

## CHAPTER TWO

# CUSTOMIZING COMPOSITION: STUDENTS BROADENING BEHAVIORAL CODES

One revealing and previously undervalued way that historical student writing has related to people and ideas is through the writing's ties to institutional, or site-specific, expectations for student behavior. In question form, this relationship might be expressed as: to what extent did student writing do the work of upholding rules about how students should act and what students should prioritize at their university? The answer tells us one kind of story about the rhetorical work of student writing, a story of students using their writing to maintain or revise the roles granted them by their higher education institutions.

In a general sense, studying historical student writing in relation to a people's customs, as opposed to a people's specialized body of knowledge, is an old analytical move. It formed part of the thesis of *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, in which Robert J. Connors portrayed late-nineteenth-century composition in American colleges as an answer to social needs (7-8). Since Connors' book, many scholars have gestured to the role of institutional customs in contributing to historical student writing (e.g., Donahue and Moon; Gold; Ritter, *Before*; Masters; Kates). But in this chapter, I posit that work remains to be done to unpack the influence of formal and institutionally specific expectations for student behavior on student writing. En route to finding and interpreting such expectations, we can continue the tradition of recovering and learning from individual professors and students and the tradition of gathering knowledge about general types of institutions (e.g., women's colleges), but emphasis on individuals or on large-scale categories of postsecondary institutions can maintain blind spots about the role of specific institutional configurations in shaping why, how, when, and where students wrote. For example, in *Practicing Writing*, Thomas M. Masters explores broad themes that describe postwar composition practices at three Illinois colleges and universities. He names the colleges and universities that he studied, but focuses on "values and beliefs prized in the academy" (146) rather than another possibility: the values and beliefs nurtured by a student body's institution, whether the small, private, Christian Wheaton College or the large, public land-grant University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. By contrast, Kelly Ritter, in *Before Shaughnessy*:

*Basic Writing at Yale and Harvard, 1920-1960*, creates space for viewing historical writing programs as institutionally specific products, supported by stark differences between Yale and Harvard's early twentieth-century handling of developmental writing. Yale, she finds, separated developmental writing from its regular curriculum, while Harvard acknowledged developmental writing's equal place among its other courses, a difference leading Ritter to propose further study of "local values" affecting a university's categories of students and writing courses (136). Her point echoes Kathleen A. Welsch's study of 1850s college student Mahala Jay, who transferred from Oberlin to Antioch College where Jay followed "the ethnologic of the college," Antioch's honor code (Welsch 19). Yet Ritter leaves many of the local values that she mentions inferred, and Welsch ultimately focuses on Antioch's use of Richard Whately's rhetoric—an intellectual, not an institutional, tradition. Left unfinished is the work of tracing how closely student writing followed behavioral expectations established for students. And composition scholars who have depicted the university itself as a "site for required, enforced behaviors" (Strickland 57; see also Ohmann) have tended to focus broadly, in Donna Strickland's case on the rise of the CCCC's management of composition faculty members across institutions.

The relationship between student writing and institutionally specific expectations for student behavior matters because, first, we now know that part of what students do when they write for academic purposes is try on new roles (Carroll). If students act in new ways through the writing that they produce, we must consider what their actions mean for the students' university. As students write, are they conforming ever-more fully to the behavioral scripts of their university? Are the students normalizing the scripts? Are the students developing a sense of agency apart from their university's expectations? The students' degree of power is vitally important if we wish to discern just how their writing has related and might relate to the institutional setting around them. Second, the relationship between student writing and institutionally specific expectations for student behavior matters because institutional expectations change from institution to institution; therefore, we miss a layer of influence on student writing when we study a broad subject that we call academic values.

Here is where *nomos* helps. As discussed in Chapter One, *nomoi* are rules created by people to guide or control human behavior in a specific location, and as neosophistic rhetorical theorists emphasize, rules for language use itself fall into this category. Ken Lindblom states the neosophistic perspective well, I think, when he calls *nomoi* "continuously renegotiated agreements for the making of meaning that constitutes the work of a particular community" (qtd. in Gillam 55). As social constructs, *nomoi* can be changed. So as I think about *nomoi* in terms of student writing at specific universities, my main questions be-

come: what role did students have in “continuously renegotiat[ing] agreements” about how the students should behave? To what extent did student writing show the students upholding, ignoring, or changing existing rules for how the students should act? However, before trying to answer these questions, I want to highlight two additional features of early sophistic understandings of *nomoi* that I find to have explanatory power today: 1) *nomoi* could entail beliefs or customs on the one hand or formal codes or laws on the other hand, and 2) *nomoi* carried power largely because they endorsed someone’s or some group’s moral values. Classics scholar W.K.C. Guthrie explains that in the fifth-fourth centuries BCE, *nomos* was “believed in, practiced or held to be right” (56). In “moral or political spheres,” many early sophists evoked *nomoi* by emphasizing “traditional or conventional beliefs as to what is right or true” or by emphasizing “laws formally drawn up and passed, which codify ‘right usage’ and elevate it into an obligatory norm backed by the authority of the state” (Guthrie 56-57). For instance, in *On Truth*, when Antiphon alludes to people who treat their parents in a particular way or who view self-defense in a particular light (Col. 5 [132-64 H.]), he implies prescriptions about moral behavior under the larger idea of *nomos*-as-custom or *nomos*-as-belief. When, in *A Defense on Behalf of Palamedes*, Gorgias calls himself “a great benefactor” for having “written laws, the guardians of justice,” among his other contributions to his society (30), he implies prescriptions about moral behavior under the larger idea of *nomos*-as-law. These examples indicate that by recognizing current customs or beliefs or current rules or laws, one conveys a standard for right thinking or action. So part of the new territory to investigate based on a neosophistic updating of *nomos* is, what moral implication accompanies one’s work to renegotiate current customs or laws?

As site-specific, renegotiated rules carrying moral associations, the ancient concept of *nomos* can inform a study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century college student writing. This application brings with it new possibilities, chiefly the possibility that the renegotiation process, and with it a reappraisal of moral associations, will involve students whose tuition dollars keep universities afloat. So as I consider *nomoi* that affected historical student writing at Ohio University and the University of Houston, I examine *nomoi* of the kind that Guthrie describes as “laws formally drawn up...which codify ‘right usage’”: administrative expectations for student behavior enshrined in institutional literature (e.g., in university catalogs). Then I consider *nomoi* in terms of “conventional beliefs as to what is right or true” (Guthrie)—here the *students’* beliefs about what kind of behavior they should exhibit, as suggested by their writing. By heeding both of these accounts of everyday behavior, I illustrate some of the nuance overlooked in past cultural analyses of composition, and I uncover the kind of agency that

students at two institutions demonstrated through their writing.

One of the most noteworthy of my findings is that although OU and UH are contextual opposites, representing vastly different kinds of institutions, regions, and student populations, the interactions between early institutional nomoi and student writing at each site showed marked similarities. The most striking similarity was that through their writing, historical students from OU and UH did not simply follow or overturn the nomoi-as-rules of earlier administrators; rather, students from each university elaborated on earlier nomoi, and their elaborations complicated earlier expectations for student behavior. In other words, students added detail that *extended* or *broadened* what early institutional nomoi encouraged the students to act like. Future studies of student writing in the past or present might take up this analytical thread to see how well this kind of interaction characterizes student writing where the researcher teaches, or to see how other kinds of institutional nomoi, those at historically Christian colleges, for example, influence and are influenced by student writing. If focusing on social class, then researchers should notice that the working-class student population of 1930s-era HJC and UH avoided direct resistance to institutional codes for behavior, despite the defiance shown by many workers elsewhere in the country toward industry managers (e.g., J. Hoover 43). Future studies might also focus on different kinds of artifacts from those that I consider. In the remainder of this chapter, I track the relationship between institutional nomoi and those late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century student writings that offer the fullest accounts available of student life: a diary and scrapbook in the case of OU and a student newspaper in the case of UH. Like any other historical sources, these can't represent all late-nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century students at OU and all early twentieth-century students at UH, but the sources nonetheless hint provocatively at what many students thought.

## THE CASE OF OU

At Ohio University, institutional nomoi governing student life—that is, terms establishing the rules of desirable, and, by implication, morally sound, student behavior—date back to the institution's founding in 1804. However, in light of the fact that nomoi are negotiated and renegotiated as opposed to fixed, a full review of this university's rules across the years is unnecessary. Also, early institutional nomoi gloss over this information. For example, the Ohio Legislature's 1804 "Act Establishing an University in the Town of Athens" says almost nothing about rules for student behavior and gives passing attention merely to the need for a university to promote morality. The only other nod to the university's expectations for student behavior comes when the act adds that Ohio

University's rules will adhere to state and national laws ("Ohio University Charter" 4-5), a point worth heeding given later changes to federal laws pertaining to slavery, women's suffrage, Prohibition, and the like. Then, in the rules adopted in 1814 by the OU Board of Trustees, general warnings appear for students to avoid drunkenness, bars, lies, arguments, lasciviousness, disobedience, and cross-dressing (T. Hoover 27-29), as well as encouragement for students to treat all people respectfully (T. Hoover 28). It was later nineteenth-century catalogs that clarified behavioral expectations from Ohio University, so I turn here for samples of institutional *nomoi* that influenced students as they wrote and went about their college lives.

The earliest OU catalog that has been retained comes from 1843, and its statements about expected student behavior apply primarily to graduation requirements. But two other points receive close attention: the role of the university's literary societies in shaping students' lives and the degree to which the university, through its geographic location, cultivated moral student behavior. Basically, literary societies were student groups that met regularly, in many cases weekly, to discuss literary works, deliver original orations, debate social and political issues of the day, and socialize; typically, a university had more than one literary society, and they would hold public debates with each other or possibly with the literary societies of other institutions. Accounts from some higher education institutions show literary societies in the late 1800s featuring live music between debates and holding dinners and other social events (Ogren 121), giving us a fuller sense of their contribution to the campus community. In the absence of many other student organizations, literary societies proved popular throughout the 1800s (Ogren 49, 108), and at OU, they were both popular and expected activities for students into the first decades of the 1900s. The 1843 OU catalog's coverage of literary societies spans two sections and notes that the university had two such societies, each with a library holding 1,400 volumes and each society nurturing "habits of extemporaneous speaking" and "the proper modes of conducting business in deliberative assemblies" (*Ohio University Bulletin* 14). A "public contest" (most likely a debate) between the societies marked the end of the winter term, and a public addresses from the societies occurred at the end of the summer term (15). The 1843 catalog's second point of emphasis, morality, appears in the expectation for applicants to the university to have "testimonials of good moral character" (14). While the meaning of this expression goes undefined, the idea of morality returns in a detailed description of OU's location, its setting in the Ohio River Valley called "elevated and healthful" and the university's members called "distinguished for intelligence, refinement, and morality." As an institution that is "removed from the great thoroughfares of travel," the catalog continues, OU "affords the best security to the morals of

Students” (16). This acknowledgment of the university’s rural setting encouraged students to focus on ideas and cultivate behaviors that the 1843 catalog associated with morality.

OU’s 1872-73 catalog, administered during the writing of a student text that I examine below, again shows the university’s two literary societies singled out for recognition. Now the catalog says that the societies give students “exercise in declamation, composition, and debate” and help students “becom[e] familiar with the modes of conducting business in deliberative assemblies” (*Ohio University Bulletin* 22). As in 1843, no other student activities appear in the catalog. And again, the 1872-73 catalog alludes to a vague sense of morality, first when discussing admission to OU: “Testimonials of good character are required from applicants for admission” (22). Subsequent references to morality are new. One of them concerns a rule about absences: “No student is allowed to be absent in term-time without special permission. The absence of a student for even a single recitation, exerts on his progress an evil influence, which is seldom appreciated by parents or guardians” (23). Then, and perhaps surprisingly for this public institution, references to morality appear in terms of required religious involvement: “The students are required to be present at prayers in the College Chapel every morning. Every Sabbath afternoon a lecture on some moral or religious subject is delivered in the Chapel” (23). A difference between references to morality in 1843 and in 1872-73, what we might call a renegotiation in institutional *nomoi* given the passing of three decades and a national war, is the 1872-73 catalog’s substitution of comments about location and morality with comments about money and morality. It cautions parents, “Whatever is beyond a reasonable supply [of money] exposes the student to numerous temptations and endangers his happiness and respectability” (23-24). (Incidentally, we should not overlook the male pronoun *his*.) Gone by this point is the description of Athens, Ohio, as isolated enough to preserve students from vice and distractions.

In sum, the catalogs from 1843 and 1872-73 reveal expectations for OU students to participate in 1) a literary society; 2) recitations in courses; and 3) daily prayers in the chapel, and, very likely, Sunday lectures in the chapel. Finally, students were expected to avoid temptation that the 1843 catalog associated with mobile populations and that the 1872-73 catalog associated with money. With these expectations made plain, I turn to student writing itself to gauge how fully the students followed or changed the *nomoi* at their institution.

The most detailed pre-1950s writing completed by an OU student while enrolled at the university is an 1873 account of the daily life of one student and her graduating class of six peers (Davis 10). Her writing shows the student and her classmates regularly attending literary society meetings, delivering recitations in classes, and attending church services where they received behavioral advice,

sometimes from their professor and university president. Also in keeping with the OU catalogs' prescriptions, the students are depicted as focused on Athens, Ohio, events, not harboring urban longings, and the writer of the 1873 piece alludes to possessing little spending money. However, here is where things get interesting, because even when following the catalogs' expectations, the students depicted in the diary appeared to elaborate on their received behavioral scripts. And in the process of elaborating, of describing and humanizing the actions dictated by university catalogs, the students revised the behaviors expected of them. When we view this and other students' writing about college life in relation to institutional *nomoi*, I argue, we see students nudging their rhetorical education away from structured formal learning (mere memorizing and reciting) and toward interactions that privileged multiple educational venues and traditions, even spontaneous occasions for learning. Accounts from students' pens show students subtly creating space for new customs to support their rhetorical education.

The first and most detailed piece of OU student writing that I reference is an 1873 diary kept by Margaret Boyd, who in June of that year became her university's first female graduate. Boyd graduated in a class of only seven students total (see Fig. 1), and after her death, her classmate John Merrill Davis affirmed her perspective on OU student life (Davis).

Of course, Boyd cannot speak for the remaining six OU graduates of 1873, but as a member of a disenfranchised group, she must have had an unusually acute perspective on institutional expectations for student behavior. As someone whose very status as a woman deviated from past descriptions of OU students' identities (see the use of *his* in the 1872-1873 *Ohio University Bulletin*), someone who entered the university under the name "M. Boyd" (*Ohio University Bulletin, 1868-1869* 11)—the only student listed without a first name—her success in the institution would have depended on her knowledge of required academic subjects as well as her knowledge of expectations for student behavior. She would have had to be able to answer questions like, where were students expected to go? When? And what were students expected to spend their time doing? We glimpse some of the risks of being female at a previously all-male postsecondary institution in the 1870s Midwest in Olive San Louie Anderson's autobiographically inspired description of a physically harmed female student in *An American Girl, and Her Four Years in a Boys' College* (68). If being female already marked one as an outsider at a newly coed postsecondary institution, then the female student had to show skill in navigating new social and academic spaces. Also, although the writing that OU's Margaret Boyd left behind takes the form of a diary, as opposed to a speech or an essay submitted for a grade, I believe that it should be taken seriously as a composition artifact because Boyd was

a college student when she produced it, she discusses her rhetorical education in it, and she viewed the diary as a record of her writing progress. For her first



*Figure 1. The Ohio University Class of 1873. Courtesy of the University Archives, Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries.*



entry, on January 1, 1873, she wrote, “This book was given to me Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> by sister Kate [i.e., Catherine Boyd]. I must try and write every day. In after years it may be nice to look over. I must try to improve a great deal this year, every way.” From January 1 until June of 1873, Boyd wrote about her social and intellectual development at OU, supporting Judy Nolte Temple and Suzanne L. Bunkers’ point that nineteenth-century women used diary writing to “shape and control their experiences by means of mastering language” (198). For my purposes, Boyd’s diary is most important because it allows me to compare institutional nomoi to student writing about campus life.

Some of the elaborating or nudging of institutional nomoi evident in Boyd’s diary appears in her coverage of her interactions with elocution professor William Henry Scott, who taught several classes, including rhetoric, and who had recently become president of the university. Scott attended some of the meetings of an OU literary society, made Boyd recite lessons in class, and on some Sundays preached in church about living well, all indicative of campus activity encouraged by the OU catalogs. Yet as Boyd makes clear, Scott did more than follow these roles blindly, and Boyd and her peers did more than follow orders to listen, read, speak, and write. Like the university president in Anderson’s 1878 roman à clef who had “to be all things to all men, and to women, too” (O. Anderson 110), Professor Scott’s involvement in Boyd’s life extended to a range of activities inside the classroom and out (e.g., visiting her at her home). Through this involvement he became a key figure in her late-college life, helping her reflect on her experiences and see how particular communication challenges pertained to each campus activity that she knew. Overspilling the boundaries of coursework, the rhetorical education that Scott encouraged through modeling, teaching, preaching, conversing privately, and participating in student activities took a whole-person cast fitting Arthur E. Walzer’s definition of rhetoric: “Historically, rhetoric is a complete art for shaping students—influencing how they think . . . how they express themselves . . . and how they move and sound” (124).

One of the areas of her life that Boyd discusses most often is her weekly participation in a coed literary society, which by then was a common feature of Midwestern and Western institutions (Ogren 110), though progressive Oberlin lagged behind on this point (Fairchild 183). Both what the OU catalog prescribed and more, Boyd’s literary society meetings occurred on Friday nights and involved formal agenda items, readings and debates among society members, and social stimulation, occasionally with Professor Scott present. All of these factors appear in Boyd’s entry from January 17 when the culmination of her day is the fact that she accompanies a friend to “Society.” There she mentions Scott’s presence: “Prof. Scott came in just as the president [of the literary society] was giving his decision on the debate.” She continues, gesturing to the deliberative

and social work of the society, “From the Minutes of preceding meeting [sic] we learn that a vote of thanks was to be given to the Ladies for their donation of table cover [sic]. It seems it was to be in writing and that it was to have been very nice. The committee reports progress, speeches from Scott, Evans and Walker.” Indicating the centrality of literary society meetings to her weekly life are references such as these: From February 7: “Stay at home this morning to finish my oration. Go in the afternoon and then to society at night. Carrie [a friend] goes with us, I do not enjoy it.” March 20: She is examined by Professor Scott in astronomy. That night she attends a meeting of “The Philos” (i.e., the Philomathean Literary Society, one of OU’s two main literary societies in 1873) where she reports having “a very nice time. A mock trial in which Ballard [a peer] was tried.” The regularity of literary society meetings is still more visible when Boyd alludes to unexpected changes in them, as on April 11: “Ella, Kate and I go to society tonight. I speak ‘I know her.’ There was a stranger there and I thought I never could get through. Ah! little coward that I be.” Elsewhere, Boyd refers to going to literary society meetings with the same two classmates mentioned above. As details of this kind accumulate, they suggest the value that she placed on literary society involvement, for she wrote about that which interested her or contributed to her overall development, as established in her January 1 entry.

But the interpersonal dynamics at literary society meetings quickly allow the meetings to take on a life of their own, apart from OU catalog descriptions—a difference only hinted at when Boyd notes the stranger who attended and frightened her while she was delivering an oration. On Friday, April 25, she depicts a literary society meeting as nearly wild: “We have lots of fun. Some one takes hold of Mc. and pushes him around on the lower hall floor. It is dark and he does not know there is a give along. I call to Ella before he lets go. Well Well Well!!!” Though some of the details elude modern-day readers of Boyd’s diary, we can imagine a picture of coed amusement that is physical and playful, and all happening at or just after a literary society meeting. Also, much as Boyd shares social high points at the literary society meetings, she records social low points whose causes we can only guess. On Friday, May 2, for example, she writes, “Ella, Kate and I go to Society. Effa Ballard is there. We stay till it is out but then we do not stay long.” The variation in tone and the hints of meaningful interactions render her literary society experience a multifaceted contributor to her whole-person development: structured and probably male dominated, yet also social, lively, and refreshingly diverting.

While nineteenth-century literary societies at all-female education institutions strengthened the social bonds of their participants (Kelley 124), many of these literary societies focused on academic and political work (Kelley; Conway 216). Based on archival research at institutions across the country, Mary Kel-

ley explains that all-female literary societies “acted as schools within schools” because the societies emphasized informal academic work, exposure to more books, and participation in debate (117). As female students contributed to literary societies, she explains, the students “experiment[ed] with subjectivities, which were informed by the advanced education they were pursuing” (Kelley 118). At OU’s newly coed literary society, Boyd and other students also experimented with subjectivities; however, based on Boyd’s descriptions of individual literary society meetings, that experimentation transcended ordinary academic activity, adding new dimensions to institutional *nomoi* that encouraged OU students to participate in literary societies. For one thing, Boyd spoke publicly while masking her fear, thereby following a male-dominated rhetorical tradition for her generation (Johnson 22), even though her female peers were acknowledged for contributing table decorations for a literary society meeting, thereby following postbellum advice literature that taught women to support and not challenge men (Johnson 71). For another thing, sometimes she interacted joyfully and freely with male and female literary society members alike, as if postponing academic and professional commitments and momentarily escaping expected gender roles.

Furthermore, Boyd’s recitations for classes, that is, her demonstrated recall of recently taught information (Connors 45, 77), both followed and elaborated on the catalog’s vision of student behavior and that vision’s ties to morality at 1873 OU. The recitations’ importance to her appears in her diary entry from February 4: “Study and recite, Study and recite [—] what monotony! Sometimes I get tired.” In the weeks surrounding this date, she reports reciting in certain buildings, reciting for certain classes (e.g., Mental Science), and reciting for other faculty members when Scott is away on university business. The word *recite* fills many of the diary entries about her academic work. Yet coexisting with and commonly outshining references to her recitations themselves are rich details about the gendered communication environment that she endured and the social networks that sustained her. Near the same time as her “study and recite” entry above, Boyd shares, “Scott wants to know if I ever speak orations. I say, ‘no[.]’ He says he would like to have me speak an original oration two weeks [from then] if I will. The boys [her classmates] say yes I must” (Jan. 25). Over the next two weeks, she records spending her days writing, to the point of missing a prayer meeting, which was exceedingly rare for her as well as a violation of a strict interpretation of the 1872-73 university catalog. “Vainly I call on the Muses,” she laments at one point (Feb. 5). Then, on February 8, she shares the outcome of her preparation: “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 [probably her brother] tonight just finishes me. I wish I could get mad.” As remark-

able as this classroom event was for her, whatever the problem's source, is the fact of her classmates seeing her through it. She concludes her February 8 entry by referencing a letter that she received from a classmate, Kate, and Boyd says that later she and a friend named Lucy visited various people and "had a nice time." Later that month, her friend John Merrill Davis "came in [her] room at college." Boyd reports, "I was all alone and we had quite a long talk. He gives me back my oration that he teased from me several weeks ago" (Feb. 24). This note and an entry from the following day provide a sense of closure to her painful oration from early February, for on February 25 a friend gives her a quotation reading "No real progress without pain & labor." Yet perhaps the clearest sign of her rebound from her February 5 oration is when, on February 22, she worries about moving after the end of the school year and adds, as if free-associating, "I fear 'Rip' [a classmate] & I laughed too much in elocution class this morning! He likes candy." This entry is one of many times when her elocution class appeared to serve a purpose larger than the academic.

Other support from her classmates, male and female, persists in the coming months. One such moment, presented in unusual detail, comes on May 24:

I do not debate as the boys want me to. Scott requests 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 ... he does expect of me, but I will do the best I can any how. I would not have cared so much if the boys had not taken it up so quick[.] They are good & I like them.

Despite the fact that Scott asked her to write an essay, presumably unlike his request to his male students to debate, Boyd's male peers wanted her to join them in debating as they do. Their support led her to care more about this gender-based difference in expectations. Also, verbal support from friends led to a changing of gender restrictions in at least one important instance. On June 17, after having expressed sadness about the masculine word endings on her diploma (which was written in Latin), she wrote that two friends, at least one of whom was male, accompanied her "to Scott's room." She continued, "I tell Scott I do not want a diploma with masculine endings and he says he will have it fixed. We four look it over together and find there are only two words that need changing." Given the gender distinctions that color many of her other interactions, the gender of at least one of Boyd's friends likely mattered for a professor who was accustomed to graduating male students. To this we must note Professor Scott's growing support in the weeks surrounding this event, support expressed in class, church, and individual meetings. A classroom example occurred on Saturday, May 10, the day of her elocution class, when Boyd announces, "I did better on

my oration today than I did the last time. Scott rather praised me.” By June, she attended a class party at Scott’s home where she shares that she had “a nice time” (June 10). On June 18, eight days before her graduation date, she writes, “Had a long walk with Scott today, get back my essay. He says I need not fear about it.” Then, four days before her graduation, she mentions a public lecture given at her church by an unnamed speaker who was probably Professor Scott in his role as university president: “[The lecturer] tells the boys that they may well be proud that they belong to the class that contains the first lady graduate. I can hardly keep the tears from my eyes such a day” (June 22).

It is, however, her graduation-day entry that surpasses all her others in conveying the level of support she felt by the end of her school term:

Day of all days—Commencement day for the class o [sic].  
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 boquets [sic] one from Emma and one  
from Kate Dana. After we are dismissed so many come to  
congratulate me. I get tired of it. (June 26)

While of course this scene transcends the protocol for student behavior clarified by earlier catalogs, the same can be said of Boyd’s experiences in class, at church, and at her literary society meetings. In her writing, Boyd located her overall college development in venues emphasized by OU catalogs, but many of the experiences that she recorded in the greatest detail were defined by the strength of her social connections: her relationships to her classmates, male and female, and her relationship to her professor and eventual supporter, William Henry Scott. The silliness and joys that she alludes to and the pain that she conveys mark her development into a successful member of her college class, someone who would be lauded very publicly by the time of her graduation. And the range of people from whom she drew comfort and by whom she gauged her progress reminds us of the power of networks to give meaning to one’s actions. Using the idea of intergenerational social circulation, feminist theorists have illustrated this point in composition history. For example, Lisa Mastrangelo, in *Writing a Progressive Past: Women Teaching and Writing in the Progressive Era*, teases out connections over time among educators John Dewey and Fred Newton Scott at Michigan and many of their female graduate students who, around 1900, exported the educational theory that they learned from Dewey and Scott to Northeastern women’s colleges where they taught (54-55). But a key difference between that example and Boyd’s network is that whereas Mastrangelo reveals top-down chains

of influence (faculty shaping students), Boyd's account shows influence moving in multiple directions thanks partly to students' efforts to voice their concerns. Sometimes Scott's standards clashed with the desires of students as they tried to accommodate their new female peer, and other women, some of them mentioned in Boyd's diary, soon followed Boyd by graduating from OU. We might read these clashes as *nomoi-as-customs* exerting pressure on *nomoi-as-rules*, in which case we may note an undercurrent of different moral options.

If judged beyond the context of her institution, Boyd's difficulties seem still more considerable and her triumphs somewhat modest. She became the first female graduate of Ohio University decades after female students began graduating from nearby Oberlin College. As early as 1859, Oberlin's female students were allowed to read essays that they had written for commencement ceremonies (Fairchild 181). Boyd left her university with less visual grandeur than did the congress gaiters-attired Lydia Short, the second female graduate of Indiana's Butler University, over a decade earlier (Weidner 259). And Boyd's graduation year places her on the eve of the largest demographic change to have affected American higher education in that era: the rise of female students (Soliday, *The Politics* 45-46). So I must stress that I am tracing signs of the interactions that structured the writing and educational outlook of a student in a particular institutional context. At Ohio University, a classical education in the tradition of early nineteenth century educational ideals persisted, and, contrary to the growth seen at newer agricultural and mechanical universities, enrollment stayed low and local through the 1870s. Thus, small accomplishments for a student such as Boyd may be read as breakthroughs, and the fact that Boyd recorded struggles that she managed through her interactions with classmates and faculty suggests many ways to supplement the roles envisioned for students in institutional literature. Evident in the standards to which Boyd and her classmates held themselves was the fact that their educational guidance transcended classroom walls (or any particular group or society's walls), the fact that they received guidance from faculty who had the power to influence university customs (e.g., by revising diplomas), and the fact that many students advocated for the inclusion of a new kind of student, here a female student. These newer standards support modern-day compositionist Sara Webb-Sunderhaus' defense of the "personal connection" students in some writing classes feel when the students talk with their instructor and write about their "thought processes and feelings." Also, the cross-venue emphasis in Boyd's diary is echoed in Webb-Sunderhaus' desire for "multiple support structures that go beyond a writing program" (111).

Showing another push away from strictly regulated learning and toward an unpredictable and interpersonally rich educational environment is a glimpse of student-teacher interactions in the scrapbook of OU student Grosvenor S.

McKee in 1913-14, when many other universities were prioritizing research over teaching and student activities, and when many composition instructors elsewhere were abandoning relationship-building opportunities like individual student conferences in favor of editing student writing (Connors 151). In a page titled “Professors I Have Met,” McKee lists “Dr. [Edwin Watts] Chubb,” an English professor, as one of his favorite faculty members. McKee mentions general subject areas covered in Dr. Chubb’s course (“Eng. Comp.” and the English poets Tennyson and Browning) as well as the grade that he earned (B-). But McKee also records aspects of Dr. Chubb that speak to the social environment in which McKee wrote and learned. Dr. Chubb’s main hobby, McKee writes, was “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 comments could suggest anxiety McKee had in his composition class; perhaps he once suffered embarrassment for having made a joke at Dr. Chubb’s expense. But overall, and especially in light of the scrapbook page’s commemorative purpose, I read the comments as suggesting an agreeable classroom community. The perspective that McKee shares is corroborated in 1949-1950 by first-year OU student Carol Tyler in *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History*, when Tyler, looking three decades backward, writes that students routinely “read their own stories and poems” at Professor Chubb’s house. Tyler’s and McKee’s comments are mere hints, suggestions about the rhetorical experiences created by faculty and students; but alongside Boyd’s late-nineteenth-century depiction, they draw attention to students who valued and promoted a whole-person rhetorical education that persisted outside of formally designated learning venues and thrived on social, not just intellectual, exchanges.

## THE CASE OF UH

To discuss institutional *nomoi* of the University of Houston before the 1950s, one must remember that UH was founded as Houston Junior College (HJC) in 1927 by the Houston Independent School District (HISD), an arrangement reflecting national trends in the administration of public junior colleges in the late 1920s (Witt et al. 48). From 1927 to 1945, the HISD continued to govern HJC, which became UH in 1934. However, HJC/UH lacked a campus of its own until the late 1930s, initially holding classes at night in Houston’s San Jacinto High School and later in a local Baptist church. So institutional *nomoi* that I examine for this higher education institution come from HISD Superintendent Edison Ellsworth Oberholtzer. (Few details remain in catalogs from

the 1920s, and yearbooks from the 1930s, the earliest period available, reiterate Superintendent Oberholtzer's vision.) To the superintendent's expectations I compare the first set of detailed student writing available from HJC: 1920-1930s pieces written for the student newspaper *The Cougar*. Like Boyd's diary and McKee's scrapbook in the case of OU, many of the *Cougar* articles describe HJC and UH student life itself.

In research collected in the late 1940s, UH Associate Professor James Chester Cochran, supported by records from former Superintendent and later UH President Oberholtzer (Cochran iii), described UH's philosophy as "emphasiz[ing] those educational services growing out of the individual and community educational needs of the citizens of the area" (Cochran 1), a philosophy consonant with many of the junior colleges founded in the 1920s (Witt et al. 40). Categorizing UH as a municipal university, which "operate[s] under some phase of municipal control and serv[es] the local educational needs of a city and its contributing territories (2-3), Cochran linked UH's *raison d'être* to the practical and cultural needs of Houston by offering classes of interest to the city's prominent industries. In addition to serving nearby industry needs, he continued, municipal universities and junior colleges link city school districts to higher education: "The establishment of [municipal universities or junior colleges] means, in effect, the extension upward of the local public school system. Each has been established for the purpose of extending the privileges of higher education to those for whom they would not otherwise be available" (Eckelberry qtd. in Cochran 14). The link to local public schools was seconded in a 1948 article in the *Texas Outlook*, a publication of the Texas State Teachers Association, which called the Houston Junior College of 1927 to 1934 a "branch of the Houston public schools" (Patterson 11).

Official UH records that I see as *nomoi-as-rules* show the institution fitting this description. The charter from the HISD Board of Trustees, published in 1934, framed UH as necessary "to provide a background for intelligent citizenship" (qtd. in Oberholtzer 23). It added that to help "our citizens meet the issues of life," the citizens must "develop the qualities of open-mindedness, adaptability, and a willingness to work together for the common welfare. Although individual initiative must be maintained, citizens of a truly democratic society must become aware of the evils of selfishness and narrow individualism" (qtd. in Oberholtzer 23). In 1945, after the Board of Regents assumed "active duty" of UH (Oberholtzer 29), the university's mission was "to serve all the educational needs of the citizens of this community" (31). It is important to realize that these references to citizens and the community meant, first and foremost, Houston citizens and the Houston community. On January 17, 1944, for example, the UH Board of Trustees voted to make "courses adapted, in length and content,



to the demands for trained personnel for Houston business and industry” (qtd. in Oberholtzer 60), and Houston’s continuing growth kept demand high for trained personnel.

The interests permeating the statements about UH above correspond to the earlier vision of HJC attributed to President Oberholtzer and HJC dean F.M. Black and summarized in a March 7, 1927 *Houston Chronicle* article. There, HJC’s aims were presented as follows:

To accommodate the large number of high school graduates with limited means.

To enable boys and girls who must work at jobs during the day to attend college after working hours in the evening.

One of the great aims of the Junior College is to offer vocational, trade, and business training to those who have no intention of going to college.

To offer an opportunity to the more mature adult group who wish to attend class purely for the love of learning.

The Junior College will be able to adapt its courses to local needs.

To provide pre-professional training for students who plan to enter professional schools. (Watts qtd. in Cochran 33)

Oberholtzer and Black grounded this educational experience in terms of accessibility, practicality, and student and worker proximity, terms indicating the kind of student that they anticipated and the kind of education that this student would receive. He or she would already have a job, would make time for college at night, would pay little for college, and would value skills that had caché in Houston. Thus planned, HJC grew into the most populous junior college in Texas by 1928 (Cochran 51-52).

By 1934 when HJC became UH, the institution’s student body appeared similar to the student population anticipated in 1927. The majority of UH’s students came from local public schools (University of Houston Administration), showing that demographic data from this time matched university leaders’ vision. Also, from 1934 to 1944, the most bachelor’s degrees awarded at UH went to students who majored in education, with English second and business administration third (ibid). The output of educators and business leaders fit the university’s mission; so did the high number of English majors once we see that at this time “English majors” included students who wrote newspaper articles and edited the university yearbook.

This leaves student writing: did it mimic and thus maintain institutional nomoi by portraying HJC as an extension of local public schools and as attentive to the practical and cultural needs of Houston? To an extent, yes. However, HJC students did more than follow an existing script; in their writing, the students also pushed to make HJC appear distinct from nearby primary and secondary schools and from local businesses and industries. In stressing HJC's differences, students supported feelings of institutional pride and, as at OU, located their education amid memorable teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions. The students' views during HJC's early years are important because they show students complicating the terms of their rhetorical education, and nowhere was their work to complicate more apparent than in their writing for the student newspaper *The Cougar*, writing that counted for academic credit and dwelt on students' experiences.

To be sure, *one* way that students discussed their writing and other educational experiences at HJC was by centralizing the new institution's connectedness to the HISD and to local business and industry. The recurrence of these references testifies to the power of institutional expectations to shape how students see themselves. In the 1929-published "Education," a typical article publicizing HJC's local connections, student Helen Cheney lauds HJC for its distinctive service to the local school district. She writes that the HJC is the "only institution in Houston offering the education courses that are required before a person may enter the city system," and she adds that many Rice University students attend HJC for this reason. Her institutional hype hinges on HJC's attraction to other Houston organizations: Rice University and the public school system. Also common in *The Cougar's* early issues are pieces that introduce HJC administrators while also foregrounding HJC-HISD connections. For example, a 1928 article on Dean F.M. Black shares the fact that Black had supervised Houston's secondary schools and overseen the building of San Jacinto High School where he served as principal and where HJC held its first classes ("F.M. Black"). Given the associations conveyed in the article about Dean Black, one's qualifications to uphold expectations at HJC appear to stem from one's nearness to the HISD.

Yet this is not the only or even the most prominent narrative in *The Cougar*. Troubling the institutional nomoi that foregrounded links to local industry and the local school system is the fact that within a few years of HJC's founding, students highlighted characteristics of their education that lacked direct links to surrounding organizations. In some cases, the students asserted the uniqueness and worth of their college education by touting HJC apart from its surroundings. Today's readers might criticize the sensationalism common in newspaper articles from the early twentieth century, but this genre also facilitated students' revisions of institutional nomoi. In at least two ways, students who wrote for

*The Cougar* broadened the idea that, as HJC students, they should further the common (Houston-area) good, train in ways needed by nearby businesses and industries, and treat their education as an extension of a Houston public schools education. First, the students portrayed their rhetorical achievements as commendable in their own right, regardless of needs from the surrounding city. Second, the students highlighted faculty members who created a unique rhetorical education apart from demands of local businesses, industries, and K-12 educators. In short, the students used their newspaper to assert a version of HJC whose significance transcended mere proximity to Houston-based organizations.

In tone, subject matter, and organization, 1920s-1930s articles in *The Cougar* treated HJC students' lives and achievements as intrinsically worthy topics. Pictorial indications of a new identity emerged in 1928 when the paper began featuring a cartoonish image of a cougar across the top of the front page, and when, in the same issue, the paper featured numerous articles urging HJC students to show more school spirit, a stronger collective identity. By April 1929, one issue of *The Cougar* featured front-page articles with titles that spoke loudly and collectively (see Fig. 2): "Status of Junior College Important," "State Recognizes Work Completed at Junior College," "Municipal College Shows Progress in Educational Field" (with the subtitle "History of Houston Junior College Replete With Scholastic Achievement"), "Scholastic Rating of Junior College Above the Average" (*The Cougar*, 1929).

Granted that articles about status and ranking refer to relationships to other institutions, these articles nevertheless downplay the narrative of HJC serving HISD and local business interests and instead support a newer narrative of HJC creating valuable educational experiences. A distinct institutional identity is also suggested by the newspaper editors' decision to place the April 1929 issue's front-page articles around a large, centered article about President and HISD Superintendent Oberholtzer—accompanied by his picture (*ibid*). If this arrangement failed to convey a new sense of HJC's educational value, readers could flip to student testimonials such as Bruce Manley's "Junior College Best Preparation for Life of Higher Education":

When I finished high school I was thoroughly tired of staying at home. Accordingly, a few months later I was standing in line in front of the registrar's office at a university over 2000 miles from home.

I entered the University of Michigan positively knowing that I wanted to become a geologist. When I returned home this past summer, I had lost all interest in ever becoming a geologist, did not care whether or not I ever finished college.

# THE COUGAR

Published by the Journalism Students of the Houston Junior College

HOUSTON, TEXAS, APRIL, 1929

NO. 2

ENROLLMENT  
DATES  
SUMMER TERM  
APRIL 15, 16, 17, 18, 19  
FALL TERM  
SEPT. 17 & 18

ENROLL NOW  
FOR THE  
SUMMER TERM  
AT  
HOUSTON JUNIOR  
COLLEGE

## STATE RECOGNIZES WORK COMPLETED AT THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

### Issuance of Teachers' Certificates Made Possible by State Affiliation

The State Department of Education has given Houston Junior College the honor of being the first in the state to receive certification upon completion of certain required work at Junior College.

The certificate which the State Department of Education has issued to the Houston Junior College is an acknowledgment of the fact that the work done by the college meets the requirements of the State Department of Education for the issuance of a high school certificate of merit. This certificate is the highest honor which the State Department of Education can bestow upon a school which has completed the requirements for the issuance of a high school certificate of merit.

The certificate which the State Department of Education has issued to the Houston Junior College is an acknowledgment of the fact that the work done by the college meets the requirements of the State Department of Education for the issuance of a high school certificate of merit.

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## DR. E. E. OBERHOLTZER



President, Houston Junior College and Superintendent, Houston Public Schools

## STATUS OF JUNIOR COLLEGE IMPORTANT

### Oberholzer Stresses Advantages Offered by Institution

"The Junior College is to the general mind what the High School was to the mind of the past," said Dr. E. E. Oberholzer, superintendent of Houston Public Schools, and president of the Houston Junior College, in a recent interview.

"It is a most valuable institution," said the Junior College president. "The educational training period in years for those that find the need. It is an opportunity for those who cannot afford to attend the Senior College, but who wish to receive the same preparation for the work of the Junior College, as well as also receive that necessary college instruction."

"The Junior College offers the best opportunity for one to two year courses in vocational training and the preparation for professional training. Trades and business require wider knowledge of printing and designing and interpretation of plans and designs. In addition the knowledge it will give the preparation to the Senior College."

Preparation for the fully is most necessary now than ever before. "Senior education" is not possible until the State Department of Education has provided for the State Department of Education."

"Many have asked of me, how the Junior College of Houston originated," Dr. Oberholzer declared. "Many complaints were given me regarding the 'lack of a Junior College' in Houston."

## MUNICIPAL COLLEGE SHOWS PROGRESS IN EDUCATIONAL FIELD

### History of Houston Junior College Replete With Scholarly Achievement

The Houston Junior College was established by the Board of Education in the spring of 1917 after extensive work with representatives from the State Department of Education, University of Texas, New University, and New Houston State Teachers College.

The College opened with a summer session June 5, 1917, in the Box Byrd School High School building with a faculty largely recruited from the ranks of the University of Texas and New Houston State Teachers College. The Houston Junior College has since been established for this session and courses were offered in Education, Spanish, English, History, Biology, Art, and Physical Education.

The first regular session of the college opened September 23, 1917 with a staff and faculty of 100 teachers. During this session the faculty was increased with a view to teaching ability, as well as academic training.

Full instruction and equipment were provided, special provisions being made for classes preparing for professional courses in teaching, engineering, dentistry, and law. In addition to the regular classes of the Junior College, over two hundred students, provided by the various schools of the Houston Junior College, are in receipt of instruction.

During the first year, the work of the Junior College was recognized by the Junior College of the first year, and the law, as well as full instruction in preparation for the Junior College.

## NEW COURSE ON LIST OF TEACHING REQUIREMENT

An especial interest in prospective teachers to an act included in the new law passed by the last legislature. This act provides that students who take the teaching certificate must include in the required course three semester units of government, such as the government of the United States.

Government 101, offered by the Houston Junior College, will satisfy this requirement and will be offered during the summer term. Those who have an interest in government and who wish to receive credit at the end of the summer term should enroll in this course.

## MR. F. M. BLACK



Dean, Houston Junior College, and Director of High Schools, Houston Public Schools

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUMMER COURSES

### Dean Black Anticipates Larger Enrollment for Summer

Courses of instruction to be offered in the Houston Junior College summer session, beginning Monday, June 17, and extending for six weeks, until July 12, have been announced by Dean F. M. Black, according to the Houston Junior College.

Dean Black, anticipating a greater enrollment, officials expect that this year's enrollment will exceed that of the past two years, and anticipating to offer more work than the past two years.

Provision is now already made in the following subjects: English, mathematics, public address, physical education, history, French, Spanish, education, public address, and chemistry and physics.

Students whose names already appeared in the Houston Junior College, should enroll in the summer session of the Houston Junior College.

Students who have not already made their registration should do so at once. The Houston Junior College is now open for the summer session.

## SCHOLASTIC RATING OF JUNIOR COLLEGE ABOVE THE AVERAGE

### Texas Association of Colleges Gives Full Certificate Privileges for Work Done

One of the highest scholastic ratings in the State Junior College in the past two years to the Texas Association of Colleges, according to the report of the Texas Association of Colleges, Houston, Texas, has been given to the Houston Junior College.

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## TEMPORARY HOME OF HOUSTON JUNIOR COLLEGE



Figure 2. The Cougar, April 1929. Courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, University of Houston.

The first few months I was at the university I was completely lost. My best efforts were usually rewarded with low grades. At final examination all the freshmen were worried. Accidents do happen, however, for some of us were allowed to stay.

From my own experiences, I believe that by going to a junior college first, a student should have no such difficulties when he later enters a distant college. In the first place, the professors in a junior college take much more interest in the students because the classes are small. The professors give only short lectures at first, thus accustoming the students to taking notes on long lectures. By waiting a couple of years before entering a larger college, a student is more mature and better able to judge what he wants his life work to be. I feel that by going to junior college this year I have learned a number of things that will improve the character of my work when I return to the University of Michigan next fall.

Manley, whose educational commitment is cemented by his tie to the older and better-known University of Michigan across the country, adds to the other articles' message by mentioning small class sizes, professors' interest in students, and the need for students to consider learning and life options. His experience also supports institutional nomoi concerning HJC's role in providing practical higher education options for local students, but this constitutes one of many points supported by his narrative.

More jubilant and prescriptive articles followed that encouraged students to serve as advertisers of HJC. "Be Booster," an anonymous article from December 1929—months after the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression—explained,

Many high school students judge the College by the actions and words of their friends who are now enrolled there. *Let your words and your actions show that you are attending a real, live college, and that you are proud of your school.* If you can not get this attitude, why are you here? Better far that you should get out and try some other institution, where you may find matters even less to your liking. (emphasis added)

If before this period students selected topics and organized articles to imply a new direction for the identity of HJC students, now students called directly for their fellow students to show pride or leave. The idea of attending HJC purely for the sake of convenience (e.g., family ties, low living and tuition costs) appears unac-

ceptable to the writer or writers of “Be Booster.” Now students were requested to identify unabashedly with a college that had not even existed a few years earlier.

Given the plethora of articles emphasizing HJC students’ accolades and positive opinions, what else might readers need in order to see HJC as a distinct and valuable entity for reasons beyond its local economic and educational contributions? By the early 1930s, one answer became student organizations, the rise of which reflected national trends among junior colleges (Witt et al. 105). At HJC, many of the student organizations blended intellectual work with social engagement in ways comparable to the literary societies experienced by OU’s class of 1873. In 1933, oratory and theater assumed the most prominent places on the front page of HJC’s *The Cougar*, to the point that by November the newspaper led with an article on the Dramatic Club. By February 1934, front-page articles covered numerous student activities, and by March 1934, the largest and most prominently featured front-page article addressed an upcoming debate that would be followed by a school dance. This article ends with the statement, “The contest has been arranged for the night of the Freshman Dance so that those attending the debate may go the [sic] dance which will begin at ten o’clock at the University Club building” (“Junior College” 4). As these examples indicate, students presented academic contests and social bonding together, and without attempting to link them to Houston’s educational and economic needs. Also emphasizing HJC-facilitated social life, students added front-page articles on a sophomore prom, a speakers’ club, and pro and con perspectives on dancing. On the front page of one November 1933 issue alone, readers find updates on the Science Club, the Outdoor Club, the Dramatic Club, and the Honor Society, as well as announcements of academic and athletic achievements (*The Cougar*, 1933).

The fact that contributors to *The Cougar* dwelt on organizations and events that encouraged the building of intra-institutional, not just inter-institutional, relationships indicates a movement—organized or intuited, direct or indirect—to modify earlier depictions of HJC students as trainees of local businesses and education interests. By implication, the movement created a different moral standpoint, suggesting that a focus on institutional identity building is good or right. Writing from *The Cougar* turns more decidedly in this direction given its additional focus on the popularity and amiability of individual HJC professors. This is the case when a Harvey W. Harris, instructor of “English and public speaking” and “chairman of the [HJC] Social Committee,” is quoted about HJC’s appeal in an article titled “English Prof Has Praise for College” (Shepperd). Harris, who “will be in charge of the English department during the summer term,” is quoted as saying, “I understand there is quite a demand being made for the second half of sophomore English . . . and I feel that in case sufficient demand is made for it the administration will

offer the course” (qtd. in Shepperd). By 1934, professors were singled out as spokespeople for all the courses that they taught, acting nearly as salespeople. In a section of the newspaper called “Rambling Reporter,” appearing soon after HJC’s transformation to the University of Houston (UH), one finds:

Visit Mr. Holt’s classes and you will wish you could squeeze in a period with him. He even makes poetry interesting. In expounding the whys and wherefores of poetry he finds place for little interesting or humorous happenings that lend a ready explanation to some point. He says “Poetry is like olives, you [sic] have to cultivate a taste for it.”

Accompanying this enticement is an invitation to visit faculty member L. Standlee Mitchell’s English class to be entertained by his jokes. (Although it can’t support broad conclusions, the fact that some early-twentieth-century students at both OU and HJC/UH praised English professors for their jokes indicates one way in which student-instructor relationships developed.) Another enticement in “Rambling Reporter” appears in a humorous description of Professor Harris’s popularity: “Due to an overcrowded condition in Public Speaking I, the class has been divided into three sections with a chairman over each section. Mr. Harris, instructor, tries to be present in all three of these classes simultaneously, and comes nearer to accomplishing that feat than one might think.”

The tradition above continued and intensified in subsequent issues. For example, in late 1934, Mr. Holt is singled out as follows:

Professor Holt, instructor of English, is one of the most charming and pleasing personalities at the University. He presents his course in an interesting manner, commenting frequently on the poem or author under discussion. Not only does Mr. Holt explain the poem to the n<sup>th</sup> [sic] degree, but he also adds that personal touch concerning his views on the philosophy of the poem.

Mr. Holt has an excellent sense of humor and finds something humorous in the most serious poetry. All students enrolled in his classes are beginning to think seriously of the meaning of ‘fatalism’ and its outcome. (“Personal”)

In examples such as this, students emphasize the worth of particular courses by describing their professors’ charisma, frequently their humor. What emerges as the trend continues is a picture of HJC/UH as an organization whose students and faculty control the education to be found therein, an organization that,

while connected to a larger city, should be experienced for the mini-societies that it cultivates.

Featuring more articles in the late 1920s and early 1930s than I can analyze here, *The Cougar* fails to support a single conclusion about how students portrayed HJC and the literacy practices encouraged therein. Even as some articles spotlighted new interactional possibilities at the college, other articles continued to discuss HJC's value in terms of its ability to meet "a need in the community" and its "distinct usefulness in the educational system of the city," as one 1932 article put it ("Dear Old College"). What is important for my purposes is the fact that both of these trends coexisted, creating a discursive environment where students' visions of themselves and their education began to fill prime sections of the newspaper. Much as the cases of OU's Margaret Boyd and Grosvenor S. McKee show students nudging institutional nomoi in a new direction, contributions to HJC's *The Cougar* show students acknowledging and broadening President Oberholtzer's vision of students' educational purposes and priorities. These are not cases of students revolutionizing their rhetorical education, but cases of students using writing to re-center, slightly but significantly, the terms of their rhetorical education. Evidence from OU and UH shows students moving away from officially recognized identities and actions and toward personally meaningful approaches to their rhetorical education.

## CROSS-SITE LESSONS

As discussed in Chapter One, composition scholars and instructors seeking to make sense of where they teach may feel paralyzed when faced with seemingly limitless possibilities for studying the notion of place, whether place is conceptualizing as a rhetorical ecology (Rice) or as "activities, actors, situations, and phenomena [that] are conceived as independent, diverse, and fused through feedback" (Fleckenstein et al. 389). Where does one start? Which "activities, actors, situations" and so on should one select? Based on the evidence in this chapter, one viable starting place could be tracking the nomoi underlying students' actions in college (institutional nomoi) as well as the nomoi that students endorse, perhaps informally or indirectly, as they work together to elaborate on institutional nomoi. With this done, one may look for tensions between the assumed goodness or rightness of each nomos. Even if, through their writing and other rhetorical activities, college students adjust institutional nomoi only slightly, that adjustment creates an opportunity to examine new convictions that aren't immediately or necessarily preserved in institutional literature about the direction in which a university should head and about the kind of students or student-writers a university should produce. If nomos-as-custom never manages



to become *nomos-as-rule*, then that yields another dynamic to explore. This analytical thread accentuates *one* set of interactions—students’ interactions with institutional codes—that scholars and instructors may take up and consider at other institutional sites without denying the many factors in play when a writer writes. The thread positions scholars and instructors to speak back to local histories of composition by asking how academic values (Masters 146) and “local values” (Ritter, *Before Shaughnessy* 136) have played out institutionally; how institutional discourses such as guidelines for student behavior have been interpreted by particular students or by particular classes or generations of students; and how personal writing (e.g., diaries, scrapbooks), journalism (e.g., articles, advertisements), or other writing genres have enabled students to suggest new ways of acting and identifying.

While I will return to pedagogical applications in Chapter Six, a productive starting point for writing teachers who attend to present-day interactions of student writing and institutional expectations is to ask, what expectations for student behavior are upheld by my institution, and how do those expectations differ from expectations found at other institutions? With this known, one can ask, how are my students, through their writing, interacting with their institutional expectations? If alignment between the two isn’t visible, an instructor could study strategies by which students construct different visions of themselves and reasons for attempting such revisions. An implication for teaching is that instructors may want to think more deliberately about the relationship between their (institutionally informed) teaching goals and the writing environments that they cultivate in classes and in other areas of student life. Ultimately, the instructor who investigates these issues would be thinking about context, but to stop here, with the notion of context, allows the instructor to overlook the specific interactional qualities that this chapter’s analysis of student writing at OU and UH has surfaced.

Of course, any analysis suffers from “incompleteness and distortions” (Fleckenstein et al. 389), in this case by elevating one set of relationships over other sets of relationships. So I accept the sophistic tenet of *dissoi logoi*, or opposing arguments, by turning now to a historical analysis that privileges a broader set of interactions: student writing and once-current issues for the students’ surrounding state or city.