CHAPTER ONE

PLACING HISTORY, HISTORICIZING PLACE

This is a book that asks those of us who teach and study writing, especially college-level writing, to scrutinize how the locations of our work matter. I say locations, plural, to stress that we teach not in an environment that must be understood in a single way, but in environments formed by discursive options and by social, economic, and political negotiations, large and small, to say nothing of material factors bearing on where college student writing occurs. We teach in institutions that are governed in a certain fashion and steered toward certain goals, perhaps aligned with the goals of other institutions, educational or otherwise. We teach in towns or cities, neighborhoods, and political districts whose borders can shift with the will of a populace or a set of leaders. We teach in classrooms and, increasingly, in configurations such as writing studios and online forums. And we teach among colleagues and students who import learned attitudes about writing, education, and the world. Even if we perform our teaching in one campus building or help one group of students over several semesters, we teach in many places.

The same ideas apply to the history of college student writing. Even if traced to actions taken in a given year and at an institutional site, historical student writing need not be understood merely as a product of students' interactions with one and only one place, a classroom, and with one and only one kind of engagement, an assignment. In the 1800s and 1900s, American cities, towns, institutions, and writing classrooms changed continually in accordance with changes in the teachers and students populating the classes and with the larger societal needs served by the classes. Influencing and influenced by social, political, and institutional changes were alterations in the discourse surrounding college student writing, widespread framings and re-framings of college student writing as rhetoric, composition, essay or theme writing, journalism, or something else, and as the province of first-year college students, underprepared students, or other categories of students. Many past versions of college student writing in America have already been captured in snapshots of teaching or learning practices at specific institutions, what I call site-specific histories of composition (e.g., Donahue and Moon; Ritter, *To Know*, *Before Shaughnessy*; Gold; Masters; Kates; Hobbs, *Nineteenth-Century*; L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo; Varnum). Together, such histories along with increasingly nuanced understandings of past and

present places of composition enable us to draw from multiple pasts. Also, they prepare us to consider the possibility that more than one history can emerge from the same institution and, grounded by different theoretical orientations to place, yield new insights.

It is the latter point, a multidimensional understanding of college student writing's past interactions with places, that I explore in this book. I argue that despite our type of institution or demographic surroundings, college student writing should be seen as an interaction between students and various overlapping and evolving places that were and are maintained through discourses, perceptions, social agreements, and physical resources. With this made visible, we move beyond concluding that writing is local or contextual (helpful though these points are) and beyond accumulating local histories, each a complication of what preceding histories have led us to expect about composition. In addition, we begin developing an analytical method that helps us untangle numerous *kinds* of figures and forces that have shaped, and may still shape, college student writing. The resulting perspective is never more needed than now, I believe, as we grapple with changes such as ever-diversifying student populations, pedagogical approaches that value multilingual and multimodal competencies, disciplinary growth, and intensified public and political scrutiny. In short, now, as our students and teaching methods change and as our commitments to educational stakeholders mature, we find ourselves in a fitting moment to both pluralize and specify what we mean when we associate college student writing with places beyond the classroom, with communities, ecologies, and publics.

Some of what's at stake appears in trends that are all too familiar to college faculty in America. In light of cuts in state funding to public colleges and universities, colleges and universities have had to strengthen their relationships to nearby civic and business groups. Given pressure to keep undergraduate English and writing studies majors competitive on the job market, English departments and writing programs have worked to secure internships and career counseling for their majors. Furthermore, given calls to broaden the purview of composition studies from "the" writing classroom to other sites and networks where writing occurs, evident, for example, in the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) 2013 theme, "The Public Work of Composition," disciplinary attention has shifted from classroom-based writing to writing in workplaces and civic groups as well as to public dimensions of college writing. These and other developments suggest that we risk making college student writing anachronistic if we fail to discern how composition connects, sometimes conflictingly, to sites, organizations, and ideologies that thrive beyond campus borders.

To illustrate the perspective on writing that I explain in this book, I use two

institutional cases from before the 1950s, when the CCCC established an annual tradition of organizing and managing writing instructors (Strickland), a tradition preceding composition's late-1960s status as a "social formation" (Zebroski 29). I look to the time before *composition* had become *Composition* because this period saw changes vivid enough to virtually demand analysis, changes capable of enriching our understanding of composition's spatial work in the past and present. Well-documented and widely felt academic developments in the late nineteenth century included a post-Civil War shift from rhetorical training grounded in memorizing and reciting classical rhetorical principles, studying political topics, and affecting a suitable tone when delivering speeches, to rhetorical training grounded in writing; a mid-1870s push, influenced by Harvard faculty and others, to use writing to test and sort incoming college students; a late-1880s tendency, supported by textbooks, to divide writing into the separate modes of narration, description, exposition, and argument; and the subsequent popularity of writing on observable topics (Connors; Kitzhaber; Brereton). By the early twentieth century, many faculty members at elite research universities evaluated student writing based on its adherence to textbook rules and grammar and punctuation conventions, though compelling alternative accounts continue to surface of female and other nontraditional college students writing with an eye toward social causes (e.g., Kates; Mastrangelo; Gold). And writing instruction in the 1940s is remembered for answering calls from the U.S. military to prioritize practical communication. However, lest these developments convey a tidy progression of events unrelated to other factors, we should acknowledge the overlap of various theories and social and economic changes. As Lisa Mastrangelo explains, identifying a single theory of writing instruction during the Progressive Era (1880-1920) is difficult because pragmatism preceded and coexisted with progressivism and early versions of feminism (xviii). Even Deweyian-Progressivism, which "focused on active and experiential learning" and "encouraged self-expression and the development of the individual," had roots in older philosophies (Mastrangelo 23). Also, looking at the 1930s-1940s, Cara A. Finnegan and Marissa Lowe Wallace argue that much of what we associate with World War II-era courses on practical communication could instead be located in Great Depression-era exigencies as college and university leaders worried about student retention (403). These and other scholars show that attempts to plot major developments of composition on a single timeline risk oversimplification.

Too, the study of English itself and the proliferation of academic departments in the late 1800s and early 1900s illustrate the degree of change surrounding composition before the 1950s. The mid nineteenth century saw a widespread rise of extracurricular and non-collegiate educational programs and sources,

from the lyceum circuit to the national circulation of magazines, which rivaled college rhetoric coursework in influencing the public and, Thomas P. Miller argues, hastened the collegiate turn toward academic specialization (87). From the 1870s to the 1890s, classical and philosophical course sequences once seen as the core of a higher education expanded to include course sequences in science, commerce, and other types of specialization, such that by the early 1900s, faculty members who most championed specialization and research also demoted teaching (T. Miller 134-135). This portrayal echoes the research of Susan Miller and Sharon Crowley, who fault 1890s-era literary specialization for demoting writing and the teaching of writing in the university. Furthermore, as James A. Berlin argues, the late-nineteenth-century rise of specialization reflected broader social changes in that the American college "was to become an agent of upward social mobility" given new business and industry needs (60). Influenced by college-industry connections, America's college student population doubled in the decades around 1900 (Brereton 7). The number of women enrolling in colleges more than quadrupled from 1870 to 1890 and continued growing into the 1900s (Hobbs, "Introduction" 16), though as numerous historians have shown, perceptions of acceptable livelihoods for women lagged behind.

All this is to say nothing of changes to the mission and structure of American colleges and universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1862, the U.S. government passed the Morrill Land-Grant Act, which supported the creation of universities focusing on agriculture and industry. Thus, many universities arose that now bear the designations "State" or "A&M," and the higher education landscape grew more crowded. In the 1870s, state normal schools, which trained teachers and which initially offered coursework leading to diplomas rather than college degrees, became a fixture in America's small and mid-sized cities. Over time, land-grant institutions and normal schools competed with older public and private postsecondary institutions so that by the late 1800s many institutions closed due to a lack of funds and students. By the 1910s many state normal schools became degree-granting normal colleges, and by the 1920s public junior colleges were founded in the hope of giving working students more affordable and accessible higher education options. Overlapping these developments was institutional restructuring evident from the late 1800s through the early 1900s as colleges and universities created new departments for faculty who narrowed their research interests and joined increasingly specific national organizations where the faculty could share their work with likeminded peers. So the Professor of Rhetoric and Belle Lettres in the early 1800s would have likely identified as Professor of Rhetoric and Mental and Moral Philosophy (or the like) in the mid 1800s, as Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature by 1900, and as Professor of Speech or as Professor of Literature by 1920. But

one important factor persisted, albeit in multiple forms, throughout the many changes summarized above: students studied and practiced how to wield language effectively.

If looking before the late 1900s to a time when numerous groups vied to control student writing on college campuses (and a time period from which we now have some distance), I believe that we can examine competing interests within and beyond colleges that converged in composition courses and in other college writing initiatives, and we can enhance our view of the social, discursive, and physical places that affected college student writing. From this historical starting point, I extrapolate new ways to read today's interactions of college student writing with its surroundings. One of the institutional cases that I consider is college student writing at Ohio University (OU), a rural institution in the northern foothills of Appalachia and, given its 1804 founding, the oldest public university in the area now known as the Midwest. The other institutional case that I consider is college student writing at the University of Houston (UH), an urban institution founded in 1927 as a junior college in the south-central United States and in a metropolitan region that experienced explosive growth throughout the 1900s. These institutions are nearly opposites in terms of their origins, missions, student populations, and geographical locations. I select them for that reason as well as for the practical fact that I have taught and done historical research at both institutions, my time at each institution immersing me in some of the spatial issues discussed in the historical texts that they hold. While on site, I found surprising similarities in how the student writing at OU and at UH interacted with surrounding places and groups. Although separated by 1,200 miles and serving different communities, themes emerged from my research at these institutions, themes that the right theoretical perspective can make explicit and useable for researchers and teachers at other institutions.

Ohio University, frequently mistaken today for its larger, younger, and better-endowed peer The Ohio State University about seventy-five miles to the northwest, lies in the town of Athens, Athens County, in the southeastern part of the state and in the heart of the region now called Appalachian Ohio. Marked by hilly terrain, a small population, and a mining past, Appalachian Ohio, comprising the southeastern third of the state, is not what many people think of when they hear *Ohio*. Scholarly speakers who come to OU to attend conferences or other events usually fly in to the state capital of Columbus (home of The Ohio State University), a metropolitan region of nearly two million residents as of the 2010 U.S. Federal Census ("Annual Estimates"). Then the speakers take an hour-and-a-half road trip from the flat lands of central Ohio to the hilly and more sparsely populated lands to the southeast, in effect entering a new social and physiographic region. The trees multiply, the roads begin winding, the

speed limit decreases, and the towns shrink. During my years at OU, I overheard more than one visiting scholar remark that the drive from Columbus to Athens made them wonder whether they were lost and should expect to end up in West Virginia.

However, for all of the signs of remoteness that the drive from Columbus to Athens brings today, events from Ohio's early history reveal a more complex picture of the state's center and margins. First, Ohio, as it is known today, was not settled all at once but in pieces, the product of multiple purchases made by an investment group called the Ohio Company of Associates. The Ohio Company focused initially on land near the Ohio River, now along the border of Ohio and West Virginia, and then worked westward and northward. Second, according to Thomas Nathaniel Hoover, twentieth-century OU faculty member and historian, when OU co-founder Manasseh Cutler interacted with members of Congress in the late 1700s, 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" (T. Hoover 10, emphasis added). So as of 1799, the Ohio town now known as Athens was called *Middletown* to signify its location in the middle of the Ohio Company's first purchase of land west of the Ohio River (T. Hoover 21). Third, among the first names considered by Manasseh Cutler for a university in this newly acquired region were American University and then, in conjunction with other planners, American Western University, names suggesting a great deal about the ideals attached to this institution during westward-oriented nation building. Founded among these lofty sentiments, Middletown soon became Athens, and American Western University, lying in what had temporarily been the middle of a new settlement, soon found itself demoted to the name *Ohio University* and occupying land in the southeastern corner of a western- and northern-expanding economic and political entity. Visitors to OU today who wonder why the university is located where it is find much to consider upon realizing that Ohio's southeastern border was once seen as a center.

Enrolling no more than a couple of hundred students at a time throughout the 1800s, any changes to OU's white male student population were conspicuous. The institution enrolled its first male African American student in 1824; in 1828, the student became the first African American to graduate from college in all of the Midwest. Women of all racial backgrounds were slower to join the student body, the first female student enrolling in 1868 in the preparatory department, at which time she used (or was given) a gender-anonymous version of her name in the university catalog (*Ohio University Bulletin, 1868-1869* 11). She graduated in 1873, revealing OU's rather late attempts to support coeducation compared to Oberlin College, which had transitioned to a coed student population in the 1830s and 1840s. Female African American students followed,

beginning in the 1870s. Finally, the early twentieth century saw greater geographical diversity among OU students, namely a rise in students from all over Ohio as opposed to a population comprised primarily of students from southeastern Ohio counties; and OU admitted at least one international student as early as 1895.

The University of Houston's history is as or more intertwined in spatial and other transformations. It was founded and initially governed by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in 1927 as Houston Junior College (HJC), half of a pair of racially segregated junior colleges: HJC, attended by white students, and Houston Colored Junior College (HCJC), attended by African American students. Unlike at OU in the nineteenth century, these colleges taught male and female students from their beginnings. Also, the timing and state location of the junior colleges' foundings fit national trends, for 1927 has been called "the peak year for new junior colleges" (Witt et al. 44), and in the late 1920s, Texas trailed only California in the founding of new public junior colleges (Witt et al. 51). The city of Houston's growth was equally remarkable at the time: by 1920 it boasted 138,276 residents, and by 1930 it had become the largest city in Texas, with 292,352 residents ("Historical Population"). Subsequent decades continued to see significant population growth given the normalization of technological advances such as highways and air-conditioning. Amid local and national developments, HJC and HCJC served as Houston's first public postsecondary institutions, though it would be many more years before these institutions became self-governing. As of 1928, the one-year-old HJC, with 510 students and 25 faculty members, called itself "the largest junior college in Texas" (Cochran 51-52), yet both HJC and HCJC lacked campuses of their own, as did most public junior colleges in Texas at that time (Witt et al. 55) and many of the earliest public junior colleges across the country (Beach 5). Houston's HJC and HCJC held their classes in the evenings at public high schools, HJC at San Jacinto High School in the centrally located neighborhood now called Midtown and HCJC at Jack Yates High School in the Third Ward, a primarily African American neighborhood on the city's east side. When the need arose, city churches also provided room for the colleges' class meetings. So initially, HJC and HCJC operated as educational concepts that were put into practice in borrowed rooms and buildings—concepts whose visible reality manifested when students gathered at approved locations to learn.

The 1930s and 1940s saw significant developments for HJC and HCJC, from the adoption of permanent campuses, to changes in institutional category as the junior colleges, which had been governed by the HISD, became independent state-supported universities offering graduate and undergraduate programs. Key moments of change follow:

- 1934: HJC became the University of Houston (UH), and HCJC became the Houston College for Negroes (HCN). This marked a shift in emphasis from two-year course tracks to four-year course tracks.
- 1939: UH moved to its permanent campus where it could offer day classes freely as well as graduate classes.
- 1945: UH became a self-governing private institution as opposed to an HISD-governed institution.
- 1946: HCN moved to its permanent campus, separated by a few city blocks from the UH campus.
- 1947: HCN became the Texas State University for Negroes (later shortened to Texas State University), an independent state-supported institution.

Initially funded by the Houston Public School Board and supervised by the HISD, the earliest versions of the University of Houston and Texas Southern University moved, physically and politically, toward independence between 1927 and 1950. Given my employment at and familiarity with UH, I focus most of my Houston-based research on its institutional holdings; however, in Chapter Three, I also consider 1930s-era essays written by HCN seniors because these essays give perspectives from African American students whose college education was controlled by the HISD.

OU's centuries-old history is one of slow transformation from center to margins, and UH's shorter history is one of fast-rising prominence and visibility. Indeed, the latter institution's history is shaped by a search for an identity within and beyond Houston as the city grew outward in all directions and as residents tried to discern what it meant to constitute Texas's largest city. In demographic trends as in related economic and cultural trends, the cases of OU and UH are opposites; doubtlessly, other colleges and universities in America have found themselves somewhere between the two pictures that I am painting as populations move, enrollments change, and institutional significance shifts. Exceedingly rare is the institution that avoids change.

RETHINKING PLACE AND HISTORY

Place and history, the concepts at the heart of this project, are by now familiar in Rhetoric and Composition; and to a great extent, my work builds on disciplinary movements from the last twenty years that have situated composition in an array of richly described locations and expanded composition history to include previously unrecognized sites and voices. However, I maintain that the very popularity of movements to localize college student writing and pluralize historical narratives of college student writing has created a need for scholars to

look more deliberately and carefully than they are used to doing at how they *place* student writing.

Scholarly work on place transcends a single theoretical lineage, research method, or political goal. Whether we produce knowledge from the angle of place-based education (Gruenewald and Smith), a trialectics of space (Soja; Grego and Thompson), spatial rhetorics (Enoch, "Finding"), or critical regionalism (Powell); whether we write ethnographies, conduct surveys or interviews, or analyze texts; and whether we do research with the hope of shaping a new social, political, economic, or physical landscape, we follow paths already trod by scholars who have examined place. Rhetoric and Composition's ecological turn, stemming from work by Marilyn Cooper, Margaret A. Syverson, and Richard Coe, led in 2001 to the pedagogical theory known as ecocomposition (Weisser and Dobrin, *Ecocomposition*), one of the field's most obvious twenty-first-century manifestations of spatial thinking. In *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches* (2001), editors Christian R. Weisser and Sidney I. Dobrin view writing as a practice of creating or sustaining links among people, things, and ideas. It is, they say, about "relationships; it is about the coconstitutive existence of writing and environment; it is about physical environment and constructed environment; it is about the production of written discourse and the relationship of that discourse to the places it encounters" ("Breaking" 2). Outside of ecocomposition, scholars have taken up ecological theories to describe rhetorical phenomena (Goggin; Rice; Fleckenstein et al.; Rivers and Weber; Devet), sometimes to inform teaching practices, while other scholars have used cultural and feminist geography to advance knowledge about how, and with what consequences, writing is a social act (e.g., Reynolds). At the same time, postmodern ideas from the likes of Richard Rorty and Edward Soja have crossed scholarly fields and supported analyses of writers whose members interact according to rules established by particular communities or societies. Additionally, place-conscious education (Gruenewald and Smith; Brooke), by striving to create sustainable physical environments, has provided another, more empirical view of place. From those of us who identify primarily as instructors to those of us who identify primarily as researchers or scholars, and everyone in between (e.g., teacher-researchers at National Writing Project sites), seeing writing through ever more considerations of place has given us options for moving beyond the acknowledgement that writing is a social or cultural act. Due to the sheer amount and range of scholarship on place, it is now not only helpful but also, I believe, crucial for us to specify what we mean when we discuss places of writing or rhetoric.

The central challenge for people in Rhetoric and Composition who study place is quickly becoming a challenge of specificity, of spelling out what exact

conception of place we mean and how we can study places of writing without attempting to study everything: all discourses, any number of social groups, numerous intersecting physical sites. While of course we can return to ethnographic analyses of ways that selected populations use texts, as in Shirley Brice Heath's famous *Ways with Words* (1983), recent contributions from ecological theories, critical regionalism, and so on demand that scholars account for more of the messiness of the practice and effects of situated writing. We must heed questions such as, how should we decide which contexts of writing to study and why? And: what do we miss if we strive to isolate a classroom of student writers for study apart from related sociopolitical contexts?

Also noteworthy in recent decades is the proliferation of histories of composition, providing pictures of pre-1950s college writing and writing pedagogy at institutions that have only recently been seen as worthy of notice: normal schools, rural institutions, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), women's colleges, and institutions populated by working-class and/or non-white-majority students. Now, in addition to realizing that how we teach writing has been shaped by attitudes from late-nineteenth-century teachers at Harvard who valued grammatical correctness and thematic unity (Kitzhaber; Brereton; Connors), we have begun to see other, underexplored genealogies in our occupational family tree. Some of the many contributions in this area include Lucille M. Schultz's *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools*, which exposes influences on colleges and universities from assignments at common schools; Kelly Ritter's *Before Shaughnessy: Basic Writing at Yale and Harvard, 1920-1960*, which uses hitherto marginalized remedial writing programs at Yale and Harvard to argue for site-specific developmental writing instruction; David Gold's *Rhetoric in the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947*, which shows how certain Southern, African American, female, and working-class institutions merged conservative teaching methods and progressive goals; and Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon's edited collection, *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, which features site-specific portrayals of composition as influenced by occupational divisions, social classes, and individual instructors.

The usual goal of local histories of composition—to offer examples, descriptions, or stories that give recognition where it is due and complicate previous grand narratives—is one that I support even though it is not my primary goal here. Such a goal goes back at least to 1995 when the contributors to Catherine Hobbs' *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* used thick description, of sorts, to expose under recognized social tensions navigated by early female college students at particular Northeastern and Midwestern institutions. The goal persisted when, over a decade later, Gold showed how, and with effects, faculty

members at three little-known Texas institutions mixed ideologies and teaching practices, and when Donahue and Moon's contributors shared information about individual instructors and students who overcame obstacles amid trying learning environments. Despite the fact that readers can learn from the site-specific examples that such histories provide (e.g., Masters; Ritter, *To Know*, *Before Shaughnessy*; Enoch, *Refiguring*; Kates; Varnum), I don't want to ask readers who teach at other postsecondary institutions to remember and retrieve details from an ever-growing body of research on individual colleges and universities. As this research grows, so do readers' challenges in plucking insights from it. It doesn't take long before readers of local histories of composition ask: which local examples best guide the writing assignments that I assign and the relationships that I cultivate? Should I stick to examples from my current region and examples that reflect my institution's history or academic classification? Perhaps foreseeing this difficulty, David Gold poses the following question after he describes the teaching and philosophy of Melvin Tolson, an African American professor at Wiley College in east Texas: "Is it possible for a white professor to participate in the traditional role of the black HBCU professor as an interpreter of the cultural experience (Roebuck and Murty 118) for her black students?" (Gold 62). Gold responds by suggesting that readers embrace "the contradictions in our teaching" (ibid). But if one compares the case of Wiley College to other, equally compelling historical cases of teaching or learning, a question remains: which examples of teaching and learning—which local histories—should the reader draw from and why?

The challenge for the potential user of local histories of composition is to sift through and evaluate the great range of cases before her based on her location and needs. After all, creators of local histories have long defended their work for its ability to enlarge the pedagogical repertoire of the liberally minded scholar, instructor, or writing program administrator (WPA). For example, in *Practicing Writing: The Postwar Discourse of Freshman English*, Thomas M. Masters supports Richard Miller's goal of giving current WPAs "tolerance for ambiguity, an appreciation for structured contradictions, a perspicuity that draws into its purview the multiple forces determining individual events and actions," among other assets (qtd. in Masters 26). Other historians flesh out and defend perspectives from under recognized student or faculty populations (Ritter, *To Know* 6, *Before Shaughnessy* 9; Moon 4-5; Gold x), as do historians who emphasize rhetoric over composition (Enoch, *Refiguring* 10-11; Kates 1; Bordelon 4). As informative as this work is, its very range, like the range of research on place, pushes readers to ask: how will I determine how to navigate the local cases before me? How will I decide which cases to draw from for inspiration or practical guidance, and when?

The two movements that I am discussing, one to situate present-day writing through notions of place, the other to localize historical student writing, have developed at roughly the same time but without one movement seriously engaging the other. Local histories continue to offer detailed narratives of occurrences at newly studied colleges or universities albeit without always theorizing the places that they describe—their descriptions often substituting for spatial analysis. Meanwhile, theories of place continue to proliferate, yet without substantial application to histories of college student writing. I would like to change this, and in effect, to theorize place through historical studies of college student writing. So in the remainder of this book, I proceed a little differently from past historians of composition: I shift attention from historical site-specific examples, descriptions, or stories themselves to *kinds of interactions* suggested by historical site-specific details. The shift recalls Stephen Toulmin's ethical system for privileging "types of cases and situations" over general laws about humankind on the one hand and over particular examples of human activity on the other hand (107). Though elsewhere I refrain from referencing law or ethics, I make a similar move as Toulmin—toward sharing a few *kinds* of interactions between student writing at specific institutions and other forces, kinds of interaction that are supported by historical sources from more than one university. My goal is to present some lines of analysis that readers can take, amend if they so desire, and apply to institutions other than those that I consider here. In addition to showing diversity in teaching practices and learning goals, I focus on giving composition instructors and scholars takeaways to apply to their own teaching locations in the past or present. That is, I want to help composition instructors and scholars think through how student writing at various institutions, including but not limited to the institutions where the instructors teach, moves through glocal webs and yields transferable insights about writing (and the teaching of writing) as a contextually multidimensional act.

One point of emphasis from ecological theories that is relevant to my study is the situating of writing in multiple and sometimes messy contexts. For example, consider Kristie S. Fleckenstein et al.'s call for research on contextually rich writing:

> To flourish, writing studies must generate individual research projects that focus on a wide array of contexts, from the bodies of individual writers to classrooms, workplaces, clubs, churches, neighborhoods, virtual environments, and historical moments. This aspect of diversity impels researchers to seek out different contexts for writing, to read beyond their normal scope of disciplinary literature, and to redraw the circumfer-

ence of immersion. (401)

I share Fleckenstein et al.'s embrace of multiple contexts, but I fear that, like much recent theorizing about place, this approach fails to resolve a problem of focus. Histories of composition that examine a breadth of contexts can quickly become unwieldy unless the researcher makes tough and principled choices about which contexts to study and where to place parameters around a research project. Key research concerns become, which strands in ever-enlarging glocal webs of people, ideas, and places should one select to study? How does one keep from studying how composition has related to everything, from local demographics to the widespread dissemination of tools such as pencils? So to give shape to my analysis of historical student writing, I organize my study of pre-1950s student writing at OU and UH around a few concepts that have long informed—we might say, situated—the study of rhetoric: concepts from sophistic and neosophistic perspectives on language. The concepts that I summarize below orient readers to specific ways that language, in this case college student writing, has interacted and may still interact with its surroundings.

STUDY: THEORY AND SCOPE

The late twentieth century saw a revival and modernizing of First Sophistic teachings on the part of scholars in Communication Studies and then, by the 1980s and 1990s, from scholars in Rhetoric and Composition. As the latter's social turn revealed expansive new ways to study writing, questions and concerns from the First Sophists gained renewed attention, and Rhetoric and Composition scholars such as Sharon Crowley, Susan C. Jarratt, Victor J. Vitanza, Bruce McComiskey, and Ken Lindblom came to treat language as always perspectival, interested, and situated—always partial tellings of a subject and contingent on the purposes of a rhetor or rhetors. It is not my wish to review this disciplinary movement in full. Given the recurrence and complexity of debates about how First Sophistic ideas can be understood by contemporary scholars, a debate involving mainly Vitanza and Communication Studies scholars John Poulakos and Edward Schiappa and reaching back to historiographical concepts from Richard Rorty, such a review could comprise a book of its own. Suffice it to say that I endorse John Poulakos' work to update terms and issues that were important to ancient teachers associated with sophistic outlooks, and I support the category *neosophistic rhetorical theory* to account for scholars who use and modernize ideas from ancient sophists for contemporary communication contexts, as I do here.

Edward Schiappa 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 rhetorical theorists Michael C. Leff and Susan C. Jarratt in this category ("Neo-Sophistic" 195). It bears mentioning that this definition does not render neosophistic rhetorical theory synonymous with Richard Rorty's better-known historiographical category of rational reconstruction even 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, however, is more specific, necessarily inspired by early sophistic teachings, and this theoretical approach contains an important extra step: 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 researcher's perspective; 2) allows the researcher to take insights gained from, or at least inspired by, early sophistic teachings (material from the past); and 3) encourages the researcher 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. Susan C. Jarratt, in "Toward a Sophistic Historiography," shows how such a definition can be put into practice. She uses sophistic principles to advocate studies of texts across modern-day disciplines, explore implications of knowledge gaps, and tie texts to social conventions that decide, at any given moment, which persuasive strategies a society finds convincing and which communication goals a society deems valuable ("Toward"). Most relevant for my project is Jarratt's urging for scholars to tolerate contradictions across historical narratives and for scholars to prioritize probability and multiple narratives over a sense of historical singularity—even if one narrative has long been accepted as reliable ("Toward" 272). Beyond building on ancient sophistic ideas to re-see the present, Jarratt reminds us of the need to treat whatever new understandings and narratives we create as provisional, tied to the kind of sources, people, and situations at hand.

From the recent mining of First Sophistic teachings for contemporary purposes, that is, from neosophistic rhetorical theory, I take a few concepts that highlight specific analytical threads available to the researcher who sees knowledge and language as situated and political. I take this step even as I recognize that since the 1990s, many sophistic concepts (e.g., *kairos*) have mainstreamed into rhetorical studies generally, while other sophistic concepts (e.g., *dynaton*) have faded from view. Soon after Edward Schiappa criticized late-twentieth-century scholars for taking ancient ideas from individual sophists and thereafter constructing a sophistic rhetorical tradition ("Neo-Sophistic," "Sophistic Rhetoric"), scholars in Rhetoric and Composition, with some exceptions (Vitanza, *Writing Histories*, *Negation*; Greenbaum), moved away from calling their work

sophistic and instead began to call their work ecological, feminist, or geographical. (Notably, Vitanza advances his Third Sophistic project in the service of historiography and of a broad view of Western rhetoric, not in reference to local histories of college writing.) By 2010 when *Composition Forum* published an interview with Susan C. Jarratt titled "Still Sophistic (After All These Years)" (Holiday), one's use of *sophistic* made a strong statement about the continued value of underscoring a non-foundational pre-Aristotelian intellectual heritage. I, too, would like to make a statement by organizing my historical analyses through concepts that I trace to the early sophists. With this approach, I argue that despite whether Rhetoric and Composition scholars now use sophistic terminology regularly, many of our assumptions about language remain indebted to pre-Aristotelian sophistic thinking, especially that of fourth-century BCE sophist Gorgias of Leontini, who practiced a "time- and place-specific" logic (Poulakos, "The Logic" 13). Above all, I argue that those of us interested in contexts of writing and histories of college student writing can sharpen our analytical vision by foregrounding sophistic concepts that have fallen into relative disuse as well as sophistic concepts that have mainstreamed quickly, leaving their critical potential underappreciated.

Although when I began studying pre-1950s students writing at OU and UH I felt tempted to organize my research through thick description or imaginative narratives, or by presenting historical information with minimal commentary (Ritter, "Archival"; Brereton), I realized that in order to account for the spatial complexity that I sensed but couldn't quite articulate and unpack, I needed other analytical tools. Inspired in particular by Poulakos' explanation of three concepts that showed an outlook shared by multiple sophists (*Sophistical*), I organized my account of the relationships between student writing at OU and UH and other forces via the concepts of *nomos*, *kairos*, *epideixis*, and *dynaton*. (See the Glossary for concise definitions of these terms as well as some terms important in the history of American higher education.) So guided, I tracked connections between student writing at these universities and influences (mostly, people and ideas) within and beyond campus borders. My findings showed that shapers of composition practices included savvy instructors, administrators, and students (people usually highlighted in studies of historical student writing), as well as civic clubs, city leaders, physical infrastructure, state politicians, and K-12 and other postsecondary education organizations (people and entities usually considered in histories of literacy or community rhetoric, such as Royster and Gere). My analysis shows how such forces and groups intermingled, frequently in a close geographical area, with the result of constructing a certain kind of public university, student population, and writing environment. At OU and UH, "college" student writing belonged as much to a bevy of surrounding people and

interests as it did to students—a perspective worth applying to student writing today. From this angle, boundaries blur between the concepts of college and community, composition and rhetoric, education and politics, and local and regional, and even among the categories of students, teachers, administrators, and community members; and a picture begins to emerge about what it can look like for researchers and teachers to make new knowledge from and about places of writing.

Each of the four concepts that guides my analysis bears a sophistic lineage that evolved in the hands of post-First Sophistic thinkers from Aristotle to contemporary theorists, yet each concept nonetheless retains ties to earlier sophistic outlooks. While for explanatory purposes I focus on one concept at a time, the concepts work synergistically by steadily familiarizing us with the work of rethinking who and what is involved when college students write. Also, the four concepts comprise some of many other ways of seeing, a few starting points among others that await articulation. The first of the concepts that I consider, *nomos* (plural *nomoi*), was used by the fifth-century BCE sophist Antiphon, among others, to refer to social rules or conventions. In fragments that remain from his treatise *On Truth*, Antiphon examines nomos by comparing it to *physis*, or nature: people determine nomos while the gods determine physis. Classics scholar Michael Gagarin elaborates by pointing out that for Antiphon, *physis* entailed features like breathing that everyone shares regardless of their societal affiliation (Gagarin 66-67). From this perspective, nomos supplements physis by "impos[ing] rules on matters that *physis* leaves unregulated" (Gagarin 69). But whereas Antiphon's attitude toward nomos was ambiguous, other sophists embraced the concept's usefulness—Gorgias in his popular *Encomium of Helen* and *Defense of Behalf of Palamedes*. For neosophistic rhetorical theorists, the most intriguing and useful aspects of nomos include its suggestion of the mutability of social rules (McComiskey 33) and its implication that discourse itself is connected to political interests (Jarratt, *Rereading* 74). As Jarratt puts it, "though normally applied to law, by implication [nomos] could be taken to deny the possibility of any discourse—'literary' or 'philosophic,' for example—isolated from the operation of social customs and political power" (*Rereading* 74). Importantly for my purposes in Chapter Two, Jarratt adds that the "provisional codes (habits or customs) of social and political behavior" designated by *nomos* are geographically specific (ibid). So as I examine specific institutional sites where pre-1950s student writing at OU and UH trafficked, I ask, what nomoi shaped the writing? And I suggest nomoi that we should heed today.

The second concept with sophistic roots that I use, because it complements and complicates a perspective from the angle of nomos, is kairos. Before the early sophists, kairos referred to ideas such as "due measure" and "proportion"

(Schiappa, *Protagoras* 73). Through its handling by the sophists, kairos came to mean the timeliness of a message, that is, the utterance of a message suitably near in time to the event or message to which it responds. We see the concept referring to timeliness in the anonymously authored text *Dissoi Logoi* and in the contributions of Gorgias. But for Gorgias as well as his student Alcidamas, kairotic action was not defined by timeliness alone; it could also signal a departure from expected communication in favor of inventive extemporaneous speech (Tindale 117; E. White 14; Poulakos, *Sophistical* 61; see also McComiskey 112). The fact that the meaning of kairos continues to grow should not trouble us, I believe, and in Chapter Three I follow Bruce McComiskey's contemporary updating of kairos so that it primarily emphasizes the feature of responsiveness, whether sudden or planned. The resulting easing of temporal constraints suits a study of writing as opposed to speech, and it allows consideration of questions such as, to whom or what was student writing responding, whether directly, as in the form of work completed for academic credit, or indirectly, as in work that countered perceptions and opinions from elsewhere? Whereas nomos focuses attention on behavioral codes that student writers uphold or try to change, my use of kairos shifts attention to textual conversations involving both college student writing and discourses from a surrounding state or city.

The remaining two concepts that I take from the rehabilitation of First Sophistic teachings are *epideixis* (plural *epideixeis*), as in the now familiar category epideictic rhetoric, and dynaton. A popular definition of epideictic rhetoric is ornate language used in ceremonial occasions to praise or blame, language fitting to contribute to a spectacle. But it is important to add that before Aristotle codified this term in his *Rhetoric*, epideixis concerned language that displayed one's rhetorical prowess to an audience as opposed to language that achieved practical or private purposes (McComiskey 90; see also Kerferd 28). That is, for many of the sophists who preceded Aristotle, epideictic language could be used primarily to impress by showing one's facility with words. Accounts of early sophists' epideictic speeches reach us through Socratic dialogues including *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Protagorus*, *Axiochus*, and *Eryxias*, as well as through the work of Thucydides (Guthrie 41-42), among other sources, so in many cases non-sophists used *epideixis* to describe the work of early sophists. We can detect something of an epideictic effect in the early sophists' language by turning to Protagoras of Abdera, who reportedly said that teaching, education, and wisdom are "the garland of fame which is woven from the flowers of an eloquent tongue and set on the heads of those who love it." In addition to bringing fame, he continued, an eloquent tongue's "flowers" lead applauding audiences and teachers to "rejoice" ("Graeco-Syrian" 127). Heighted and poetic language of this kind displayed one's learning and thus enhanced one's reputation. Also, such discursive

moves reflected early theatrical language, which privileged "show, appearance, art, deception, imitation, illusion, and entertainment" (Poulakos, *Sophistical* 41). So when early sophists applied these features to non-theatrical discourses, the sophists highlighted the discursive construction of reality in various venues (Poulakos, *Sophistical* 39; Consigny 284). And as early sophists took theatrical language beyond the realm of theater, the sophists produced what Bruce McComiskey calls "a new amalgam—the amalgam that Aristotle would later call epideictic rhetoric" (McComiskey 43). In my application of this tradition to historical student writing at OU and UH, I ask, what relationships were evident between historical student writing and occasions for displaying the writing openly? How did the opportunity to *exhibit* student writing affect the writing's effect? From such questions, I consider occasions today when faculty, administrators and others hold up student writing for public acclaim.

Finally, adding another dimension to my analysis is the idea of *to dynaton*, or *to dunaton*, which I will refer to here simply as *dynaton*. Like epideixis, dynaton was codified by Aristotle, but the concept first appeared sometime earlier. In his translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics, Book IX*, Montgomery Furth associates dynaton with the terms "potent, potential, able, capable, possible" (qtd. in Aristotle 132), adding that context shapes the exact translation. However, most neosophistic rhetorical theorists approximate dynaton's meaning with the English word *possibility*. We find dynaton appearing in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Gorgias*, though its availability as a descriptor of many sophists' ideas comes from John Poulakos, who explains the cultural context surrounding the work of selected ancient sophists. In his view, dynaton kept speakers mindful of the fact that "what is actual [i.e., agreed upon as factual] has not always been so but has resulted from a sequence of possibles" (*Sophistical* 69). Stressing the concept's emphasis on novel ways of thinking and acting, Poulakos adds, "If the orator's display succeeds in firing the imagination of the listeners, and if their hopes triumph over their experience of the world as it is, the possibilities before them are well on their way to becoming actuality" (ibid). So, too, I argue, concerning composition historiography, or how we study historical student writing. I use the concept of dynaton to inform an analysis of people involved in early-twentieth-century composition at OU and UH who crossed boundaries between local and global contexts and between academic and professional spheres. Comparing and contrasting the movements made by these people at OU and UH, I re-present local histories of composition as comparisons of *movements or changes* rather than as snapshots of familiar and clearly bounded scenes of writing such as writing from Illinois, writing from women's colleges, or writing from underprepared students. I argue that beyond geographical location and demographic facts, historical student writing in the past and present can be understood

through its associations with variously identifying people and with variously situated ideas, and the work of tracing these associations can expand our sense of what composition is.

Herein lies the primary contribution of my project. Although I am invested in the work of localizing student writing and I champion site-based particularity, my analyses of historical student writing at OU and UH resist the overarching goal of accumulating site-specific historical information to fill gaps in previous narratives of composition history. Instead, my analyses use site-specific historical information to expose *kinds* of interactions that exist in different forms across colleges and universities. We are missing the boat, I suggest, if we see student writing today as unrelated to kinds of interactions that shaped the writing in Composition's pre-disciplinary history and if we sidestep opportunities to apply our rhetorically informed method of interpreting site-specific insights to other colleges and universities. Those of us studying composition's past via a particular college or university can build on transferable ways of seeing how college student writing relates to glocal factors trafficking in shifting social and discursive (and physical) terrain. Scholars and instructors with this perspective stand to resituate composition many times over, each time noticing new interactions between the work that goes on in the classroom and the work that goes on throughout campus or beyond campus borders. Students stand to learn what it means that writing assignments and activities come from multiple somewheres, filtered through regional and institutional needs, tied to institutional leaders' goals, and bearing influences from people who traverse or have traversed composition classes: those instructors who specialize in something other than Rhetoric and Composition, guest speakers who are brought to composition classes, people with whom instructors of all stripes associate at conferences and community events, people with whom instructors associated before teaching or researching composition. Finally, those instructors who study historical composition texts at their place of work stand to see how, even if their immediate teaching environments differ from teaching environments found at other colleges and universities, they can adapt insights from other locally focused historians.

Chapters Two through Five each uses a sophistic concept to analyze the local or glocal meaning of a set of historical texts at rural nineteenth-century-founded Ohio University and urban twentieth-century-founded University of Houston. Following Jarratt ("Toward" 272), each chapter brings up factors that allow the historical narrative presented to complement and occasionally contradict the historical narratives presented by surrounding chapters. Also, each chapter exposes ways that student writing at OU and UH, despite obvious institutional differences, experienced similar kinds of relationships to its surroundings. Chapter Two, which centralizes nomos, considers an 1870s diary and a 1920s scrapbook

in the case of OU and 1920s-1930s student newspaper articles in the case of UH. These texts were selected because each contains detailed observations and opinions from students about student behavior at their university (a point that I connect to nomos). Chapter Three, drawing on kairos, considers late-1800s literary society records, student newspapers, and creative writing in the case of OU and a combination of 1920s-1930s student newspaper articles and 1930s senior papers, which functioned like undergraduate theses, in the cases of UH and the Houston College for Negroes. These texts were selected because they brought up sociopolitical contexts surrounding the university, contexts in which the university formed or grew (a point that I connect to a writing-focused version of kairos). Chapter Four, focusing on epideictic communication, considers a three-volume student-written history of OU in the case of that institution and issues from 1936 to 1950 of the student-written magazine *The Harvest* in the case of UH. These texts were chosen because they provide examples of student writing that was taken from classroom contexts and made into a display of student achievement for audiences other than students. Chapter Five, using dynaton to organize its findings, rethinks common ways of organizing local histories of composition by examining how people and ideas at OU and UH have moved through composition classes while bearing traces of their past involvements in social, professional, and disciplinary networks. This chapter relies on an array of source types, from local and national newspapers to biographies, yearbooks, and course catalogs, to illustrate ways that numerous influences wove through historical composition courses.

Most of the primary sources that I cite from Chapters Two through Five come from the archives at OU and UH: Ohio University's Robert E. and Jean R. Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections housed in Alden Library, Athens, Ohio, and the University of Houston's Special Collections housed in M.D. Anderson Library, Houston, Texas. However, the boundaries of these and other archives grow fainter each year as collections are digitized, sometimes with the help of other organizations (e.g., the Ohio Historical Society), and as sources are retained in multiple forms and places: bound volumes as well as microfilm, books kept in officially designated archives as well as books kept in a library's annex or general holdings. Therefore, when I call the bulk of my research *archival*, I mean that most of the historical sources that I studied are held in some form in the archives that I named above. The sources may also be held elsewhere, and some source types, such as major historical newspapers, may be retrieved through a library's general databases. As archived materials continue to reach more readers and viewers who cannot travel to a particular collection, I ask that readers place generous conceptual parameters around the term *archive*. Building on Linda Ferreira-Buckley's work, Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan argue for "an

expanded conception of archives" involving "our family, social, and cultural history" as well as traditional historical texts ("Introduction" 3). Although I do not follow their advice fully, I sympathize with their point: historical texts may have value despite their designation as archival. So, occasionally, I consider historical sources that speak back in provocative ways to my main archived sources—for example, using documents from an early Houston women's club that show why the club funded the studies of certain early UH students.

Chapter Six concludes my project by explaining how each of the analyses from the previous chapters unsettles common understandings of *local* writing and how each of the analyses complicates traditional understandings of *composition*, *literacy*, and *rhetoric*. None of these concepts alone is adequate, the chapter maintains. Finally, the chapter discusses ways that instructors at various colleges and institutions may use the analyses that I have illustrated to shape how they orient their students to writing and place. Despite whether instructors and scholars work at the institutions that I studied for this project, or at institutions in the same region or institutions that are similar in type to the institutions that I studied, instructors and scholars can rethink the analytical threads that I share based on the historical texts available to them and the issues that they find most pressing in the locations where they teach.

Above all, *Placing the History of College Writing: Stories from the Incomplete Archive* is intended to help readers interested in applying historical knowledge about composition as well as rhetoric to college student writing and the teaching of writing at their institutions; in the process, I hope that the book helps these readers reconceptualize what *composition* can mean, what individual, programmatic, institutional, communal, or regional visions it promotes and what opportunities for agency it creates. Also, as the book's subtitle suggests, it is intended to help those whose access to traditional sources of composition history (see Masters 2; Brereton xv-xvi) is limited by the sources kept by their institution, sources that, if judged based on the standards of previous histories of composition, might seem unrelated to composition or so distant from composition as to be useless. Many researchers would hesitate before studying composition history via students' yearbooks, newspaper articles, or creative pieces, or before studying composition history by looking at funding and programming from civic clubs. Such judgments of historical sources and interpretive options do not necessarily hold, I argue, because almost any college or university archive holds texts that speak to the context of one's institution. What matters, then, is figuring out how to make sense of context (or of place) in a way that helps researchers at more than one site—a task that, without clear organizational guideposts, risks being as vague and unhelpful as accounts of *nature* or *society*. If properly focused, the act of situating student writing in relation to place(s) can help historians and

instructors revise their outlooks and their teaching.