quite cheerfully lead parades of students when they came to

greet him after one of his frequent journeys—this to illustrate further his love of display.

This time there is no footnote, yet I hesitate to believe that Carew is not relying on a seasoned faculty member's reminiscences. To say that President Ellis loved to wear diamonds is, for a student in 1950, some thirty years after Ellis's death, an assertion that might have been backed by firsthand accounts in early newspapers and other sources. But for a student in 1950 to look back thirty years and say that President Ellis "loved to put a haze of romantic color about himself" and had a "love of display" reveals an attempt to get inside Ellis's mind, to share with others what Ellis really loved. This suggests to me a level of confidence that I find unlikely if the information stemmed from the student writer's own private research into library sources.

We know from Charles Super's 1924 history, *A Pioneer College and Its Background (The Ohio University)*, that President Ellis had his critics, people who disapproved of the fact that a sitting university president named a building (Ellis Hall) after himself and otherwise called attention to himself. However, in Super's acknowledgment of his bias and his admittance of his history as an *interested* story—an analysis that comprises much of the preface to his book—he is perhaps closer to the first sophists than the other history writers whom I consider. In the student writers' accounts, by contrast, comes a matter of fact-ness that is buoyed by interviews with the same few faculty members and administrators (sometimes John C. Baker himself is among them).

In terms of tone, optimism in these student-written histories ensues when a student named Margaret Scott mentions the OU literary societies' status in the early



1900s. I will discuss the literary societies at length in the following chapter, but for now I wish to note that at OU the literary societies formally dissolved in the early 1920s for reasons that none of my other sources agrees on. As if oblivious of the dark cloud on the horizon for OU's literary societies, Margaret Scott assumes that the emergence of seven new literary societies between 1909 and 1919 is "proof of [students'] interest in them." She might be right in noting some students' interest in them, but I think her use of "proof" renders her claim problematic. The rise of multiple new literary societies just before such activities vanished from OU life may also signal attempts by the faculty and administrators to force students to continue contributing to OU in a traditional form. The fact that around 1900, OU began mandating that students take part in a literary society is another such point: it *might* show students' devotion to the literary societies, as Betty Hollow for one believes, but it might also indicate a change in the governance of these societies, a shift from students undertaking reading and composition in their own way to a time when higher-ups forced students to maintain a tradition that students, if left to their own devices, may have wished to change. We do not and cannot know any of this for sure, but I want to surface how other writers have acted as if they did know, when, in my view, the situation was far from certain.

In Caskey, Heidler, and Wray's composition text and in Paul Kendall's composition students' three-volume work, I see signs of doxastic rhetoric among OU students' compositions or methods for producing compositions. By *doxastic*, I mean rhetoric—or writing in this case—that reflects the wisdom and ways of thinking that were sanctioned by the community. Kendall's students did not write of discord between

students and faculty even though writers with considerable clout within the community (Charles Super being one such example) could do so.<sup>27</sup> Instead, his students devoted their writing (or were told to devote their writing) to describing clubs and activities that entertained students within plain view of OU faculty and Athens townspeople. The students wrote to please members of each of these communities, and the students' compositions appear to have been judged based on how well they conformed to the visions of the community held by those with power. While I do not have Paul Kendall's grade book and so cannot say which of his student's papers earned As, which earned Bs, and so on, I can notice that what went into the published volumes of his students' compositions all conformed to the descriptive writing of then publicly approved communal activities described earlier. It might be interesting to wonder what these volumes would have said about, say, Alston Ellis's presidency at OU had Ellis still been in power during the time that the students were writing their three-volume history of OU. As a whole, the writing looked outward to the visible, tangible community and its forms of entertainment or diversion, as the students were following the advice of Caskey, Heidler, and Wray, and recorded the basic purpose and function of each group or event.

To some extent, the same may be said of the writing that students produced and shared some four five decades earlier at the meetings of the Columbiad Literary Society, though this example makes matters more complicated because the Columbiads' writing was shared within the homes of OU professors and sometimes among townspeople. I

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<sup>27</sup> In a personal interview, Janice Allegheny, a former OU faculty member who also served as director of composition in the late twentieth century characterized the history of OU and Athens, Ohio, as a history of turmoil between members of each party (see coda). This perspective is another example of someone who has enough clout to think critically about the community without fear of censure.

cannot say, absolutely, that where the students shared their writing necessarily caused the students to adhere more stringently to writing that reflected the tastes and standards of faculty. But I can raise the question: how might this venue—the physical location and social makeup of the Columbiads’ meetings—have encouraged students to produce certain kinds of writings? Professor Chubb, who hosted many of the Columbiad Literary Society’s meetings in his home, later went on to become a dean at OU. He also figured into a commemoration page of 1910s student Grosvenor McKee’s scrapbook, suggesting the Professor’s popularity with and influence on other students. When the Columbiad members wrote their poems and stories about professors and academe, they may well have done so while under pressure to please their host and to continue the unity of the Columbiads—to contribute to their collective mission to promote Anglo-American writing.

The close cousin to doxa, *nomoi*, or the norms that structure community life, surface each time that we consider the standards in place in Athens or at OU that encouraged students to act a certain way, to write about certain topics, to share their writing by certain accepted channels, and to study writing by attending to certain concerns. Some of these norms may have been instilled by one influential figure (e.g., Manasseh Cutler, let’s say, or Professors Scott, Chubb, or Kendall) or by a group of influential people (e.g., the authors of *College Composition*), but regardless of their origin they have come to be accepted by members of the community as the preferred way of doing something, for example, the preferred way (place, time, means) of engaging with writing and reading in nonacademic settings or the preferred way of dealing with students

who neglect to follow a community's codes of conduct. To speak of a community's ways of handling writing, education, discord, or something else is to evoke the nomoi that certain community members have persuaded their peers to adopt.

To look at nomoi that encouraged writers to count certain ideas, certain kinds of writing, and writing produced or disseminated in certain kinds of situations as "laudable," "publishable," or the like is, I believe, to foreground a sophistic notion of community in the sense we make of composition's past. In this approach, composition does not describe writing acts that simply *are* one thing before they then change to another thing (as in, composition as part of an oral-based rhetoric and then composition as an obsession with mechanical correctness). Rather, composition in a sophistic sense designates the results of social forces that channel ideas and writing into forms that power-holders of a community find palatable.

Although it takes me beyond my 1825-1950 timeframe, I would now like, very briefly, to trace some associations within the OU English Department that I believe make a case for a community-conscious pedagogical approach that was encouraged for OU composition instructors even after 1950. The presence of Paul Kendall in the English Department overlaps that of Dr. Edward Stone, a director of first-year composition at the University of Virginia (UVA) who in 1956 left Virginia to join the faculty of the OU English Department. Notably, in my view, is that Stone joined the OU faculty just one year after editing a book called *Selected Student Prose*, which featured UVA undergraduate students' writing and which was directed at students in UVA's freshman English classes. A Charlottesville, Virginia, newspaper reported that the idea driving his

book was to show students “what an ‘A’ paper requires when written by a student of [their] own age and relative educational background “(“New Approach”). Although the student essays are “intended to show form” and accompanying essays written by professionals are intended as “examples of thought, enlarging the student’s area of knowledge and opinion” (“New Approach”), I think Stone’s emphasis on reading and preserving student writing could find fertile ground at OU among the Paul Kendalls of the English Department. More, I believe the influence of these two scholars could hardly be overstated: by the mid 1960s, Kendall and Stone had earned the title of Distinguished Professors of English, and Stone had served as chairman of a “committee on literary scholarship and [the] teaching of English” of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, in 1955 Dr. Edgar Whan joined the English Department (“Dr. Whan”). Information I have obtained about Professor Whan speaks to his involvement with students in the 1960s and 70s; however, this information shows tantalizing similarities between his philosophy of education and the teaching approaches of Kendall and Stone. Like Kendall and Stone, Whan did not just teach writing but seemed to prize students’ words and perspectives, encouraging students to write from their interactions with their surroundings, their lived and felt experiences. But whereas Stone and Kendall had books behind them to illustrate their involvement with first-year students’ composition, Whan had special programs at the University such as the Honors College

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<sup>28</sup> This information about Stone’s involvement with the NCTE comes from a newspaper article dated 29 May 1966; the article’s title and author are unknown. The article may be located in the OU archives in a biographical file on Edward Stone.

and the Cutler Program, both of which he described as “experimental” in how they engaged students (“Whan Teaches”). Stressing students’ own ways of learning and calling the Honors College approach to education a “stimulus,” he sought to channel students’ passions toward learning what they found personally relevant. For example, for students who wished to gain admission to OU’s Cutler Program, he described the situation as follows: “These students say what it is they want to do. When they apply, I ask them: ‘What do you want to be, what do you want to know, what do you want to put together?’ They have to convince me that they have something *they* want to do” (“Whan Teaches,” my emphasis). And concerning the students’ surroundings, Whan says, “When they first get here, students find it hard to see Appalachia around them. But students are changing that” (“Whan Teaches”). He adds, “They’re looking outside. They’re trying to make the world better” (ibid). Granted that this account comes from a 1969 article from the *Post*, OU’s student newspaper, and so may bring up an array of post-1950 cultural and educational factors that bore on students’ learning in higher education, but I have to wonder whether Whan’s long-time presence in the same department as Paul Kendall and Edward Stone served as one influence on the philosophy of learning that he expressed in 1969. Tentatively, from this string of possibilities, we might call the period at OU from Caskey, Heidler, and Wray’s 1943 textbook to Whan’s 1969 declaration something along the lines of “composition as personal and communal awareness.”

Why kernels of this pedagogy appeared repeatedly at OU may be due to numerous factors, but a look at the larger context of OU and Athens’ growth and setbacks might give us more to consider. I find it easy to believe that Athens County citizens had

ample reason to look to their own university and town to develop an identity through their writing and speaking. In the following section, I illustrate why.

### Context

By *context*, I mean signs of the sociopolitical and geographic milieu in and from which composition occurs. I treat the Ohio University community and the overlapping Athens, Ohio, community as parts of a larger context relevant to a history of composition at OU. This broader socio-cultural approach positions composition practices at OU as emerging from ebb and flow of institutional and regional status. It also makes use of many sophistic concepts: *to prepon* (what is appropriate), *to dynaton* (what is possible), *kairos* (timeliness). Of these, I believe it is *kairos*, or the rhetorician's attentiveness to the appropriate *time* of a message, that factors into this section most productively, for consideration of a message's timeliness must take into account many aspects of a message's context: what *culture* the message comes from, what *immediate situations* motivate the message, what goal is *hoped for* with the message, and what *kinds of power* are at play in a message's delivery. This emphasis reminds us that persuasion does not occur even if a speaker (or writer) follows all the right rhetorical moves, even if his or her argument withstands the scrutiny of others. Outside of a message's logic, support, and eloquence lie larger cultural and political forces that affect how or if one's message will be heard, what kind of response one's message will receive.

Part of me is drawn to *kairos* because I see it coexisting peacefully with my interest in place—in physical spaces and in socially constructed attitudes that populations

come to have about what it means to live in or be of a place. Just as messages exist on points in time (a linear conception of time, according to a western perspective), they come out of and go into particular places, complete with all the baggage that places have on both material and symbolic levels. Furthermore, messages come out of and go into places that have ties to political power so that *where* someone lives, works, and receives a message may bear on the person's access to individuals who have the ability to effect change. I see this as intensified when looking at southeastern Ohio's history because the access of OU faculty and administrators to the (shifting) Ohio state capital, among other places, likely bore on OU's monetary situation, and students and prospective students' access to Athens, Ohio, likely bore on enrollment levels. Available texts about OU's sociopolitical context tell a dreary tale of a university whose physical and political location almost resulted in the university's demise. But throughout the tale, composition was present; students were writing for classes and for other ends, and other university affiliates were writing and seeing their words judged in turn.

In this section which I have called "Context," I consider the time and place surrounding the maintenance and production of texts affiliated with OU, context as a way to broaden my earlier consideration of *nomos* and *doxa* so that I no longer consider just a community's ways of handling education and composition but also look for social, political, economic, and other large-scale forces that may have affected *doxa* and *nomoi* that governed the production of written texts. Chiefly, I bear in mind the question: why did students and other university affiliates look to their own immediate surroundings to spur their writing? Also, I bear in mind postmodern understandings of time and place that



see these concepts in terms of social location and control. In so doing, I cannot stick to the historical parameters I originally set for my project, 1825-1950, without suggesting that this time period itself exists a-contextually, unaffected by what preceded or followed it. So I will proceed more loosely here.

Relying on former OU history professor Clement L. Martzolf's work and other early histories, as well as on University minutes, bulletins, and catalogs, OU alumna Irene Elizabeth Smith raises a point that speaks to what the geographical location of OU may have meant for the University, the state of Ohio, and the Northwest Territory at the time of the University's founding. I quote her liberally because I find her summation of OU founders Manasseh Cutler and Rufus Putnam's intentions vivid and far-reaching in its implications. She concludes that OU in the early 1800s served as

a convincing talking point to win settlers for the new territory. The wilds of the northwest were softened by the knowledge that here was a new commonwealth in which education, even in its higher forms, existed as a fundamental feature. This propaganda reached as far away as Paris where it was used by the Scioto Company to induce emigrants to come to Ohio. The vision was one of a new land, free from all the evils and abuses of mankind where there were no ancient customs and traditions to reform and where the inhabitants were persons inspired by the "noblest sentiments". The establishment of a university "shed an especial luster on the settlements", and inspired hope that "means of acquiring useful knowledge will be placed on a more respectful footing in this country than in any

other part of the world.” (Martzolff, “Ohio University, the Historic College of the Old Northwest,” qtd. in Smith 21)

Both Martzollf and Smith are early twentieth-century OU affiliates, Martzollf an OU history professor, Smith a graduate student whose words above come from her master’s thesis. With the advantage of time and a perspective that time can bring, both see the early rhetoric surrounding OU *as* rhetoric in the sense of an interested message that elicits certain actions. They pick up on the rhetorical power that the location of OU might once have had for proponents of westward expansion. Whether or not OU had permanent buildings, steady streams of students, or well-trained instructors, each of which seems to have been dubious in the University’s early years, the *idea* of a university on the fringes of the then pioneer encouraged white settlers to re-see the pioneer as a place cultivated for whites and prepared to sponsor formal higher education of a sort that lacked the baggage of “ancient customs and traditions.” Based on Smith’s account, this idea rendered OU one example (of many more, doubtless) used to advertise the Northwest Territory to possible settlers on the East Coast and as far away as continental Europe.

Of more interest to me, though, is the fact that the lofty sentiments captured in the passage above treat OU, the state of Ohio, and the Northwest Territory as a monolithic entity in which what is good for one is automatically, unconditionally what is good for all: the presence of OU will help persuade skeptical settlers to enter the territory, lay down roots, use the new university, and add to the society of the territory. Consider, too, OU trustee James Irwin Coon’s 1843 comments about OU: “From its funds and position [OU] must become a *prominent institution* in the west—I believe that under the right

auspices it may be the *leading—the first institution of the west*” (193, qtd. in “The Crisis”). Here, Coon was writing to Reverend Alexander T. McGill to encourage McGill to accept the position of OU president in the wake of President McGuffey’s resignation and OU’s uncertain financial state. While Coon’s comments might be understood as hyperbolic, I think the ambitiousness of his argument that the financially desperate OU of the 1840s might become “the leading” university “of the west” calls attention to an institutional self-perception that University leaders anxiously wanted to retain. And Coon’s depiction of OU’s grandeur in the context of “the west” is itself significant: the perceived greatness of the University came not from its mere existence but from its continued existence, hopefully its exemplary way of conducting its business, *in the then-west* of the United States.

Two local historians writing in the late nineteenth century and very early twentieth century reaffirm an idea of OU’s founding as integral to the early development of the United States as a whole. Whether this idea reflects local chauvinism or a legitimate link between local and national politics remains unclear. What I wish to do here is note the idea’s persistent appearances over time. Writing in 1869, Athens County historian Charles M. Walker’s describes OU’s early prominence not just locally but nationally, as if to intimate that early decisions about OU’s founding and initial support established a model that large public universities in the Midwest and the South would emulate:

The Ohio university [sic] for which [Manasseh Cutler] secured so liberal a land endowment (as was then thought), was the first ever thus endowed by

congress; but the policy then begun was continued and we now see the universities of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Alabama, Mississippi, and other states all endowed by congress. It may fairly be asserted that these noble results are the legitimate fruits of Dr. Cutler's early efforts in fixing the policy of congress on the subject. (310)

I want to highlight Charles M. Walker's assessment of OU's founding as part of the "noble results" and the "legitimate fruits" of Manasseh Cutler's interactions with members of the federal government. Likewise, local historian Edgar Ervin, or "Ervin of Meigs," in a brief 1906 history of Ohio University, casts the founding of OU in a decidedly national context:

When the different States owning claims of the Northwest Territory ceded them to the federal government for the general good, Congress then assumed control over the same and exercised their first *national* duty. Although peace had been declared and the immortal Declaration of Independence had been unquestionably acknowledged, yet the true *national* element was yet prevailed over by state jealousies, and it still remained for our country to have a new birth, and that a *national* one. Out of these primitive uational [sic] acts evolved the Ohio University, our present territorial form of government, our present system of land surveys, and the great Ordinance of 1797 [...]. (7, his emphasis)

For Ervin, a review of OU's founding seems tantamount to a review of milestones in American history. He does not see fit to address OU in isolation from a national context.

These sentiments, which may well stem from facts about the Ohio Company's propaganda and a pattern of national involvement in university building after 1804, get checked by other accounts as the nineteenth century brought OU administrators face to face with long-term financial distress. Other accounts point to a culture of competition concerning educational firsts and attainments in different regions of the country rather than to a notion of OU and Athens, Ohio, as an educational center backed by the will of the United States government. If, just after the time of OU's founding, OU enjoyed a period in the national and international spotlight, then other sources suggest that this period was short lived for OU and its immediate surroundings, that the circumstances in which the university's students would write would lead students even to question the quality of their education itself.

Signs of dominance and one-upmanship between different parts of Ohio appear in texts about the Athens area as soon as literacy institutions were established here, and quite possibly before. The existence of the first library in Ohio was itself a subject of debate between proponents of the Cincinnati Library and proponents of the "Coonskin Library" of Ames, Ohio, in Athens County. This Athens County library also went by the name of "the Western Library Association at Ames" (Grosvenor qtd. in Athens County) and "the Library of the Western Library Association" (John Eaton qtd. in Athens County), and it was said to have been established in 1804 (Grosvenor qtd. in Athens County). The debate, which seems to have reached its zenith in the 1870s, hinges on whether builders of the Ames library broke ground before builders of the Cincinnati Library did.

In his 1869 history of Athens County, Charles M. Walker argued that the Coonskin Library was the state's first to break ground and operate as a library; he was supported in these claims by the Athens County Pioneer Association, a group of Athens County citizens who sought to preserve and commemorate the early history of the county. Walker writes, "the Rev. Dr. Cutler [...] accompanied Mr. Brown [Samuel Brown, another pioneer] to Boston and selected a valuable collection of books. *This was the first public library formed in the northwestern territory*, though not, as some have supposed, the first incorporated" (369, my emphasis). After mentioning two other libraries, one in Hamilton County in southwest Ohio and one in Granville in Fairfax County, both of which were incorporated before the Coonskin Library was, Walker says, "But, that to Athens county [sic] belongs the honor of having given birth to the first library created in the territory of the northwest, does not admit of any doubt" (369). Evidently, it did admit of doubt because Walker then spends a page justifying his position by noting early Coonskin Library meetings and contributors. He also defends his sources, saying that his information came from "one of the surviving founders" of the Coonskin Library in addition to other records (372). He claims to have given "the literal truth" and to have fought against a "somewhat fanciful account" of the library's formation, a notion that all the library's books were made from animal skins (372). While I cannot be sure of this book's popularity with readers outside of the Athens County Pioneer Association, I can note that by 1880 it reached one influential reader, Ohio State University President Edward Orton. In an April 17, 1880, letter from Orton to Charles M. Walker, Orton praised the book and added of the Athens County Pioneer Association, "They have

charged themselves with the duty of preserving the memories of as virtuous and far seeing a band of pioneers as any settlement of the county can boast” (qtd. in Athens County). Walker’s rhetoric of firsts had gained at least one high-profile supporter in addition to a local group of devoted allies.

The early rhetoric of Athens County and literary firsts became a topic of contention, however. Within ten years of the publication of Charles M. Walker’s history, the publisher, Robert Clarke of the Robert Clarke & Company of Cincinnati, showed himself to be a staunch opponent of the book’s—and the Athens County Pioneer Association’s—view on the Coonskin Library. Clarke’s position of power can be induced from his job and from his refusal to accommodate the Pioneer Association’s pleas for him to attend meetings to discuss the Association’s records. He was the first of five heads of “Robert Clarke & Co., Publishers, Booksellers, Stationers, Importers” based in Cincinnati. What he argued, in short, was that the Cincinnati Library was Ohio’s oldest. According to an 1878 letter sent by Clarke to one John Eaton, a Washington D.C.-based historical authority whom the Athens County Pioneer Association had already contacted, Clarke noted that he had written a paper for the *Cincinnati Gazette* in which he “simply gave the evidence of” another source, which noted the Cincinnati Library’s status by citing “the Original [Inscription?] Paper of the Cincinnati Library” (Athens County Pioneer).<sup>29</sup> Whatever this “original” document’s exact wording and form, it gave Clarke a position from which he did not deviate during his dealings with Athenian and former OU student A.B. Walker, who spoke on behalf of the Athens County Pioneer Association.

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<sup>29</sup> I have been unable to pinpoint details about this original source.

In 1877, one year before Clarke defended his position on the library issue, A.B. Walker wrote a lengthy letter to John Eaton in which A.B. Walker, citing Charles M. Walker before him, argued that the Coonskin Library functioned as a library before the Cincinnati Library received and circulated its books. A.B. Walker also reminded his reader that Washington County, of which Ames Township was then part, was Ohio's first county, and Athens County the state's second. He thus based his central claim on local records cited in Charles M. Walker's history and on historical probability given settlement patterns in Ohio. But most important for my purposes is the fact that like Charles M. Walker before him, A.B. Walker treated his position as one of absolute truth. In his letter to Eaton, dated November 8, 1877, A.B. Walker writes, "It is well to preserve the strict truth of history, if possible, even in matters of merely local interest; and in this case I trust Mr. Clarke, whose love for antiquarian research is so admirable, will be able to settle the matter beyond any doubt" (*Athens County Pioneer*). A.B. Walker's defense of "the strict truth of history" is doubly interesting in light of the fact that later historian Randolph C. Downes, in a book devoted to the formation of Ohio's counties, used legal records to show that Athens County was not formed until March 1, 1805, and was far from Ohio's second county (33).

When Robert Clarke responded to A.B. Walker's claims, Clarke not only affirmed that his own words reflected the information of his Cincinnati-based source, but Clarke also attempted to drop subject altogether, adding, "I am a very busy man, am only in the city during business hours, and cannot give the matter any further attention. So far as I am concerned, the controversy must rest here." In Clarke's response to A.B. Walker, I



hear Clarke saying, first, that his words are only as good as those of his sources, but that even so, he does not see fit to interrogate the truth value of his Cincinnati-based sources; and second, that he has more important things to do than participate in this (for him) petty squabble. When A.B. Walker pressed Clarke a second time to clarify the record, Clarke wrote a second letter in which he reaffirmed that he is a busy man and that his position merely reflects the evidence he received. In a letter dated December 6, 1878, directed to A.B. Walker, Clarke writes, “There may be other evidence which some one with plenty of time on his hands might unearth,” and adds that his Cincinnati friends support his current position based on the evidence available to them (*Athens County Pioneer*).

What I see in this debate between late-nineteenth-century Ohio historians and publishers is a competition between rural, hilly Athens County, Ohio, and the increasingly metropolitan Cincinnati, Ohio, over a symbol of educational attainment—here it happens to be the state’s “first” library. Who was in fact telling the “truth” and who claimed himself the “winner” of the debate does not interest me much given my decision to elevate the perspectival nature of history writing and to show that whatever counts as “truth” to different parties emerges from ever-shifting contexts involving who is allied with whom and who influences the perspective of whom. What does interest me is the fact that this debate occurred for years and with such intensity, as each party refused to let “the” history of Ohio libraries congeal from sources outside his own immediate area. Letter after letter in the archived collection of the Athens County Pioneer Association reveals a persistent A.B. Walker and allies arguing with a curt and dismissive Robert Clarke, Clarke refusing to apologize for or alter his previously published

comments about the Cincinnati library's status. This competition for a symbolic status occurred at the same time that Ohio University administrators were being denied, year after year, for state funding that they felt was due OU as opposed to OSU (Hoover). While the two events may not be connected in an immediate way, they point to a culture of literacy competition and status-seeking among differently located parties. The competition was for literacy firsts in history (social recognition), and in the case of OU administrators, for money (financial support). These intrastate disputes lead me to suppose that writers affiliated with Athens County saw little reason to identify with writers from urban centers to the west and north. They lead me to perceive OU and Athens, Ohio, as communities whose status rose or fell depending on the results of (sometimes written) debates between selected Athens County citizens and influential Ohioans with interests elsewhere.

This competition implicated OU's status as well, for Clement L. Martzoff, who not only served as an OU professor but also headed OU's Department of History in the early 1900s, emphasized the Coonskin Library's affiliation with Manasseh Cutler, who purchased books for the library (C.M. Walker). In his 1924 history book *Fifty Stories from Ohio History*, intended for what today's readers would call middle and high school students, Martzoff speaks of the Coonskin Library as if it were Ohio's first, even if he refrains from making such a claim explicitly: "From time to time other books were added [to the library] and hundreds of young people got a taste for reading books because their father had the foresight to think of a library when the [Ohio Company's] settlement was new" (145). His brief chapter on the Coonskin Library constitutes the only chapter in

*Fifty Stories* devoted to an Ohio library. This inclusion of the Coonskin Library and neglect of the Cincinnati library has another layer once we consider Martzoff's organizational strategy for his book: "the aim has been to select such [topics] as have not been overworked in the past" (*Fifty* 5). Through this, he suggests that despite Charles M. Walker's *History of Athens County*, the history of Athens County's Coonskin Library has not yet been widely circulated while the histories of other early Ohio libraries have.

In a general sense, the desire for literary prestige in the Athens area is felt again when we note Athens resident Charles H. Grosvenor's efforts to persuade industrialist Andrew Carnegie to donate \$30,000 to OU's library. The fact that in 1904 OU erected "Carnegie Library," now E.W. Scripps Hall, near the center of campus in honor of its generous benefactor speaks to the University's eagerness to develop showpieces from its beneficial associations.<sup>30</sup>

But competition alone did not characterize the literacy developments of OU and Athens, OH. At a more fundamental level, physical geography inspired and otherwise affected much writing done by OU and Athens, OH, affiliates, as evidenced in writing from OU students, faculty, and alumni alike. We might say the physical geography bore on the social scene that emerged. Twentieth-century OU history professor Thomas Hoover reminds us that when dealing with member of Congress in the late 1700s, Manasseh Cutler demanded "lands for a university not at the center of the [Ohio Company of Associates'] *entire* purchase but at the center of the first 1,500,000 acres, *i.e.*, the Ohio Company's grant" (10). For that time, the logic of such a request seems

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<sup>30</sup> The fact that after his retirement Andrew Carnegie donated large sums of money to thousands of libraries across the country does not seem to lessen the University's pride in being included in Carnegie's charities.

apparent: early white settlers traveling west down the Ohio River would recognize the existence of a university in what for that generation was the center of the Ohio Company's new expanse of land. Hoover adds that in 1799, Athens, OH, was called Middletown, after all (21). However, population shifts in subsequent decades rendered the location of OU more worrisome for students. Consider, for example, the 1821 letter sent by OU student Owen Evans to his father, in which Evans recorded his anxiety surrounding the journey from Chillicothe to Athens, a journey that today would take one hour by car. The feelings expressed in this letter typify the sentiments shared about Athens prior to the emergence of the railroads. Owens says, "I set out alone a [sic] long strange road, that far from home yet going still farther with indeed some tender feelings [...]" (qtd. in Hollow 20). After noting that he met a footman whom he made his companion, Owens notes that they continued on eleven miles farther, stayed the night at "an old Dutchman's house," traveled five miles more before eating breakfast, and then "walked on nine miles further and entered the wilderness. The people told us that there were bears, panthers, and plenty of deer in it. Here, how glad I was that I had Charles [his companion] with me. It was the most lonesome road that I had ever traveled" (ibid).

Compare this account to two much later albeit similar depictions of OU's locale. The first comes from OU professor Charles Carlson's recollection of OU in 1954, captured in a collection of pieces celebrating OU's bicentennial anniversary, in which Carlson describes his first trip to OU. Coming from the more populous Columbus area, he recalls thinking, "No one in his right mind would drive to and from Athens. It's at the end of the world" (18-19). The second account, coming from Dr. Edgar Whan in 1969,

gives a more positive reaction: “I like Athens [...]. I like it because it’s one of the few college towns left—far away from the world. You kind of make your own world” (“Whan Teaches”). For some, especially those living in the nineteenth century, Athens’ geographical location gave cause for physical and emotional distress. For others, it was a scaffold to a certain disposition toward learning—“you kind of make your own world.”

I am struck here by the persistence of the idea of Athens, Ohio, as a geographically marginal place even in 1840s-era letters from OU faculty and trustees to persuade Reverend Alexander McGill to accept the presidency of OU. Even as OU faculty and administrators praised various aspects of Athens life—the low cost of living, the amiable society of learned professors—they acknowledged difficulties in accessing Athens, Ohio, from other towns and regions (“The Crisis”). Apparently, actual or imagined difficulties of access to and from Athens, Ohio, did not vanish with the advent of the railroad system in the 1850s in southeastern Ohio.

In February 1843, well before Athens became linked to the Marietta & Cincinnati Railroad (in 1857) and to the Hocking Valley Railroad (1870), OU students published an article in the student-run paper, the *Echo and University Record*, titled “Removal of the College,” which reports on a proposition from the Ohio Legislature to move OU to Mansfield, in northern Ohio. In the article the students question the choice of Mansfield, hoping instead for a more “central place” such as Zanesville, Columbus, or Lancaster (qtd. in Hollow 43), all nearer the geographic and then political center of the state. The students write, confidently, “Then, and NOT UNTIL THEN will the Ohio University take a rank among the Literary Institutions of the land, consistent with its lofty name and the

character of the distinguished men who conduct its affairs” (ibid). Articles and also debates within and between the OU literary societies on related topics became a recurring feature in Athens as the population shifted northward and westward in the mid-nineteenth century. During the 1837-1838 school year, members of the Philomathean Literary Society debated the question, “Is Athens a suitable situation for a literary institution?” (qtd. in White 38), and in 1843 members of the Athenian Literary Society debated the question, “Should the O.U. [sic] be removed from Athens?” (qtd. in White 57). If juxtaposed alongside Manasseh Cutler’s earlier writing about the University and later Ohio poets’ depictions of a beautiful and noble OU, the students’ sentiments reveal a curious conflict that may have been present in the attitudes of many students and higher-ups at OU, a desire to be at the “center” of Ohio, which they began to see as elsewhere, and a lingering, perhaps fading, sense of OU and Athens, OH, as that center.

We see signs that OU administrators also felt the effects of OU’s distance from urban areas in how they discuss student problems. In the *Minutes and Resolutions of the President and Trustees of the Ohio University, 1899-1906*, the recorder notes that the trustees discussed the fact that those universities in or near cities have students who finish their degree programs more regularly than OU students do. Thus, OU’s trustees were concerned about what their students could do to support themselves financially for the duration of their degree program:

From the nature of the case those Colleges and Universities in or near large cities have the most [universal?] attendance. The Very few populous universities outside of large cities have been made attractive by their Very

liberal equipments [sic], or by Short Courses. In fact it becomes year by year more difficult to maintain a respectable standard among reputable colleges, and at the same time increase the attendance. (80)

This willingness among the trustees to compare OU to “populous” colleges and universities “in or near large cities” lets slip a standard that the trustees may have long had in mind for what they thought a respectable 1900s university should be: whatever populous urban and suburban colleges and universities were. I suspect that a hundred years prior to this, supporters of OU (or of American University or American Western University) half-expected OU to be a large university in a densely populated area, a beacon of educational grandeur in “Middletown,” the city in what the Ohio Company of Associates had then considered the middle of their purchase from the U.S. government.

By the mid twentieth century, Dr. Paul Kendall’s students who were writing for the two-volume history *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* were collecting information that spoke of a university that had modest local aspirations. Student Virginia Lee Carew, in her chapter “Administration of Ohio University,” writes that sometime between 1905 and 1915, President Ellis gave a “report to the legislature, in which also included the evaluations of this University by Kendrick Babcock, who called himself a ‘Specialist in Higher Education’.” One point that Mr. Babcock observed, according to Carew, was that “the present faculty [at OU] suffers from a tendency to inbreeding and from the geographical isolation of the University.” Student Janet Ayers, writing in the same volume, reports, “In 1900, Ohio University was largely a local university; most of the students came from Ohio and the greatest number of these from those counties nearest

Athens.” Although Ayers notes that by 1925 OU had students from the vast majority of Ohio’s counties, this lag in gaining a statewide population of students is noteworthy for an institution that was originally billed as a selling point of the Northwest Territory.

Two of the reasons commonly cited for OU’s diminishing status throughout the nineteenth century in particular are the lack of funding it experienced once state courts refused to allow OU to reappraise the value of land that it owned around the University proper, as well as the rise of other colleges and universities in Ohio, many of which were within closer proximity to urban or easily traversable areas. According to Professor Thomas Hoover’s 1954 history of OU, these reasons were intimately connected, for he portrays OU’s nineteenth-century story as that of a struggling, impoverished university that, cheated out of its rightful inheritance from its improvement of nearby lands, routinely sent ambassadors to Columbus in attempts to persuade state legislators to better fund the University. These ambassadors included generations of OU faculty and administrators who pleaded with state officials who, as time wore on, sided more decisively with the interests of Columbus’s own state agriculture and mechanical university, which came to be called Ohio State University. It is a narrative that also creeps into Margaret Boyd’s diary of 1873, providing an unsettling political backdrop to the college experiences that she highlights, though Boyd’s own awareness of its significance is doubtful. According to Hoover, William Henry Scott, president of OU from 1872-1883 and also an OU alumnus, campaigned vigorously for funding for OU, stressing “the needs of of the natural science department and the demand for an additional story for the main building for housing the literary societies and the museum” (143).



Scott's campaigning was not unique, but I single it out due to Boyd's references to it when she was a senior at OU. Evidently, Scott also served as Boyd's professor of elocution and astronomy, and in her diary Boyd records repeated instances of cancelled classes because of Scott's political work in the state capital.

References from Boyd about Scott's many absences from teaching may well signify times when Scott was busy persuading state legislators to give more support to OU, and indeed, in two references, Boyd makes this link overt. Her references are as follows:

- From January 14, 1873: "Did not recite today in Butler [Hall]. Scott absent. I recited alone in Mental Science."
- On January 24, a curious comment appears amid observations about other academic matters. She writes, "Prof. Scott busy writing."
- From January 24: "For the first time since Monday we recite in Butler. Scott has been in Columbus seeing about the interest of the college."
- From Feb. 3: "Scott is away, [sic] I am so glad."
- From April 1: "Scott is away attending to the interest of the O.U. so we have a chance to play."
- From April 2: "I hear today that Scott will not be back till Monday [five days away from the date of this entry]. We will have a long time to get our first lesson."
- On April 7, the Monday mentioned in the selection from April 2, she recites for a Mr. Adney "while Scott is gone."

- May 5: “Scott does not hear us recite this forenoon. He is not here.”

I suspect such notes would have persisted if Boyd had not graduated from OU in June of that year. The irony of President Scott’s eventual relocation to Columbus to serve as president of Ohio State University should not be lost on us either: did the years he and other OU administrators spent traveling to Columbus to defend OU weary them to the point of abandoning ship? Just as plausibly, did it persuade them to go elsewhere to gain power?

Thomas Hoover gives a general picture of OU’s late-nineteenth-century status that is perhaps bleaker and more accusatory of hostile or blasé politicians: “From the outset [of the Morrill Land Grant College Act of the 1860s], the legislators paid little attention to [OU’s] position as a state institution which should be supported actively by state funds” (127). Here OU sounds like a neglected child that was suffering from malnourishment, a result of faulty parenting. Writing some eighty years after Boyd, Hoover blames state politicians directly much as we might blame parents or other guardians for not caring for their dependents.

But even if we do not focus on Scott and his colleagues’ presence or absence at OU or on state legislators for indications of OU’s problematic status, we get a sense of the public’s relationship with OU from heeding Boyd’s comments about scarce attendance at the University. On January 7, 1873, the first day of the winter term, she writes, “Not many students out today [that is, in plain sight around campus]. I fear for the future of the old O.U.” From here, she talks about how sad she will feel to leave the University after this year. Could her comment about fearing for OU’s future result from

her observation that few students were on campus that day? Might it imply something more about OU's service to the state population? Similarly, on Sunday, January 19, she records an instance when she went to church only to discover that there would be no service that day. Then she says she went to class where she noted, "only four there beside the leader." Among other functions that this comment may serve to various readers of Boyd's diary, it reminds us of how small a student body we focus on when we study the situatedness of composition at OU historically. Available pictures of Margaret Boyd at OU do much the same, as Figure 1 shows (Boyd is second from the left in the back row):



Figure 1: Ohio University Class of 1873 photograph, from the Boyd Family Collection available at [ohiomemory.org](http://ohiomemory.org).

Worth bearing in mind is the fact that even after significant growth from the late 1800s to the 1930s, by 1938 OU enrolled just over 3,000 students (Smith 41). A century before this, in 1839, OU under President McGuffey enrolled 111 students and had five faculty members (Smith 30), and many of the students in the 1830s and 40s never graduated. The OU that Boyd knew was a far cry from the university many of us know today. Plagued by low attendance rates throughout the nineteenth century, OU seemed to some observers as undeserving of even the designation *university*, as evidenced by the comments of Henry S. Pritchett, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who in 1909 wrote, “The Ohio University is a mixture of college, normal school, and academy, while Miami University is a fairly good college with the same mixture of normal school and academy” (qtd. in Hoover 196). Just before this, Pritchett wrote, “It is evident that the three State universities are not all real universities. That designation may fairly be conceded to the Ohio State University” (ibid). Small, isolated, and poorly funded, OU may have long had a negligible status in the eyes of educators and state politicians, however much the place meant to the Margaret Boyds of Ohio and however much it seemed worth fighting for to the William Henry Scotts of the area. Whatever thriving community or communities that existed in Athens had limited power to withstand large-scale indifference on the part of larger populations elsewhere.

However, this is not to say that President Scott’s efforts left no impression. In 1893, the writers of *The Athena*, OU’s yearbook, summarized Scott’s presidency this way: “Then there were stormy times when Dr. W.H. Scott, an alumnus of the institution, became president; but he fought well, and won many battles, the benefits of which are

still enjoyed” (7). According to Hoover’s 1950s account, during President Scott’s campaign for increased funding for OU in the 1870s, Scott “stressed the needs of the natural science department and the demand for an additional story for the main building for housing the literary societies and the museum” (143). Hoover relates that Scott also fine-tuned admission requirements and organized early teacher training courses, among other accomplishments. OU did indeed grow during Scott’s and his successor’s times as president of OU. The lack of reported crises during this time tell a story of growing stability at long last, perhaps even that of a rise in prominence, though the University would never recapture its early status in the minds of ambitious pioneers from the eastern states.

Writings from OU alumni also suggest a good deal about the social ramifications of the geographic location of OU and Athens, OH. Martzloff’s collection *Poems on Ohio*, contains poems by two OU alumni: E.D. Emerson (“To the Ohio River”) and William Edward Gilmore (“Lines Written on Mount Logan”). By glorifying natural features, Emerson and Gilmore fall into a Romantic tradition that sought wisdom and rejuvenation in pastoral scenes. However, more to the point for my purposes is each writer’s selection of a natural feature or scene that characterized southern Ohio, especially the hilly terrain typical of southeastern Ohio. The Ohio River about which Emerson wrote brought early settlers from Marietta to towns farther west, allowing settlers to journey up tributaries like the Hocking River, weaving around the northern Appalachian foothills to found towns such as Athens. Also, Mount Logan, Martzloff explains in a footnote to Gilmore’s poem, “is represented on the Ohio Seal, since it was this range of hills that suggested the

device. It is near Chillicothe [a former capital of Ohio]”(*Poems* 17). Mount Logan is thus a range of hills particular to southern Ohio, some sixty miles west of Athens, as well as a symbol of an abundant, peaceful land beyond the mountains, or at least amid the hills across the Ohio River from the steeper Virginia mountains.

This image of peace and abundance beyond the mountains is one that I would call a trope, for it characterizes much of the early poetry written by white settlers to the region. Consider the first stanza of the “Settlers’ Song” of some settlers from Massachusetts to Granville, Ohio, in the central (just-beyond-the-mountains) part of the state:

When rambling o’er these mountains  
 And rocks, where ivies grow  
 Thick as the hairs upon your head  
 ’Mongst which you cannot go;  
 Great storm of snow, cold winds that blow,  
 We scarce can undergo;  
 Says I, my boys, we’ll leave this place  
 For the pleasant Ohio. (qtd. in Martzloff, *Poems* 108)

In this “song,” the mountains offer only hardship, hindering travel and affecting morale. Problems given by this physical feature are exacerbated by the wintry weather that can accompany it, the “Great storm of snow, cold winds that blow.” The resulting combination produces in the speaker, who rallies his “boys,” a decisive affirmation that they will move on to a better, more “pleasant” place.

The fact that some OU-affiliated writers of the nineteenth century published poetry that praised their home region is not significant in light of the tendency of writers from this period to look to their natural surroundings to help them give shape to their reflections. But I find it quite significant that in the “Settlers’ Song,” the trope of a peaceful, almost heavenly land beyond the mountains does not fully account for the sizeable chunk of hilly land that constituted the original purchase of the Ohio Company at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the land surrounding OU and Athens, OH. This land was and is hilly, some would say mountainous. As reports by early OU Board of Trustees members confirm, the distance between Athens, Ohio, and the residences of OU’s trustees, who lived from Virginia to Columbus and Zanesville, Ohio, made meetings difficult for all trustees to attend (Hoover 45-46). Hence “a trip to and from Athens in those days of poor roads was an arduous task in itself” (Hoover 46). Whether this southeastern section of Ohio is included in the Ohio of the “Settler’s Song” is, I think, dubious. And coexisting with this oversight is the appearance of two OU alumni in Martzloff’s collection, both of whom buck the westward-oriented trend by looking back to the hills and beyond for inspiration in nature.<sup>31</sup>

The oversight of southeastern Ohio in poetry that blends nature and spiritual feeling was counteracted by Emerson in another poem, “Athens, Ohio,” in which he brought the Eden-esque pastoral back to Athens and the hilly surroundings. This is a poem that appeared not in *Poems of Ohio*, which attempted to feature poetry from across

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<sup>31</sup> This is not to say that all the other poets featured in Martzloff’s collection praise features of only northern or western Ohio. But what I find telling is that of the two writers in the collection who have stated connections to OU, both focused on geographical features that lie within a day’s journey of the University—possibly a result of Martzloff’s selection.

the state, but in a book with a more local focus: OU President Charles William Super's 1924 history of the University. The poem begins,

Sweet Athens! The home of learning and beauty,  
 How I long for thy hills and thy rich, balmy air!  
 For thy wide-spreading green, smiling sweetly on duty,  
 And the valley beneath and the stream winding  
 There! (qtd. in Super 75)

In line one, the speaker links the “beauty” of Athens with “learning,” giving readers their first two clues about what he would like them to associate with Athens. The rest is a tribute to the natural surroundings of the town and to the colorful events that involved student growth. Significantly, it ends by associating Athens with a “heavenly plain” (qtd. in Super 76), possibly signifying an allegiance to the Romantic tradition of using nature to explore and explain the sublime. However, Emerson describes more than nature—he describes the OU curriculum, the literary societies, the “fun of the blunders at each recitation!” (qtd. in Super 75). Here, in the act of Emerson's writing, was an OU alumnus who brought Romantic poetry to the region of Athens, OH, rather than allowing other writers to appropriate the genre to elevate ideas about their own regions. Emerson's as well as Gilmore's poetry may be read as a potential defense of a geographic context and educational center that newer waves of settlers and quite a few poets overlooked in their formation of an Ohio identity. A defense of Athens County's aesthetic qualities can be found in Martzloff's comment about Hockingport, a small town on the Ohio River: “It is a beautiful place where the river empties into the broad Ohio. George Washington when a



young man camped one night here and he writes about it in his journal. On the Virginia side of the river the land is still known as Washington's Bottom" (*Fifty* 85). This example marks one of many times when Martzolff calls attention to Washington's favorable impressions of the area.

If, by the mid to late nineteenth century, some OU-affiliated writers felt compelled to defend Athens and rural, mountainous southeastern Ohio and if many students felt the need to debate the value of OU's location, these events occurring around the time of OU's temporary closure (1845-1848), then it strikes me as significant that Athens, OH, was singled out and made a center again by the 1870s, with the construction of the grandiose Athens Lunatic Asylum just south of OU, and as of 1988, part of OU. It strikes me as significant that what mental health professionals and state legislators perceived as Athens' remote location was one of the reasons they selected it for the asylum: the asylum was to be "a calming sanctuary removed from the noises, tensions, and distractions of urban life" (Hollow 64). Though this particular description comes from the pen of later historian Betty Hollow, it summarizes a common notion of Athens, OH, as marginalized, and this same marginalization proved attractive for those in the mental health business. The decision to construct an asylum designed to hold 500 patients in Athens, OH, does not counter the pastoral vision of OU and Athens created by Emerson because of the reasons suggested for the asylum's location here. But these reasons also suggest that earlier OU students' expressed fears about the geographical irrelevance of OU and Athens were not unwarranted.

The dominance of the Asylum in OU student life can be felt in an 1880 letter written by OU student Orlando Lowry to one A. Rogers at another college. In the letter, Lowry gives an overview of life at OU and in Athens, Ohio, to his friend who is unfamiliar with the area. At the beginning of the letter he shares what might be called typical facts about OU: the number of students present that term (just 75), the number of buildings used by the University (only three), the distribution of professors in the buildings. Then, after associating OU with the Hocking Valley and the Marietta-Cincinnati Railroads, he spends a third of his letter describing the Asylum, which he calls the “Ohio Insane Asylum.” His shift of focus to this topic and his enhancement of detail may speak to the centrality of this institution in the social life of the town:

It [the Asylum] is a very large building & about  $\frac{3}{4}$  a mile around it. There are about six hundred persons in it at present [or 100 more than the building was designed to house]. I have been through it twice & it is a horrible place to be, & beyond the power of my pen to describe. They have a dance every Thursday night for the amusement of the lunatics & it is fun to see dance [sic]. The best dancing I ever [seen?] was by some of the “lunnies,” as they are called, Every one can dance that wants to providing they dance with a “lunny.” There were about four hundred at the last dance that they had & if my feet would permit me I would take a step with them just for the [name?] of it. I believe it is no harm for them to dance for they enjoy it so well. Well, leaving the Asylum we will go to the college again.

The contradictions in Lowry's letter are themselves intriguing. For example, did he find the Asylum "horrible" or "fun" or both? However, I would like to dwell longer on this section of the letter in conjunction with the other sections. After dwelling on this point Lowry discusses OU's literary societies and spends a few lines asking about people that he and his reader know, but the topic that takes up the most space in his letter is the Asylum. For some reason he sees fit, in his description of OU and Athens, to move from general comments about OU to more extensive comments about the Asylum and back. According to his letter, life at OU, whatever its number of students and buildings, is characterized largely by the happenings at the Asylum, the mental health *center* that was intended to occupy a *marginal* cultural place. The letter supports the assertion that mid-nineteenth-century OU students' concerns about the location of Athens, OH, did not die during the late nineteenth century after the railroads facilitated transportation to Athens. The newly constructed Asylum, already overpopulated and busy with scheduled events that apparently involved OU students, reminded students of the town's marginalized status in the eyes of some specialists and legislators.

The gradual change in the status of OU as the state population shifted northward and westward throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth is felt acutely when we consider Martzloff's boast that "the [original white] settlers sent out by the Ohio Company of Associates, a land surveying company, had a greater number of Harvard and Yale graduates than any similar body of pioneers in America" (cited in Smith 19), and when we note Manasseh Cutler's explanation, in his June 1800 charter of OU, that he picked "The American University" as his preferred title for the university because it was

the “*most natural*, easy, and agreeable” (qtd. in Smith 20, my emphasis). What had seemed to Cutler only “natural” when naming the university that would be within a day’s journey of the Ohio River, which brought early settlers west from Pittsburgh and Marietta, would seem undeserved, if not laughable, to later generations of OU students. What had seemed to Martzloff a point of pride about the educational affiliations of many early settlers of Athens, Ohio, would become a joke for twentieth-century students who would refer to OU as the “Harvard on the Hocking.”<sup>32</sup> The very idea of composition at OU gives us an extended example of a dynamic setting due to a steady onslaught of sociopolitical factors that shaped and reshaped understandings of what it meant to attend and support this university.

In sum, and without giving a single all-encompassing conclusion, what might it have meant to study or teach or administrate at OU at different points in its history? I think we would receive vastly different answers if we reviewed the written perspectives of Manasseh Cutler, student members of the mid-nineteenth-century literary societies, local historian Charles M. Walker, Cincinnati publisher Robert Clarke, OU student Orlando Lowry, OU alumnus and President William Scott, OU graduate student Irene Elizabeth Smith, and other sources, each of which reflects somehow on how their work gets prompted or received in relation to tensions in OU and Athens’ relationship with other parts of the state (i.e., where the writing comes from) and in relation to how they

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<sup>32</sup> Whether Martzloff’s words were the driving force behind the label “the Harvard on the Hocking” is debatable. Additional reasons for the label could stem from Alston Ellis’s visits to elite East Coast schools during his presidency at OU, as well as from President John C. Baker’s education at Harvard. Also, Athens lawyer and writer William E. Peters reminds us that Manasseh Cutler modeled OU after Harvard and Yale (88).

reach audiences in other locales (i.e., where the writing goes). If members of this university encouraged and sanctioned certain kinds of writing (compositions)—and old catalogs and similar sources say they did—then this knowledge was put to use in ways that imply an awareness of, if not obsession with, an uncertain institutional status of OU and cultural status of Athens, Ohio, in the eyes of others. To write at OU seems to have meant to make sense of shifting contexts.

## CHAPTER FOUR: COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION AT OU

## Composition

By *composition*, I mean *writing produced for and sanctioned by members of a college or university, usually writing produced by students and judged by members of the university community*. This definition, expansive even for proponents of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement, entails the writing that students do in their composition classes but also the writing they do for other classes, writing they do for school-sponsored groups such as literary societies, and writing they produce that faculty judge informally outside the classroom, such as original orations written to be performed at commencement addresses. By not limiting my definition of composition to writing produced in or for first-year composition courses, even as I acknowledge that this generous definition is not how many modern-day rhetoric and composition scholars use the term, I hope to show that OU students, faculty, and administrators were invested in writing at many levels, and that the writing that they encouraged and practiced overlapped with oral, public rhetoric in ways that had immediate and long-standing effects on the OU and Athens community. Too, I define composition broadly so that I can account for a range of composition definitions and understandings endorsed by variously situated students and other OU affiliates. What composition entails for different people at different times, given the documents that are available to us, is worth examination. As I hope to show, few sources agree on what *composition* involves exactly, but most of them seek fruitful, context-specific connections between writing and persuasion.

One outcome of tracing ways that composition has signified for different OU-affiliated groups is to expose the interestedness of composition itself. At one time, for one department or college at OU, *composition* seems to resemble one thing, and at other times (or even the same time), for a different group of scholars, it appears to mean another, such that any story of composition at OU begins to feel pluralistic to the point of schizophrenia if one allows for everyone's definition of composition to stand on equal footing, that is, if one refuses to create a schema by which to judge or rank some definitions as more or less pure or accurate than others. My purpose, then, is not to celebrate multiple definitions of the term even as I point them out, but to acknowledge *how* and *for whom* the term *composition* seems to be operating at different times. I believe that in considering several (any?) forms that composition has assumed at OU, we embrace what Victor J. Vitanza called for in *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*. We get to echo his cries for "more" and "yes" regarding possibilities for future histories of rhetoric. While I focus on composition as my primary subject matter, I nonetheless engage in some of the same rhetorical moves that he does.<sup>33</sup>

Today, it is no secret to say that whoever controls composition has a far-reaching influence on the core curriculum and on how students write. In OU's history, something of the same situation likely applied. The College of Liberal Arts seems to have been aware of the consequences of controlling the composition curriculum, but the same can be said for OU's State Normal College, which for over three decades in the early

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<sup>33</sup> I speak of a basic comparison. Vitanza pluralizes what histories of rhetoric might consider and look like on many levels, including at the sentence level. Even as I recognize slippage between sign and signifier, I persist in trying to use language to construct a history whose questions and inconsistencies are generally "clear" at the sentence level.

twentieth century made its own attempts to control composition at OU. On a smaller, departmental scale, whatever form composition is allowed to take may affect the proximity of each scholar's specialty area to the core curriculum (the core curriculum almost always involved composition as a requirement at multiple stages of undergraduate students' coursework). If composition is allowed to mean what many of us today would call creative writing, then faculty members whose interests include the output or even just the interpretation of creative work stand to benefit from this close association to the required curriculum. If composition is presented as the necessary counterpart to the study of (what counts to English departments as) literature, then those scholars who specialize in particular literary periods gain campus exposure and enhance their ability to influence students by teaching interpretive strategies for selected literary works alongside or in conjunction with required composition initiatives. In this section, I speak primarily of composition in the first decades of the twentieth century, before OU had transitioned from a teaching university to a research university. That is, I want to note that without a publish-or-perish academic culture that controlled the priorities of English Department faculty members (and others), the extent to which different faculty members might have influenced larger or smaller groups of students then enrolled at OU probably mattered greatly.<sup>34</sup> With local influence at stake, the importance of how composition came to be defined and who got to be involved in teaching it gained greater significance.

What this means for us today, looking back, is that by taking a historical, neosophistic look at how composition has been defined and owned, we stand to gain a

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<sup>34</sup> See the Coda, specifically the interview with Dr. Roland Swardson, for more information about OU's mid-twentieth-century transition to a research university.



nuanced appreciation for composition as a site of contestation among groups who were vying for academic centrality, at least at OU. In her book *Textual Carnivals*, Susan Miller has already traced the late-nineteenth-century decline of composition as a consequence of many faculty members then-new interest in literary study. By concentrating on many forms that composition seems to have taken at a local site, I seek to further expose power struggles that ensued over the scope that various groups allowed composition to have. In looking back and seeing composition as a site of contestation and change as opposed to seeing it as assuming a natural-seeming evolution of rhetoric to writing, I believe those of us who teach composition at colleges and universities today can develop a sense of our theoretical and pedagogical heritage as one of interestedness and conflict in the areas that different ones of us allow *rhetoric* and *composition* to occupy.

Below, I trace the use of the term *composition* by following instances when it was used at OU, instances when the term was not used but when a situation gives rise to the definition of composition I have outlined, and instances when past OU affiliates did not use the term but may have implied a kind of composition that varies from my definition.

In prioritizing the concepts of possibility (*dynaton*) and conflicting perspectives (*dissoi logoi*) from the first sophists, I am creating a history that is not inherently one thing but many, and not many narratives that complement one another perfectly but many narratives that conflict without reaching a single resolution. This lack of unity is due to many factors, including the various locations from which different writers write (or from which different speakers speak), complete with the particular advantages and disadvantages that come from occupying each subject position, and including the

slipperiness of language, a human-made construct, to capture the essence (if any) of things and ideas. Much as the early sophists reveled in linguistic ambiguity and multiple perspectives, the narrative below highlights multiple definitions of composition and the many locations from which these definitions (perspectives) came.

As in the section called “Context,” I cannot use a neosophistic analysis to examine the forms that composition has assumed at OU from 1825 to 1950 without implying that composition assumed a stable form during the years before and after this time. So I will treat this time frame loosely, looking just before 1825 and just after 1950 in addition to looking between the two dates when doing so enhances the number of compositions we might consider and our understanding of how various notions of composition might relate. First, I turn to two early sources in OU’s history: a letter written by OU student R. Humphreys in 1821 and the autobiography of OU’s first graduate, Thomas Ewing, who entered OU in 1810 and who went on to become a lawyer and a U.S. Senator. Separated as they are by eleven years, these texts might seem arbitrary selections to readers who are unfamiliar with the holdings of the OU archives. I choose these texts because they are among the very few primary sources that I think reveal early OU students’ perspectives on life at OU; and among this already small batch of sources, the two texts are almost alone in bringing up rhetoric or composition.

In R. Humphreys’ 1821 letter, sent to one James Lawton, Jr., Humphreys writes about writing and uses words such as *style* and “Rheterick” in ways that fit what modern-day scholars would call composition. But notably, he does not use the noun *composition* or the verb *compose*. To his friend Lawton, Humphreys writes,

I wish you could spend a couple of sessions here in studying Rheterick [sic]. It would be of incalculable advantage to you. I showed one of your pieces ('The Wolf Hunt) to Dr. Darr a gentleman from York state. He expressed his approbation of it in very flattering terms and expressed a great wish that you might attend further to education. I have lately been reading in Greek Aristetle [sic] in the art of Poetry and some of the Criticisms of Longinus [...].

Here, skill or potential in "Rheterick" is linked to one of Lawton's "pieces" that could be "shown" to Dr. Darr, presumably an educational authority. If Humphreys could pass on Lawton's "The Wolf Hunt" to a faculty member or like figure, then this "piece" would likely have been a written text, one whose original purpose is unclear but one which students used to gain approval from an educational authority figure. We can say that eventually the piece worked like a composition, which it might have been originally. So even though this text is brought up in a point about rhetoric, the example at hand is, or later became treated as, a written work—a composition. Furthermore, the lack of semantic barriers between Aristotelian rhetoric and writing for institutional purposes for Humphreys tells us something about the philosophical and practical ends to which rhetoric was then applied. For this student in 1821, rhetoric bore directly on writing; in his letter at least, he did not treat the two as separate categories. From this avoidance of the term *composition*, we might suppose that no stakeholders existed at this time who might have benefited from elevating composition over rhetoric, or rhetoric over

composition. Whether talking about ideas or style, speaking or writing, rhetoric was seen as the appropriate category for such issues.

Earlier in his letter, too, Humphreys writes about what many current scholars would call composition, albeit without using this term. Instead, he speaks of style, telling his reader, “You must not expect because I am a College student, that I shall furnish the most excellent specimens of style. Indeed, you have no idea how they [presumably, faculty members] hurry us sundays [sic] and all days. There is not a moment’s rest.” Due to his studies, which he later likens to “overwhelming torrents,” he feels he has little time to tend to “style”—a canon of classical rhetoric that he applies to writing. Style, for Humphreys, designates written flow and ornamentation, and rhetoric (or “Rheterick”) includes writing, and quite possibly composition. Struggles for primacy between composition and rhetoric (and between composition and literature, composition and speech, and composition and creative writing) seemed a non-issue for Humphreys in 1821; rhetoric subsumed the rest.

This is not to say that no OU students in the early nineteenth century used composition to refer to their writing, just that signs of a barrier between rhetoric and composition did not inevitably appear. Thomas Ewing, for one, used the term *composition*, though in a way that signals a categorization scheme that differs from many of ours in the present. In Ewing’s autobiography, which he said he intended for his descendants (3), he wrote of “composition” in terms of “prose and poetry,” noting exercises in “rhyme” and “blank verse” that he had to complete (34). However, the last OU-related scene he recalls in the autobiography is one that involves what I would call

composition, but which he never refers to with this term. This scene involves the writing and presentation of his commencement address, in which he compares the United States favorably to Napoleonic Europe. Ewing's use of *composition* to describe "prose and poetry" of a sort that many today would call creative writing and his withholding of the same term to describe his commencement address illustrates the multiplicity of uses *composition* has had and might have, and it makes implications about where academic areas have arisen. If composition, for Ewing in 1810, included prose and poetry, then the absence of a separate category for the writing of prose and poetry (e.g., creative writing) suggests that for Ewing at this time, the term *composition* lent itself to widespread use more easily than terms like *prose* did. Similarly, Ewing's withholding of *composition* to describe his commencement address implies that the writing of a commencement address would fall under another realm of knowledge, perhaps rhetoric. Although he wrote his commencement address putting pen to paper for an institutional purpose, the realm of composition that Ewing acknowledges does not extend to writing done for a public ceremony; presumably, *rhetoric* subsumes writing that was completed for this end. In his autobiography, then, he uses *composition* to describe some but not all kinds of school-related writing, that which is nearer to classroom exercises and assessment than to public display. In the broader parameters for composition that I adopt, however, both discourses would count as compositions; both could be learned or crafted in a university setting. Also, in much of OU's subsequent history, the line between writing and oral rhetoric would be blurred, particularly through the rise of OU's literary societies.

The examples of Humphreys' and Ewing's texts remind us of the basic linguistic principle that language changes and has always changed, and in Humphreys' letter especially we see the influence of the belles lettres tradition. What I sense in Humphreys' and Ewing's writings are conceptions of composition that apply *composition* to a few specific writing endeavors or types—for Ewing, prose and poetry and for Humphreys, implicitly, writing style. This restrained use of composition prior to the time when first-year composition and other composition courses would become a requirement at OU suggests that in the early 1800s at this university, areas of study such as rhetoric, however much they overlapped with what I would call composition, had as much or more academic legitimacy than that of composition—if composition could be called a distinct area of study. For Humphreys and Ewing, it seemed a straightforward matter to attribute various aspects of writing, even surface-level features, to rhetoric. Less straightforward is their lack of agreement about how small the province of composition can be. To more fully consider Humphreys' case, his reliance on a belles lettres tradition to ensconce writing-related matters within the broader realm of rhetoric is not surprising in light of the job titles held by OU presidents before and after 1821 who also served as Professors of Science and Belles Lettres: Jacob Lindley (president 1809-1822), Robert Wilson (1824-1839), William McGuffey (1839-1843), Alfred Ryors (1848-1852), and Solomon Howard (1852-1872) (Walker 349-350).<sup>35</sup> This long line of high-ranking university officials associated with rhetoric via belles lettres legitimizes writing as a surface-oriented subsection of rhetoric.

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<sup>35</sup> Had Walker written his book at a later date, he might have also noted that William Henry Scott, president of OU from 1872-1883, held a similar professorial title.

Ewing's linking of composition to creative writing finds a surprising affinity with some later descriptions of composition courses in the OU catalog. But here, too, composition seems to entail creative writing one year and something entirely different another year. The term's varied applications in the catalog make it seem almost as malleable as *rhetoric* and give us clues about how certain groups of faculty wanted the term to be used. Approximately 110 years after Ewing penned his autobiography, in OU's 1919-1920 catalog's "Detailed Statement of the Departments of Instruction," the College of Liberal Arts described rhetoric coursework as synonymous with composition: "In the classes in rhetoric, the main stress is placed upon the actual work in composition done by the student" (49). This blend is complicated further by the simultaneous prevalence of literature in the English Department: "*When studying literature, emphasis will also be placed upon the practice of composition, and in the classes in rhetoric much attention will be given to the study of literature*" (49, its emphasis). This 1919-1920 source reveals that members of the English Department tended to literature, composition, and rhetoric, each of them vis-à-vis the other. At this time the English Department expressed as its general aim "to train the power of expressing thought, and to cultivate an appreciation of literature" (49)—a statement that was inclusive enough to house any kind of writing and any kind of interpretation of printed texts, provided that the texts counted as "literature." Was this departmental scope an attempt by department heads to prevent factions? to bring many specialists under a united front which could claim textual production and interpretation as its exclusive specialty area? In the context of OU's early twentieth-century reliance on its State Normal College to bring in students and state

funding, I see a push for a united front as a possibility from the English Department of the College of Liberal Arts.

When it put its philosophy into practice, the English Department of the College of Liberal Arts revealed a curious mix of inclusivity and exclusivity as it discussed composition through what might have been literature and creative writing. The catalog from the 1919-1920 school year lists, in addition to Freshman English, a course labeled “113. *Advanced Composition*,” which is described as follows: “The course will deal mainly with the Short Story, but may be varied to suit the needs of the class. Open only to those who have shown superior ability in courses 101 and 102 [Freshman English courses]” (51). (English 101 and 102 at this time focused on self-expression in both writing and speaking—in “oral and written composition,” and they also managed to acquaint students with English literature [47].) If dealing “mainly with the Short Story,” in terms of the interpretation or the production of this form of prose, then “Advanced Composition” here would fall squarely into the modern-day realm of literature (if interpretation is emphasized) or creative writing (if production is emphasized). If by “deal[ing] mainly with the Short Story” the course emphasized writing about short stories, then it might have operated as a composition course in a modern-day sense or as a writing-enriched literature course. At any rate, those faculty members who were invested in the interpretation of texts, creative writing, other kinds of writing, or even speech seemed to want a connection to the required composition sequence, or if not the required part of the sequence, then a selective branch of it. The composition-related course descriptions of 1919-1920 are broadly worded enough to let just about everyone in.



From my modern-day perspective which has grown familiar with gate-keeping functions of composition through the required status of first-year composition and even junior-level composition courses, an oddity of the 1919-1920 “Advanced Composition” course is the fact that it was made available “only to those who have shown superior ability” in their Freshman English work. This course appears exclusive, intended for a mere handful of the students who might wish to take it. Was such exclusivity a consequence of this composition course’s alliance with a form of writing that by 1919 counted as literature? We cannot know for sure why the course was designated for a select few high-achieving students, but we can pause long enough to notice that at OU in 1919-1920, literature and literary specialists may have been able to make a strong claim to controlling “Advanced Composition” if the course focused on writing about short stories or perhaps even the writing of short stories. In 1920, some four and a half decades before the OU English Department’s establishment of an official program in creative writing, the production of creative work fell into a disputed academic area, a borderland whose nearness to required composition courses make it all the more tantalizing for instructors invested in teaching writing and instructors invested in teaching literature.

Elsewhere in the catalogs and in the University’s bulletins, the provinces of composition appear as a push and pull among subjects or concentrations such as literature, creative writing, grammar, rhetoric, and teacher training, for in course descriptions and sometimes department and college descriptions, faculty members with interests in each of these areas harnessed composition to fit their own areas of expertise. Again, I speak here particularly of the time period 1900-1950, the years when

composition was supposed to have meant mechanics and correctness, according to Kitzhaber and his followers. In examining various definitions of composition at OU, especially those definitions that appear after 1900, I wish to note a tension among faculty with different interests within the OU English Department as well as among faculty across whole colleges at OU. At a time when *composition* seems to have been used indiscriminately, signs of its interestedness crop up if we consider which groups stood to benefit or lose from tying composition to their goals and thereby claiming an ownership of composition. Past OU bulletins<sup>36</sup> and the student writers who produced the three-volume history of OU overseen by Dr. Kendall affirm that two OU colleges, the College of Liberal Arts and the State Normal College, made claims to composition at the same time. From its inception in 1902 to the 1930s, the State Normal College posed what may have been the biggest threat to the College of Liberal Arts's hold on composition courses.

The State Normal College's August 1903 bulletin makes clear that the College's mission was to train teachers to have a deep rather than superficial knowledge of many subjects. It (by which I mean the Normal College's administrators and influential faculty members) also wished to provide scholarly training on a par with that provided by the College of Liberal Arts, hence the Normal College's broad scope of classes and training sequences. Within the Normal College in 1903, rhetoric was to be taken in one's second and third years in the teacher-training sequence (24). Also, courses in rhetoric were given

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<sup>36</sup> The distinction between a bulletin and a catalog is fuzzy in light of texts available in the OU archives that identify as one or the other or both. From what I can tell, bulletins give more general description about the university: its history, its mission, its clubs and societies. Catalogs tend to concentrate more on actual courses offered. But in numerous seasonally produced pamphlets that archivists have placed in bound volumes, the categories get combined, so that it is common to find a pamphlet or volume that identifies as a bulletin *and* as a catalog.

“each term” in the Normal College (25). The Normal College’s early bulletins present rhetoric in terms of composition and reveal no sign that the courses were affiliated with the College of Liberal Arts. For instance, in the summer 1901 bulletin of this college, a course called “Rhetoric” is described as placing “the stress [...] upon actual work in composition.” Below this and other course descriptions is the explanation, “In all the work in English the aim is two-fold, the appreciation of literature, and the ability to give adequate expression to thought. For this reason, while studying literature, composition is also studied.” I cannot say for sure whether this focus belongs to an English department that is disparate from the English Department of the College of Liberal Arts (though I see nothing to prevent me from making this astonishing conclusion), but I can note that in such pamphlets the information is presented *as if* it came from somewhere within the State Normal College.

Likewise, under the section heading “English” in a summer 1903 pamphlet of “Ohio University and The State Normal College,”<sup>37</sup> these courses are listed: “English Grammar,” “American Literature” (which covered works by Irving, Cooper, and Emerson, among others), “Shakespere [sic],” “Rhetoric,” and “History of English Literature” (which focused on canonized English authors). The course description for “Rhetoric” is as follows: “College work will be done. *The emphasis will be upon actual work in composition.* Forty-five hours’ credit will also be given” (21, my emphasis). These brief excerpts contain several telling features. For one, the course description for “Rhetoric” conflates rhetoric and composition to an extent that each seems synonymous

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<sup>37</sup> Like the information before it, this pamphlet appears within a bound volume titled *Ohio University Bulletins 1903-1908*.

with the other. For another, the courses listed appear to belong to the State Normal College, not the College of Liberal Arts. So faculty who were in charge of training future teachers were laying claim, on some level, to composition, rhetoric, literature, and the study of the English language. A third point comes from the seemingly innocuous statement, “College work will be done,” a statement which begins the course description for “Rhetoric.” Why did the writers of this course description feel compelled to specify that “Rhetoric,” which for nearly a century had been a college course at OU, would involve “college work”? In this statement I sense some potential insecurity regarding the then-new State Normal College’s claims to academic respectability within the university setting, an insecurity that factors into Normal College faculty member Henry G.

Williams’ introduction to the State Normal College in a bulletin from 1904:

Normal students in science, history, mathematics, literature, etc., are thrown into classes with college students who are pursuing purely literary and scientific courses in the University. In this way the several colleges of the University are put upon the same level. There can be no lowering of standards. The tendency is toward a raising of the standards in all departments. (2)<sup>38</sup>

If faculty members of the State Normal College were concerned about their courses being as rigorous as those of the College of Liberal Arts, then they may well have designed their own rhetoric courses to match or even surpass the liberal arts college’s rhetoric

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<sup>38</sup> This information comes from the “Ohio University Bulletin,” volume two, number one, of August 1904. It appears within the bound volume *Ohio University Bulletins 1903-1908*.

courses in scope or depth. Doing so would have fit their agenda as expressed by Williams and as echoed in the Normal College's 1903 course description for its "Rhetoric" course.

In *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century*, volume two, multiple student writers of Paul Kendall's class remark on overlaps between the State Normal College and the College of Liberal Arts. The exact nature of these overlaps may not be discernable or may vary depending on the source and the source type. Here, let me note how a few 1950-era students perceive it, and then I will examine the college-to-college relationship as it appears in other sources. Carol L. Tyler, in a section of *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* titled "Education Divisions at Ohio University," writes that the State Normal College of the early 1900s had a department of elocution and a department of "English Language and Literature," among other departments. She adds that the College of Liberal Arts also had a department of "English Language and Literature" and a department of "Public Speaking." Student Virginia Lee Carew, in the section called "Administration at Ohio University," writes that during Herman G. James's time as president of OU (1935-1943), "there were no less than two departments of English, history, math, and biology functioning at the same time. In one year [ostensibly, one year since James assumed the office of president] he had reorganized the existing colleges and created the necessary new departments and colleges." Although I have spent considerable time raising questions about the influential figures whose opinions may underlie the points raised in this student-written volume, I resort to this source again partly because the students' words appear to have been sanctioned by Paul Kendall and perhaps by administrators and the then president of OU. I suspect such overseers would not have

allowed a mistake involving a miscount of the number of OU's English departments, or if they had allowed it, then they wanted such a representation for a reason (e.g., to generalize the state of a department that had not been fully approved by higher-ups or that was continuously developing under the umbrella of a larger department?).

Connections between the State Normal College and the College of Liberal Arts seem to have been complicated at best, as depicted by students from the first decade of the State Normal College's existence. Perhaps the two colleges' handling of composition was more intertwined than Paul Kendall's students of 1950 imagined. Student writers of the 1908 edition of *The Athena*, the students' yearbook, say that OU's normal college plan was "unlike the plans pursued in all other States. Never [until OU founded its normal college] had any State [sic] undertaken to establish a teacher's college or normal school in connection with a college of liberal arts" (67). The writers continue:

After six years of trial and a steady growth in the attendance upon the Normal College classes, it can be said that the experiment has been quite successful. The presence of a high-grade college of liberal arts, in which all normal college students may pursue regular collegiate work, has been beneficial to those who wish to become leaders in the teaching profession, and the presence of the Normal College has been equally advantageous to those who pursue work in the college of liberal arts, and many such students have taken much of their elective work in the State Normal College. Thus, standards in both institutions are kept high, and each one profits by the presence of the other. (67)

This depiction presents the two colleges as leaning on each other rather than merely coexisting. Students from one college may take core courses in the other, and students in the other may take electives in the first.

If the matter were as simple as this, then I would doubt the coexistence of two *distinct* departments of English, each of which conducted altogether *different* composition courses. However, by 1923, two separate departments of English are indeed summarized in separate sections of *The Athena*. On one page appears the College of Education's English Department, with this description:

English was given a department in the College of Education in 1905. Before that time English Composition and Literature had been given in the College of Arts, and courses in methods, in the College of Education.

With the growth of the University and the College of Education, it became necessary to have a department of English in the College of Education. There are now 450 students in the English Composition courses of the department.

This department has for its aims the development of expression, oral and written, and the acquiring of a love for good literature. It gives special attention to the methods of teaching English subjects. (72)

The development of this newer English department is linked to the "growth of the University and the College of Education," to an increase in the number of students who presumably wished to benefit from formal training in teaching methods. Also, the writers

speak of “composition” in conjunction with how many students the Department had: 450. Did the College and the student writers of this description see the teaching of composition classes as a bridge to departmental growth and autonomy?

This College of Education-run English Department lists four professors who were housed therein. This is in contrast to a separate page in the 1923 *Athena* that lists a five-professor-strong Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts. While the student writers of the page on the College of Liberal Arts’s English Department cast this English department in historical terms, linking it with the fact that English was first taught at OU “as a subject” in 1860 and English Literature was first taught at OU in 1862 (51), the student writers offer little description of what actually went on in this department, what priorities and goals the department held dear. Instead, the writers list the names of past faculty. Between the depictions of the two English departments in the 1923 *Athena*, the scope of the College of Education’s version seems clearer.

Meanwhile, the catalogs, perhaps the longest-running record of how academic departments and colleges portrayed themselves to students, give hints that composition was viewed in similar but not identical ways across the two colleges. For me, a point running through this story of composition from the early 1900s catalogs is that *composition* appears to serve as a catch-all term for an explicit focus on the study and production of language. The 1919-1920 catalog lists a sequence of two “Freshman Composition, Teachers’ Course[s]” handled by the Normal College (133). Additionally, under the normal college umbrella, the catalog lists courses such as “Literature for the Primary Grades,” “Literature for the Grammar Grades,” and “Methods of Teaching the



English Classics and Composition in the High School,” even courses without an articulated pedagogical bent, such as “American Poetry,” “English Poetry from 1798 to 1896,” and “Mrs. Browning and George Eliot” (133). From this, it would seem that the Normal College was positioning itself, through its stated mission of training teachers well in an array of subjects, to be an authority on both composition and literature. From this and other course descriptions, we might go so far as to say that by 1920 composition was going the way of rhetoric, serving as a form of study that lacked obvious boundaries.<sup>39</sup>

On a subtle level, it is possible to make the case that the Normal College faculty covered composition more comprehensively than the College of Liberal Arts did, based on the detail of the course descriptions from the 1919-1920 OU catalogs. At this time the College of Liberal Arts offered a course called “Freshman English,” which had “two definite purposes: (1) The endeavor to increase the student’s power of self-expression through emphasis upon practice in oral and written composition; (b) A systematic preliminary survey of English literature” (47)—a generalized emphasis on literature and self-expression that is strikingly similar to the State Normal College’s explanation of its own English courses as stated in its much earlier (August 1903) bulletin. Also in the 1919-1920 catalog, the State Normal College is listed as having its own first-year composition course, a “Freshman Composition, Teachers’ Course[s].” This course is described as having the purpose of helping students in “oral and written composition in narration and exposition” and in “oral and written work in description and argumentation” (133). These two descriptions show that the Normal College’s version of

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<sup>39</sup> See Michael Leff’s late-twentieth-century essay “The Habitation of Rhetoric.”

first-year composition spent more time breaking down the types of writing that the course would cover. The Normal College's course description spells out the writing modes "narration and exposition" and "description and argumentation." It also portrays composition as retaining ties to oral rhetoric. By contrast, the Liberal Arts College's course description keeps the oral component and adds a literature component, but includes just a vague comment about "increasing" one's "self-expression." In its concern for connecting writing to English literature, did the College of Liberal Arts concede composition to the State Normal College? Insofar as course descriptions tell a story, the descriptions of the State Normal College tell the more intricate story of what composition at OU looked like circa 1920.

Although every year's catalog does not tell the story encapsulated above, the possibility that some catalogs might do so could give us pause if we consider "the" history of composition as an area that is no longer owned by colleges of arts and sciences. Another sign that OU's College of Education<sup>40</sup> took composition seriously comes in the 1926-1927 bulletin and catalog, which gives the stipulation that "a student must have an average of 'C' or above, or a 'C' or above in his last course in English composition before he may do student teaching in any school" (123). Moreover, those students who sought to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in education had to take a two-course sequence of "Freshman Composition" and two courses in literature; plus those students who sought to teach English in high schools had to meet additional English requirements.

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<sup>40</sup> From references in catalogs of different years, it appears that around the early 1920s, OU's State Normal College became the College of Education.

In 1925-1926, the College of Education's course descriptions for its two required first-year composition classes appears sparse and vague compared to what had appeared in the catalogs just five years earlier. In 1925-26, there was no longer any mention of specific writing modes; instead we see only that each course was a "teachers' course," that it involved "several sections," that it was a three-hour course, and that it was taught by four core faculty members (one of whom was a professor) (163). However, in the same year the College of Education offered a class called "Sub-Freshman Composition," the only basic writing course I see for any OU college in the 1925-26 catalog. This course's description is as follows: "A course planned for those whose preparation has been insufficient to meet the demands of [the College of Education's two required first-year composition courses]. No credit" (163). Even though the College's descriptions grow vague by 1925, the fact that this college alone offered basic writing tells us something about how it connected its mission to composition: College of Education faculty members may have treated their purview as entailing both the *preparation* of college students *for* college-level writing and the *instruction* of college students *in* college-level writing. With such moves, they broadened their focus beyond teacher preparation at the primary and secondary levels. They too become gate-keepers for the University. It is noteworthy that by the early 1930s, catalogs show that the College of Liberal Arts offered a basic writing course that was similar to the College of Education's, as the College of Liberal Arts ostensibly sought to keep up with the influence of the College of Education.

A final point I want to dwell on regarding the College of Education's treatment of composition during the 1925-26 school year is that this college advertised a course that is called "Literature and Advanced Composition," described in the catalog as follows: "Two semesters of English composition required. Recent writers of essays, poems, stories, and the shorter forms of drama will be read and discussed *as a basis for creative and critical writing*. 2 hours" (164, my emphasis). It was taught by one Mr. Slutz, who was part of the College of Education faculty. Please recall the "Advanced Composition" course controlled by the College of Liberal Arts in 1919-1920, how this course "deal[t] mainly with the short story" but how the course's catalog description never specified how, or even if, the course would relate writing to its coverage of short stories. In the College of Education, "Literature and Advanced Composition" appeared to be marketed explicitly as a writing course, telling us something about the centrality of writing to this group of faculty's pedagogies—or something about how this group of faculty members wanted to market their specialty area to the campus community.

Taking a step back from the course catalogs and bulletins and the student yearbook, what might it mean that during the rise of OU's Normal College from 1902 to the 1930s, composition became the province not only of the English Department in the College of Liberal Arts but also of the English Department in the State Normal College? The sustained co-existence of the two departments, or at least the two colleges' holds on composition, tells us that the faculty of either college did not have the means of persuading higher-ups that they had sole claim to controlling student writing. For that matter, might this have been a period when composition and an overlapping sense of

rhetoric thrived at OU despite what Albert Kitzhaber and others have written about rhetoric's demise in the early twentieth century? Was the desire for composition at OU so great that two colleges—for a time, the only two colleges at OU—offered subtly different versions of it? Or, were the faculty of the State Normal College at odds with the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts given the fact that each group of faculty members persisted in maintaining their own composition courses and their own English Department? Perhaps, perhaps, and perhaps. All I can conclude from advertisements of OU's courses is that around the time that OU President Alston Ellis devoted his attention to establishing and improving the State Normal College, this same college also took hold of composition, sometimes articulating more fully than the Liberal Arts College what it meant by *composition*. It would take a few decades and a university president who had different priorities to reverse this trend.

The claiming of composition by both the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Education in the 1920s gives us what may be the most vivid and longstanding example at OU of two groups of faculty members who laid claim to composition. But signs of composition's appeal to yet other groups of faculty members appear as well. In the early 1930s, OU had a "School of Commerce" that was part of the larger College of Liberal Arts. (In 1935, with Dr. Alston Ellis's death and the advent of President James's new agenda for the University, the School of Commerce would become its own college, and duplicate departments would be eradicated.) The School of Commerce offered a section (department?) called "Secretarial Studies," under which several course offerings appeared

in the catalogs. One such course was “Business English,” according to the catalog from 1932-1933. The course had this description:

The established principles of communication are applied to business writing. Specimens from business literature are analyzed and practice is given to writing to induce attention, understanding, and belief, as needed in business transactions. This course is required in B.S.S. and A.B. in Commerce courses of all students whose grade in English Composition 102 [the second of the Liberal Arts College’s required first-year composition courses] is D. 2 hours. (112)

This course was taught by a Miss Reynolds. I want to note the course’s required status for many students, and I want to note the course’s explicit focus on writing even though the writers of this Business English course’s description avoid the term *composition*. The same school also advertised a course called “Business Letter Writing” (112), whose title is self-explanatory. One point of interest to me is the involvement of “Secretarial Studies” in writing courses that sidestepped the term *composition*, but which nonetheless treated writing as integral to their own disciplinary work. Whether it may have been fashionable or politically advisable at OU by the 1930s to avoid the term *composition* is a subject I will return to shortly. For now, let me just note that the School of Commerce gives us another way we might examine the history of composition at OU, a way that is not as focused on first-year composition requirements.

The relationship of the State Normal College and the College of Liberal Arts and even that of the English Department within the College of Liberal Arts to the departments

and areas elsewhere within the same college give us contact zones where composition, or university-affiliated writing, operates like a natural resource that gets mined by competing parties across this institutional landscape. But a broader look at how *composition* appears in the official record of OU's courses tells us still more about the changing status of this term over time.

Many of us today in the field of Rhetoric and Composition may prefer to treat "the" province of composition loosely, much as we treat rhetoric as adding a dimension to human communication across disciplines. At OU in the late 1800s and again by the 1930s, course catalogs show courses in "rhetoric" or in "writing" that many of us today would label composition courses, but at these times the term *composition* acts like a chameleon, readily fading into the background as if it was better off hidden from view. Yet between the late 1800s and the 1930s, that is, during the time when the State Normal College thrived as OU's generator of larger student populations and increased funding from the state, the term *composition* thrives and seems owned by multiple groups, as we have seen. Alongside the rise of the State Normal College in 1902 and with it OU's ability to award teachers the training and credentials needed for them to serve schools elsewhere, course descriptions in the OU catalogs point to an omnipresent use of *composition* in courses ranging from the theoretical to the practical. At OU from 1902 to the early 1930s especially, it is as if composition has assumed rhetoric's nineteenth-century place as the glue that held together those forms of study that got recognized as specialized: it brought together the duties of offering practical training that would lead to

teacher accreditation with liberal humanistic duties of exposing students to a culturally valued set of texts.

Outside of OU, the general picture of education in America from the years 1900 to the 1930s marks a time that Bob Connors and others have argued is the heyday of a narrow, simplistic, grammar-obsessed form of composition in American colleges and universities, a time when specialized study in literature and in professional fields had severed rhetoric from its central role in American college life, leaving only a practical version of composition in its place. Did OU administrators and faculty buck the Harvard-led trend that Connors speaks of? If so, did they do so consciously? Perhaps most importantly, does OU's past handling of composition courses seem socially and intellectually viable from a modern-day perspective? As we have seen from OU undergraduate and graduate students' writings from the 1930s to the 1950s, specifically Irene Elizabeth Smith's thesis and Paul Kendall's first-year composition students, and as we see in the interview with Dr. Roland Swardson of the OU English Department (see coda), OU in the early 1900s may well have been—or seemed, to these writers—a place where an emphasis on research, specialized study, and individual careerism was slow to change the small-town emphasis on strong relationships among students and faculty members and the tendency for composition and rhetoric to act as an adhesive that connected many faculty objectives.<sup>41</sup>

A whirlwind tour through the chameleon-esque appearances of composition courses in the OU catalogs from the late 1800s to the mid 1900s may give us more to

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<sup>41</sup> I take up this point again, more indirectly, later in this section and in the next section, "Communication," when I discuss the existence of the OU literary societies well into the twentieth century.



observe, however, about the somewhat peculiar development of composition at this institutional site: what kind of clout composition had, what kind of cross-disciplinary pairings it afforded. In the catalog from 1880-1881, *composition* is used in course titles in diverse ways, suggesting that it may have already coexisted with rhetoric to facilitate or perhaps even legitimize other course content. For example, there was “Latin Prose Composition” and “Greek Prose Composition” for students in the classical track (and “Latin Prose Composition” is also listed for students in the scientific track). Among other justifications for the diction used, the course must have involved student writing.

Meanwhile, in the Preparatory Department, “Composition” was taken repeatedly, once in the form of “Composition, Analysis of Sentences” (21). However, the courses that many of us modern-day compositionists might expect to foreground composition shy away from this term, as if to suggest that composition operated as a tag that could assist or modify other subjects, like Latin or Greek, but not stand on its own. There appeared the course called “*Rhetoric*—‘How to Write Clearly’,” which in 1881-82 was offered in the third term of classically trained students’ freshman year (15). Then, in their sophomore year, these students and the students from the philosophical track took “*Rhetoric*—‘Principles of Rhetoric’” and “*Rhetoric*—Exercises,” followed in their senior year by “*Rhetoric*—Essays and Discussions,” with English literature required in their junior and senior years (18). Whether “rhetoric” in these instances entails a course of study that is separate from writing is doubtful given how frequently a course gets referred to as *rhetoric* in the title but whose descriptions use terminology that suggests written work.

Yet composition itself has no place in the titles of these “rhetoric” or “writing” courses.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> At this time, OU’s course catalogs did not provide course descriptions. So in my examination of courses

By the 1890s, composition appears to have been more commonly paired with grammar based on the course titles listed for the English Department, then called the Department of Rhetoric and English Literature. I take this pairing as a sign that a move toward a surface-oriented composition took hold at OU like at Harvard and elsewhere. But the persistence of oral rhetoric in remaining part of course descriptions and the continued pairing of composition with other areas makes me reluctant to say that the history of composition at OU *mirrored* the Harvard narrative of composition, with the latter's late-nineteenth-century emphasis on the writing of daily themes and the application of grammatical rules. At OU in 1890-1891, the course "English, Grammar, and Composition" was required for students in all four of OU's tracks of study: classical, philosophical, scientific, and pedagogical. However, the expressed aims of the English Department affirm an interdependent approach to dealing with writing from specialists in reading, writing, and speaking. The 1891-1892 catalog includes a description of the department under Professor Boughton, who, as we might recall, hosted weekly meetings of the Columbiad Literary Society in the 1890s. That description includes the following explanation of the department's philosophy: "The art of expression is cultivated by extensive reading from the best English models, by practice in original composition, and by daily drill in public speaking. Thus are secured the fullness, accuracy, and readiness that distinguish the scholar" (57). Boughton's tripartite approach to effective expression includes oral and composition emphases even as literary study shaped the work done by

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offered at OU in the late nineteenth century, I am restricted to course titles.

English departments of this period. It was not only an emphasis on grammar or gate-keeping functions of composition.

Moving on, to examine composition courses at OU in the early 1900s means to consider composition as it was approached by multiple groups of faculty, as I have shown. In a looser sense, this may have been the case before 1902 as well: perhaps faculty members of various backgrounds dealt with composition on some level, as some of their course titles suggest, but without the backing of a particular department or college. By 1902, this more complex departmental or collegiate backing buoyed the development of course titles and descriptions that readily acknowledged composition. By the summer term of 1904, OU's State Normal College offered classes in "elementary rhetoric," "rhetoric," "reading," "English grammar," "Shakespeare," and the "History of English Literature" (*Bulletin, 1903-1908* 27-28), this variety suggesting that rhetoric would have its own province from work that focused explicitly on writing and reading. But the corresponding course descriptions show that this isn't so. In elementary rhetoric, we read that "composition work will receive the main emphasis," and "methods of teaching composition in the grades will be carefully discussed" (*Bulletin, 1903-1908* 28). This approach to composition and to pedagogy is again via what the catalogs call rhetoric in the course titles. The course in "rhetoric" (not "elementary rhetoric") focuses on paragraphing and "editorial writing"—clearly features of written persuasion. Prominent too in the course is oral communication: "each student also gives, from time to time, oral reports upon technical works on subjects closely related to composition and style" (*ibid*). This inclusion of oral reports is striking for its resilience in such courses despite the

emergence of a separate department of public speaking that would spring up at OU within the next decade. Its inclusion here, in OU's official record of courses, finds an affinity with the words of past OU students who spoke of composition alongside oral communication and vice versa. As catalogs from ensuing years will show, to speak of composition in OU's history may mean to speak of speaking as well.

I have already summarized descriptions of composition courses from 1919-1920, noting a blending of composition, rhetoric, and literature. Let me reiterate that at this time the College of Liberal Arts's "Freshman English" courses still required "*oral and written composition*" (49, my emphasis), as did the Normal College's "Freshman Composition, Teachers' Course[s]." But by the 1930s, we see more extensive signs that composition at OU was going the way of current-traditional rhetoric by stressing surface features of writing and neglecting any links between writing and knowledge making. Here, at long last, appears a version of composition that Kitzhaber and Connors said characterized composition throughout the early twentieth century, though again, I do not think OU's version of composition fit perfectly with current-traditional rhetoric.

In the 1931-1932 catalog, we see composition limited to a skills-and-drill approach, though at least the writers of these course descriptions emphasize individual conferences. By the 1940 catalog, after the abolishment of the College of Education's hold on composition, there appeared in the College of Liberal Arts a grammar-based "English Composition" course that acted as a remedial course for students who could not pass an English proficiency test; two courses on teaching English in high schools; a course called "sophomore exposition," which had students write essays and reviews and

taught from “meritorious examples from experienced writers” (156); and a course called “engineering English,” which, as its title suggests, applied writing strategies to writing forms common to engineering. Of these examples, the engineering English course strikes me as unfamiliar in the history of OU’s writing courses: ostensibly, it blended composition with another discipline, in theory not unlike “Latin Prose Composition” from 1880. But unlike “Latin Prose Composition,” engineering English allowed university-sanctioned writing to adapt to a discipline that had roots in modern professional practices.

Then, in the 1940 catalog, there appear two versions of another freshman composition course, both of them titled “English Composition,” whose features range from the mechanical aspects of written composition to writing modes to a hybrid composition-communication study:

A course in the fundamentals of composition, the structure of the paragraph, and the writing of exposition. Students who make unusually high grades in the proficiency tests are excused from Eng. 3 [the first of the two versions of the course] and allowed to enter Eng. 4 [the second of the two versions]. Eng 4. places emphasis on the study of models of argumentation, description, and narration and gives special attention to oral English. (155)

Mostly, this description refers to writing as an imitation of models and a structuring of short segments of text (paragraphs); a familiar writing mode, exposition, remains as well, a nod to Alexander Bain’s nineteenth-century influence on composition practices. But

something that I think does not fit current-traditional rhetoric is the implied hierarchy within this description, which presents surface-level feature of language at the bottom, writing modes above them, and “oral English” at the top. The oral component does not occupy a tangential or ambiguous position but a privileged one. The courses’ coexistence with other, increasingly specific writing courses could point to room at the sophomore level to return to elocutionary concerns that in past decades had been the province of literary societies and formal elocution classes.

Much of this composition curriculum remains in the catalog from 1950-1951, with some telling changes. Generally, the underlying differentiations between the composition courses remain, but additions speak to developments within the University and perhaps within the English Department as it pertained to the fledgling field of Composition.<sup>43</sup> Instead of a course in engineering English, there appears a course called “Writing Technological and Scientific Reports” (224). The two versions of the standard “English Composition” course are now described beginning with the phrase, “A progressive course in written composition” (223). The course reviews grammar and paragraphing, includes reading comprehension, and focuses on “the writing of clear, forceful exposition” (223). The addition of reading comprehension as an expressed aim of the course is new based on course descriptions I have reviewed from earlier years. Also in 1950-1951, there remains a course called “Sophomore Exposition,” but with an extended definition that gives students more control over their reading selections and

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<sup>43</sup> The Conference on College Composition and Communication had its first meeting in 1949, giving us one of many possible starting dates for the field we now know as Rhetoric and Composition.

writing topics.<sup>44</sup> The next year, strangely, this innovative version of the sophomore composition course vanishes from the catalog. I have every reason to suppose that from 1950 on, composition courses at OU continued to change their scope and status in relation to other courses because records from the English Department from the 1960s-70s as well as data from an interview with a retired composition faculty member (see Appendix A) reveal the existence of discussions among faculty and administrators about the required status of freshman composition and flexible, perhaps even experimental pedagogical practices used by faculty in such classes.

Another way we might examine the place of composition at OU from the nineteenth century into the twentieth is to turn to its place in the activities of OU's literary societies. I admit that exploring this area forces me to blur the lines between this section, on composition, and the next section, on communication, but I think such blurring is appropriate and necessary for this topic because so many past texts and perspectives bring up composition by talking about oral communication and vice versa.

Many perspectives on composition in early-nineteenth-century OU focus on composition not in the classroom but in the extracurriculum: composition as one area of interest for members of OU's literary societies, which appear to have flourished from the 1810s to as late as the 1920s. In her 1969 thesis on OU's literary societies, the expressed purpose of which was to show connections between the literary societies and forensics, OU graduate student Jacqueline Ann White defines *literary society* as "an extracurricular student organization the main function of which was the cultivation and exercise of

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<sup>44</sup> See the section on "Community" in the previous chapter for more information about this sophomore exposition course.

literary skills” (7). In this definition no distinction is made between written and oral discourses. “Literary skills” seems to transcend such compartmentalization; they may be “exercised” in any way—although other records show a decided emphasis on oral communication within the societies. White defines *forensic* as referring to “literary tasks such as *composition*, debate, discussion, poetry, declamation, etc., performed in meetings or at public exhibitions by members of the literary societies of Ohio University” (7, my emphasis). She adds that her particular focus is on these societies during the years 1812-1860 (7). For my purposes, the range of genres within forensics, from the creative (poetry) to the functional (debate) to the presumably written (composition), warrants emphasis. If literary society members at OU sought to “cultivate” students’ literary skills and maintained close connections to “composition, debate, poetry” in both private and public settings, then the societies’ aims place something here called composition extremely close to public oral discourse, treating this “composition” as integral to public oral discourse on campus. For example, the Polemic Literary Society expressed in its 1819 Constitution that sophomore members’ duties comprised “speaking and writing alternatively and such other exercises as the society may prescribe with a view to their improvement” (qtd. in White 18-19). Junior members had similar duties, and senior members’ duties comprised “debating, delivering original orations, and writing compositions” (ibid). Quite possibly, “compositions” here refers to writing that was intended to be delivered orally, writing for performance. If so, then the Polemic Literary Society’s Constitution uses *composition* in a way that Ewing, in his autobiography, resisted.



Not to be outdone, OU's other literary societies kept a form of writing that they called composition central to their mission. For instance, the Philomathean Literary Society, founded in the 1820s, expressed in its Constitution that its objective was "the cultivation of the minds in Classical oratory and elegant composition: for which purpose exercises shall be performed consisting of declamation, composition, and debating" (qtd. in White 20-21). According to the Minutes of the Athenian Literary Society of June 15, 1822, one of the topics selected "for composition" was "The best methods of improving in composition" (qtd. in White 32), while shortly thereafter one literary society debated on the "benefits of writing," among other, more abstract topics (White 33). Such topics provided some of many subjects used for writing and debate, but their presence alone tells us that members of the Athenian Literary Society at least occasionally composed *about* composition, while other societies at least debated the use of composition as an intellectual endeavor.

An additional point I want to surface about composition in the literary societies is that according to the Athenian Literary Society's 1814 Constitution, the Society's exercises were not to use compositions that students had written for class (cited in White 32). So although the term *composition* appeared in abundance in these venues in the early 1800s, this may not have been the same kind of composition as that which students completed for immediate assessment by faculty members. As Thomas Ewing's autobiography shows and some of the catalogs show, classroom-oriented composition may have consisted of what we now call creative writing, among other forms. However, contrary to what we might expect, by 1900 the relationship between classroom-oriented

composition and literary society- and forensics-oriented composition may have been alive and well. According to Jacqueline Ann White, one of the primary stimuli to forensics activity circa 1900 was the Department of English, which “offered a class in ‘Public Speaking and Argumentation’” (92) that featured a public debate as well as “orators” and “vocal scholars” as the term drew to a close (92). These debates, White says, “drew the interest of the entire student body” (92). At OU in this period before the widespread split between English and Speech Communication, writing for classroom purposes may have been assessed by the same group of people as that which trained students in oral communication.

The nearness of institutionally supported writing to the OU literary societies also serves as a recurring element in the diary of Margaret Boyd, a member of the Philomathean Literary Society. But Boyd’s diary gives us something more: it surfaces connections between writing, oral rhetoric, and the institutional culture described earlier. To illustrate a point of connection between Boyd’s writing and the sociopolitical context of OU’s growth (or lack thereof) in the late nineteenth century, let me return to her depiction of Professor Scott, her professor of elocution who required not just orations but written essays from students. As I have shown, Boyd notes Scott’s many absences from class as he saw to OU’s interests in Columbus, but once she overcame her fear of Scott, she also praised his oratorical skills generally. Tellingly, I think, is that near both kinds of descriptions appear Boyd’s reflections about her own writing and education. Directly after recording her positive impressions of a lecture Scott gave on Sunday February 23, 1873, at a church service, Boyd writes, “I wish I could write as he. I wish O so earnestly

that I was a better and stronger girl. Strength of character.” This desire to write like Professor Scott did is expressed after she hears him lecture, not after she reads his essays or letters, as we might expect. In this entry, Scott’s rhetorical savvy in spoken communication, his apparent earnestness and conviction on the subjects of “manners [...] associates, books, secret thoughts,” gives Boyd inspiration to direct her energies to her pen. Days later, on February 26, she writes of Scott that at church he “talked so very nicely. Such a solemn, good meeting,” and in a subsequent paragraph adds, “I wish I was a better teacher and I sometimes think perhaps I ought not to teach. Still I know that is no excuse. If I am not a good teacher I ought to be.” Whether Scott alone sets the stage for Boyd’s self-doubts about teaching cannot be determined from her diary, but once again her records of Scott’s influence coincide with her descriptions of Scott’s persuasive dealings.

Perhaps most telling of all, however, is the writing process that Boyd undergoes during Scott’s absences. On April 3, 1873, one day after noting that Scott will be gone for several days, she says, “I put all my day on my essay. In the evening I get it in a shape that I can read to the folkes [sic].” This order of events suggests that for Boyd, first comes solitary drafting, then revision with the expectation of preparing the piece for an actual audience—and an audience of more than just the professor. She intends it to be “read to the folkes.” Because Scott was in Columbus at this time, Boyd’s comments indicate that students may have relied on themselves and their peers throughout much of the writing process, leaving professors to act as assessors of finished products. In some ways the resulting emphasis on assessing finely written products fits the mold of what

rhetoric and composition historians have argued about composition's movement toward current-traditional rhetoric from the 1860s to the early 1900s. If Boyd could be left to her own devices to prepare her composition for her professor's judgment, then we might read her professor's absence as indicating that he cared little if at all about writing processes.

Yet, other aspects of Boyd's writing process and situation refuse to align with current-traditional rhetoric. First, although she prepared her speeches alone and outside of the classroom proper, she nonetheless wrote with the goal of sharing it with an audience of real people, if just members of her elocution class. Her awareness of her audience does not fit neatly into the concerns of current-traditional rhetoric. Furthermore, Professor and President Scott's frequent absences from class may not signal indifference concerning writing processes as much as the expediency of his presence in the state capital to argue on behalf of OU's funding needs. His persuasive powers seemed directed first and foremost to defending the worth of OU to a powerful and possibly hostile audience of outsiders. This larger contextual issue intrinsic to an OU-based history of composition gets lost if we focus on composition practices as beginning and ending with what faculty members actually did with their classes and how they changed curricula. Scott's political work and its precedence over his teaching tell us a good deal about the roles of some OU faculty and administrators during this time and about the relationship of high-stakes rhetorical occasions to writing that students completed for class.

On the Saturday night of May 3, two days before she discovers that Scott is gone again, Boyd brings up a composition that she finds particularly vexing. She writes, "I must try and get something done on oration for next Saturday morning. It almost kills me

to undertake a thing too.” This comment comes about two weeks after she confides that she has had to miss church on a Sunday morning in order to stay home and write—an exceedingly unusual choice for her given that church life occupies a primary place in her diary as a whole. Here she does not name the genre of that which she is working on nor the specific occasion in which it is to be shared, but the gravity of her words coupled with the time of year when she was writing initially led me to suppose that she was speaking about a commencement address. Four days later, on May 7, she shares the genre of her work, an oration, and her subject is a topic she would seem to know from firsthand experience: “The Pleasures an [sic] Disapointments [sic] of Students.” However, despite Boyd’s devotion to this piece of writing, the writing occasion turns out not to be commencement or anything so lofty, but another day in Professor Scott’s elocution class. She does well when she gives this oration, noting that “Scott rather praised me” (Saturday, May 10), but it is her preparation for this event, her prioritizing of her work on this oration that again strikes me. For Boyd, one of the only activities that could compete with her devotion to church and social activities seemed to be the writing of speeches.

Taking a more fully articulated view on the relationship of composition to rhetoric was William Iler Crane in his 1902 OU master’s thesis, *The Mechanics of Composition*, in which he posits a sharper distinction between composition and rhetoric than what the previous sources present as doable or desirable. His thesis therefore contrasts with the sources above that note kinds of composition at OU that were bound up in rhetoric. Crane argues that composition consists of organizing one’s thoughts mentally, while rhetoric consists of conveying those thoughts to another party. Underlying this argument was his

belief that composition must be learned prior to rhetoric (2). He also articulates what he calls a “universal [...] law of composition” (8) This law, which he calls the “Law of Division” (9), posits that tasks must be divided into small, easily manageable parts before they can be dealt with successfully (6). This law he applies to phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, spending considerable time arguing that instructors should teach paragraphing, unity, and sequencing not explicitly but by focusing on ways to divide ideas (58). I detect in Crane’s words an approach to composition that might be called simultaneously old-fashioned and progressive, a disposition toward composition that puts thought ahead of writing and seeks to sever the two (thereby aligning him with Peter Ramus), but a disposition which also views surface features of writing (e.g., paragraphs) as intimately related to idea development. The result makes me resist the temptation to call Crane’s composition a pedantic current-traditional treatise. However, I acknowledge that much of Crane’s thesis positions composition as an internal, individual activity that reflects a nineteenth-century preoccupation with “mental discipline” (Connors 72-73). Crane’s words give us a glimpse of the narrow enterprise that composition seems when viewed from the perspective of a graduate student who studied it directly as opposed to someone who dealt with writing less systematically.

Clearly, what counts as “composition” can involve different things for different people, but at the same time I do not wish to relegate the subject of composition at OU to semantic play. I think the ideas of composition we sense when we trace how differently constituted individuals used the term give us useful options we might explore today in our conceptions of composition within and across departments, in effect our handling of

writing across the curriculum. Chiefly, a look at composition's past at OU gives us angles from which we might begin to reflect on who owns composition, and with what consequences: if composition is owned by multiple groups of faculty, then might it reach more students? Might it then seem like part of a university's core educational mission? If students have ownership of composition goals and methods in semi-structured settings apart from classrooms, then are the students creating spaces in which to make composition more meaningful to their lives?

With such questions, we might begin to analyze what changes and who is reached when composition moves outside of colleges of arts and sciences or colleges of liberal arts, for such moves may bring with them subtle but important changes in the composition curriculum. Such moves may also show us that different groups of students are being reached. In OU's case, the duplication of the English Department allowed composition classes to reach liberal arts students as well as students who trained to be teachers.<sup>45</sup>

Looking at composition's past at OU might also lead us to wonder: what does it mean for composition and other subjects if composition is used to service other subjects? If composition goes through periods when it is evoked as the glue that binds together other forms of study, then it might be treated as a mere tool or as a source of knowledge. From catalogs alone, it is difficult to say which scenario proved true at OU, so I would like to keep both possibilities open. I would suggest that the cache of *composition* at OU rose and fell (perhaps influenced by how Harvard and other prestigious universities

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<sup>45</sup> Although several times in OU's course catalogs, "Freshman English" was listed as a "required" course, this requirement usually extended to students of the particular college at hand, not students of all colleges.

handled composition), at some times serving as the negative end of various binaries a la *Textual Carnivals* and at other times giving disciplines with new or fuzzy boundaries a core that they would otherwise lack. Secretarial Studies made extensive use of composition in the early 1900s. So did OU's literary societies, which asked students to compose outside the boundaries of required coursework.<sup>46</sup> At OU, to call oneself a specialist in *composition*, especially in addition to another field, seems to have given one control over many courses and access to many students—no small matter in the years before universities esteemed publications as the supreme sign of scholarly achievement.

Composition hasn't ever been or looked like one thing at OU even if those people who were closest to it in their studies have sought to formalize it, encase it in rules that controlled how and where it could function and with what effects. The play of difference across uses of composition gives us hope that future theories of writing can look to local histories to see alternatives to writing as an established, formalized entity on the one hand and as a nebulous free-for-all on the other.

### Communication

By *communication*, I mean rhetoric that involves either the coexistence of oral and written forms of persuasion or the presence of oral forms alone. In selecting this term rather than *rhetoric*, I wish to emphasize the ubiquity of rhetoric in everything I have discussed so far and in that which I discuss now. I take rhetoric to entail the five canons,

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<sup>46</sup> An exception is when OU began mandating that students participate in a literary society.



broadly conceived: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.<sup>47</sup> By using *communication* I wish to focus more on delivery, particularly to a conception of delivery that involves both oral and written discourse. This does not mean that I wish to ignore idea development, organization, and stylistic touches, just that I wish now to see these matters only as they bear on delivery.

The fact that many of the classical Greek sophists were interested in display, in demonstrating their ability to use language to convey the appearance of having multiple kinds of specialized knowledge is a theme that I would like to keep in play in the background of this section.<sup>48</sup> At OU, where for over a century students devoted large chunks of their weeks to practicing the art of delivering speeches on topics local and national, concrete and abstract, I see a sophistic residue, a residue that strikes me as doubly interesting in light of its ties to writing. But contrary to Plato's depiction of the classical sophists as tricksters and self-servers, I think that the oral rhetoric that I notice in OU's history played a part in creating a local *culture* whose ideas, expectations, and rituals became bound up in a conscious and collective play with language.

In a past section, I mentioned OU student Orlando Lowry's 1880 letter with regard to the Athens Insane Asylum's influence on the lives of some students. Also noteworthy about the letter, however, is that apart from the Asylum, the subject to which

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<sup>47</sup> I realize that the classical understanding of invention aligns poorly with the current idea of invention as a generative process. I would like to allow both understandings of the term, to say yes to both classical and modern perspectives on rhetoric.

<sup>48</sup> Here I speak primarily of the sophists depicted in Plato's *Gorgias*. Of course I also acknowledge Plato's preferences for Socratic perspectives on Truth and essences.

Lowry gives the most space is the literary societies; this subject gives his reader the fullest look at what OU life was like. He writes,

We have two good litteraries [sic], the Philos and the Athenians, and I belong to the latter. They are carried on in order and every member has to [unreadable] pay a fine of twenty five cents-to-fifty cents. The duty is assigned to every one, I was on Essay the last night and the next to [sic] nights I will be on debate, and leader at that. There will be a contest between the two societies in a few weeks and that will be a big time. [It?] will be public and free for all.

This student chose in his letter to dwell on the Asylum most, followed by his involvement in the OU literary societies. The latter, serving as the lone on-campus involvement he describes, indicates that he attaches a good deal of importance to it, that if he must provide a sketch of his university life, then this is the way he wishes to do it. From the description, we see that even this late in the nineteenth century, the literary societies emphasized writing as well as oral debating: each duty appears to have been “assigned to every one.” Also, we see that in this student’s case, the two were handled separately, with writing done one night, debating on another. And perhaps not least important is that which seems to have given Lowry the most excitement: the public nature of the debates. As he says, the debating contest “will be a big time” and “free for all.” Prominent on campus, the literary societies put student compositions directly in touch with public performance opportunities, connecting writing to actual, visible engagement with others.

Whether Orlando Lowry's attitude was typical or atypical at OU cannot be known by examining his letter alone. Other detailed student accounts are difficult to come by in primary sources, but one that appears just over a decade before Lowry's is the diary of Margaret Boyd, a Philomathean, who speaks to the significance of the Society's role in her weekly, if not daily, life. Dutifully recording her weekly outings to Friday evening Philomathean Literary Society meetings, Boyd's account weaves the work of the literary societies into the fabric of campus life, frequently noting who accompanied her to society meetings; what transpired at the meetings; and what social activities followed the meetings. She also gives hints of the Society's prominence on campus when she records the presence of her much admired and feared Professor Scott at a meeting on January 17, 1873. Whether he was an official society member is unclear, but he seemed at the least a welcomed guest and even made speeches at this meeting. I suspect that he was a regular part of the Society proceedings, much like OU's first president, Jacob Lindley, had been a member of the Athenian Literary Society in the early nineteenth century (*Athenian*, volume I), in light of Boyd's trepidation at signs of change in the Society's usual attendees. On April 11, 1873 she relates, "[Ellse?], Kate and I go to society tonight. I speak [sic] 'I know her.' There was a stranger there and I thought I never could get through. Ah! little coward that I be." If the presence of an outsider at one Philomathean meeting sufficed to make Boyd question her ability to finish her oration, then one conclusion we might draw is that outsiders were infrequent. (Another conclusion could be that Boyd was prone to timidity, perhaps as a result of the men's control over oratory.) Also, if Professor and President Scott participated regularly in Philomathean Literary

Society's meetings, then his involvement with the Society gave them credibility as an important part of OU social and intellectual life.

Another sign of the literary societies' influence on students is the function they served at the days-long commencement, not only to bring oratory to the Athens, OH, public but also to underscore society members' contributions to ideals of good citizenship, in a Quintilian-esque tradition. Three days before her official commencement, Boyd notes her participation in public oratorical displays that were part of the lengthy proceedings. She says, "I go with [name unrecognizable] to the contest tonight. They do well. We 'Philos' receive our diplomas tonight." After mentioning the order of the diploma recipients, she writes, "Dr. Lash presented our diplomas to us. He mad [sic] a nice little speech." To a reader unfamiliar with the tendency of nineteenth-century commencement ceremonies to stretch across multiple days, this event may well seem as it were the commencement finale, the one and only conferring of college graduate status. If it did, then Boyd would be among the students who identified not just as an OU student or graduate but as a Philo ("we 'Philos'") who received her diploma with her fellow society members. Then, on the day of her official commencement, June 26, 1873, she describes the ceremony via her involvement in literary society performances:

Day of all days—Commencement day for the class o. 73 [sic]. They all do well. Do not forget any of their pieces. I was so very ~~tired~~ frightened before I went up on the stage that I thought I would fail completely. I did much better than I feared. They cheered me as I went up and I think that

helped me. I received two bouquets [sic] [...]. After we are dismissed so many come to congratulate me. I get tired of it.

Of all the ways she could have discussed what may have been the most decisive event in her life that year, Boyd chose to focus on the speech she gave as part of the literary societies' traditions. Historians have observed that Boyd followed gendered customs by reading her speech rather than speaking it from memory, as many of her male peers did, but this fact does little to lessen the role of the spoken word on her sense of accomplishment and on our sense of what graduating from OU once involved.

An examination of Lowry's letter and Boyd's diary makes the absence of other student voices that much more noticeable, reminds us of the loss of voices and perspectives that comes with an inability or unwillingness to retain students' writing. I cannot say that because of Lowry's letter, the sentiment he expresses was shared by his peers, or that because of Boyd's involvement in her literary society, all other students must have shown the same devotion to communication. But I can notice that student publications and later historians have found more cause to suppose that the literary societies had considerable power on this campus that seemed to invite students to engage in public speaking. In 1904 the *College Mirror*, one of the early newspapers run by OU students, quoted an OU alumnus who reflected on his involvement in a literary society:

Of the intellectual forces that touched my life at college I feel that I owe more probably to the literary society than any other. Good, solid, substantial work was done. While the course in English was too meager this was supplemented by research in the library in preparing for society

exercises. We read, and we read the best, and there were positive advantages in being thrown upon our own resources. (qtd. in Smith 77)

For this student at least, the literary societies appear to have filled a void in the curriculum in literary exposure and language appreciation. Work in the societies seems to have involved in-depth reading of self-selected authors' writings, authors who were then called "the best." Add to this the earlier *College Mirror* article, from 1874, in which the literary societies are portrayed as limbs of the University (Smith 78), and we see a recurring depiction of the literary societies as integral to what it meant to receive an OU education. Consider as well the Athenian Literary Society's Constitution and By-Laws of 1914 which give us signs that yearly inter-society oratorical contests between the Athenians, the Philomatheans, and the Adelphians drew a crowd even into the twentieth century, long after the time when literary societies were supposed to have lost their influence. For these oratorical contests, which took place in December, a committee had to be assembled to handle duties such as "printing programs, tickets, securing ushers, a place for holding the contest, etc." (Constitution 14). Final debates seem to have remained a formal event on campus at least through the 1910s.

From the historians, a similar picture emerges, and the tangible contributions of the literary societies to OU appear more clearly. Clement L. Martzoff, for one, notes the prominence of public speaking at OU in its early days when, in his biographical sketch of Thomas Ewing, Martzoff offers this as one of his only observations about Ewing at OU: "In college he was quite a debater and speaker. So, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1814, he was invited to deliver the oration" (*Fifty* 215). For another, Jacqueline Ann White notes that by the

1840s, public exhibitions by members of OU's literary societies were occurring regularly at commencements. Also, she claims that in the early to mid 1800s, the "libraries of the [literary] societies were in effect the University library" (52), adding that occasionally students "use[d] these books as class texts" (52). Betty Hollow says that the literary societies of the 1820s "generated most of the social and cultural life of the school for the next one hundred years" (18) and points out that in 1878 the literary societies "voted to merge their libraries with the university's," thereby "tripl[ing] the number of volumes in the library" (70). A writing-and-debating culture appears to have been instilled on the campus, with the oral communication side influencing the social and intellectual life of students (to some extent, that of faculty and administrators as well) and the availability of print texts on campus.

It is Irene Elizabeth Smith, however, in her 1930s thesis, who gives what I take to be one of the more thorough treatises on the role of literary societies at OU. She explains the origins of the literary societies and observes two important aspects of their prominence at OU: the ample physical space they occupied and the prestige associated with their readings and debates at commencement. Lest we be overzealous in a desire to portray the OU campus as the birthplace of public speaking performances on campuses, she reminds us that literary societies were pervasive at American colleges and universities in the nineteenth century, adding that the societies were not even American in origin but British (75).<sup>49</sup> In the case of OU, she says the Zelothian Literary Society started in 1812; then came the Polemic Literary Society, out of which came the Athenian

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<sup>49</sup> However, Smith does say that OU's Athenian Literary Society "the first [literary society] northwest of the Alleghenies" and "the first permanent society formed at OU" (74).

Literary Society in 1819; then came the Philomathean Literary Society in 1822; and others came and went such as the all-female Adelphean Literary Society, which was formed in 1890 but which soon dissolved. Although initially the societies operated with a degree of secrecy and selectivity, at some point in the nineteenth century they involved all OU students—the 1895 university catalog records that students had to participate in a literary society for at least one year. In my opinion, having considered the role of the literary societies alongside the sociopolitical context of OU and the attitudes and ways of the Athens public, what differentiates the literary societies at OU from other literary societies is that they occupied so central a role at OU for so long notwithstanding the social and financial turmoil that, for Super, Hoover, Hollow, and others, characterizes OU's nineteenth-century existence. Literary societies at OU began forming three years after OU admitted its first class of students (a class that contained just three students). Moreover, the reign of the literary societies at OU lasted well into the 1920s, not dying off at the century's end. I turn to Smith's detailed explanation to support my point that literary societies at OU occupied at *peculiarly* central place at OU.

Two signs of the centrality of the literary societies at OU are the physical space that the societies occupied and the contributions of the societies to OU's collection of print texts. For one thing, "each society had its own hall, for a great many years on the third floor of the Center Building [now Cutler Hall, the aesthetic centerpiece of campus], where individual libraries were housed and where meetings were held every Friday evening" (Smith 75). Also, "each society owned, through purchase and gifts, very ambitious libraries for the times, consisting of 1200 and 1400 volumes by 1875" (75).



Later, Smith adds, “The first college papers were those put out by the literary societies” (79). Compared to the meager resources OU had throughout much of the nineteenth century, the literary societies appear to have done quite well. Even though many colleges and universities may have had popular literary societies, I find it remarkable that OU’s seem to have flourished even as the University floundered economically.

Furthermore, Smith’s account of the literary societies shows that eventually they did not debate in private or secrecy but at public events that attracted members of the University and the town. Consider her comment, which coincides with student Orlando Lowry’s account in his 1880 letter, that

at the end of each year at commencement time the year’s traditionally outstanding event was the contest between the literary societies when the best in each society competed *before the entire student body, townspeople, faculty, Board of Trustees, etc.*, for supremacy in the various types of society work. *The highest honor and recognition to be had in the school* was to represent the society at the annual contest and to win the various events over traditional rivals and enemies. (75-76, my emphasis)

If, under the gazes of townspeople and University officials, students strove to represent their society and perform well in the oral debates that the societies fostered, then it seems that this communicative event operated as a focal point for students’ years at OU.

Above are factors that speak to the rhetorical situation of what may have been the OU literary societies’ most important performances as well as some of the effects of the societies’ goodwill toward OU. More difficult to determine are the particular kind(s) of

delivery that the societies encouraged and, to a lesser extent, the particular modes of oral discourse and oral-plus-written discourse that the societies most favored. According to Smith, the usual forms of engagement at meetings of OU's literary societies were debate and the reading of original essays.

This summation accords with the *Athenian Literary Society Minutes* of 1819-1826, which reveal a pattern at society meetings of distributing a topic for the following meeting's debate alongside a topic on which members should compose an essay. Debate topics tended to focus on current events, some of them local in nature, whereas essay topics tended to be more abstract, often suggesting a need for descriptive writing. In time, essay topics seemed to fluctuate between one and two per meeting as well. From January to early June of 1825, the Athenian Literary Society's topics for debate and composition were as follows:

- For debate: "Should the 200.000 Dollars given to La Fayette, be paid from the public Treasury or be raised by private Subscription [?]" For composition: "The sources of Contentment" (175).
- For debate: "Has the establishment of banks been beneficial to the United States[?]" For composition: "Meditation—a source of pleasure as well as [unclear]" (174).
- For debate: "Should the Greeks make reprisal on nations indirectly [afflicting?] the Turks[?]" For composition: "The best means of securing the interests of our Society" (174).

- For debate: “Would it be [politic?] for the State of Ohio at this time to construct a Canal from Lake Erie to the Ohio River[?]” For composition: “A Snow Storm” (175).
- For debate: “Is [unclear] a sufficient cause for divorce[?]” For composition: “The pleasures of taste [...] Friendship” (176).
- For debate: “Is circumstantial evidence sufficient to convict of [sic] crime[?]” For composition: “‘Hunting’—Which is superior ancient or modern chivalry[?]” (177).
- For debate: “Is it reasonable to suppose there are witches[?]” For composition: “[Beauty?] of Variety, Skating” (177).
- For debate: “Is it ever right to practice deceit[?]” For composition: “Dignity of man, [spring?]” (174).
- For debate: “Ought punishment or execution of a criminal immediately to follow his conviction?” For composition: “Divination, Dreaming” (179).
- For debate: “Was Elizabeth justifiable in her conduct toward Mary?” For composition: “Pleasures of memory” (180).
- For debate: Is capital punishment justifiable for any crime[?]” For composition: “Examination” (180).
- No debate this time due to special circumstances. For composition: “Vacation” (181).

- For debate: “Ought students of a seminary to be subjected to perform military duty & labor on the the [sic] [roads?][?]” For composition: “A rainy-day. ‘Forgetfulness[’]” (182).
- For debate: “Is slavery consistent with the policy of the government of the U.S.[?]” For composition: “Agriculture” (183).
- For debate: “Should polygamy be sanctioned?” For composition: “Power of the will—Love” (183).

In the debate topics from early 1825, subjects of interest range from history to judicial practices, international affairs, and state concerns. Although the essay topics were more abstract, as if an extension of theme writing so common in nineteenth century classrooms, they at least appear regularly in the Athens Literary Society’s weekly meetings throughout the 1820s and into the 30s, at which point the Athenian Literary Society minutes record debate topics but not composition topics. This fits Smith’s summary of the Athenian Literary Society’s debate topics in the nineteenth century as falling into the categories of “national events and controversies, philosophical discussions based on purely personal opinion, and matters of curriculum and other school issues” (77).

While I have not conducted a content analysis of available Athenian Literary Society records, my review of these sources leads me to conclude that national and international events were particularly common topics for debate in 1825; a review of the topics listed above might suffice to support this tentative claim. By the 1830s, when tensions between OU students and faculty were worsening and OU’s dismal funding

situation was being realized, I notice the continued prevalence of these topics, but with a conspicuous smattering of topics that delve into local interests. Volume IV of the *Athenian Literary Society Minutes*, covering 1833-1837, gives some examples, including the question debated on 3 September 1836: “Would the adoption of the manual system in our institutions be advisable[?]” A week later, the members debated, “Should the faculty of the O.U. prohibit the students from [gallanting?] the ladies[?]” And on 31 December 1836: “Ought that portion of the surplus revenue which this State is to receive to be expanded in the Support of Common Schools or Colleges[?]” Other questions from this time pertain to temperance, freemasonry, theaters and morals, phrenology, the independence of Texas, republican government, early matrimonial engagements, and so on.

The Athenian Literary Society’s debate topics differ somewhat from the topics of interest to members of the all-female Adelpian Literary Society of the 1890s. Topics that the Adelpians engaged with can be gleaned from the following debate questions and resolutions:

- “Should Women Read the Newspapers[?]” (2)
- “Debate—Resolved There should be the Same Standards of Morality among Men and Women” (2)
- “Resolved—A Teacher Can Do Better Work in a Country School than in a Graded School” (2)

Subsequent debate topics included prohibition, the price of postage, athletics in women’s education, philosophical versus classical courses in college, patriotism, and whether they

were “Better than [their] Grandmothers” (6). Such topics point to an interest in gender, local issues, and citizenship generally. In the last example I detect an awareness among the Adelphians of their situatedness to history and to the present, an awareness which I can only call existential. As a whole, their debate topics spoke more to the interests of particular people struggling with particular constraints, for example, those constraints of a (probably female) teacher proving her worth in a “country [Appalachian Ohio?] school.”

All this isn't to say that by the late nineteenth century OU's literary societies favored oral communication so heavily that they disallowed writing completely, but signs of a shifting and perhaps uneasy relationship to writing emerge in some of the records of the Athenian Literary Society, easily the OU literary society whose records have been best preserved. In 1855, essays were noted as a regular part of weekly meetings (*Athenian* VIII 35), although their status as original compositions are unclear for this time. Another blending of writing and reading comes from the fact that an essay was referred to as a “performance” (ibid), and students were routinely fined for their “nonperformance” of pieces (*Athenian* IX). Later entries from volume eight of the *Athenian Literary Society Minutes* give credence to the possibility that the essays were original compositions because they were listed as “Essays by [name of student].”

By 1881, “biographical essayists” and “readers” were categories alongside “orators” (*Athenian* XI 3), indicating an officially acknowledged presence of writing categories among speaking or speaking and writing categories. But the *The Athenian Literary Society—President's Record* of 1885-1905 presents a standard “Order of

Exercises,” which was followed at weekly meetings, that throws the role of writing into question. The schedule from spring 1885, handwritten in ink, appears below, complete with sections that someone had later crossed out in pencil:

Call to Order,

First Roll,

Minutes of Previous Meeting, read and correct [sic]

Second Roll call and mark absentees

An Article from the By-laws read

Communications, if any receive them

Petitions & Initiations

Installations

Class Duties and Extempore Orations

Original Orations

Debate. regular then miscellaneous

~~Reading~~

~~Biographical Essay~~

Appointment of Orators for 3 weeks,

[ditto marks] Debaters for 2 weeks,

[ditto marks] Biog. Essayist for 2 weeks,

[ditto marks] Reader for 1 week,

[ditto marks] Committees.

Report of Council

Reports of Committees, Standing and Special

Miscellaneous Business

Motion to Adjourn

Adjournment. (65)

Writing of some sort appears to have been embedded in this weekly ritual of formalized discussions, as evidenced in the appointment of a biographical essayist and a reader, as well as in the crossed-out designations of “Reading” and “Biographical Essay.” And as with Plato’s *Phaedrus*, someone’s writing had to preserve the oral proceedings despite, in this case, what came to be the literary society members’ preference for spoken rhetoric—an earlier note shows that members of the Athenian Literary Society unanimously voted in 1888 to abolish the biographical essay and readings from their meetings (125). Also noteworthy about the above schedule are the additions that a later reader had penciled in. Next to the crossed-out “Reading” and “Biographical Essay” are the words “No good” penciled in by an unidentified source. Also, vertically along the left-hand side of the page someone had categorized the proceedings into the general sections of “Preliminary,” “Regular,” “Appointments,” “Reports,” and “Closing,” as if to formalize the handling of events still more. This schedule then shows what Athenian Literary Society members could expect at their weekly meetings in 1885 as well as what they could expect in the



following years. The form of their meeting was perhaps strict but also subject to change. This situation mirrors that of the Athenian Literary Society's handling of writing in its 1819 Constitution, for according to section thirteen of this document, "Each member [of the society] shall furnish himself with a pencil or pen ink and paper to take [sic] remarks on the speaking [sic]—subject to a fine" (4). However, a similar story unfolded: someone had later written "Repealed" over this section. The 1885 schedule above also hearkens back to a diary entry of Margaret Boyd, of the Philomathean Literary Society, who wrote at a January 17, 1873 meeting, "The committee report progress, speeches from [Professor] Scott; Evans and Walter read a selection in ~~reading~~ elocution." Ironically, changes in the preferred mode of representation and the label that accompanies it are consistent across these sources that are separated by anywhere between one and seven decades.

By 1914, however, writing appears in abundance in the Athenians' *Constitution and By-Laws*. It comprises three of the six categories in which students from the Athenian, Philomathean, and Adelphean societies competed. In addition to noting that "all reports [of the committees involved in the inter-society contests] shall be in writing" (12), the by-laws allow that the categories of "reading," "essay," and "original poem" were among those to be judged, the remaining categories being "debate," "short story," and "oratorical" (15-16). If many of the students' performances involved their own writing, then these competitions displayed and garnered appreciation for more than elocutionary merits alone. Although "reading" and "essay" may or may not have involved the student's writing, "*original poem*" (my emphasis) is a difficult category to dismiss.

Other noteworthy features of the Athenian Literary Society's weekly meeting include the centrality of a student who served as the official critic. I single out this role because the critic's duties illustrate some of what a literary society member could expect at meetings in terms of feedback on his or her performances. According to the Athens Literary Society's 1819 Constitution, the critic was to "receive the compositions as soon as read, and at the next meeting, to give a critical analysis of each piece, noticing its beauties and faults and specifying the best method of correction" (2). Section seventeen of the Constitution specifies that the critic also has the duty "to give out themes for composition" (2). Later articles in the Constitution clarify that the critic was to receive a member's composition before the member read the composition to the other society members; immediately after the reading of it, the critic was to begin criticizing the piece (12). Concerning debate topics, however, a Board of Censors had the duty of deciding on the questions used (13). Smith claims that topics for debate and writing were determined one month before the meeting (76). However, primary records of the Athenian Literary Society show a one-week preparation period.

Another revealing feature of the meetings was the allowance of exactly four disputants involved in each debate, and the rule that each disputant could not speak for more than fifteen minutes at a time. Again, the earliest *Athenian Literary Society Minutes* available (from 1819-1926) reveals that these disputants received their question at the previous meeting. The Philomathean Literary Society too restricted its members' speeches to fifteen minutes apiece (*Philomathean* 91). Based on this evidence, interaction from disputant to disputant and between the critic and each composition writer appears

frequent and encouraged, particularly in the well-documented work of the Athenians. Given the additional factors of the students' range of debate topics and the students' approval of multiple forms of expression, the literary societies' work seems to fit with the terms of OU's four-year curriculum, established in 1819, which held that "three principles" were "fundamental and sacred in all work: exactness, punctuality, and *regular expression* (Smith 55, my emphasis).

The prominence of the literary societies' meetings can be felt if we consider them alongside the meetings of the short-lived Columbiad Literary Society (1895-1901), which seemed to have prioritized original creative writing. Meetings of the Columbiads included the following series of events, after opening remarks were made:

- Reading
- Roll-call with responses by [sic] original stanzas
- Minutes of previous meeting
- Program for the evening
- Business
- Adjournment. (*Columbiad* 11)

This abbreviated form of the goings-on of the Athenian Literary Society is made more remarkable by the fact that like the Athenians, the Columbiads appointed a critic to respond to the readings, and some of the readings given at the Columbiad Literary Society meetings were not of the students' own work, leading us to wonder whether the critic sometimes focused on elocution. Whatever the exact relationship of creative writing to elocution at these meetings, the adherence of the Columbiads to a meeting schedule

that allotted time for formal and closing remarks, reviews of the past meeting, readings, responses, and other business (electing officers? fining members for breaking rules?) echoes a tradition that had long been established by the Athenians, Philomatheans, and others. In the Columbiads I see, among other things, an instance of writers who also speak imitating speakers who also write.

Thus far, I have focused this section on communication within and across OU's literary societies because their influence appears in the words of students across many generations not to mention the portrayals of OU historians. But room exists in available texts to see significant concern for oral rhetoric in coursework, too. This in itself is hardly noteworthy considering the abundance of portrayals of nineteenth-century American higher education as a stronghold of formal rhetorical training teeming with gatekeepers of elocutionary excellence. But at least one account of oral communication in and for courses at OU surfaces social inequalities that could easily be overlooked. Mainly I turn again to Margaret Boyd's diary, and I wish to remind my readers that her 1873 account would become that of the first female graduate in OU's history, that of a student who, in her first year at the University, had to go by "M. Boyd" in official records. Although Boyd seems to have been surrounded by female supporters and companions off campus during 1873, her descriptions of her in-class learning and relationships depict a learning environment marked by its gender roles and norms.

One of the classes she discusses at most length is her elocution class, held on Saturdays and taught by the seemingly omnipresent Professor Scott. A conscientious student, she reported in her diary that she spent many evenings preparing for this class,

sometimes cancelling her other engagements to tend to the writing of an “oration” which she would then read aloud in the class. Such is the chain of events on February 5-8 of 1873, for on Wednesday, February 5, she says, “Prayer meeting at Tusckers [sic] tonight. I do not go. I must write. Vainly I call on the muses.” Then, on Friday, February 7: “Stay at home this morning to finish my oration. Go in the afternoon and then to [the literary] Society at night.” But in spite of her preparation, her performance in elocution class that Saturday is calamitous, based on her tone: “I speak my oration this morning. O! how I felt, I could not keep from crying all the way home. O dear! A letter from Hugh tonight just finished me. I wish I could get mad. A letter from Kate too. Am glad she wrote.” She does not relate the particular cause of her grief, does not distinguish between her reaction to Hugh’s (a classmate’s?) letter and what transpired in elocution. But later entries suggest gender barriers that the small population of OU students in this economically and culturally marginalized town were reluctant to dismantle.

Other incidents in February and March of 1873 tell us important facts about her situation. On Thursday, February 27, she writes, “I stay at home tonight and select a piece to read in elocution class on next [sic] Saturday. The subject is ‘Going after the cows’. Rather much love about it but I do not find any thing else.” Here we find a selection of an extant piece of writing, not an original textual production. So at stake is not her writing abilities but her speaking abilities. When Saturday, March 1, comes, she reports, “The boys laugh when I read. I don’t think it very funny.” The “it” that she refers to is unclear and may well go unknown. “It” could be her performance as a whole, something in particular she did while reading—her rhythm, pitch, tone, gestures, or

posture—the nature of the piece she chose to “read.” But undeniable is the gendered space in which she is being singled out for others’ (male students) amusement and perhaps ridicule.

Vague but telling associations between public speaking and manliness occur in many more of her entries, including her comments about another’s reaction to Professor Scott’s speaking ability. On Sunday, March 23, she writes, “Prof. Scott preached. James [a friend from out of town] thinks he [Scott?] is a man & so he is. Am glad he can see that he is” (her emphasis). In this instance, Scott’s preaching gives James cause to form a conclusion about Scott’s manliness and with that, something about the professor’s overall worth, something that makes Boyd “glad” that he made the connection between public speaking abilities and manliness. Similarly, on Saturday, May 24, a day that is much closer to the end of her final term at OU, Boyd says, referring to her elocution class, “I do not debate as the boys want me to. Scott request [sic] me to write an essay. The boys do not want me to do it but I guess I must. I think myself that Scott might tell me what [word unclear] he does expect of me, but I will do the best I can any how.” The illegible section and the confusing syntax aside, Boyd’s comments reveal her professor’s adherence to gender norms (men debate, women write; men may speak spontaneously; women must stick to a script) but also her male peers’ hopes for something different. Thus, she shows a side to her male peers that prevents me from casting them as unyielding defenders of public speaking conventions.

I cannot tell whether Boyd won over her male peers during the time between the winter and summer, but I can note that her later words paint a picture in which women go

on being associated with print texts, men with speeches, despite the fact that she successfully challenged Professor Scott to change the Greek word endings on her diploma from masculine to feminine case. When on June 25 her male friend Davis visits her, she says, “I read my essay to him and he reads his oration to me. His is nice. He makes a few corrections on mine. I am glad he came.” Davis sounds like an equal of Boyd’s, a peer, though obviously a male one who is more willing to correct Boyd’s writing than allow Boyd to correct his. Also, Boyd refers to her writing as an “essay” and to Davis’s writing as an “oration” when in fact they read both their pieces to one another. This may well have been a sign of the masculine hold on spoken rhetoric in the late nineteenth-century college setting. Indeed, she did go on the next day to read the piece she had written for commencement. She then received public praise from the audience. She graduated and left. But then, a decade later, members of the Athenian Literary Society resolved that women should “not be allowed to enter the O.U.” (Athenian XI 46)<sup>50</sup>; and two decades later, members of the Adelpian Literary Society, OU’s first literary society for women, presented grievances to then President Crooks about being “molested by the boys” (*Chronological* 7). These examples make me feel hesitant to call the 1870s-90s a welcome time for women at OU regardless of Boyd’s efforts to succeed in and out of her elocution class.

While Boyd’s words do not paint a flattering portrait of elocution classes at OU, they do show us the emotional toll that such classes can have on some students, particularly those students who are not privileged by dominant traditions surrounding

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<sup>50</sup> This might be mitigated by OU’s decision in 1890 to hire its first full-time speech instructor: a woman, Miss. Catherine A. Findley (Arnold 29). However, the Adelpians’ grievances remain.

public speaking practices. For good or ill, Boyd's comments also support the argument that oral (and written) communication was once central to the lives of some (all?) OU students. I would add that the long-standing impact of the study, practice, and performance of oral communication at OU, and this communication's intertwining with composition, may have been magnified by the University's small size, relative isolation from urban areas, and uneasy (often lowering) social status. Note that master's student Ralph Arnold, in his 1941 thesis on public speaking at OU, admits that he does not know why interest in OU's literary societies waned during World War I and dissolved by 1923 (36). He wonders about students' disillusionment once they witnessed how rhetoric could be used on national and international scales for various ends. He also wonders about the rise of technologies that sought to entertain people electronically. To me, both of these possible factors implicate the isolated and perhaps sheltered side of nineteenth-century campus life at OU. Once many students acted on a larger stage, once they turned their attentions to a hostile outer world, might the comfortable, smaller OU literary societies, complete with their regularly scheduled contests and lengthy contributions to commencement ceremonies, seem inadequate?

Let me clarify that OU is not by any means unique in having had literary societies that occupied an important place in campus life. Its literary societies are not unique to have entertained and impressed others during commencement addresses—as Arnold points out, this tradition goes back to the twelfth century (7). But to my knowledge, OU may well be unique in having a culture of oral communication practice and performance that some sources say strengthened the once fragile University as a whole (e.g., through



book contributions), that kept writing tied to issues of delivery (e.g., gender inequalities in oral, text-based performances), and that let oral communication retain its role of educating and involving students well into the twentieth century.

If, to the Socratics, a focus on rhetoric as spectacle and performance leads to something other than pursuits of “truth,” then I am guilty of following such an ignoble path. I interpret performances from elocutions classes, literary society meetings, and commencement addresses as moments not of sharing “the truth” of any particular subject but of revealing the rhetor’s situatedness in relation to his or her audience and its expectations about what is appropriate for whom. In the case of Margaret Boyd, for example, her performances in her elocution class, at her literary society meetings, and at her commencement give us signals about which individuals and groups exerted power over others. Additionally, I interpret such performances with an eye to their ostensible or possible effects on the OU and Athens community—how they encouraged or discouraged faculty and students to tie writing to oral rhetoric, how they persuaded audiences to re-see identity politics in rhetorical occasions, how they brought audience members together for events that assumed great importance in campus life. This emphasis on the effects of discourse (here oral discourse) should show my indebtedness to Steven R. Yarbrough’s 1999 book *After Rhetoric*, as well as to the early sophists, who concerned themselves more with how to move audiences than with how to assemble a logically foolproof argument. As sophistically aligned rhetors from Gorgias to Susan Jarratt to Victor Vitanza have shown us, rhetoric has many sides, and perspectives, situations, and linguistic choices can all be questioned for how they shape an audience’s experiences.

### Summary of Chapters Three and Four

Throughout the past two chapters, I have attempted to show that we can tell at least four different but overlapping stories of composition at OU, each story “true” insofar as it finds support in past perspectives and opinions. There is the story of composition from its relationship to a fickle, changing community, its connectedness to social norms and commonly held beliefs in the area: this story unfolds in people’s homes and in public venues. There is the story of composition from its connections to the ebb and flow of the sociopolitical world at the state and regional levels: this story unfolds in Columbus, OH, and on the pages of those Athenians and Athenian allies who created and defended certain portrayals of OU. Then there is the story of composition as whatever this term (and comparable terms) has meant for past members of the University: this story gives us a shape-shifting, boundary-defying idea of what composition can mean for different groups of people, who might benefit from enlarging or narrowing its parameters, and what effects such a transformation might have on students and university protocol. After this, there is the story of composition via communication: this story reminds us of what’s possible for composition if it retains ties to oral expression. This story comes full circle to consider again the roles that context and community might have on writing and speaking expectations that develop at a particular university site. More stories than these are possible, and each would frame the history of composition at OU differently.

My decision to use community, context, composition, and communication to describe composition history at this location is primarily a matter of theoretical alignment and of textual availability. To talk about community necessitates some exploration into

what a group of people thinks and believes, the values it holds dear, the kinds of work it lauds and rewards, the events it looks forward to—the stuff of *nomos* and *doxa*. To talk about context is to talk about situational and cultural factors that are always shifting, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically, and to talk about when and how composition and communication enter this picture—the stuff of *kairos*. To talk about composition in a pluralistic way, based on signs taken from others' perspectives, locates reality within the individual—the one I study as well as myself, the interpreter. Finally, to talk about communication as it bears on composition forces us to seek out cracks in modern-day boundaries that have solidified between departments that handle writing and departments that handle oral rhetoric; it forces us to slip out of discipline-specific perspectives and concerns and gives us chances to re-see the work that we do from a new angle—*dynaton*, and perhaps a conservative example of *paralogy*. These concepts, fundamental to modern-day allies of the sophists, have crafted the lens I am using to see composition history. But as we know from Kenneth Burke, plenty of lenses are available to us; the lens I use for this project need not color other local histories that may arise.

I see my role as a historian much as Beth Daniell frames her contributions to qualitative literacy research when, in her book *A Community of Friendship*, she speaks of the narratives she creates as “little narratives,” or narratives that add to but do not erase existing narratives about a subject. I do not intend my narratives here to explode existing accounts of composition's development, but I do hope they show us aspects of composition's history that we have not thought about before. I would suggest that this local history primarily adopts the social perspective of texts, as described by Lester

Faigley in his article “Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective,” for I spend most of my time exploring factors pertaining to where compositions at or about OU came from and where they seem to have gone, the milieu in which they appeared and disappeared (or appeared and then changed forms). There are, however, traces of the individual perspective on texts, too, in that I return repeatedly to Margaret Boyd’s composing process as evidenced in her diary entries. The textual perspective, meanwhile, has had few opportunities to surface because of the relative lack of student compositions from 1825-1950 retained at OU. I have not analyzed formal elements of the student papers from Professor Paul Kendall’s honor’s freshman composition class of 1949-1950 for the regularity or absence of certain features because I do not think such a small textual sample, when viewed in the scheme of college student papers written in a 125-year span, will tell me much. The empirical, with its sights typically set on closure, on certainty, does not fit the disposition toward language that I have adopted for this project.

Yet the project is unfinished. Although I have now shared what I take to be most important about OU’s uses of composition that have appeared in the texts that are available to me in Athens, Ohio, in 2009, I have not taken time to explain what I hope my project does for composition history more generally, and I have not yet compared my project to other composition histories. Except for in a few asides, I have not traced what my composition history tells us that other composition histories overlook. In the next chapter, I unpack some lessons from sophistic history writing, and I reconsider my project in light of other scholars’ arguments about the history of composition. As local histories of composition multiply, where does mine stand? And as historians of

composition adopt different historiographical frameworks, how might the neosophistic lens that I adopt inform that choices that other historians make about how to interpret their data? In the ensuing conclusion, I elaborate on some implications about what the information I have considered might mean for compositionists today. Insofar as to adopt a neosophistic historiography involves using sophistic tenets to analyze the past in order to teach something new to those of us in the present, I have not finished engaging my historical findings and analysis with present concerns.

## CHAPTER FIVE: A NEOSOPHISTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY OF COMPOSITION

Here and elsewhere I want to resist saying that I have written “a history,” singular, of composition at OU, for I think that even with a few sources scattered across more than 125 years, we can detect multiple histories regarding how composition was viewed and handled at this site, what purposes composition seemed to have served for different university constituents. Instead of saying the history of composition, I will say *composition histories at OU*, or *OU-based composition histories*, as both of these phrases allow for *dissoi logoi* that spring from privileging different perspectives. For the faculty and administrators who supported the 1949-1950 freshmen students’ production of a three-volume history of OU, composition may have meant the opportunity to indoctrinate students with a view of university and community history that glossed over conflict and uncertainty. For the nineteenth-century writers and educators of Athens County, from poets to local historians, successful training in composition may have served as an academic and regional status symbol to other, more populous parts of Ohio where political figures commonly convened and higher education institutions mushroomed. And for some of OU’s nineteenth-century students, composition may have served as a path to insider status regarding social, educational, and political spheres: the proper channel for allowing Margaret Boyd to speak publicly in a sexist society, the implicit scaffolding that prepared Thomas Ewing for a life of letters and public service, a manner of expression that put R. Humphreys and his friends in high standing with the professors of his day. In these student examples, composition appears to have operated in accordance with David Bartholomae’s modern-day view of the term, as an education in the etiquette and

conventions of academic discourse communities. Yet another history of composition emerges in the continued involvement of writing in OU's literary societies, which retained an official place for the writing and reading of students' compositions as well as for public critiques of writing even as the societies held a more fundamental allegiance to oral debate. Moreover, the literary societies' use of public audiences and forums, such as OU's commencement ceremonies, kept language use a prominent part of what was intended to impress or delight a community. And within the literary societies themselves, many histories of composition are noticeable, from those of the conservative, Anglocentric Columbiad Literary Society where canonized English literature served to inspire and guide students' writing, to the histories of composition evident in the records of the Athenian Literary Society where the status of writing fluctuated wildly in its relation to speech.

In terms of the interestedness of the texts I have studied, or the degree to which each text reflects the biases and agendas of certain groups, none escapes scrutiny either. Even the MA theses that I have used to tell parts of OU's history with Athens, Ohio, tell and fall into many histories of composition once we realize that until the 1930s, graduate study at OU was controlled by Ohio State University in Columbus. This being the case, do the perspectives of OU's early twentieth-century graduate students Ralph W. Arnold and Elizabeth Irene Smith reflect "OU-based" histories of composition? Also, records that may seem to operate as the backbone of OU's institutional history, such as minutes from the meetings of past OU presidents and boards of trustees, reveal the influence of many people and forces, from those who were listed as present at recorded meetings to

those who recorded the proceedings, to those (often unnamed) who transcribed the meetings, to those who chose to retain the resulting records for public use. The information that made it into OU's official record that those of us today can access and study is a product of what many groups before us have seen fit to preserve for posterity. The results might therefore be viewed as a carefully selected compilation of facts and opinions. To an extent, the same can be said of the interestedness of past OU catalogs; this extensive record, which shows who taught composition and when and in what context, must have been approved at the department, college, and university levels, each level with individuals who had something to gain or lose by portraying themselves in one way or another.

I will never get to the bottom of how composition at OU "really" went. The ever-shifting thinking behind what it meant to attend OU at different points in its history tells me as much; the few remaining and cross-disciplinary texts that speak to composition's past at this site do much the same. In place of certainty, what I can rely on are versions of history, told from particular vantage points and serving particular ends, each version succumbing to communal pressures of the time and place regarding what college-affiliated writing should do or show. In place of whether any of these histories attain "the truth" about composition at OU is the rhetorical "truth" that each of the sources and histories serve doxastic ends, not seeking consensus with other sources, but affirming for one group or another what members of that group thought good education or good writing looked like.



As we consider the resulting picture(s) of composition in OU's history from 1825 to 1950, or from the time that OU actively sought to defend its image to the time when it had grown into a research university, I would like us to reflect on some lessons that these histories of composition teach us about what it means to conceive of composition's past in the first place and what it means to align a set of composition histories within a rhetorical tradition. Regarding the former lesson, what it means to conceive of composition's past, I think that these OU-based histories of composition alert us to the *centrality of place* in *any* version of composition history. These histories remind us that the geographic and cultural location where composition practices were condoned matters because texts that are rooted in a local scene give us signs about what students there were allowed or supposed to do in the community, signs about what ends their writings were meant to serve, how their writings figured into the social space of the scene. I believe my OU-based histories of composition give us one example of reading composition's past "crookedly," to use Cheryl Glenn's term, an example of how *in composition history* we might go beyond where well-known archives at Harvard or elsewhere might lead us and make sense of textual artifacts that, if understood in context and via certain rhetoric principles, do more than speak to general institutional and regional history.

The histories of composition that I have assembled are not alone in speaking to composition's past at a particular site, nor are other "local histories" of composition the only kind of composition history that can ground a study of textual artifacts in the surrounding conventions of a specific institution, town, or region. What I believe local histories of composition like my own do, and what I believe mine do especially, is make

salient a point that gets swept under the rug when scholars write or cite histories of composition: whether one claims to write a local history of composition or a broader history of composition in America, *that history will necessarily emerge from a study of texts that were composed in “local” contexts, texts that once served “local” (institutional, communal) ends.* My OU-based histories of composition put into stark relief something that I think applies even to the historian who uses Harvard’s archives as the basis for his or her project: regardless of whether someone’s or some group’s practices (e.g., Adams Sherman Hill’s group at Harvard) persuade other people in other communities and contexts to change their practices, the originating person’s or group’s practices emerge as a response to *local* institutional needs and desires. In the case of Harvard, those local needs may have involved maintaining the University’s standards for its incoming students.

My OU-based histories of composition are part of a movement in Rhetoric and Composition to localize composition histories, a movement that spans the late 1990s to the present. Into this recent re-envisioning of past composition practices I would also place David Gold’s 2008 book *Rhetoric at the Margins* and Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon’s 2007 edited collection *Local Histories*. Taken together, the histories in these books and manuscripts give us signs of the means and ends of writing as it was (or in the case of my work, how it may have been) practiced at Ohio University, Wiley College (TX), Texas Woman’s University, East Texas Normal College, Antioch College (OH), Lafayette College (PA), Butler University (IN), Wellesley College (MA), Illinois State University, the University of Wisconsin – Platteville, Westfield State

Normal School (MA), Fitchburg Normal School (MA), Lincoln University (PA), and various two-year colleges. To these works I might add Catherine Hobbs' edited collection *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* (1995), though Hobbs' contributors explore writing practices at sites on and off college and university campuses. But in addition to fleshing out this localizing trend in composition history writing, I want to posit the possibility, even probability, that histories of composition that begin with and focus on classroom texts, practices, and philosophies at Harvard University (or at Yale University or at the University of Michigan) can also be read as local histories. Realizing the extent to which Charles Eliot's, Adams Sherman Hill's, and Fred Newton Scott's views of composition affected textbooks and classroom norms at institutions in the Northeast and in other regions should not deter us from applying the descriptor of *local* to their philosophies and methods.

Why is it, then, that for some places, some institutions, the term *local* gets elided? Herein I sense a power issue that I think stays hidden if we accept uncritically the idea that there is, has been, and can only be one worthwhile history of composition, a history that starts with Harvard President Charles Eliot's response to a perceived literacy crisis of the 1870s. The influence of Harvard on composition attitudes and practices at other higher education institutions may indeed have been profound. However, total acceptance of this narrative at the expense of other possible narratives reduces any deviations from the Harvard narrative, any other traditions of composition practices to a local (non-national, non-influential) status. So those of us today who write and read newer histories of composition that foreground the importance of composition at specific sites complete

with factors such as student demographics, communal needs and expectations, and access to teaching materials have called this work merely local in scope. What I hope that I have done with my OU-based histories of composition is show that by re-centering our geographic and cultural focus, particularly by moving that focus from a powerful institution (e.g., Harvard) to a more obscure institution (e.g., Ohio University, no longer “American University”), and by relying almost exclusively on an archived collection that does not conform our usual expectations for what constitutes a good or “complete” archive, we can challenge the assumption that little known sites of composition practices must automatically, necessarily bear a local status while familiar, well-examined sites of composition practices must bear a national status. Even when uncovering and examining traces of composition practices at Harvard, the historian is looking at what happened, or at what may have happened, at a certain time and in a certain location. Whatever influence Harvard administrators and faculty had thereafter is, I believe, a different subject, though a subject that has long been conflated with the study of composition at Harvard and similarly configured universities.

Note that in my OU-based histories of composition, I do *not* examine the *influence* of any handful of OU administrators, faculty, or students on other institutions. Perhaps someone could set out to do so if he or she found a means of making connections across institutions. Whatever influence, great or small, OU affiliates may have had on how composition came to be taught and viewed in other institutional contexts is a subject that I am leaving for another historian, for someone who wishes to trace genealogies of

theoretical and practical trends—Nan Johnson, say, or the early James Berlin.<sup>51</sup> Instead, I look for signs of how composition-related ideas and practices got constrained and channeled through the official or unofficial social protocol of Ohio University and Athens, OH. I would argue that in this project I foreground the role of place (geography as it pertains to culture and identity), and that my doing so alerts us to how place-based factors play into Harvard-based narratives of composition, too. To my thinking, the difference between my treatment of place and past historians' treatment of place is one of emphasis: I attempt to make plain the role that place may have had on past composition practices; other historians of composition have masked the effects of place on their own histories.

I hope that my OU-based histories of composition make strange the idea that there is an overarching national history of composition that was controlled primarily by a handful of presidents and professors at a few northeastern Ivy League institutions. I hope that my OU-based histories of composition lead us to look again at histories of composition that have not yet been scrutinized for how their originating sites (e.g., Harvard or Yale) are situated in complex local beliefs, exigencies, and practices.

A second key lesson that I think my OU-based histories of composition teach us is what it means to align a set of composition histories within a rhetorical tradition. I think that at issue in constructing a set of histories like those I have constructed is more than looking for signs of composition practices at ever-more varied kinds of sites: Midwestern

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<sup>51</sup> I name these historians because each has produced work in which he or she traced the influence of theoretical ideas across institutional sites. Nan Johnson, I should stress, studies histories of rhetoric in America, but of course the line between rhetoric and composition blurs significantly during the nineteenth century.

sites, Appalachian sites, normal school sites, women's colleges and universities, historically black colleges and universities. Had I not adopted a sophistic orientation toward textual meaning-making practices, I might have risked seeing my project as valuable *simply* because it gives us a non-Harvard- or non-Michigan-based version of composition history. While I do find it significant to explore composition's past at multiple sites, I think that aligning my view of text and meaning with the views of the classical Greek sophists lets me maximize my use of "incomplete" archival holdings. Whereas a historiography that prizes completeness and closure would frown upon my extensive reliance on holdings from the OU archives alone, a sophistic tradition that sees any truth as shaped by linguistic and other social conventions and as shaped by continually shifting contexts and perspectives gives me a basis for considering archived texts that speak to OU or Athens, Ohio's, general development in addition to archived texts that illustrate OU students' actual writing. A sophistic perspective in the tradition of Gorgias and of *dissoi logoi* also encourages me to refrain from privileging any particular source or source type so that "truth" remains not the province of any one person or the result of any one line of reasoning but rather an open, always debatable, always probable entity. What I hope I have done as a result of my alliance with sophistic rhetoric is present a view of archival collections that foregrounds the choices we as historians make, the possibilities available to us, whenever we rely more or less heavily on certain source types. By attempting to democratize the sources that I let speak about composition's past at OU, I hope that I have put into stark relief a process that consumes the time of many historians who deal with archived texts.

Much as I foreground place in an attempt to highlight how this factor almost always plays a key role in our narratives of composition, my sophistic alignment lets me foreground textual indeterminacy in the hope of spotlighting the interpretive moves that underlie even the work of scholars who have at their perusal great quantities of student writing. My “crooked” read of composition history is one that revels in a view of texts as social constructs whose meanings are forever in flux, forever a give and take among variously situated individuals and groups. I attempt to keep this approach in mind as I consider each scrap of evidence I have access to and each point that I make in my analysis. Other historians of composition may not keep their selection and interpretation of sources as open to scrutiny; they may not feel a need to do so because they see their sources as generally reliable, accurate, and complete. But these historians nevertheless make choices about whose perspectives to privilege, which archived holdings (and which archives, which institutional sites) to consider, which conclusions to draw from evidence that has been carefully pieced together. The historiographical concerns that they grapple with privately, perhaps before their pens hit their papers or before their fingers reach their keyboards, I engage with publicly, openly, and I invite my readers to join me in bending and flexing possible historical narratives this way and that. I believe that even Robert Connors, who in *Composition-Rhetoric* claims to deal with sources in an a-theoretical and non-ideological manner, must contend with the fact that he cannot use any particular source or set of sources to determine once and for all how the story of composition in and across America went. He cannot be certain that he knows how the term *composition* signified for each and every group of students and instructors who used it. He cannot say

that yes, he has indeed painted a colorful, detailed, engaging picture of composition history that will stand the test of time as illustrator of Truth. Even as he utilizes sources from different archives, he made very deliberate decisions to visit those particular archives and to surface particular trends and themes.

More, my *neosophistic* alignment brings my interest in the sophists into conversation with theorists from John Poulakos on, who reclaim sophistic rhetoric from its centuries-old denigration as mere fluff and play, and who see it anew for its power to generate ideas. At least two of these theorists, Susan Jarratt and Victor Vitanza, see in sophistic rhetoric a transformative potential in terms of how it might push language to revise existing hierarchies with which we value sources and construct histories. Both treat sophistic rhetoric as a calling to upset existing models of seeing and find new rules to play by in any attempt to write history. Generally, by treating my project as a sophistic history of composition, I seek to keep meaning dispersed, as opposed to fixed, in the texts that I select for study. And by calling my approach *neosophistic*, not stopping with the term *sophistic*, I am saying that I want my OU-based histories to be understood as emerging from my exposure to this late-twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century revival of sophistic tenets of language and truth, a revival that explores ways in which language itself is connected to representation and to power.

Although I undertake a neosophistic reading in my choice of texts to consider and in the conclusions that I draw from those texts, I would argue that past histories of composition can and should be re-seen and critiqued with this anti-foundational perspective in mind. Past historians may not have articulated their interpretive lens as I



have, but a neosophistic orientation toward texts and textual meaning urges us to see language as always rhetorical and always political: as constructive (as opening up new opportunities for applying meaning), as interested (as emerging from and benefiting someone or some group), and as adaptive (as contingent on various contextual factors). This I find to be more astute and responsible than treating histories of composition as finished and objective.

As I hope I have shown, my OU-based histories' fluidity and tentativeness and the sophistic angle from which these concerns spring distinguish them from other "local histories" of composition that are proliferating. Other local histories of composition, such as *Local Histories* and *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, pluralize the institutional sites where we might analyze composition's past forms; I adopt this tactic as well. However, I seek not just to *add to* the current picture of composition's past that those of us in rhetoric and composition have inherited, but to complicate the rules we play by when we construct these histories. With my project, I hope to show that to amass textual sources that have been preserved and made available for public use is to enter into someone else's already established historical narrative of the events and behaviors that have been said to constitute the institutional and cultural heritage of a place. Moreover, I believe my project shows that for the composition historian to surface the interestedness of the preserved texts, to look for signs of multiple meanings and intentions in the ways the texts were used, and to view the texts as extensions of the norms and common knowledge of particular groups—in short, for the historian to see archived texts as fallible constructs whose modern-day availability already makes a point about what an institution

values—is for the composition historian to see the resulting narratives for their rhetorical qualities.

The resulting history, a rhetorically sophisticated portrait of many mutations that composition has undergone at one institutional site, is a messy portrait indeed. We might think of it as a crude portrait—a portrait whose painter (the rhetor-historian) never aspired to paint clean, clear lines and never attempted to imitate visible life so closely as to lose a sense of the portrait's artifice. Rather, it is a portrait whose painter celebrated artifice and wanted audiences to see reds as reds, browns as browns, brushstrokes *as* brushstrokes, canvasses *as* canvasses. It is a portrait that exposes the choices that an artist makes to create a more or less “realistic” or “impressionistic” or “futuristic” picture. As the historian in this case, I undertake such a task because I feel that past historians have not done enough to foreground the rhetoricity of their own histories of composition. Past historians have written at great length about texts, audiences, purposes, and contexts; they have examined ways in which still earlier scholars and teachers situated written texts in relation to truth, reality, or change. But past historians, from Kitzhaber to the contributors to *Local Histories* and beyond, have not always stopped to dwell on their own choices as choices beyond adopting (or in Robert Connors' case, renouncing) a general interpretive lens with which to focus their questions and assumptions. To adopt a neosophistic lens is, I believe, to undertake an intensely reflexive task, an interpretive project in which language itself may be scrutinized at every turn for its role in revealing and meeting the desires of particular groups and cultures. To adopt a neosophistic *historiography* is to

harness this attention to language-as-social-and-political-construct to see what historical texts tell those of us in the present about rhetoric.

Among many possible lessons about rhetoric that have emerged in my analysis of historical texts surrounding composition practices at OU, I have established—tentatively—that *composition* itself is an owned and contested term, a label whose cache has risen and fallen depending on the shifting mission of the university leaders who use it (see “Composition” in chapter four). I have made a case for composition as a practice of reflecting and preserving what powerful community leaders want to publicize (“Community,” chapter three), as well as a practice of facilitating public oral engagements (“Communication,” chapter four) and a practice of thinking through the community’s/institution’s relationship to other communities and regions (“Context,” chapter three). Doubtlessly, many more insights into the role of rhetoric in constructing community life and the livelihood of a higher education institution may arise from further consideration of the sources I have selected and from an analysis of additional sources, not to mention from future scholars’ analyses of these or different sources. But for now I wish to rest on these early points as possible starting places from which future histories of composition might proceed.

### A Pause for Comparative Purposes

While in chapters three and four I attempted to construct four local (OU-based) histories of composition, and so far in this chapter I have explained what I see my project doing, I think a pause for comparative purposes will give my project’s skeptical readers

opportunities to consider my work in the context of the first and the second (current) wave of composition history writing. I characterize the first wave as attempts to establish national histories of composition in America, usually histories that defend a genealogy of practices and influences from Harvard, Michigan, or Yale; and in chapter one I reviewed such histories. I see the second wave as attempts to localize and diversify histories of composition in America (see chapter two for some examples).

In this section, I would like to look back at my interpretive bases and findings to see how they differ from interpretive approaches and findings from those of other, first- or second-wave writers of composition histories. I will compare my project to a recent local history of composition that, aside from its analysis, accords well with my work. Then, to differentiate my OU-based findings from other historians' findings, I will consider my project alongside some additional histories of writing and writing-related activities. This way, I explain my project's contributions in terms of theory and in terms of historical findings.

The first history that I discuss in some detail is *Rhetoric at the Margins* (2008), by David Gold. Gold's book contains three small local histories of composition—composition as it developed at Wiley College, a historically black institution; at Texas Woman's University, an institution for women; and at East Texas Normal College, an institution founded to train teachers. All three of these institutions, while different in their missions and in the populations they served, are united by the fact of their Texas locations. Gold examined archival evidence at each institutional site to amass signs of how composition occurred therein, and perhaps needless to say, none of these institutions

appears prominently in the Kitzhaber-influenced histories of composition. Gold concludes that none of these colleges adhered blindly to the Harvard or Yale models of composition; at each institution, outside influences were tempered by local cultural challenges regarding which students were admitted to the college, which nearby citizens had power, which topics were deemed pressing, and what roles for educated persons were accepted by power holders in the area. Furthermore, these institutions all lie in rural parts of Texas as opposed to in the state's cultural and political centers. Both physically and culturally, the institutional sites might therefore be called "marginal."

More specifically, Gold finds that at Wiley College and Texas Woman's University, the isolation of students and faculty from the state's power holders helped the student faculty develop their own methods for connecting composition instruction and practice to their local context. At Wiley, such difference stemmed largely from race and class, at Texas Woman's University from gender. At East Texas Normal College, meanwhile, he finds that students were not separated from the rest of the population because of identify markers; however, normal school philosophies encouraged instructors to attend to students' needs in practical, hands-on ways and encouraged the growth of close learning communities comprised of faculty and students.

Gold's turn to institutional sites that have been overlooked by past composition histories connects his project to mine, as does his reliance on scraps of trans-disciplinary archival evidence housed at the institutions he examines. But his interpretive moves do not align his work with a neosophistic perspective, and I would like to take a moment to highlight this subtle, but I think important, difference. In his book, Gold makes many

conclusions about how composition history went at each of the three schools that he studied. In so doing, he counters the Harvard narrative of composition with the Wiley College narrative, the Texas Woman's narrative, and the East Texas Normal narrative. With these foci, I see him making a decision to pluralize the history of composition by turning to three relatively obscure institutional sites. But even so, I do not read his work as abandoning the positivist legacy of the first wave of composition histories. Note his explanation for why he selected the archives that he did: "I chose these schools [Wiley, Texas Woman's, and Eastern Texas Normal] both because they provide a cross-section of the range of institutions that served American students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries *and because each had archival resources substantial enough to sustain in-depth inquiry*" (x, my emphasis). It is his second reason that interests me, for if the substantiality of some archival holdings is what prompted Gold to see value in studying certain institutions' historical records, then I wonder whether he would overlook those archival collections (or non-archival collections) where gaps of many years exist between texts. I wonder if in striving for an approximation of chronological completeness, he would feel seduced by the depth and breadth of archival collections that resemble Harvard's.

In a later essay in which Gold explains at length how his interest grew into work that became his dissertation and subsequent book, he expresses more fully the angst that gave shape to his future work:

I was frustrated with the narrow focus of the historiography I was reading. Nearly every available text seemed to focus at the same few Ivy League

institutions. [...] Surely other schools existed in the past where the rhetoric and composition curriculum was not so stifling, where students did not receive papers dripping with red ink, graded not for content but for form? (“The Accidental” 14)

From this explanation alone, he sounds much like how I believe I may sound to audiences who are unfamiliar with my background and interests. But I think a difference between Gold and me stems from how each of us conceives of our historical work in relation to rhetorical theory. I attempt to fit my work into tradition that sees people’s language choices as (always) shaping the reality that others accept—a tradition that reaches back through postmodern thinkers like Victor Vitanza and Michel Foucault and to sophisticated rhetoricians centuries before them who used language to arrive at multiple truths or at no one overarching Truth. This is a tradition that thrives on pluralizing interpretive possibilities, complicating the perspectives from which we might analyze an event, and bearing witness to the ends to which particular texts (small “t” truths, ideas about reality) are put. This is in contrast to thinkers who, following Plato’s Socrates, see truth as attainable through a dialog comprised of the right mix of questions and the right group of citizens. What I see in composition histories such as Connors’ is a fear of relinquishing the notion that history occurred in a way upon which we can all be made to agree, if only we can all be exposed to the right texts. While Gold’s work is a far cry from Connors’, I see in Gold’s work a desire to reach some stable ground regarding composition history if we just study enough sites of composition.

When extrapolating from his own archival work to make a general comment about the nature of such research, Gold writes,

[Archival research is] like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, except that you don't have a picture on the box for reference, there's more than one puzzle in the box, the picture keeps changing depending on how you fit the pieces together, and the pieces themselves change shape when your back is turned. Only slowly do the pieces begin to form a pattern. ("The Accidental" 15)

I am grateful for Gold's openness to describing his found texts—presumably the pieces of his puzzle—as themselves changing, shifting, depending on where he is looking and how they lie in relation to one another. However, it is an implication of his metaphor that puzzles me: jigsaw puzzles, even without their accompanying picture boxes, have complete forms, just forms that are not apparent from the get go. Does he hope to "complete" his research by finding enough texts? His overall summary of what archival work entails is illuminating in this respect:

Though we may apply a critical lens or favor a particular theoretical approach, the basic methodology of archival research remains the same: read absolutely everything and try to make sense of what happened. It is a bottom-up process and messy as hell—and, more to the point, scary, requiring faith that something will be found, even if it's not what you first went looking for. ("The Accidental" 18)



As Gold says, no matter how we align ourselves theoretically, we have to read a lot and embrace what may seem an abyss of archival chaos. This process may indeed be “messy” and “scary” and require some degree of serendipity to move forward, yet it reminds me of his implicit hope to complete the archival puzzle, the hope to reach a place where one has “read absolutely everything.” I think that reading everything, by which I mean locating all available texts that might speak somehow to the subject one is researching, need not serve as the basis for historical work in composition. If I travel from site to site amassing sources about composition’s past in one location and another, then I may be able to add to existing narratives of composition history. But by reading as much as possible and going through the “mess” of “try[ing] to make sense of what happened,” as opposed to trying to raise *possibilities* for what differently situated historical figures and groups *think* happened, he stops short of embracing the sophistic tenets that I embrace.

Taking a sophistic angle on composition historiography shows us that we are always dealing with texts as perspectives that are embedded in larger discourses and interests, and that we can never get at the truth of what happened historically because our access to increased understanding is through texts (language), which are constructed and reconstructed by social groups, each with their own desires and needs.

Differences between my OU-based histories of composition and Gold’s three Texas-based histories of composition become more noticeable when reviewing Gold’s explanations for his research choices. Although he does not readily endorse national histories of composition, he offers his smaller, locally or regionally based narratives as alternative narratives that retain a desire for closure. Consider Gold’s explanation of his

research method in his chapter on composition history at Texas Woman's University (his second chapter of three, total). Here he reviews the many sources he examined and allowed to alter his focus; his goal, he says, is "to be as comprehensive as archival source material permits" (*Rhetoric* 68). After then listing a few more source types that he examines, from autobiographical writing from certain educators to school yearbooks, he writes, "I have relied heavily on these source materials to reconstruct as best as possible the educational atmosphere of the university and especially student responses to instruction" (ibid). From this statement, a history that is "as [good] as possible" might be understood as a history that considers all the sources, or as many sources as are available.

I am not attempting to place Gold's histories in the same category that I place Brereton's and Connors'. My reading of Gold shows him to be much more interested than Brereton, Connors, and others in acknowledging the limits of available archival records. But still I notice his use of "comprehensive" as a descriptor that is central to his research project. Perhaps I see this descriptor as suggesting more than Gold intended, but I feel a need to be exceedingly cautious about aiming for comprehensiveness even if I deal with a small collection of sources. I feel a need to note the opposite: that my records and interpretation of those records do not account for everything about composition at one institutional site. Indeed, I think we would learn a great deal today by keeping in play our decisions for studying some kinds of records rather than others (see the coda) and for organizing our analysis around some priorities and questions rather than others. By "keeping in play," I mean keeping these research and interpretation choices apparent and open to negotiation.

Rather than scrutinize each of his sources for its authors' affiliations, possible purposes, writing contexts, and so on (some of my core concerns), Gold looks for how his local histories fit into larger patterns of education history. As he says in "The Accidental Archivist," most of his chapters in *Rhetoric at the Margins* work deductively, beginning with generalizations that he uses to characterize the American educational landscape as it existed for southerners, African Americans, Texas women and normal school affiliates. He starts with large claims about how members of certain *kinds* of institutions and in certain *regions* approach composition instruction and practice, and then he uses his primary research to illustrate these claims, in a way that a Toulmin-esque essay might. For example, in his chapter on Wiley College, he argues that to understand the education of African Americans in the racially segregated American South, we must look to "African American educational institutions, particularly private ones" (*Rhetoric* 18). In his second chapter, on composition history at Texas Woman's University [TWU], he argues that the vocation-focused "goals and curriculum of TWU corresponded to the needs of white Texas women in the early twentieth century," this in comparison to the claim that for "African Americans, a classical liberal arts education was seen as the epitome of education attainment" (*Rhetoric* 68). It is possible that many of his Wiley College and TWU sources speak to these larger claims that depict higher education development beyond the borders of any one or two institutions; it is even possible that sources from other colleges and universities do much the same. However, my neosophistic emphasis pushes me to complicate even freshly constructed narratives of

composition history. It pushes me to resist treating my new narratives as necessarily more insightful than other narratives.

Despite our theoretical differences, Gold's findings are valuable to my project. I admire his willingness to look to less popular sites for signs of composition's past, and I think that many of his insights about composition history at Wiley, TWU, and ETNC add to the composition narratives from Kitzhaber, Berlin, Brereton, and Connors in a way that aligns with my OU-based histories. Gold gives me more to consider in terms of my own research when I see that that he used his Wiley College-based sources to show that this historically black college bucked the late nineteenth-century trend for colleges to focus less on oral rhetoric and more on writing. He gives me more to consider when I take in his portrayal of both Wiley College and ETNC as decidedly community oriented in their philosophical makeup, though in different ways: Wiley by emphasizing classical training to develop active rhetors and citizens, ETNC by emphasizing practical training to enable students to meet the immediate needs of their families and communities (*Rhetoric* 21, 143). Gold's project finds a kinship with mine when he argues that the isolation and segregation that in some ways inhibited Wiley College also gave black instructors there more autonomy in terms of their pedagogical practices (*Rhetoric* 28). He helps me when he points out that debate at Wiley became valued alongside writing (*Rhetoric* 60), perhaps as one aspect of the College's focus on community engagement. Similarly, he gives me more to consider when he presents composition history at TWU as incorporating elements of both vocational training and a liberal arts tradition, as when he surfaces evidence that at ETNC, faculty hosted student readings in faculty's homes

(*Rhetoric* 133). And more broadly, he gives me much to consider when he shares signs that some nineteenth-century Texas teachers were aware of urban and northeastern biases in the textbooks that sold well elsewhere (*Rhetoric* 138).

In short, Gold's institution-based findings give me opportunities to begin connecting my OU-based findings to composition histories at other marginalized sites. His work leads me to wonder whether geographic or social isolation are necessary to prompt some colleges and universities to endorse a local/communal focus that privileges oral rhetoric. If so, then we stand to gain quite a bit, I think, by comparing histories of composition from rural institutional sites to histories of composition from historically non-white institutional sites (or across sites that are both). I find this important because it runs counter to how we might otherwise think about differences among colleges and universities, and a sophistic analysis of historical texts or a sophistically aligned broader sketch of historical studies would have us seek out unfamiliar, unconventional ways of making connections. Giving us one rhetorical tool that we might keep in mind is Victor J. Vitanza (and before him, Jean-Francois Lyotard) who uses the concept of *paralogy*, or a willful step outside of what counts as "logical" in an effort to make new meaning. In my case, drawing parallels between histories of composition at OU and a history of composition at Wiley College would not quite illustrate paralogy—connections are still connections after all, still attempts to find points of commonality. However, I think that such a connection, from a rural, largely white Appalachian institution and a historically black Texas institution, would be para-conventional (dare I say para-normal?) for compositionists who are accustomed to thinking about and across institutions in relatively

static categories. Such a connection would prompt us to rethink our tendencies to compare composition histories in convenient but limited ways.

Without seeing similarities in community foci between OU and Wiley College and without analyzing similarities and differences in the historical contexts of both institutions, we might fall back on familiar categories like race to distinguish types of higher education institutions and the composition philosophies and practices that may have flourished within each type. A second point that a comparison of Gold's work and mine leads me to raise is that the shared tendency of TWU and OU to draw on multiple educational heritages—TWU through its vocational and liberal arts curriculum, OU through its normal school and liberal arts curriculum—gives us a basis for comparing and contrasting composition histories at schools whose mission statements and curricula render their classifications problematic by current standards for institutional types. And so on regarding other points of connection between my findings from OU and Gold's findings from the three Texas institutions that he studies. I would simply caution us to proceed with great care when tracking similarities and differences across composition histories at variously clustered institutional sites. I would urge us to resist the temptation to insert a new metanarrative of composition history in place of the one established by Kitzhaber and his followers.

What we might end up with in place of another metanarrative is a problem that I cannot solve at this point, but I would like to emphasize the need for us, as composition instructors who also study rhetoric, to keep every historical narrative that we construct open to revision, to embrace the notion of any narrative's contingency on factors

pertaining to language, situation, and perspective. I think this is an attitude we ourselves have not adopted thus far even as we write *about* what we think occurred in the slippery, context-dependant development of writing in this place or that.

Gold aside, I also wish to examine what my OU-based findings themselves offer those of us who study composition histories but who may be located elsewhere. I begin by considering my project alongside a recent book on the history of OU's sister institution, Miami University. This book is *With Sentiments of Respect and Affection: Letters of Old Miami, 1809-1873*, edited by Miami University (MU) archivist Betsy Butler. For her history, Butler collected photocopies from original documents as well as typescripts to letters from early MU faculty, administrators, and students, as well as records from Miami's early literary societies. With this selection of primary documents, she covers much of the ground that I do, noting the financial woes that plagued Miami's existence in much of the 1800s (it too closed down temporarily) and the culture of oratorical excellence that characterized campus life. Founded in 1809, just a few years after OU, lying in the rural southwestern corner of the state, and crippled by many of the same state-imposed constraints placed on its goals, Miami serves as a sister university to OU in terms of institutional history. Thus, the fact that Butler selects the university that she selects to study and that she focuses on what she does renders her project a companion piece to mine.

Two points that Butler makes stand out to me for what they suggest about OU's history, or what different ones of us think comprises OU's history. The first is her comment that MU is not an "exceptional place" in history, that it is a university much

like any other (iii). If this is so, then what claim would its sister institution, OU, have to singularity, and why would Athens historian Betty Hollow subtitle her history of OU *Spirit of a Singular Place*? Butler's characterization of Miami's history as typical renders questionable my insinuations of a unique writing environment at OU if indeed the two institutions have much in common, geographically, economically, and politically. So to this problem I wish to remind my readers of OU's place not just in a rural southern spot of Ohio but in a rural mountainous spot, and of OU's involvement in the founding of the state and in the state's luring of white settlers. With this point comes a reminder of the Ohio Company of Associates' early, gradual purchases of land in the Northwest Territory and the population shifts that followed suit, leading settlers from Marietta, Ohio, down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and up various tributaries to Chillicothe, Ohio, and the environs beyond the mountains. The grandeur that appears in the early promotional material of OU and then fades in the sources I have examined leads me to characterize composition history at OU as a practice that occurred in a dramatically shifting context. I believe that this particular context and its consequences for the status of Athens, Ohio, on a state, regional, and national level contributed to the role of overtly rhetorical endeavors that organized the cultural activities of small and isolated OU and Athens, Ohio. Out of this context appeared prominent and regular sparring in debate and in oral and written skills, ample room for off-campus writing groups to meet, and university-sanctioned writing instruction that cut across multiple departments and colleges. While some of these features of nineteenth-century composition may have also existed elsewhere,



including at MU, I suspect that they did so for different reasons (though again, I cannot be sure; I can only propose variously supported possibilities).

The second point from Butler's history that strikes me in light of my OU-based historical work is Butler's summary of the time period when Miami's literary societies formed and thrived. According to her, the first literary society at Miami was formed in 1825, or sixteen years after the University's founding, but it was not until 1910 that the literary societies there began giving their books to the University as a whole for public access (46). Also, signs of the literary societies' decline in local prestige occurred, Butler reveals, from 1885-1920. If others who peruse the same historical documents from the Miami literary societies agree, then the resulting depiction of Miami's literary societies is one that overlaps with and deviates from that which I have drawn for OU. It overlaps in that it notices that much like at OU, university-sanctioned literary societies appeared soon after Miami's founding, and much like at OU, Miami's literary societies contributed resources to their host university's overall wellbeing. Additionally, Miami's literary societies seem to have disappeared at roughly the same time that OU's did.

However, the differences seem to me more telling. My research shows that at OU, literary societies seem to have given back to their host university throughout the nineteenth century, not just in the early twentieth; this means that such was the case during the time period when OU closed temporarily (the early 1840s). By contrast, MU's temporary closing occurred in the 1870s, well before it received books from its literary societies, according to Butler. Another striking difference is that OU's literary societies seem to have flourished throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century in light of

the numbers of students involved in regularly held literary society activities and the continued proliferation of literary societies at this time. If the heyday of literary society activity at Miami started to wane in the 1880s, why was this change slower to catch on at OU? I have pondered a nearly identical question in chapter four, so I will not repeat myself here. Suffice it to say that I believe the location of the institution complete with the social situation that such a location encouraged contributed to the longevity and popularity of rhetorical activities that created a social and educational center for Athenians and OU students.

The archival evidence that Butler offers to flesh out a narrative of MU's past is helpful to my project, but I think that studying even a university that is in the same state as OU and that is roughly the same size and age as OU, a university whose institutional growth was checked by many of the same forces that checked the growth of OU, does not replace the need to study the particulars surrounding composition beliefs and practices at OU itself. While trends across institutions that have similar geographic and political histories are of course noticeable and useful, lumping the two institutions (or any such institutions) together as one kind of place where composition was handled in one generalized way does as much harm as good. Such clustering may erase subtle but telling differences in the ways that communities have viewed and used rhetoric, ways that higher education and institutionally sanctioned writing practices have affected seemingly similar but ultimately different regions.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This is a point that transcends my project's scope. So I turn to historians and cultural geographers to make the most informed and eloquent case for what we gain or lose by placing specific and consensual boundaries around particular notions of Appalachia and non-Appalachia, the East and the Midwest, the North and the South, and so forth.

Here I would like to switch gears by comparing my project to a few more extensive histories of composition, not just to other local histories, for it could be argued that the features I find striking about composition's history at OU resemble or even mirror features of composition at many other institutional sites. If this is the case, then my project would offer nothing new to a broad view of composition's past except to show that attitudes and practices that were in vogue at Harvard or Michigan or elsewhere also seem to have held sway at OU.

In earlier chapters, I have discussed the narratives of composition that Albert Kitzhaber, James Berlin, John C. Brereton, and Robert Connors have endorsed: a narrative that looks at a few elite colleges and universities to illustrate an oral-based nineteenth-century rhetoric that, owing to a gradual shift in the educational landscape from a genteel, liberal humanistic model of learning to a specialized, research-based model of learning, and owing to Harvard's lead in handling a perceived literacy crisis in the 1870s, transformed into a form of study that began and ended with students writing regular but short arhetorical pieces of writing (themes) which their professors would then assess based on how well the writing conformed to then current standards for orthography, spelling, and grammar. To this narrative I would like to add John Michael Wozniak's *English Composition in Eastern Colleges 1850-1940* (1978). I note it here rather than in my earlier critique of the Kitzhaber-influenced composition narrative because Wozniak's history gestures to the local (or at least the regional) in his focus on "eastern colleges." I think ultimately, however, it falls into many of the same traps as Kitzhaber's dissertation, using a few institutions to represent higher education institutions

everywhere, of all kinds. For instance, until his coverage of composition during the Civil War, Wozniak scarcely mentions southern institutions; considering the examples he mentions—Harvard, Yale, Brown, Pennsylvania, Williams—“eastern colleges” seems to mean “northeastern colleges.” Such examples, geographically limited as they are, do not stop him from making points about “rhetoric in [all of] America” (8) and points about composition “to early nineteenth century America [as a whole]” (17). I, by contrast, head in the opposite direction with my institutional focus.

But I see two additional points of contrast from my neosophistic OU-based study, one in Wozniak’s selection of source types and the other in his conclusions. Concerning his source types, he relates his composition history by resorting to support from textbooks first and foremost, then information about selected professors (Adams Sherman Hill for example), and then catalogs of past course offerings. However, my own source material is more eclectic than textbooks and catalogs and implicitly urges us to reconsider hierarchies commonly used to value or devalue certain kinds of records; in this regard my selection of sources follows in a tradition popularized by Susan Miller (*Assuming*). I do not, and with the materials available to me cannot, sketch the shape of composition history at OU by studying the textbooks required and used most frequently from one year to the next. The only time in my study when I do look closely at a composition textbook is to consider themes in the 1943 textbook *College Composition: A Brief Course* by Caskey, Heidler, and Wray, all faculty members from the OU English Department. Also, unlike Wozniak’s interest in a few influential professors of rhetoric, I seldom sketch the shape of composition history at OU by stressing the deeds of any one or a few professors,

however charismatic and influential they may have been.<sup>53</sup> In place of following a genealogy of individual influences, I have emphasized larger contexts and cultural pressures on composition at OU: how westward settlement patterns reshaped the early 1800s educational landscape of OU's founders, what university leaders might have expected from Athens townspeople at this time or that, how townspeople behaved toward OU affiliates, how Athens' and OU's relationship to Columbus legislators may have allowed for specific kinds of growth and limitations. Finally, although like Wozniak, I study catalogs of past course offerings, this part of my study is embedded in a consideration of composition that makes use of students' letters, scrapbooks, theses, and diaries, not to mention letters and publications from Athens-area educators, among others.

Beyond source types, my OU-based history also differs from Wozniak's history in terms of the conclusions that each of us draws. In constructing my history, I see (tentatively) signs that an early twentieth-century scramble for controlling composition classes occurred at OU not just among the usual disciplinary suspects—literature, rhetoric, and speech—but between OU's two colleges: the College of Liberal Arts and the State Normal College. Wozniak, meanwhile, notes a tendency for multiple disciplines to vie for control of composition, but does not bring up the possibility that different colleges within a single institution might simultaneously govern composition practices.

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<sup>53</sup> An exception is my focus on Dr. Ed Stone and his colleagues in the 1950s OU English Department and in my appendices which give post-1950 perspectives on composition history at OU. But these sources all speak to composition at OU after my primary period of focus, 1825-1950.

Also, Wozniak depicts college literacy societies as waning by 1875 (45-46), a portrayal that differs markedly from what I found in OU-based sources.

Another large-scale history of composition in America, but one that does not follow in Kitzhaber's footsteps, is David R. Russell's *Writing in the Disciplines: 1870-1990: A Curricular History* (1991). I single out this work because it touches on points I bring up about composition at OU having occurred outside the walls of classes whose title contained the term *composition*. Russell's work is a history of writing across the curriculum (WAC) in America. In it, he covers educational and ideological movements that impacted composition practices in America, often in conflicting ways and seldom with long-term results. Through his review of the educational philosophies of different thinkers, he argues that American educators continuously and naively bought into the "myth of transience," or the belief that a single panacea existed for all students' writing problems if that panacea could only be found. This central point allows him in his final chapter to call for WAC programs to alter the way that faculty across the disciplines view language in relation to the knowledge that they produce, WAC programs that have WAC philosophies.

Noteworthy about Russell's project is that his does not center on composition at any one or two sites; repeatedly, he dips into examples of WAC formations at different colleges and universities. And throughout his book he points out many trends in college writing and rhetoric that I think explain some of the practices I have noticed in texts about OU's history. I say "some of" because I believe that the OU-based evidence I have

analyzed does not always fit perfectly with the larger trends in composition and higher education that Russell notes. A few examples may illuminate the *partial* fits:

- Russell explains that in the old nineteenth-century college curriculum, extracurricular learning was held in high esteem, with students organizing and running extracurricular groups and societies (44). My OU-based research, by contrast, gives us signs that not only did extracurricular learning occasions involve students in the nineteenth century but also faculty and occasionally townspeople. This is seen most clearly, I think, in the records of OU's literary societies.
- Russell argues that after the Civil War, a rise in specialized forms of study wiped out the oratorical culture that had been a mark of the college-educated adult and valued in its stead an education that served practical, professional ends for students and research ends for faculty (46-48).<sup>54</sup> However, my research of composition's past at OU reveals numerous signs that this shift did not occur at OU until the 1920s and 30s when the University dismantled its literary societies and reorganized its departments into several colleges and schools.
- According to Russell, Professor Adams Sherman Hill at Harvard believed that students should write about "what they know and understand before proceeding" (50). A similar but not identical approach surfaces in the composition textbook written by OU professors Caskey, Heidler, and Wray and in the work their OU English Department successors. Caskey, Heidler, and Wray's book, *College*

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<sup>54</sup> Albert Kitzhaber dwells on the same point and emphasizes the effects of the German-influenced research model of higher education.

*Composition*, urged students to write about what they see and hear around them—that is, about the sights (and sites) common to students’ surroundings. But this personal, sensory-rich approach might be understood as an argument for students both to write “what they [already] know and understand,” to use Russell’s phrase, and for familiarizing students more fully with the town and area in which they spent their college experience. In other words, I read the approach to composition espoused in *College Composition* as an incorporation *and addition to* Adams Sherman Hill’s, among others’, view toward composition.

- In his depiction of how land-grant universities of the Midwest handled composition across departments, Russell claims that in the late 1800s, “Iowa State College [...] represents the most thoroughgoing attempt to give departments responsibility for teaching writing” due to its requirement for students to give weekly orations and its requirement for seniors to write a “graduating thesis” and for upperclassmen to “write four ‘dissertations’ (brief research papers)” on topics within their primary area of concentration (59). While all of this may have been so, the decades-long persistence of two different colleges, and thus multiple departments, at OU in teaching undergraduate composition courses begs for consideration among Russell’s examples of early interdisciplinary involvement with, and responsibility for, college-level writing.
- Russell argues that the rise of competing professional interests and the mushrooming of new departments and areas for study, all of which were sweeping the educational landscape around 1900, caused “the academic



community [to cease] to be a community in the sense that those raised in the oral, face-to-face culture of rural and small-town America understood the term. The college had become divided, rationalized, efficient, with knowledge committed to specialized writing” (69). Unfortunately, this summary does not reflect the accounts given by OU students such as Margaret Boyd in the 1870s and Grosvenor S. McKee in the 1910s, nor to the account of OU graduate student Elizabeth Irene Smith.<sup>55</sup>

- Russell discusses literary societies as if they had nothing to do with writing (80).

But my research shows me many signs that such was far from the case at OU.

These moments give us just a few instances of how Russell’s account of the history of WAC in America sweeps institutional particularity under the rug in his attempt to create a national narrative of WAC history. Had he steadfastly incorporated exceptions to the educational developments that he describes, his history would likely have seemed a meandering mess, I realize. But given my theoretical alignment, I believe that that “mess” is valuable, that reading into some of the particularity that Russell misses gives us a version of composition history that encourages us to hesitate before memorizing when, where, and how large-scale educational philosophies and practices took shape, encourages us to look for how such philosophies and practices were situated in rhetorical exchanges that involved geography, local politics, and communal patterns and norms. My

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<sup>55</sup> However, as always, these students’ accounts of educational life at OU—narratives of strong social and intellectual bonds between faculty and students—must be understood as texts that were influenced by the power holders of their day.

research indicates that composition practices at OU did not *only* follow large-scale trends in higher education.

For my OU-based histories, I did not set out to create a history of WAC, nor do I think WAC is a fitting acronym to apply to my research. Despite the fact that I study writing that was composed for extra-curricular purposes and writing completed by faculty and administrators as well as that completed by students, I acknowledge Russell's point that WAC as an educational movement did not come about until the 1970s, having come on the heels of the mid-century communications movement and the academy's 1960s' renaissance of rhetoric ("American" 11). Thus, I believe I have not written local histories of WAC as much as I have written local histories of university-sanctioned writing. I find Russell's project relevant for my work because Russell dips into nineteenth and early twentieth century history to show the persistence of the myth of transience.

I do not intend the points of comparison discussed above to serve as a comprehensive picture of how I think my project relates to *all* histories whose chronological boundaries overlap my work's—for example, histories of American education as a whole, histories of speech communication or communication studies, and histories of American social and economic patterns more generally. I think useful analyses could be conducted by pitting my and others' histories of composition alongside histories of these other, related subjects, but that such analyses necessitate work that is extensive enough to warrant separate studies. On the one hand, it is a testament to the importance of composition at some colleges and universities that histories of college-sanctioned fields as different as business, engineering, and education could all complicate

our ideas about how composition developed at any specific site. Yet on the other hand, the same ubiquity of composition renders it difficult for someone trained in one discipline to understand the history of composition from the vantage points of various disciplines. I leave the task of situating histories of composition in relation to histories of other subjects to scholars whose primary aim is cross-disciplinary historical comparisons. My local histories of composition can only gesture in that direction, and as a student of Rhetoric and Composition, I see fit for the time being to consider my project only in terms of how it adds to the knowledge base in this one field.

For those interested in comparing histories of composition to other genres of history, I think that turning to histories of speech communication and to histories of education more generally can offer us a great deal more to digest about what might have been happening for those who wrote or taught writing in colleges and universities. Such a turn would focus us on disciplinary changes that were reshaping departments of English as well as societal changes that were changing the role of colleges and universities in America. Several histories of speech communication exist that foreground tensions between early twentieth-century standards and goals of professors of literature and those of professors of speech, the latter group breaking away in 1915 to form their own national speech organization, the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, which later became the National Communication Association (NCA) (see Mailloux; William). Additionally, many useful histories of education in America give us hoards of information about demographic and cultural changes in student populations that filled American schools (see Cremin; Spring). Undoubtedly, other ways of comparing

composition histories to other histories exist, and as histories of composition proliferate, I think we as compositionists will enrich our understanding of writing by learning more about disciplines that have crossed paths with composition at different times and that have done so differently in different places.

### Implications for Composition Today

Complicating “the” history of composition in America by examining signs of how composition may have developed at one institutional site does not automatically teach us anything definitive about what we as composition instructors should do differently or more frequently in the classroom. In fact, it would take little to argue that gaining this more acute awareness of composition’s past serves only to fine-tune our sense of a disciplinary heritage, much in the way that locating obscure genealogical records might boost a researcher’s sense of appreciation for his or her family’s past. As tempting as it is for me to accept this point, I have to disagree, for I believe that although good reasons existed for composition to have taken the forms it took at particular times and in particular places, in the late 1800s, in the early 1900s, and up to today, I think that we in the present can use historical knowledge of composition from local contexts to enrich our current classroom practices in addition to our ideas about our pasts. As a caveat, I would simply add that we should refrain from applying these research findings in a monolithic way to colleges and universities in all parts of the country. Blanket conclusions about what we, as variously situated composition specialists in different parts of the country, might do to apply such knowledge to our teaching today counter the theoretical spirit that

guides my project and ignore cultural differences in student and teacher populations across regions, not to mention other forms of difference.

Below, I give a few suggestions for how my OU-based composition histories might inform the teaching practices of compositionists at institutions whose conditions parallel some aspect of OU's development. I intend these suggestions to be diffuse in application. Some may apply little if at all to compositionists who teach amid situations that render their work vastly different from the approaches and practices I have studied. All that I can hope for here, with one extended local history of composition, is to give scholars elsewhere a sense of how my findings might broaden and deepen our sense of what composition can entail, the work that it can ask of students and instructors. Each of these suggestions may not be entirely original, for each emerges in a time when scholars in English studies regularly question the directions that composition might take (see Jaschik for a recent example). Today, questions about the shape and work of composition are affected by visual rhetoric as it complicates traditional definitions of literacy; cultural studies as it begs us to consider ways that language is bound up in systems of power; and critiques of rhetoric and composition and of the humanities as a whole, both of which have been underway for decades (see Miller's *Textual Carnivals* and Stanley Fish's *Professional Correctness*, for example). However, even if the suggestions below overlap already proposed directions for composition and composition pedagogy, they nonetheless provide a direction with a basis that I think has been undervalued: a historical basis. We already have new media and current theoretical and political issues to prompt us toward articulating futures of composition practice, but we have done little to articulate a basis

for future practice that rests on some particulars in composition history. Here, then, are four suggestions for futures of composition pedagogy, suggestions that I think are supported by what we can learn from texts that speak to composition practices at OU from 1825 to 1950:

Suggestion #1: *Rethink classroom communities so that those communities are not bound by classroom walls and not limited in membership by an official roster of students and an instructor of record.* This does not necessarily mean that instructors everywhere should seek to duplicate the learning experiences of Dean Chubb's students at OU: it does not necessarily mean to invite students into your home, play host, encourage readings and critiques of original essays, and occasionally involve people from the community to take part. A more productive way to frame our application of this suggestion might be for each of us to ask: given the material realities that I deal with and the norms that surround faculty-student interactions at my campus, what might I do to bring students' writing into a more public space than the traditional classroom? How might I encourage students to share their writing and get feedback from audiences both within my college or university and without?

Whether our answers to these questions turn us to the already familiar option of service learning is a matter that depends on each of our institutions and each of our social, economic, political, and physical surroundings. For some, following in Ellen Cushman's steps in an effort to bring students to a particular community site where students might see, learn about, and help people ("The Public"; "Sustainable") could

prove a doable and insightful way for students to think and later write about ideas while transcending the constraints of the composition classroom. I imagine that tenured professors and those, tenured or otherwise, who have made longstanding connections with community groups could treat service learning as the kind of revised classroom that I am suggesting. One reservation I have with service learning is that I would hope it is not used to prompt student writing that occurs in and for the composition classroom back on a college or university's home turf; I hope that it could enable students to use their writing in a way that reaches people beyond academe and in a way that is shaped by members of the non-academic community as well as by instructors of record.

But beyond service learning, various re-imaginings of the traditional composition classroom are worth heeding. Some of us might turn to pedagogical possibilities along the lines of those advocated by Jonathon Mauk in his analysis of academic spaces for community college students whose out-of-class lives easily, readily follow them into the classroom. Mauk urges instructors to find ways to validate the importance of students' lives beyond classroom walls and make people and issues from those spheres integral to students' writing. The questions above might also or instead lend weight to the importance of tending to Anne Ruggles Gere's vision of the extracurriculum in composition, to a treatment of composition not just as writing for college but as literacy practices as they occur in multiple settings and as they are influenced by people and conditions that comprise those settings ("Kitchen Tables"). Yet another possibility that I can foresee, a possibility which might or might not coexist with the others, is to broaden

classroom boundaries and introduce public writing by relying on online forums—blogs, wikis, MOOs—to prompt students to share their writing and receive feedback.

Before I endorse computer technology as a saving grace of composition, let me stress that the findings from my historical study of composition at OU lead me to see potential in making students' writing an activity that spills into the surrounding community. The internet, by contrast, might be seen as involving many communities of readers and writers, each community with its own ways of using textual shortcuts, humor, personal references, links to other communities, and so forth. While I realize that times have changed since the days of Edwin Watts Chubb, my research can only suggest the possibility for modern-day compositionists to turn to our immediate, physical surroundings—to the people who live and work just outside the university's boundaries—for forums and audiences that may give students meaningful composition experiences. Whether we should look farther or more abstractly for such forums and audiences is a possibility that others will have to take up.

Looking back at the OU sources that support a broader, more socially and geographically diffuse classroom, I must admit that I do not know why careful records of in-class happenings were not preserved, why the archival collection I have studied contains numerous accounts that dwell on the impression made by writing as it was brought into convivial non-classroom settings. It may well be, as some sources have indicated quite clearly, that past generations of administrators and archivists wanted future researchers to view OU history in a warm and fuzzy light. While keeping in mind the rhetorical interestedness of archival holdings, I think we should nevertheless heed



signs from past OU students' texts that indicate that, for some students at least, a meaningful higher education—an education that is worth commemorating—is an education that centers on supportive opportunities for writing (and speaking). What might instructors today do keep such insights in mind?

*Suggestion #2: Keep students attentive to how their education and their home institution are bound up in larger social and political tensions, tensions that often involve geographic privileges and constraints.* What might OU's Margaret Boyd have gained if part of her educational development had involved an active investigation of the circumstances that influenced her college curriculum and her professors' expectations? Her diary shows me that she did much the opposite, but the process of studying her diary in the context of other OU sources gives me a perspective that she may well have lacked and that leads me to ask: what if Boyd had attended or read about the meetings that her professor, President Scott, attended in Columbus to defend OU? What if she had been prompted to write about the social, economic, and political advantages and disadvantages of OU's location, as were members of OU's literary societies in the mid nineteenth century? I suppose that if her education had involved this degree of reflexivity, she may have become a teacher who was more involved with educational policy and political shifts than she turned out to be, based on the later entries in her diary.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> After graduating from OU, Boyd's diary entries became increasingly sporadic. In these entries, she seems to have had little positive news to share, dwelling on her workload and isolation as a teacher in northern Ohio.

As for those nineteenth-century OU students who *were* asked to reflect on the location of their institution—members of certain literary societies—I admit that these students’ relative nearness to OU’s early days may have made their reflections seem commonsensical to other OU affiliates. When occasionally they debated the pros and cons of their university’s location they knew of the University as a few buildings and not more than a hundred students. Perhaps the institution seemed to them a place that trustees and administrators could relocate without much hassle. Today, in light of the twentieth-century growth of the OU campus and its faculty and student population, might it be called *irrational* to ask students to do the same, in their writing as well as their speaking? Perhaps today’s students would have a more difficult time dredging up facts from a past that they would likely view as distant. However, at OU and possibly elsewhere, students might do well to study alliances between their home institution and regional groups with which it is allied, for doing so would make visible some connections between the university and the communities and landscape that surround it and are affected by it. How far students go with this, that is, whether students would be expected to engage with nearby communities in a service learning vein, would depend on the goals and needs of the instructor, the institution, and the region.

*Suggestion #3: Encourage students to see—and to explore for themselves—ways that composition norms and expectations come from competing groups of scholars and administrators. Provide students with forums in which they can discover how what counts as “good writing” at any given time and in any given place emerges from complex*

*political debates, frequently debates that unfold at the local level.* At different times in OU's history, composition seemed to operate as the province of different groups of instructors. According to past catalogs, what people called "composition" congealed in various forms with literature, creative writing, and speech, even occasionally with business. When, for instance, OU received ample state funding from the 1890s' Sleeper Bill, a bill that allowed Ohio and Miami Universities to grow in a select way (in training teachers as opposed to training graduate students across the disciplines), OU's State Normal College grew by leaps and bounds, taking on composition classes to an extent that rivaled if not surpassed the course offerings from the College of Liberal Arts. I do not see indications that OU students of the 1890s and afterward studied such changes and the consequences for composition pedagogy and disciplinarity. But with the perspective that time and distance brings, I see potential in having students reflect on these kinds of changes. What if today's students studied the reasons behind why their courses and chosen professional fields are organized as they are within the college or university system and how these organizations have shifted over time? After learning of political decisions that led to the grouping and regrouping of expertise across the university (and state), might students be in a position to develop a hitherto unrealized openness toward cross-disciplinary work—toward seeing writing as it facilitates the knowledge that gets made in this field and that?

This point more than the others supports critical pedagogy as a way to enrich students' composition experiences. I cannot say that OU students from 1825 to 1950 engaged in practices that we would now label as critical pedagogy—far from it in many

cases (see, for example, Paul Kendall's students who wrote the three-volume history of OU). But studying moments when education prioritized the passing on of local, "commonsensical" knowledge can give students opportunities to explore whether their education has resembled or differed from this and chances to examine *why* their education is structured as it is, perhaps opportunities to use research and writing to analyze the key players and factors shaping educational policy and curricula. Then students might leave college with specific ideas about how education might be changed. Such students might feel authorized to speak up during discussions about educational developments.

Currently, when students identify as an English major or an Integrated Language Arts major or a Communication major, they risk seeing these groups as static entities that each simply is and has always been. Such conceptions allow for the mistaken impression that each discipline has a disparate history and knowledge base. I wonder what students would gain if they were encouraged to seek out disciplinary overlaps in the separate majors with which they identify, if for instance they were to analyze how rhetoric, pedagogy, or writing applies to several different disciplines. Might they come away with a fuller sense of how the parameters of specific kinds of knowledge get disputed and claimed by different groups of scholars? Might they develop an attitude toward knowledge making that situates this process in rhetorical acts?

*Suggestion #4: Embrace opportunities to let students enrich their writing with oral performances and to let students supplement their oral performances with writing. This*

does not mean return to the small campus environment that proved amenable to well-hyped gatherings where students could perform oratorical feats in front of audiences of townspeople and university affiliates. For many of us, and certainly as David Russell explains it, this is a campus environment that had to vanish to make way for the research-based university with its ever-multiplying groups of specialists. Also, this suggestion does not necessarily mean to merge English departments with speech departments, though I think cross-disciplinary dialog between faculty in English and those in speech would be productive.

Less dramatically, it might mean exploring opportunities for faculty in one department to guest lecture or to serve as a guest grader for a student project that comes out of another department. It might mean that faculty from different departments have candid conversations about their primary topics of concern when they assess students' writing and speaking. Whatever it might mean specifically, it brings up the bigger issue of persuading faculty to develop and support an institutional culture that values communication, whatever form that communication takes.

Sometimes, in certain institutions (or in isolated classes within different institutions), composition classes contain speech components: students might deliver a speech on the same topic that they wrote about in a research paper, and then the same students might write a short analysis in which they discuss what they had to do differently when transitioning from writing to speech as their primary mode of communication. Conversely, quite a few introduction to speech classes ask students to write detailed critiques of speeches that they watch. How might we build on these

activities to promote a culture, not just a unit or activity, that gives students forums in which to appreciate the work that language does across speech and writing and other symbolic acts?

### Where Are We Now?

While the question “Where are we now?” is common enough not to deserve attribution, I use it with the awareness that I have heard a version of it uttered more than once by Victor Vitanza during a CCCC presentation. When Vitanza asked the question at the 2009 CCCC in San Francisco, he elicited laughter from his audience, I suspect because the seemingly simple question followed a lengthy review of idea connections among various theorists and philosophers. Throughout his review Vitanza stood in the same position at the front of the room, but his thinking had obviously brought him to a new “place.”

I use the same phrase here to signal a perspectival shift that I hope I have helped bring about regarding a notion of composition history that is less a static script to learn and memorize than it is a dynamic, multifaceted set of little narratives, each with important connections to geographically specific points and corresponding local issues. After we develop our historiographies further and connect the dots among composition histories in creative ways, we, like Vitanza, may find ourselves standing in the same physical spot, in the same room, and collectively wondering, “Where are we now?”

I hope that we are in many places in where we work, in how we conceive of our pasts, and in our ideas about composition-related research possibilities and theoretical

advancements. Above all, what I hope my work does is show those of us who are constructing, revising, and elaborating on histories of composition the importance of looking to many kinds of sites (university, college, community college, women's college, normal school) in many different areas (urban, rural, Appalachian, Great Plains) for a variety of kinds of evidence (institutional records, local and regional histories, notes from student groups) that we interpret in many ways (for signs of its actual or intended audience, for its suggestiveness about local politics, for its designation of social roles and expected behavior, for what it neglects to say but might have said, for its connection to or departure from other sources that speak to the same topic). I see my OU-based histories as situated in an unlikely location for reimagining composition's past, a location whose changing status and miscellaneous textual collections give traditional composition historians a challenge that they must overcome if they are to account for this location in their production of future histories of composition. Such historians must rethink the evidentiary and interpretive approaches favored by figures such as Albert Kitzhaber if they are to let other kinds of textual sources count in their histories.

These "other kinds of textual sources" could take many forms and need not remain within the realm of printed texts at all. In *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan bring up the possibility of "reading" historical artifacts that have escaped notice by composition historians, artifacts like buildings, cemeteries, and plots of lands. While in my research thus far I have dwelt on histories as textual constructs that tell different stories depending on the texts' rhetorical situatedness—the status of the texts' author(s), the apparent or possible goals of the

author(s), the author(s)' likely or possible audiences, the constraints imposed by their audiences—I see potential in supplementing my work and other local histories with a semiotic analysis of “texts,” broadly conceived. I also see potential in going about our history writing by surfacing our indebtedness to the sophists for giving us a rhetorical tradition that avoids notions of absolute essences, shuns static perspectives, and invites us to ask questions about the fallible, human-made makeup of ideas that get accepted as real, normal, and beyond dispute. As I hope I have shown, I believe many of us already accept these sophistic tenets of rhetoric, but I think we have not always enacted them in our past histories of composition. If we start “doing” composition history sophistically, then we start learning from our varied pasts rather than shutting them down with generalizations about the legacy of current-traditional rhetoric. We start seeing composition pasts as relevant and applicable to current and future practices. And we start surprising ourselves regarding where those pasts can be and what forms they can take.



### CODA: ANOTHER APPROACH TO COMPOSITION HISTORY AT OU

In this coda, I create four additional narratives of composition at OU, narratives that bend and even defy the parameters I established for my selection and interpretation of archival research. As I explained in chapter two, I include this non-archival data in an effort to widen the types of sources that I consider (moving from print to oral sources), elasticize my original timeline as a way of surfacing some of what my original chronological parameters caused me to miss, and allow other OU insiders to speak about what they found important or noteworthy about the social side of composition at OU and in Athens, Ohio. I see my use of these additional narratives as a way to include some of Victor J. Vitanza's "noise" (*Negation*) in my histories. That is, these narratives give us *one* way to complicate attempts we might make to find overarching narrative trajectories from my earlier text-based research; they raise other possibilities for our employment of narratives. The ensuing narratives speak to composition practices and attitudes at OU at various points after 1950, and they emerge from my interactions with people who since 1950 were involved in composition teaching or administration at this site.

Apart from the time period that the interviews as a whole speak to, I place my interview-based information in a coda instead of earlier in my project because I conceive of my interview-based data as an *alternative response* to the first wave of composition histories (Kitzhaber's through Connors'), which relied on textual data in select archives to construct histories. Aside from complicating existing practices for constructing composition histories by doing archival research in an obscure site and with a sophistic lens (see chapters 3-5), I might move away from the convention of framing histories of

composition with textual data. I might ask, what happens if I let living memory guide what I notice about composition at OU?—memory that may not recall every fact accurately but that may nevertheless surface points and make connections that I had not seen from my earlier focus on what library research could show me about community, context, composition, and communication?

Although many individuals have contributed to composition practices at OU since 1950, some of whom have moved away and joined other colleges and universities, some of whom have remained in Athens, Ohio, I chose four past members of the OU English Department based on four criteria:

- (1) Each member's availability: could I find and interview him or her, and was he or she willing to share his or her reflections with me?
- (2) The time frame of my project: how much interview-based data could I analyze within a few months' time?
- (3) Recommendations from my advisors: who came to mind for current OU faculty when I wondered whom I might interview about post-1950 composition developments at OU?
- (4) My hope for including diverse perspectives: did each interviewee hold a different English Department-related position from the other interviewees, and did each interviewee speak from experience gained during a different time period from the other interviewees?

Initially, my advisors and I considered quite a few names, but soon I discovered that some of the originally proposed interviewees had passed away, moved away, or

otherwise vanished from my sight. With time constraints looming, I decided to interview four former OU English Department faculty members, each of whom had had direct experience dealing with, or perhaps shaping, composition norms at OU at a specific point in time after 1950.

Each interviewee whose observations I feature below did not singlehandedly shape composition pedagogy and the experiences of faculty and students at OU. In giving attention to each interviewee's perspective, I do not wish to insinuate that heroic, larger-than-life individuals were or are the driving force behind composition changes. Rather, I want to use a few perspectives that are not my own (or not *solely* my own, as I explain later) to add to the text-based history that I have assembled so far. I want each interview-based perspective to give us a richer sense of the complex situations from which composition-related protocol has sprung.

The concepts of community, context, composition, and communication gave shape to my general organization of each interviewee's comments. Before each interview, I shared with my interviewee my interest in these concepts; however, I did not mandate that my interviewees speak only about how they saw these four concepts playing out in their recollections of composition at OU. I described my project to the interviewees in the same way that I have throughout this dissertation, albeit without using terms from rhetorical theory. I called my project a social history<sup>57</sup>: I explained that I was looking at signs of where past OU-based writing was coming from and where it was going. For each

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<sup>57</sup> This is the same terminology I have used earlier, citing Lester Faigley's "Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective." I see it as a more accessible, if less intricate, perspective than that of the neosophists, who theorize along similar lines.

interview, I added that while I was mainly interested in the years 1825 to 1950, I wanted to hear the interviewee's perspective as a way to add cultural commentary from other OU English Department insiders. My questions to each interviewee were open-ended and mostly unscripted, reflecting a quasi-structured approach to interviewing, because I wanted to elevate the perspectival nature of each additional narrative. I wanted to see where *their* memories would take me.

Moreover, the narratives below are not attempts on my part to construct full-fledged histories of composition at OU from 1950 to the 2000s. I have not systematically studied textual sources about composition at OU in this time period, though I believe such a study could be done. One reason I did not was due to the sudden change in source material available from the mid twentieth century on. After 1960, detailed records from English Department faculty and administrators (but still not from students) were preserved and held by the English Department itself—sources such as notes from English Department meetings, proposals to make changes to undergraduate and graduate study in literature and in composition, and bulletins and brochures that capture the department's public relations strategies at particular moments. I have reviewed this material in passing, and I leave it to future researchers to assemble OU-based histories that give these artifacts the attention they deserve. A second reason I have not studied these materials in depth is that I wanted to end the bulk of my project on what I think of as a hot spot, or a vivid text or set of texts that illustrates a great deal about composition in a particular sociocultural moment. In this case, that hot spot was the three-volume history of OU composed by students from Dr. Paul Kendall's 1949-1950 first-year composition class.

The first three interviews that I conducted were with Drs. Janice Allegheny<sup>58</sup>, Arthur Woolley, and Roland Swardson, each interview conducted in September 2009. The fourth and final (and much shorter) narrative comes from a written correspondence I maintained with Dr. Edgar Whan during the fall of 2009. Dr. Whan, a faculty member at OU from 1955 to 1991, wrote to me from a retirement home in Columbus, Ohio.

In the case of the first three interviews, I took the possibly risky step of not audiotaping the results but rather relying on my own note-taking during and immediately after the interviews. Although I realize that my readers of an empirical bent may long for methodological steps that ensure accurateness, I refrained from following this expected procedural step for case studies in Rhetoric and Composition for the same reason that I refrained from following the (more implicit) standard procedure for archival research in the subfield of composition history: in my view, a neosophistic orientation toward meaning-making endeavors (e.g., reading, writing, research) bends, plays with, and tries to move beyond extant protocols and paradigms. Instead of following norms, it recognizes norms *as* norms and seeks opportunities to multiply the perspectives that seem available for creating meaning from any given utterance or writing at any given time and in any given culture.

Had I created additional narratives based solely on my transcriptions of audiotaped interviews, I would indeed have been able to verify the order in which each interviewee raised points and perhaps the exact wording that each interviewee used to describe aspects of composition's past at OU. However, this attempt to preserve accuracy

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<sup>58</sup> A pseudonym in the case of this interviewee.

and authenticity would not ensure that my interviewees' words were any more accurate than they would be otherwise because memories fade and change over the years, even if they are shared eloquently. In some cases in my interview-based research, I was dealing with faculty members who spoke to me about their training and teaching of over forty years ago. Additionally, if I had worked from transcriptions of audiotaped interviews, I would then have rendered living memory into artifacts that mirrored the kinds of artifacts I had already studied: typed paper-based documents. If dealing with such artifacts, I might have downplayed the extent to which my rational reconstructive historiographical impulses (the role of my modern-day perspective and knowledge base) shaped the oral sources with which I had indeed interacted.<sup>59</sup>

Let me emphasize that the information that my interviewees gave me occurred in relatively naturalistic ways: in settings of their choice, without the operation of potentially distancing audiorecording or videotaping equipment, and without my use of a pre-arranged script from which we had to converse. The interviewees shared their memories, and indeed the few questions that I offered sought information about the social scene in which OU composition was taught and studied; however, the wording and timing of my questions depended on where each interviewee was taking me with his or her recollections. My presence and my questions mattered, shaped the observations that were covered, but the resulting narratives constitute a communicative dance between my interests and the interests of my interviewees. The fact that I constructed the narratives

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<sup>59</sup> Too, practical reasons bore on my decision not to audiotape the interviews: Dr. Woolley wished to be interviewed in a public place, the cafeteria of Baker Center on OU's campus, and this area proved to be too noisy for my audio equipment.

below based on my own handwritten notes makes salient my role as a filter on the other perspectives that I wish to privilege here; if I had worked from a transcript, this role that I occupied might have been less visible. The perspectives below do indeed come from Drs. Allegheny, Woolley, Swardson, and Whan, but not without my prompting and my pen. Furthermore, after I had interviewed Drs. Allegheny, Woolley, and Swardson and compiled my handwritten notes into narratives, I gave each interviewee the chance to critique, in writing, my summary of the interview. Each of these interviewees then corrected points that they felt I had misrepresented and added details that they thought would benefit my project. Thus, the resulting summary communicates their spoken words as captured by my pen and assembled into my narrative structure, later reviewed by them, and finally edited by me.

While I endeavored to take notes on every point that was raised during each interview, a few points undoubtedly proved too complicated for me to catch. And while I attempted to fit all my interview-based notes into the narratives below, a few of the points I recorded doubtlessly proved too vague or indecipherable to feature—products of my hasty handwriting. In these respects, audiotaped recordings would have been helpful.

To enhance reading ease, I have refrained from using attributive tags in the sections below except 1) when attributive tags distinguish the comments of the interviewee from the points of someone that the interviewee cites and 2) in the footnotes and in the separate analysis section that concludes my focus on each interviewee. *In all of the sections below except for the footnotes and the analyses, the information consists of my summary of what the interviewee at hand chose to share.* I restrict my own reactions

and interpretations to the footnotes and to the analysis sections that conclude my coverage of each interviewee's comments and give me spaces in which to highlight points that I think add to or otherwise complicate the OU-based composition histories that I sketched from my archival research.

I take full responsibility for any inaccuracies that my interviewees or others detect in these little narratives. However, I want to emphasize that these narratives result from what was said to me during interviews and from what I wrote down, usually in summary form. Every event and issue covered below was, for those who saw or experienced it firsthand, undoubtedly more complex than my rendering of it can show. Next to every paragraph, the reader would be justified in writing, "Is that it?" or "Surely it wasn't that simple!" But despite each narrative's brevity, my tendency to stop with a point when an interviewee elected to move on to another, I trust that each narrative gives us a fuller idea of what sort of place the OU English Department seemed, especially in the late twentieth century, to those who taught and learned composition.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> In each case the interviewee spoke of composition primarily as it took shape in or through OU's Department of English. This reflects the interviewees' past departmental allegiances.



Results of Interview with Dr. Janice Allegheny, Former Associate Professor of English  
and Administrator at Ohio University<sup>61</sup>

Dr. Allegheny's title upon coming to OU was Assistant Professor of English and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum. Later, she became Director of Composition and Chair of the English Department. She held these positions from the early 1980s to the late 2000s.

*Town and Gown Relations*

In terms of community, one of the concepts that I explained was underlying my analysis, Dr. Allegheny resorted to her own knowledge of OU history and referred specifically to Betty Hollow's book, *Ohio University 1804-2004: Spirit of a Singular Place*, to note that conflict had been characteristic of Athens and OU's relationship in the early 1800s due to the fact that the University's boundaries changed over the years: the University had to sell portions of its land to survive financially, and both townspeople and University affiliates sought to use the land that is now known as the College Green. (Dr. Allegheny directed me to Betty Hollow's point that in OU's early years, some townspeople let their sheep, goats, and other animals use the land, much to the indignation of OU administrators.) Dr. Allegheny added that while conflict did not characterize everything about town and gown relations, the period following World War II was another time when town and gown relations were put to the test. Enrollments rose swiftly in the wake of veteran students who had returned to school after the war, leading

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<sup>61</sup> Interview conducted Thursday, September 10, 2009, in her home in Athens, Ohio.

OU personnel to beg townspeople to house students because the University simply lacked adequate space.<sup>62</sup>

*Composition at OU in the 1970s and Afterward*

At OU in the mid 1970s, the faculty senate voted to no longer require the first-year composition course. Theoretically, composition was then to become the province of the individual departments, but in practice no such thing happened: at the request of other departments, first-year composition went back to the English Department. Also in the 1970s, one of the English Department's two linguists left the Department to join other faculty in a separate linguistics department. Fortunately, Dr. David Bergdahl, the other of the Department's linguists, remained in the English Department, for in the late 70s and 80s insights from sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics were informing the teaching of writing in many programs. In the late 1980s or early 90s, the University also mandated that composition courses must include oral rhetoric; stipends were available to faculty who incorporated oral rhetoric into their junior composition courses.

By the 1980s when Dr. Allegheny joined the faculty at OU, a fledgling WAC program existed. Already existing disciplinary courses at the junior level were overseen by the University College, not the English Department. Such courses were taught by faculty members from various departments (for example, history and psychology), though this system did not last long. When Dr. Allegheny took over the position of

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<sup>62</sup> Clearly, these comments point to a period at OU that precedes Dr. Allegheny's experiences there. I suspect Dr. Allegheny shared these observations as a result of her own previous research at the OU archives. I would suppose that this rationale holds for Dr. Allegheny's comments about composition at OU in the 1970s.

Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, one of her duties was to train faculty to teach writing, so she used methods that were similar to those used by today's director of composition, such as having instructors of composition attend an orientation to acquaint them with pedagogy strategies they might use and ways to design and evaluate writing assignments. Generally, younger faculty members were assigned to the J-level courses<sup>63</sup>, and they took their teaching of the courses seriously. Composition class sizes were kept at twenty, but even with this relatively low class size, some department heads were not enthusiastic about their faculty teaching writing because this meant the faculty member was not available to teach the department's required courses. It also meant that new faculty did not get to teach their "specialty" courses as often.

In the 80s when Dr. Allegheny joined the English Department, eight out of ten teachers of first-year composition in the Department were TAs. As director of composition with a degree in the field, she had the Department's TAs read work by Stephen North, Janet Emig, James Kinneavy, and David Jolliffe; had composition scholars come to campus to present on current theories and the practical side of their research; and sought out ways to ally the teaching of composition with major rhetorical theories. Most other faculty members, the remaining two of ten of the department's composition instructors, were not reading this research even though the department had access to the latest issues of *English Journal*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *College English*.

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<sup>63</sup> J-level courses were junior-level courses that the University required be writing intensive and that, once passed, gave students credit for having fulfilled the University's writing-related requirements.

In the 1980s, OU also had a developmental writing course<sup>64</sup>, which had fifteen students and focused on editing skills, bringing students only to the point of completing paragraphs. Additionally, the course gave students no credit toward the first-year writing requirement. In first-year composition, by contrast, students' work counted for five credit hours, and students focused on writing and revising essays. These students approached their work by repeatedly undergoing a cycle of planning, writing, and revising. They studied collections of expository essays and then wrote their own. Everyone in the department was required to teach a "service" course, so most faculty taught J-courses. English 152 and 153, the former a writing about literature course and the latter a special topics composition course, also counted for first-year composition credit (and did until 2009), but tended to demand essays that were more sophisticated than the essays found in English 151.

Dr. Allegheny wanted more English 152 and 153 classes to be available to instructors because she wanted to tap into instructors' interests. She, for example, taught some first-year composition courses that focused on Appalachian writing (much of it about the history of the Appalachian region) in an effort to educate students who came from outside Appalachia and to teach her Appalachian students about themselves.<sup>65</sup> About some of her composition students, she said, "They had never heard about coal mining." So in her Appalachian-themed first-year composition course, she had her

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<sup>64</sup> This course had the number 172 for a time. Later it became "English 150."

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Allegheny mentioned that she had not realized that she herself was Appalachian until she did some research on how this category gets defined. She then learned that the term is defined economically, not just culturally.

students relate novels that they were reading to oral and cultural history; her students would then produce papers that were informed by their reading and research on topics such as coal mining, quilts, moonshine, family, and religion.

### *Gender and Composition*

For decades in the history of the OU English Department, there were either no female or very few female faculty members. In 1983, the department had just four women other than Dr. Allegheny. At the time that Dr. Allegheny joined the department, the director of composition was chosen by the department chair, and men tended to voice an interest in being administrators. Dr. Allegheny did not direct composition at OU until 1987 and then in 1994 transitioned to chairing the Department of English.

Generally, when men were director of composition (DOC), they treated the work that came with this title as belonging chiefly or solely to the DOC himself. However, when Dr. Allegheny became DOC she got work done by relying largely on committees of faculty who were invested in teacher preparation. But despite this, the English Department in general would not approve a Master's of Teaching (M.A.T.) degree, even though many of the courses were already being taught, faculty had been paid to design new courses, and the University Curriculum Committee had approved the courses. This refusal was Dr. Allegheny's biggest disappointment during her time with the English Department.

### *Historiography*

When doing research for her bicentennial history of OU, Betty Hollow, wife of the late John Hollow, a former chair of the OU English Department and director of composition, found little information specifically about composition in OU's archives, according to Dr. Allegheny. Dr. Allegheny feels that this was due to a system that "did not call departments" to contribute student papers. Much of OU's history, then, must be seen by perusing catalogs, alumni bulletins, and individuals' files.

### *Analysis of Interview with Dr. Allegheny*

A few points from Dr. Allegheny's comments stand out to me in light of my archival findings. For one, her Betty Hollow-inspired comments about strained town and gown relations extend the observations of much earlier writers almost to the present. If indeed OU and Athens, OH, did not work well together in their efforts to accommodate fluctuating student population sizes, then why do some archived sources from as late as 1950 persist in painting a rosy picture of the history of OU and Athens, OH? If town and gown relations were strained in both the distant and recent past, then what might this have meant for students whose university instructors encouraged them to write about the community?

Concerning WAC, Dr. Allegheny made a point of noting that her opinion was that WAC was a "fledgling" program when she took over as director in the 1980s. Among other things, this relatively recent time period reminds us of the WAC movement's newness in some locations.

Looking back at my records that speak to composition being handled in various forums and by various people outside the composition classroom, I believe my OU-based histories of composition show us forms that composition might take in different classrooms and even outside classrooms proper. However, I have to stop short of calling my study a history of WAC as an organized movement because the movement, which according to David Russell began in the 1970s, presupposes the existence of specialized departments, each operating according to its profession's own standards for teaching and research. Even if I argue that to think about composition through concepts such as community, context, a pluralistic notion of composition, and an oral-based notion of communication is to think about writing as it occurred across the curriculum and into the extracurriculum, I would need to label the resulting picture with an acronym (or term) other than WAC.

Also, in my archival work, which explored texts pertaining to composition history at OU from 1825 to 1950, gender did not strike me as a key topic outside of its role in Margaret Boyd's diary, though its relevance in departmental (and other) power struggles cannot be denied. But Dr. Allegheny's comments move gender from the periphery to the center regarding how composition came to be viewed and treated at OU.<sup>66</sup> Previously, I did not consider gender as one way to analyze my data from a neosophistic angle, but why not? Susan Jarratt has shown many links between feminism and the sophists. I have

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<sup>66</sup> Here I am reminded of Peter Mortensen's research-related observation, "What we discover largely depends on what we choose to look at and what we choose to ignore" (122). My earlier focus on community, context, composition, and communication may have allowed me to overlook ways that gender factored into each of my concepts.

to consider that my status as male, among other things, may have hindered me from considering a sustained focus on gender.

Finally, Dr. Allegheny's comments about Betty Hollow's work in the archives shed light on the rhetorical side of archives themselves. What is housed in any given archive reflects the interests of power holders in the corresponding institution. What is absent—quite a lot of student voices in the case of OU's archives—reflects this as well. If OU has established no system with which to direct its departments in how to preserve students' texts, then the University has legitimized the development of a very selective institutional memory. During my interactions with the OU archivists I learned much the same thing. Regardless of how "good" this or that archivist was or is, OU has precious few archivists to handle the many items that others donate to the archives; and, more to the point, no formal system between the departments and the archives encourages department leaders to preserve work that might be of interest to later generations. What the archives has, then, reflects what various benefactors and staff want it to have. It is not a repository designed to feature various perspectives equally.



Results of Interview with Dr. Arthur Woolley, Former Professor of English (1964-2001)  
and Director of Composition at Ohio University<sup>67</sup>

In his early years, Dr. Woolley was educated at William Penn Charter School, a Quaker school in Philadelphia. The school had mostly wealthy students, though Dr. Woolley's family did not fit the school's financial norm. Dr. Woolley attended Princeton University for his undergraduate work, and so it was here where he took his first-year composition course. However, Princeton had no courses that it officially set aside for "composition," so his first-year composition course was essentially a Shakespeare course, taught by Edward Hubler. In it, the students studied Shakespeare's works, but they also wrote three 1,500-2,000 page papers that were evaluated by senior graduate students. The class format consisted of two lectures per week followed by a small (6-10 person) discussion group. The instruction Dr. Woolley received assumed that he had a method when he wrote. That is, it prompted him, during one-on-one sessions with the graduate instructor on each paper, to respond reflectively to the question, "*Why* did you write that?" As a result, he gained a perspective on writing that emphasized the writer's responsibility and the writer's production of texts. This sort of dialog—discussions that focused on one's reasons for making certain writing choices—eventually took hold elsewhere, though for the Princeton classes the peer discussion group remained fixated on Shakespeare.

Dr. Woolley received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and had two years of experience in the U.S. army. At Wisconsin in the early 60s, composition classes

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<sup>67</sup> Interview conducted Saturday, September 24, 2009, at the food court in Baker Center.

consisted of about twenty-five students apiece, and all University of Wisconsin students had to take one long grammar test. The TAs used a handbook written by Porter Perrin that adopted a non-prescriptive approach to teaching composition. Yet the same TAs also had to use a single unit outline that was very prescriptive. In the same vein, Wisconsin's director of composition, Ednah Thomas, demanded that each TA annotate three student papers, and in her office she would then go over each of the papers with each TA individually. Her main concern seemed to be whether the TA "missed" anything in his or her red-marking of a paper. After his Wisconsin training Dr. Woolley came to OU in 1964, though he did not receive his Ph.D. until 1971.

### *Composition at OU*

Dr. Woolley joined the OU English Department in the 1960s, hired by Dr. Edgar Whan, department chair in 1964, and Dr. Woolley retired in 2001 at the age of 67.<sup>68</sup> He served as Director of Composition at OU from 1973 to 1978 and again in the 1990s. Before he received his Ph.D., he taught more composition courses than most OU English professors did. Throughout his career, he had little interest in publishing and published just one short piece, an essay on computers and composition, in a regional pedagogical journal subsequently distributed by NCTE. He directed his attention to teaching and service and more than once served as director of composition. He also found that the writing instruction he had received at Princeton was quite different from what he noticed here. At OU, one would work with students who "took in" instruction as opposed to

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<sup>68</sup> Dr. Ed Stone served as department chair before Dr. Whan.

students who were made to question their own writing choices. When he joined the OU English Department and eventually trained teaching assistants, he relied partly on what he had learned from his own Princeton training. Also, he emphasized to his OU TAs that, as diligent and verbally talented students, they could not model their expectations of their freshman students' verbal capacities on memories of their own verbal growth.

In and around the 1960s, the department underwent many important changes. Dr. Ed Stone, a Henry James scholar, was hired to be the chair of the English Department. At this time, the department included Paul Kendall and Roma King, internationally known Shakespeare and Browning scholars respectively. And to handle the University's ballooning enrollment, in 1964 the English Department hired twelve new faculty members, including Dr. Woolley. They all had their training in literature though they commonly had taught freshman writing in their doctoral institutions. Jack Matthews was hired to start Ohio University's creative writing program. (OU was thus earlier than many universities in training students in creative writing specifically.) At about the same time, the PhD program was getting started under Dr. Whan.<sup>69</sup> The pre-1960s English Department at OU had lesser pretensions to a national reputation in literature and probably focused on remedial writing in the way that a handbook might.<sup>70</sup> For many of

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<sup>69</sup> Dr. Woolley explained that the PhD program was instituted as a matter of institutional prestige and reputation accompanying its demographical increase, not simply in response to it. Subsequent technical innovations were needed in a transitional phase when the graduate students were not yet there to teach the vastly increased number of incoming students. In the mid 1960s, the number of part-time (non-student) and full-time instructors in the department ballooned.

<sup>70</sup> Because Dr. Woolley did not teach at OU in the 1950s, this point must be treated as speculative.

the new hires of the mid 60s and thereafter, teaching composition was far from the center of their ambitions.

Dr. Woolley worked with a graduate student assistant one semester, and between them they handled four sections of composition per term: Dr. Woolley taught two classes directly and mentored his assistant who taught 1-2 more classes. Together, Dr. Woolley and his assistant would meet to discuss what they would do in class in response to the audio-visual component of the class (explained below). Classes met three times a week, using a semester calendar until 1967. A genre of writing that Dr. Woolley taught frequently was the research paper: his students would research something on a piece of literature and associate that research with a topic of their choosing. For example, a paper on *Moby Dick* might use research about whaling to connect the book to another issue.

During the early to mid 60s, Dr. Whan, along with Dr. William (“Bill”) Holmes, chair of the English Department’s composition committee, attempted to modernize composition practices. Whan was very “60s-ish” and experience-based, a hands-on and do-it-yourself professor. He was directly involved in the founding of the Honors Tutorial College at OU as well as the department’s tutorial program—work that warranted a faculty member’s complete attention (later the attention of two faculty members) for an entire quarter.<sup>71</sup> He was a proponent of pass/fail grading and later of giving no Fs, only As, Bs, Cs, and grades of no credit. Dr. Holmes, meanwhile, was an advocate for smaller class sizes in first-year composition. But in addition to advocating for new programs and

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<sup>71</sup> Dr. Woolley explained that the department’s tutorial program used two faculty members’ entire teaching load for the full year to teach a total of 20-25 students with weekly individual tutorials and exclusive classes. The program later used three faculty members full-time for one quarter each year

grading procedures and for smaller class sizes, the work of Dr. Whan together with that of Dr. Holmes brought in new technology to facilitate the teaching of composition. Drs. Whan and Holmes established an audio-visual system in Ellis Hall designed to service various composition classrooms from one central control panel.<sup>72</sup> The idea was that someone from a classroom could tell the workers in the central language lab to play a particular tape, and the tape would play on a small television set at the front of the darkened classroom. The tape usually consisted of a video of Bill Holmes giving a lecture on a matter related to composition. Through this method, students in separate first-year composition classes could watch lectures on topics such as paragraphing. For the mid 1960s, this was very new and exciting. Although students soon found the tapes boring, perhaps because Dr. Holmes had had no television experience, the attempt to bring audio-visual equipment into the composition classroom seemed very exciting to the department at that time.<sup>73</sup> By the late 60s, however, as students started writing on subjects of their own choosing, attention in the composition classroom to social issues like racism in America displaced the focus that had been given to technology.

Also in the 60s came a move toward seeing language as inventive rather than as either efficient or inefficient. Dr. Woolley liked the principles behind an unsuccessful textbook called *Montage: Investigations in Language*. In this book was, among other things, a survey of different groups of people's attitudes toward mechanics and lots of

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<sup>72</sup> In my archival research, I came across a folder called "OU Buildings Ellis Hall" that contained an article from an alumni bulletin about this then novel technological addition to composition classes; the article included pictures. I leave it to future historians of composition to study this development in depth.

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Woolley noted that at the time when he was hired, Dr. Whan and Dr. Holmes seemed very excited about what this technological addition could do for composition.

graphics including a cartoon by New York artist Saul Steinberg, which enabled the instructor to lead students through an investigation of the dynamics of metaphor. The survey gave students an idea of how differently mechanics mattered to various groups of people classified by occupation. The cartoon used various non-representational graphic lines patterns to represent what, by their realistic setting, had to be people, thus suggesting the metaphorical process in a graphic version. More generally, Dr. Woolley urged students in his introductory literature courses to think about both discursive and metaphoric forms of language: the discursive values the clear, logical, and explicit, and the metaphoric values the imaginative, emotional, and implicit. This dual emphasis proved useful when he taught graduate teaching assistants how they might think about language and writing assignments.

### *Composition in the Context of the 1960s*

From the 1950s through the 60s, OU was “booming and growing” under Presidents John Baker and Vernon Alden’s influence. However, the campus also served as a hotbed of social protest and activism. Compared to Miami University, for one, OU was and is “relatively liberal.” In the early 70s as the Kent State University killings and the Vietnam War were major national issues, OU students “took over” Chubb and Lindley Halls, two prominent buildings on campus. Students also “sat in” Cutler Hall, never fully taking over the building, but making their presence and discontent visible to the entire state. At OU, the state’s first custodial staff union was formed as well, and the “drug culture” was active here as it was in numerous universities of the time. The year

1968 in particular was “a revolutionary year” nationally and for OU. Many students at this time were “semi-militant,” and students believed they needed to teach themselves rather than listen to older generations, whom they came to see as no longer in charge.

In terms of in-class learning, composition classes used student writing as the course’s key texts. More attention was given to the “experience of language” from both the production and the receiving ends of the text. The emphasis in classes on expository writing and on creative writing came to reside on what a piece of writing did for someone else (the peers constituting a test audience) and on getting honest feedback in return. Students were writing what they knew. But the reliance on the student-centered classroom had its problems, especially in literature. When teaching his twentieth-century literature course, Dr. Woolley noticed that his students did not know historical or artistic contexts, so he had to teach them this information directly outside exploratory discussion time. So it seems that instructor-centered classrooms had a basis from which to reassert themselves.

As a result of the 60s social upheaval, complete with the Vietnam War, the OU student population of the early 1970s dropped from 18,000 to 11-12,000 in just three years. This drop hurt OU’s state funding and OU’s teaching appointments for non-tenured faculty, so the English Department did not hire anyone for approximately eleven years after this. During these leaner times, departments across the university were asked to name *tenured* faculty members who they could part with. The English Department did comply with this request, though some departments, like Physics, did not.

*Analysis*

Teaching composition in the 1960s seems to have been a different ballgame from what various sources indicate had come before. What I am struck by when reflecting on Dr. Woolley's comments is not that Dr. Whan and others advocated for student-centered classrooms, but that in light of my archival research, I could read these 1960s OU instructors' approach to composition as both a sign of the times and as an extension of an approach that had long urged that students write from their own interactions with their surroundings. This is a tradition that I sense in the old literary societies and a tradition that I think informed Caskey, Heidler, and Wray in their 1943 composition textbook. I feel compelled to raise the possibility that the historical isolation of OU, whether actual or perceived, gave OU instructors reasons to encourage students to look to their immediate surroundings—the ways of the local community or the terrain of the surrounding landscape—for clues about what good description, exposition, debate, or the like could entail.

Dr. Woolley's comments about Drs. Whan and Holmes' reliance on technology give me yet another angle from which I might view OU's composition history. Hitherto, I have not characterized this history as one that involves technology, but I might have. The dissemination of writing utensils is a form of technology, Dennis Baron reminds us in his 1999 essay "From Pencils to Pixels." So, too, is the evolution of textbooks. What's more, in the history I assembled from available textual sources, I might have treated writing manuals as technological products of social movements, might have interwoven technology into the social perspective I take on composition at OU. By neglecting to



acknowledge the possibility that the technologies used to facilitate writing at OU may be read as the community's responses to students' and others' needs for making writing practices more readily available in various situations, on and off campus, I risk presenting technological developments as unaffected by individuals' intentions. At least in this section, thanks to Dr. Woolley's comments on the history of composition that he knew, I can account for this additional possibility.

Finally, let me note that Dr. Woolley's early exposure to composition via Shakespeare courses at Princeton complicates my earlier argument that composition at OU and perhaps at other institutional sites in the Midwest or Northern Appalachia was a different story from that of composition at prestigious East Coast institutions. In my examination of the latter group, I concentrated on Harvard and Yale because this in turn is where scholars who preceded me (Kitzhaber, Brereton, Connors, and so on) focused. What might it mean, then, that one of OU's recurring directors of composition traces a genealogy of composition pedagogy that stems from practices undertaken at Princeton University? I hesitate to say that this fact undermines my argument because I and the majority of scholars whom I cite do not explore composition practices at Princeton at length. A conclusion that I feel more comfortable making is that Dr. Woolley's reliance on his Princeton training to teach composition and composition pedagogy at OU cautions us not to generalize too greatly even when talk about "prestigious East Coast schools" or the like. Even here, room for variation exists, and additional composition histories might be written.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Dr. Woolley later summarized his Princeton composition experience as a period of intensive conferencing on papers written in a course that was part of an established academic discipline.

Results of Interview with Dr. Roland Swardson, Former Professor of English at Ohio  
University<sup>75</sup>

Dr. Swardson started at OU as an instructor in 1954. Prior to this, he did his graduate study at the University of Minnesota and served in the United States navy. While at Minnesota, one of his professors was Robert Penn Warren. Dr. Swardson was hired at OU after his brother happened to be playing tennis one day with Edward Hodnett, Chair of the English Department at OU; through this association Hodnett found Dr. Swardson.

*State of the OU English Department in the 1950s*

Dr. Swardson was one of three new professors hired in 1954-1955, and during a year in either the late 1950s or early 1960s, the department hired ten more.<sup>76</sup> In 1954, the department structure was that of an “inverted pyramid,” with many (around eight) full professors four associate professors, no tenure-track assistant professors, and a swarm of instructors. The English Department hired a new batch of instructors every year because the instructors did not get tenure, so they did not stay long. (Paul Kendall, who got tenure in 1937, was the last instructor to do so by Dr. Swardson’s time.) The senior professors taught the department’s summer courses and advanced courses. Among the literature faculty in the 1950s, there was a conflict between the historical critics and the (then new)

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<sup>75</sup> Interview conducted Saturday, September 26, 2009, in Roland Swardson’s home in Athens, Ohio.

<sup>76</sup> These numbers do not align perfectly with those given by Dr. Woolley. Perhaps we might read each account as an estimate.

New Critics. When Dr. Swardson joined the department there was only one New Critic, Eric Thompson, but this seems to have changed as time went on.

Additionally, there were four assistant professors who were non-promotable by an agreement that was established when they were hired: these people could reach the rank of assistant professor but could not advance further. These were high school teachers who were needed to cover classes during the post-World War II period, a time of burgeoning enrollment. They taught for seven years and then received de facto tenure as assistant professors. They taught only composition.

This hierarchy within the OU English Department reflects a transition period from the “old genteel university” to the modern post-World Wars research university. At this time, Joseph Heidler<sup>77</sup> was one of the few faculty members in the department who had a Ph.D. Also, during the time when Dr. Swardson came to OU, four women—Lorene Brown, Jane Hand, Leona Pickard, and Virginia Konnicht—“pretty much ran composition.” These women went above and beyond the call of duty, he said, some of them doing enough publishing to embarrass the English Department’s male professors who were not as active.

Of the OU English Department of the early 1950s, Dr. Swardson said, “The place was small,” so “knowledge of each other was pretty acute.” Turnover rates were high for the department chair; fights and changes were frequent, and no full professor had been able to hold the job without being undercut by others in the department. Seeing the discord that had come to characterize the department, OU President John C. Baker

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<sup>77</sup> One of the co-authors of *College Composition: A Brief Course*.

brought in Ted Hodnett from outside the University to be the new department chair. Hodnett lasted only two years in this role, though ironically, in the year that he was fired he published a book called *The Art of Problem Solving*. After this, Baker made the “mildest” person in the department, Edith Wray<sup>78</sup>, the temporary department chair. Then Dr. Edward Stone was brought in to steer the department more decisively toward research, and his example began a line of good department chairs.

### *The English Department's Instructors*

In 1956, instructors by the name of Taylor Culbert, Harrison Butterworth, and Roland Swardson (the interviewee) received tenure and were promoted to assistant professors. They were the first instructors to get tenure since Paul Kendall did in the 1930s. Office space at this time was tight for the instructors. They had their offices in a house across the street from the former Scripps College of Journalism (itself the former Carnegie Library) and across the street from Baker Center on Park Place<sup>79</sup>.

### *Composition and Communication at OU*

In first-year composition, a large committee took on some of the younger instructors and attempted to pick a composition textbook that the instructors “would be happy with.” During one of Dr. Swardson’s first years at OU, the younger instructors

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<sup>78</sup> Another of the co-authors of *College Composition: A Brief Course*. She is listed third of the three authors.

<sup>79</sup> I suspect that this building would be what is now known as the Crewson House because Dr. Swardson called the building the “last house on Court Street.” It was known then as “Chubb House,” Dr. Swardson clarified, as it had been the home of Edwin Watts Chubb.

wanted a textbook called *Teaching English Usage*, which focused on usage and followed the philosophy of its author Robert C. Pooley; this was a more “contemporary kind of book.” Older faculty members, meanwhile, were more in touch with the nineteenth century and its historical approach to language study. There was an even division between the two groups. At some point in this conflict, a faculty member named Taylor Culbert, who became Dean of the Graduate School, Director (and founder) of the Ohio University Press, and University Provost, discovered that the chair of the English Department had ignored the committee’s desires and picked a textbook in secret, even going as far as to inform the bookstores of this choice. Dr. Culbert might have been carrying out the desires of some other faculty members, but at any rate he ignored the desires of the young members of the committee, who thought they were being allowed to participate in the decision. Naturally, the young instructors were furious but unable to change the decision.

The load for the composition classes was determined by need, primarily. Instructors could expect to teach four sections of first-year composition, each with over thirty students. In each section, the students were supposed to write ten themes, though sometimes instructors assigned fewer. The new instructors in charge of these classes had to finish their dissertations in two years. In the second-year composition classes (English 4), literature was used as a basis for essay writing, and the instructors “hungered” for this inclusion of literature. Dr. Swardson’s themes arose from class discussions, an approach that took care of plagiarizers. In his first four years at OU, he taught nothing but

composition. After he got tenure, he taught sections on “great American writers.” He taught on Saturday too, a practice that was normal for the time period.

OU composition students reflected a range of abilities and interests, for OU was required to admit any student who had received a high school degree. Consequently, many students failed their composition courses. English 1, also known as remedial English, had a very high failure rate. Years later, OU offered an advanced composition course which students resented because it was required; in these courses, professors were free to do as they pleased. During Dr. Swardon’s early years at OU, the College of Education offered a famous course on English grammar.

As the English Department shifted from teaching to research and from historical criticism to New Criticism, the department lost its belles lettres tradition, its tradition of “gentlemanly debate,” and its focus on aspects of taste. However, one tradition that lingered in the English Department, at least in spirit, was that of OU’s long-standing literary societies, the Philomatheans and the Athenians. Edward Hodnett, when department chair, required all the English Department’s instructors to attend the senior honors’ seminar, which met once a month in the evening in the old Baker Center. These seminars were also open to graduate students and to members of the general public. Here, people “had a wonderful time arguing out the issues” of concern to those present; topics tended to be about literary criticism. One such discussion pitted a student named Nancy Jones (later Nancy Roe, as wife of English Professor Robert Roe) against Dr. Paul Kendall, who was a “showman” of a teacher and very popular with students. Their topic was the value of New Criticism, Jones arguing on behalf of New Criticism, Kendall

arguing for historical criticism. The story goes that at one point Jones said to Dr. Kendall, “What is it that you *do* with a text, Dr. Kendall? Just *wallow* in it?” Apparently, their discussion occurred in a public space where a student could make a few light jibes at a professor’s expense.

However, this forum ended after Hodnett’s time as department chair. Then there was a brief revival of it via the English Club, though that too failed. Then there was the English Academy, co-founded in or around the 1960s by Dr. Swardson. Here one professor took a position on an issue and read a paper on it, and others then engaged this professor in a debate. One such topic that was debated by the English Academy pertained to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Dr. Swardson, in one of his turns to read a paper, wrote on the turning of Christian figures into epic figures and claimed that this led to a reduction of spiritual truths, and he went through *Paradise Lost* sharing evidence of this reading.<sup>80</sup> For this time period, such a topic proved controversial for the Academy.

Despite the persistence of debating circles, there was little contact among the English professors with OU’s speech professors.

#### *Dr. Swardson’s Position on Composition*

By and large in his early years as a teacher, Dr. Swardson viewed the creative process as a mystery, and he took an editing-based approach to student papers from his classes. However, he spoke with John Hollow, a specialist of popular literature and a

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<sup>80</sup> This paper became the basis of Dr. Swardson’s book *Poetry and the Fountain of Light* (1961).

former chair of the OU English Department, who prompted Dr. Swardson to revise his earlier views on writing by informing Dr. Swardson about process-oriented inquiry.<sup>81</sup>

In his dealings with the Honor's Tutorial classes, which were smaller than usual composition classes, Dr. Swardson had his students write about problems, and their own lives, and about literature, in fact encouraging students to write about literature in light of their own experience. He allowed personal essays because he felt that one thing students were experts on were their own experiences, so in his later composition courses he made a point to let students read literature on topics that they wrote about from personal, experiential angles. In his Honor's Tutorial classes, the students spent an hour in a tutorial with Dr. Swardson about what they had read; then, at the end of the week, they would meet as a group and have to determine where as a class they stood on the topic they were exploring, and they would have to lead the next meeting. This practice of collaboration and student-led meetings contrasted with the traditional term (research) paper, which Dr. Swardson moved away from quickly.

Sometime in the 1980s, Dr. Swardson tried in his own advanced composition course to institute dialectical, philosophical debate, hoping to create classroom environment that was more meta- and platonic than was customary in such a course. However, this particular attempt proved overambitious for the students.

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<sup>81</sup> Whether Dr. Hollow would have used the phrase *process-oriented inquiry* is doubtful, I think, if Dr. Hollow came from a literature background.



*Records to Which Dr. Swardson Gave Me Access*

Dr. Swardson loaned me two texts that he used during his early teaching years and his grade books from the mid 1950s to the 1960s. The texts are the *Harbrace College Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by John C. Hodges in consultation with Francis X. Connolly (printed in 1941, 1946, and 1951), and the *Modern English Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, by Robert M. Gorrell and Charlton Laird (printed in 1953 and 1956). Dr. Swardson said that these books were used widely during this time period.

From a current rhetoric and composition perspective, the *Harbrace College Handbook* might be deemed current-traditional, with its opening sections on sentence sense, sentence fragments, and comma splices and fused sentences. By chapter 8, it explores mechanics, by chapter 12 punctuation, by chapter 18 spelling, and only by chapter 23 does it explore sentence-level features in relation to ideas. It culminates in chapters on the paragraph, on “planning and writing the whole composition,” on writing the “library and research paper,” on letter writing, and on “grammatical terms.” In this organization we see a gradual move from parts to whole, an organizational feature that was popular even in the nineteenth century, and we see a an attempt to embed the relationship of ideas and writing within a larger treatment of surface language features. Frequently, in the few chapters that deal with paragraphing and the writing of whole compositions, the writers feature a sample text written by a well-known author and follow this with now-you-try exercise.

By comparison, Gorrell and Laird in the *Modern English Handbook* appear more willing to embrace writing as it relates to idea development. However, from a modern-

day perspective, their orientation too might be viewed as connected to nineteenth-century composition, though for different reasons than the work of Hodges and Connolly. Mainly, Gorrell and Laird prize unity, coherence, and emphasis as well as familiar modes of organizing thought, including classification, definition, and “specific details” (by which they introduce inductive and deductive reasoning). Curiously absent is persuasion as a formal category. And attention to grammar is infused throughout the chapters. In short, I would call this text a mix of logic, grammar, and modes of writing—a rhetoric that is classical in its foundation, nineteenth century in its devotion to writing modes, and early twentieth century in its persistence in discussing grammar and punctuation details.

Dr. Swardson’s grade books, which he kept since 1954, reflect that he taught four composition classes per term at OU, and that most classes had approximately thirty students. On the inside cover of his grade book from fall 1956, he lists what I take to be four topics for students’ themes: “The first \$ I ever made,” “Why I like (dislike) \_\_\_\_\_,” “The best party I ever went to,” and “My first date.”

### *Analysis*

Concerning Dr. Swardson’s handwritten comments in his grade books, I do not know his motivation for including just the four themes noted above, and based on his other grade books from this time period, I think making these additional notes was unusual for him. What the notes offer readers today is, I think, is a glimpse of some topics about which students may have been asked to write in the mid 1950s. From the

titles of these writing topics, I suspect that coherence or unity was prized, aligning Dr. Swardson's mid-1950s teaching closely with the *Modern English Handbook*.

Concerning Dr. Swardson's narrative as a whole, I think another story about gender emerges, this time from a male's perspective. Dr. Swardson's comments about untenured female faculty members who basically "ran" composition at OU and shamed male colleagues with their publication rate and Dr. Hodnett's use of Edith Wray, the "mildest" faculty member in the department, as a temporary department chair give us clues about how women in and around the 1950s challenged male faculty and were in turn challenged by male faculty. I do not read this as a story of solitary despair (the sad woman in the basement, to use Susan Miller's phrase of choice) or as a story of triumph, but one of tension between faculty members who had various degrees of power and various ways of relying on each other to deal with conflicts.

Gender, in the 1950s, seems to have mattered at OU English. So I have to consider, again, why I did not use it as a cornerstone concept in the history of OU I sketched from my textual sources? I might look back at my sources and wonder about the significance of the fact that Edith Wray was the third of the three faculty authors listed for *College Composition: A Brief Course*. I might wonder why it was that Paul Kendall's 1949-1950 students cited authority figures like John C. Baker and Edwin Watts Chubb regularly, but seldom if ever cited a female faculty member or administrator to support their claims. If OU employed few female faculty and administrators, then I would need to inquire into these facts, looking for signs that indicate what specific type of faculty members and administrators were sought and why. Too, I might wonder about the

existence of a few former OU students' letters, asking questions about why the ones OU has retained tend to come from male authors and how many of the submitted student letters reflect male perspectives. And I might look again at the literary societies in light of the few remains available about OU's one female literary society, the Adelphian Literary Society. The textual absences in what OU has chosen to retain and prize in its library collections give us signs of groups whose voices have not factored prominently into narratives about composition history at OU.

Likewise, for scholars wishing to develop narratives about past black students at OU, whose presence on campus was felt since the 1820s, a history based on available textual sources appears to me exceedingly difficult to produce. For vivid indications of black students at OU, I have had to consult twentieth-century historians who in turn consulted past enrollment data, and on one occasion I turned to the work of a current OU theater professor, Charles Smith, whose twenty-first-century play *Free Man of Color* dramatizes the college learning experiences of OU's first black student, John Newton Templeton, and his interactions with then OU President Robert Wilson and Wilson's wife.

Other comments from Dr. Swardson that strike me as especially important are those which pertained to the English Department's continued interest in oral debate after 1950. Why professors of speech were not involved in the English Department's weekly debates is a question that, to my thinking, brings up insights regarding social and departmental perceptions. Dr. Swardson maintained that the meetings were open to anyone who wanted to attend, and added that faculty members from the Philosophy

Department and the Department of Modern Languages came. He also noted that a stereotype existed of Speech Department faculty members portraying them as interested only in techniques of persuasion.

One intradepartmental insight that Dr. Swardson's comments give me is that the personalities of a department's professors can be instrumental in shaping the way the department functions. In the English Department, who was an interpersonal showboat, who was mild, who was a historical critic, and, eventually, who was aligned with specific developments in composition—these factors matter because they nudged faculty members of different standings toward adopting certain practices in the classroom and out. The textual sources I have consulted do not always expose this, despite my insistence that I am creating a social history of composition.

Finally, Dr. Swardson's reflections on his own changing teaching practices as he opened up to process pedagogy remind us of the fluidity of instructors who may seem to promote one kind of learning for a time and then promote a second kind of learning a bit later. To present any instructor's philosophies and practices as static denies the instructor's ability to adapt to new influences. With this in mind, I wish to stress that the historical sketches that available textual sources give us about past students and teachers alike, including Orlando Lowry, Edwin Watts Chubb, Margaret Boyd, and Paul Kendall, are mere glimpses of people at specific moments in their development as ever-better teachers or students. The fact that people take on new questions and interests should not surprise us any more when dealing with their written words than when dealing with them face to face.

Results from Correspondence with Dr. Edgar Whan, Former Professor of English and  
Administrator at Ohio University<sup>82</sup>

(Correspondence Maintained During Fall 2009)<sup>83</sup>

Dr. Whan noted that during his time at OU, one striking social factor surrounding composition at this site was demographic changes brought on by the GI Bill. He writes that students had to take “an English proficiency test to graduate.” Their topic was not “Xmas on Gran[d]pa’s farm, but not much better. A horror of papers! Much group profanity. A couple of us decided that the purpose of this drill was to see if they could write a paper which would not give offense to an intelligent citizen.”

From this, I sense a very different sensibility and relationship between students and professors from that which prevailed for Dr. Kendall’s honors first-year students of 1949-1950. Rather than attempt to please faculty members by depicting warm and fuzzy moments from OU’s past, the students who studied at OU courtesy of the GI Bill seemed either not to know or not to care what kind of language OU composition instructors would find acceptable, perhaps more the former if these students were indeed attempting to pass an English proficiency test.

Dr. Whan added that the people in charge of composition soon “discovered that faculty wives would meet the requirement so they were enlisted to read [the students’

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<sup>82</sup> Since my correspondence with Dr. Whan, I learned from an archived file about him that he earned his MA and PhD from the University of Michigan. Other OU faculty have also told me that he brought several faculty members to OU who had been educated at Michigan; informally, members of this group were called the “Michigan Mafia.” What Whan’s Michigan training looked like—whether it exposed him to anything like the rhetoric of Fred Newton Scott from decades earlier—is a question I cannot answer.

<sup>83</sup> In this especially brief section, I combine my summary of Dr. Whan’s points with my analysis of those points.

papers] – and they were wonderful and enjoyed [the experience] in [a] way that someone recognized they were good judges.” For me, this instance stands out because it signals a time when the evaluation of students’ writing rested not just on the University’s professors and instructors. Whether the faculty wives had *much* say in the students’ evaluation is unclear, but I find it noteworthy that they were involved in the interpretation and evaluation process. This instance stands out to me also because it suggests that the evaluations of these students’ papers rendered the workload of the composition professors and instructors unbearable, or at least unsatisfying. Perhaps the four-course-per-term schedule that Dr. Swardson spoke of, complete with thirty or more students per course, was exacerbated by the addition of student writers that the GI Bill brought to OU. If we read the faculty wives as members of the Athens community first and foremost, then their involvement in “reading” compositions gives us a relatively recent example of the community’s attentiveness to OU students’ writing.

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