

CHAPTER THREE

TRACKING LINES OF COMMUNICATION: STUDENT WRITING AS A RESPONSE TO CIVIC ISSUES

Writing of all kinds is connected to so many people, ideas, and things that untangling and studying its locatedness might seem manageable only through thick description or broad theorizing. In this chapter as elsewhere, I strive to occupy a space between these two positions, using concepts with sophistic roots to elevate one connection at a time between college student writing and its surroundings. As Chapter Two showed, one connection worth tracking between college student writing and other people and ideas is the writing's connection to *nomoi* that have dictated desirable student behaviors in the area where the writing was initiated and completed. Studying this set of relationships can highlight behaviors that are requested by institutional power holders as well as behaviors from students on the ground, so to speak, students who, through their writing, amended received behavioral scripts. But studying other connections between college student writing and its surroundings can support more understandings of the writing's spatial work.

In this chapter, I examine some of the ideological work of student writing in the late 1800s to early 1900s in the case of OU and from the late 1920s to the mid 1940s in the case of UH, periods when each university fought to clarify its purpose to itself and others in the wake of surrounding growth. To accomplish this, I unpack the relationship between student writing and an emerging cultural region in the case of OU and the relationship between student writing and an emerging metropolitan area in the case of UH. At OU, college student writing in many genres and venues can be framed as a collective response to the social isolation and political marginalization that engulfed southeastern Ohio, and indeed much of the area now called Appalachia, from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. In Houston, early-twentieth-century college student writing of various genres can be framed as a collective response from working and nontraditional college students to a city population that had not systematically heeded this group's perspectives in civic discussions. Thus, I frame student writers as attentive to coursework at the same time that the students attended to geographically

specific political, economic, and cultural conditions. Although students at OU and UH submitted most of their writing for academic credit, I argue that the students were also submitting ideas to a surrounding populace, ideas through which the students sought to represent other students at their institution.

This chapter's focus on responsiveness is informed by *kairos*, frequently taken to mean the timeliness of a message, and a concept preceding even the First Sophists. The author of *Dissoi Logoi* quotes an ancient verse containing the clause "there is nothing that is in every respect seemly or shameful, but the *Right Moment* takes the same things and makes them shameful and then changes them round and makes them seemly" (50, emphasis added). Later, the writer draws on the line from Aeschylus "there are occasions when God respects an opportune moment for lies" (51). These examples point to opportunities for actions that may be judged any which way depending on the interplay of custom and timing. Gorgias shows his devotion to *kairos* in his *Encomium of Helen* and *Defense on Behalf of Palamedes*, and, as scholars have argued, implies many ways in which *kairos* works (D. Sullivan 318-19; Sipiora 18-19). He observes, "It has happened that people, after having seen frightening sights, have also lost presence of mind for the present moment" (Gorgias, "*The Encomium*" 17), and, at a formal defense before a court, he says that "the present occasion requires" him to create a defense filled with self-praise (Gorgias, "*A Defense*" 32). Here he ties one type of witnessed event to a temporary moment of disturbed feeling and a high-stakes social situation to the necessity for a particular line of reasoning. By extension, it would seem that each other sight or social gathering supports a unique moment of feeling or response. If Gorgias also wrote a treatise titled *Peri Kairou*, or *On the Right Moment in Time*, a possibility acknowledged by several scholars (e.g., Sipiora 4; Kerferd 45), then we have little room to doubt that a time-bound version of *kairos* lay at the heart of his teachings.

Gorgias' views on *kairos* hold even for much recent scholarship. In the 1980s and 1990s when John Poulakos analyzed key concepts undergirding ancient sophistic teachings, he found that one of the main ideas underlying the First Sophistic enterprise was *kairoi*, or "opportune rhetorical moments" created or used by people to act in a unique situation (*Sophistical* 61). Studying speech as opposed to writing, Poulakos stressed the temporally disruptive dimension of *kairos*: "The rhetor who operates mainly with the awareness of *kairos* responds spontaneously to the fleeting situation at hand, speaks on the spur of the moment, and addresses each occasion in its particularity, its singularity, its uniqueness" (ibid). His focus on situation, with its similarity to Lloyd Bitzer and Richard Vatz's debate circa 1970 about the rhetorical situation, is shared by others, including Bruce McComiskey, who, in *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric*, called *kairos* the act of "seizing the opportune moment, choosing arguments

depending on the demands of the situation” (111). If accepted without further qualifiers, these definitions keep *kairos* tied to speech.

Of course, the fact that I am studying writing places different demands on conventional appropriations of *kairos*. Writing sticks around beyond one exchange and, as Jenny Edbauer Rice has shown, may be reused or repurposed beyond a single moment in the service of various goals. So to adapt conventional understandings of *kairos* to a student writing milieu, I extend a point that McComiskey makes about the role of language in questioning and disrupting discursive systems. In the final chapter of *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric*, as he analyzes the rhetoric of the global community, McComiskey deemphasizes communication situations that are bounded by clear timeframes and emphasizes rhetoric that speaks back to particular regulatory circumstances. Building on Michel de Certeau’s concept of tactics, McComiskey writes,

[*kairos*] speaks not of argument from institutional authority, not of an immutable base from which relations to others might be consistently managed; it speaks not a discourse of globalization, as Plato and others did, but a discourse of uncertainty, a discourse of tactics among powerful strategic discourses. *Kairotic* arguments do not dictate; they respond. (113, emphasis added)

When power is taken into account, according to this explanation, a *kairotic* argument becomes a specific wielding of language to problematize existing relations. For example, one might use writing to expose connections and interests that were previously hidden by socially privileged discourses.

McComiskey does not forget timeliness and situation. Still he defends “tactics that harness the power of the right moment, that restrict their interventions to the specificity of particular situational contexts” (115-16) so as to diminish the tactics’ cooptation by regulatory systems. But once he finishes unpacking *kairotic* action from the angles of hegemony and globalization, the “right moment” suggests a myriad of options. In one of his concluding points, a comparison of critical tactics and productive tactics, he gives the following summary of culture and change: “Cultures evolve through the production of texts, and if enough subversive texts are entered into the flow of cultural production, then the culture itself will change *gradually*, incorporating subversive ideas into the very fabric of its own process” (117, emphasis added). When he then endorses “tactics that, a little at a time, work toward challenging marginalizing strategies” and quotes Theodor Adorno’s line “steady drops hollow the stone” (117), he allows for the possibility that today we can consider several right moments, or several right days or years, for subversive texts to effect cultural change. To this, I would stress

that if focusing on writing, as in pre-1950s college student writing, we find more reasons to relax speech-oriented notions of *timeliness* and *situation* and instead notice the steady local work of texts to create a narrative seeking cultural change. Below, I examine historical student writing in terms of its responsiveness to existing social conditions, and I argue that one may act kairotically, in the tactical sense noted above, despite whether one responds directly and immediately, within a single fleeting moment. My evidence suggests that students at OU and UH responded in multiple waves to an originating issue: in the case of OU, the decision of nineteenth-century Ohio state legislators to direct educational funds to institutions other than Ohio University, and in the case of UH, the decision of the Houston Independent School District to create and govern two junior colleges for this city's population. In this way, a conception of kairos updated to reflect college student writing can support another angle by which scholars and instructors interpret composition's spatial work, an angle revealing composition's ideological contributions to rural or metropolitan region making.

COUNTERING REGIONAL NEGLECT AT OU

OU student writing in the decades surrounding 1900 shows students, increasingly students who came to OU from industrializing areas in the north and west, writing about sites and issues of special importance to OU, Athens, and rural, hilly southeastern Ohio. While today we lack access to academic essays written by students across the years and to most of the teaching materials of the students' writing instructors, clues from literary societies, student newspapers, creative pieces, student theses, and, by the 1940s, certain pedagogical materials reveal a unifying theme in the writing experiences of OU students from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s: generations of OU students investigated connections among themselves, their institution, and the surrounding town and region. Taking no one form or approach, their investigations encouraged readers to reflect on the significance of OU, Athens, and southeastern Ohio as the students interacted with these areas. Although late-twentieth-century Rhetoric and Composition scholars have shown that numerous American colleges and universities circa 1900 prompted students to write about familiar, observable topics (Connors 64; Kitzhaber 108), an analysis that considers state-level changes from the late 1800s shows that early OU students did more than fulfill class or extracurricular expectations when they wrote about the value of their university and its environs. The students also acted kairotically—tactically, from university-specific perspectives and in response to specific political conditions. The recurrence of this tendency across time and forms gives those of us teaching and studying writing today a fuller understanding of what it means for college students' academic or class-

room writing to do extra-academic work.

One of the issues dominating the history of higher education in dramatically growing nineteenth-century Ohio is the fact that state leaders had to make difficult decisions about how to fund an overabundance of postsecondary institutions, and civic and education leaders from all parts of the state worked to obtain whatever funding and political and economic goodwill they could get. In light of these state-level dealings, locally focused OU student writing in the decades around 1900 can be seen as a strategic series of responses to state leaders who had begun allocating significant amounts of education funding and related support to new postsecondary institutions in central, northern, and western Ohio. I argue that it became more than a fulfillment of course or extracurricular duties when OU students created positive portrayals of Athens and the surrounding land and when students used their writing to expose the area's challenges. The students were not writing political pamphlets and organizing within a single academic term or year, but nevertheless the students responded to feelings of sociopolitical neglect that were descending upon OU, Athens, and southeastern Ohio in the wake of Ohio's nineteenth-century growth.

By the mid-late 1800s, the oratorical and classical tradition of education still found at OU as at many other colleges and universities paralleled state developments such as the rise of Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, Dayton, and Toledo, all north or west of Ohio University, as hubs of state commerce, industry, and politics. Throughout the same period, political leaders from the earlier-settled southeastern corner of the state saw their requests for tax revenue and other resources dismissed by the state legislature (Peters; T. Hoover). In 1869, one OU alumnus who became active in Athens civic groups wrote, "At the present time [OU] is with difficulty sustained and its condition is no credit to the State" (Walker qtd. in Super 29). The alumnus attributed the conditions of the university to the state legislature's "mismanagement and trickery," which, as early as the 1840s, kept OU from revenue from the university's land reappraisals (*ibid*; see also T. Hoover 78). Charles William Super, president of OU from 1884 to 1896 and 1899 to 1901, added his disappointment that nineteenth-century families in the entire Athens area experienced poor educational conditions. He wrote,

There is considerable evidence to the effect that the children in the new environment [in and around Athens, Ohio] grew up less intelligent and less interested in knowledge than their parents. Most of the latter had acquired something more than the rudiments of an education in the "East," although the term East must be somewhat liberally interpreted. They carried with them into the wilderness some of the books they

owned. We also see from the autobiography of Thomas Ewing [one of OU's first alumni] that they took infinite pains to increase their scanty store. When these books were lost or worn out they were often not replaced. (30)

Weaving between Athens-area families and OU specifically, Super wrapped OU and its environs in a narrative of decline. A later historian wrote that although some of the earliest settlers in Ohio thought OU would "become one of the great American universities," the institution instead suffered through "years of hardship and frustration, limited facilities, enrollments, and equipment" (T. Hoover 79). Based on these accounts from politically and historically aware local residents, we might ask, were OU students likely to have similar concerns?

Although late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century OU student writing that remains today includes poetry, descriptions, and newspaper articles, not manifestos or letters to state leaders, the fact that the students wrote favorable pieces about local sites and issues while intrastate disputes about educational resources and status persisted reveals possible influences on their writing. One example of the intrastate disputes was an extended written debate in and around the 1870s between a heritage society called the Athens County Pioneer Association and a well-known Cincinnati publisher. This exchange, involving numerous letters sent between these two parties and to other historical authorities, hinged on whether the location of the state's first library was in Athens County in southeast Ohio or in Cincinnati in (the more urbanized and industrialized) southwest Ohio. The exchange, which suggests the importance of regional location on state discourses, led to a discussion about historical sources and about definitions of terms like *first* and *library* (Athens County). A second, university-based example of intrastate tensions concerned the relationship between advocates for OU's financial interests and advocates for The Ohio State University's (OSU's) financial interests. OU President Super went as far as to portray OU's late-1800s trustees as "either inside the fort defending [OU] against enemy onslaughts or on the outside trying to collect the [monetary] tribute which they claimed was justly their due" (26). With OU presented as a "fort" guarding against "enemy onslaughts," Super bemoaned OU's financial conditions as the state grew and saw its higher education needs multiply. For scholars today, placing intrastate disputes such as these alongside locally focused OU student writing from the same time period reveals how neatly student writing that praised or defended OU, Athens, or southeast Ohio fit into a larger tradition of Athens and southeastern Ohio residents seeking support, or at least recognition, from a state population that increasingly valued newer social and commercial centers. As I explain below, student writing across the same time period added "steady drops" in an

effort to “hollow the stone,” to return to Adorno’s metaphor of social change as gradual and collective.

Some of the earliest OU student writing that has survived either blended writing with oratory (as was common in the mid 1800s) or did journalistic work; in both cases students documented or even defended their college environs, encouraging reflection about the relevance of their university, Athens, or southeastern Ohio. While literary societies at other institutions focused on debates about national social issues and about the value of historical figures and intellectual contributions (Ogren 49-50), students in OU’s Philomathean Literary Society in 1837-38 made room to debate questions such as, “Is Athens a suitable situation for a literary institution?” (qtd. in J. White 38), and students in the Athenian Literary Society in 1843 debated the question, “Should the O.U. [sic] be removed from Athens?” in addition to expected topics (qtd. in J. White 57). The latter year also saw the student-run newsletter *The Echo and University Record* publish an essay titled “Removal of the College,” in which students reported on a proposal from state legislators to move OU to central or northern Ohio. The writers of “Removal of the College” supported a move to the geographic center of Ohio, concluding, “Then, and *not till* then will the Ohio University take a rank among the Literary Institutions of the land, consistent with its lofty name and the character of the distinguished men who conduct its affairs” (“Removal”).

The next mass-distributed writing from OU students that has been retained comes from the 1870s when, in volume one of *The Student’s Magazine*, unidentified students push for town-and-gown relations that interweave the interests of OU students and other Athens residents. The students write, “A word to the people of Athens. The interests of the Town and College are inseparable; and if the College is benefited by the publication of a journal, so also is the Town. And so much as the citizens encourage and aid us, just so much do they advance their own interests” (“Editorials” 25). Shortly thereafter, the writers make a case for how *The Student’s Magazine* can portray OU and its various supporters: “We now promise on our part that if we receive fair patronage and aid...[we will] use our utmost endeavors to see that the MAGAZINE reflects no discredit on the institution which it represents, and to make it worthy the support of its friends” (25). In turn, these writers continue, OU students can make a point of supporting nearby businesses:

The business men [sic] who encourage us by advertising should in return receive the patronage of the students ... [Local businesspeople] desire and expect some income from their patronage, and we should do our part that they be not disappointed.

Let every student then, who has any interest in the welfare of the MAGAZINE, and of the college, notice our advertising columns, and bestow his patronage accordingly. (26)

The article's depiction of Athens residents frames students and non-students as capable of supporting each other, reminding readers that patronage can work in multiple ways. Also, the refusal of the article writers to isolate OU students' interests from the interests of nearby townspeople carries over to later depictions of the Athens area.

Among *The Student's Magazine* more glowing pieces about OU-Athens-southeast Ohio was its 1880 reprint of the poem "Athens, Ohio," written by 1833 alumnus and Marietta, Ohio, native William Dana Emerson probably during or soon after his student years. The poem's reappearance in *The Student's Magazine*, then in President Super's 1924 history of OU and in 1920s university bulletins shows one way that generations of OU affiliates, students, and university leaders attempted to maintain or advance an image of OU-Athens-southeast Ohio as a center of education and idyllic natural scenes. Nearly every line in the poem praises Athens and its surroundings, and I find it likely that what Gorgias had called "the present occasion" requiring praise ("*A Defense*" 32) spanned a series of decades for OU students and others who recirculated "Athens, Ohio." Bringing pastoral themes common to some Romantic literature to the hilly southeast Ohio landscape, the poem begins,

Sweet Athens! The home of learning and beauty,
How I long for thy hills and thy rich balmy air:
For thy wide-spreading green, smiling sweetly on duty,
And the valley beneath, and the stream winding there:
On the north the high rock, on the south the lone ferry:
The ville on the east, and the mill on the west (Emerson)

Notably, the first two ideas that Emerson associates with Athens are "learning and beauty." After this, he pays tribute to the town's natural surroundings as well as to events that facilitated student development, for sprinkled throughout are references to the university curriculum and the literary societies, including the "fun of blunders at each recitation!" (Emerson). However, more revealing is the fact that multiple Athenians published it before and after 1900, while the nationally influential William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, was delivering addresses predicting a bleak future for poorly funded postsecondary institutions (Diener 54). The timing and venues of the poem's reappearances hint at the poem's usefulness to OU members who were invested

in upholding a flattering image of their institution and southeast Ohio despite rapid population and economic growth, as well as related increases in political clout, to the north and west. Moreover, in 1911, other locally focused creative writing by OU alumni circulated publically when OU history professor Clement L. Martzoff published William Dana Emerson's poem "To the Ohio River" and William Edward Gilmore's poem "Lines Written on Mount Logan" in a book of Ohio poetry. These poems join "Athens, Ohio," in emphasizing the natural beauty of southern and eastern Ohio.

On a basic level, the promotion of these writings as OU, Athens, and southeast Ohio fought state neglect show that the act of focusing attention can be kairotic, a tactic of recognizing the idea cluster OU-Athens-southeastern Ohio "among powerful strategic discourses" (McComiskey 113). Powerful discourses to which OU students responded included political, economic, and cultural perspectives that downplayed southeastern Ohio's interests when setting state priorities and remembering state achievements. And even though today we cannot know exactly how many people were influenced by locally focused OU student writing that circulated in the decades around 1900, we can sometimes see the writing's entry into local public awareness. For example, at OU's Columbiad Literary Society, which lasted from 1895 to 1901 and held its meetings in the home of an OU professor (at first Willis Boughton, later Edwin Watts Chubb), student members shared their writing with each other and with Athens residents such as the host professor (*The Columbiad* 1). Though the society concentrated on "purity of language, creative work, and the development of American literature" (*The Columbiad*), student members also shared writing about topics familiar to OU and Athens, Ohio, audiences. At a meeting on February 26, 1896, a date when the society's recorder kept unusually detailed notes, students read poems called "An Arbor," "Cascade Glen," "An Idol," "To Alma Mater," "In Memoriam & [?] in [?] Frieze," "To Dr. F. Cacker[?]," "Beta Theta Pi," "When Greek Meets Greek," and "To John Greenleaf Whittier," and a story installment titled "The Pedagogue" (*The Columbiad* 52). These titles hint at foci that the students found worthy of capturing in writing, including fraternity and sorority systems ("Beta Theta Pi" and "When Greek Meets Greek"); one's school, college, or university ("To Alma Mater"); and teaching or teachers ("The Pedagogue" and possibly "To Dr. F. Cacker[?]"). Of the remaining topics, "An Arbor" and "Cascade Glen," even if intended to be imaginative, likely reflected the wooded, hilly terrain around Athens. From sharing and discussing writing on these topics, students in attendance would have learned more about campus and non-campus life. Any non-student townspeople in attendance would have been exposed to descriptive accounts of university social life and nearby rural scenes and would have had time to respond and critique. Finally, professors and administrators

(e.g., Edwin Watts Chubb, who became both) would have seen how students and others imbue nearby locations with meaning.

The tendency of some students to write the local, which was portrayed as a chain of interaction between OU students and Athens residents, carried over to graduate student Elizabeth Irene Smith's 1938 master's thesis on OU history. Both a primary source (a piece of pre-1950s student writing) and a secondary source (a history of OU that synthesizes earlier records), her thesis casts 1890s OU students as beholden to a town that supported the students when the university could not:

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

Like many OU students from the 1800s, Smith views the everyday lives of OU students and other Athens residents as intertwined, such as when she argues, “[local] public opinion was an effective means of social control in the students’ activities” (111).

A final point meriting attention about the student writing that I consider here is that some of it stemmed from the wishes or allowances of faculty members—a point that I discuss more fully in Chapter Four. That is, even if students initiated and executed regionally aware rhetorical acts in their newspapers, literary societies, and extracurricular creative writing, the writing that the students completed for academic credit, like Elizabeth Irene Smith's thesis, would have had to comply with the standards of faculty or other supervisors. So Smith's thesis as well as undergraduate student writing that followed academically approved writing modes like description and exposition both fulfilled academic expectations and exposed topics of special interest in southeast Ohio. One textbook that supported this dual purpose writing was *College Composition: A Brief Course*, written by three OU English department faculty members and published in 1943. The authors, who comprised half of the English department's full professors as of 1940 and 1950 (*Ohio University Bulletin, 1940-1941, 1950-1951*), taught students to look to their own community for inspiration and writing topics: “[the student] has only to open his eyes, for there is a world around him so full of interest and tragedy and comedy that he can see and hear enough to provide himself with more material than he could ever use” (Caskey,

Heidler, and Wray 4). Initially, the textbook reads as a practical application of Deweyian-Progressivism, which privileged experiential education and the role of the self in society. However, an additional possibility appears once we notice that the textbook authors focus their summaries and activities on a community that, while unnamed, bears a striking resemblance to Athens, Ohio. They encourage readers to describe the sight of students in raincoats hurrying to class in the springtime (4). The authors present a hypothetical scenario of college themes that an instructor would likely assign, such as “My Landlady” and “My First Walk Under the Elms” (6). They ask students to “conduct an investigation of [their] college surroundings” (41). Also, they suggest writing topics such as “A College Room” and “My Roommate” (41-42). In terms of weather, vegetation, and social climate, these topics reflect the environment of Athens, not, for example, much of the American West. Students in Athens would indeed have worn raincoats in the springtime and walked under American elms, and many students would have lived in quarters where they had landlords and roommates.

By the late 1940s, students were using common discursive modes to investigate local topics and activities, as evidenced in an honors first-year composition class’s publication of a three-volume institutional history (discussed at length in Chapter Four): *Ohio University in the 1920s* (one volume) and *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* (two volumes). To complete the descriptive or explanatory pieces filling these volumes, students researched print sources such as local newspapers and interviewed university authority figures to detail the social life of past OU students. One student wrote about selective student clubs such as a Folklore Club and a Booklover’s Club, as well as regionally aware clubs such as the Rural Club, created for “students who were interested in rural life” (Hahnel). Another student commented on OU’s nineteenth-century history, calling OU’s first years bright and then observing that OU closed for three years in the 1840s due to “a lack of funds.” This student continued, “In 1848, when [the university] reopened, many of the former students had gone elsewhere and enrollment was small; however, in the next few years it began expanding again although there was never enough money available for repairs and improvements” (Morris, “Introduction—1900”). Whether students such as these described local clubs for the purposes of documentation or defense, and whether the students reviewed moments of OU’s past financial distress for the purpose of applying blame or commemorating institutional perseverance, the students, now several decades after 1900, were continuing a tradition of writing about events and activities that had shaped OU, Athens, and southeast Ohio. More than generating knowledge for knowledge’s sake, many of the students and their mentors can be seen as striving to keep the work and needs of their institution visible and appreciated during a time when memories lingered of near invisibility.

Despite the fact that most of the OU student writing that has been retained from the decades around 1900 was not overtly political in form or tone, and much of it sidestepped direct contributions to state-level political, economic, and cultural discussions, the writing can be understood in a context beyond that of the university alone and within that of a state whose centers of education, business, and industry were still emerging in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the tendency of OU students to bypass direct challenges to state-level discussions makes it all the more compelling as strategic counters to powerful discourses, for the writing shows how genres that were approved by institutional authority figures and perceived as generally apolitical can support local rhetorical engagement. Cases of college students in pre-1950s Houston further illuminate how apolitical-seeming genres can dress students' ideas in the vestments of academic legitimacy and, thus approved, render students' perspectives intelligible to wider audiences.

ADVOCATING A NEW KIND OF STUDENT IN HOUSTON

At UH and its community college predecessors, pre-1950s student writing fit a number of genres, and if studied apart from its relationship to the founding of Houston Junior College (HJC) and Houston Colored Junior College (HCJC), the student writing could be interpreted as exercises in perpetuating empty writing forms: the newspaper article, the descriptive essay, the research paper. Also, pre-1950s student writing at UH blurred lines between the nascent specialization area called composition and disciplines such as journalism, public speaking, theater, education, and creative writing. My argument here is that the genres and disciplines in which these students wrote reveal a strategy by which students completed college requirements while also entering local rhetorical exchanges. Genre and disciplinary location facilitated the writing's public work by letting students communicate their interests and expose, in academically approved ways, educational problems. As with historical OU writing, students from HJC and HCJC did not respond to one person and act in a single fleeting situation, as a speech-oriented version of *kairos* would demand, but wrote of their lives and shared their insider perspectives on education, especially higher education, to readers in a city that had no sizeable population of Houston-area public college students, no demographic of this type to reach, until the 1920s.

The most well-known interaction in Houston to which pre-1950s UH students responded was a mid-1920s discussion between leaders of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) and Houston high school students who lacked higher education opportunities unless they left the city or entered the private and selective Rice University. In 1926, approximately twelve high school

students met with HISD Superintendent Oberholtzer to discuss the city's higher education limitations (Oberholtzer 19; Nicholson 10). Though no transcription remains from that meeting, local lore holds that it resulted in Oberholtzer's decision to open HJC and the supposedly separate but equal HCJC to prepare growing numbers of working students to enter civic and professional life. Nationally, public junior colleges in the 1920s were also responding to local needs (Witt et al. 107; Diener 9). As Witt et al. explain in their history of American junior and community colleges, "if the local factory needed welders, the junior college quickly produced a welding course. If local art lovers demanded cultural events, the junior college developed an arts series. If the public demanded flower arranging, the college hired a local florist" (107). In the same vein, high school students in 1926 Houston needed a college, so educational administrators created two. HJC opened in 1927 in the city's San Jacinto High School, which continued to hold high school classes during the day and began to hold classes for HJC in the evening. Until the late 1930s, HJC, like HCJC, had no campus of its own apart from the city's existing buildings and organizations. Supported entirely by tuition dollars, HJC borrowed classrooms from San Jacinto High School and two nearby Baptist churches, and several of the college's early faculty members and administrators worked for San Jacinto High School during the day. In 1928, HJC students described their institution as "a hopeful experiment" ("Junior College"), a depiction that would resurface in the following decades.

The importance of HJC students' backgrounds and experiences in shaping this educational "experiment" cannot be understated. Generally, HJC students held jobs in the city, could not attend Rice University, or could not easily move elsewhere to obtain a college education. According to a 1948 summary of Oberholtzer's views, "the University of Houston set out ... to provide a broad curriculum in response to the changing needs of the community and society at large" (Patterson 11). This depiction of UH (at first HJC) as an answer to student demand reappears in a 1950 dissertation by a UH faculty member that begins, "The basic philosophy of the University of Houston, as revealed through its aims, emphasizes those educational services growing out of the individual and community educational needs of the citizens of the area" (Cochran 1). The dissertation's author, J. Chester Cochran, credits the idea for his institutional study to Oberholtzer, by that time president of UH (1), and Cochran attributes his access to primary historical documents to Oberholtzer and to Oberholtzer's assistant, Dr. W.W. Kemmerer (iii).

Beyond Oberholtzer, a vision for a public higher education institution geared to the practical and philosophical needs of working students persisted among other HJC supporters even after 1934, when HJC transitioned from a junior college to the University of Houston. In 1938, Hugh R. Cullen, a city

philanthropist who donated land to establish a permanent campus for UH and, three blocks away, a permanent campus for the Houston College for Negroes (now Texas Southern University), said, “[UH] must always be a college for the working man and woman.” He continued, “You see I have a warm spot in my heart for those boys and girls who have to get their education the hard way” (qtd. in Bolling 69). Given this justification, Cochran could report in 1950,

Every phase of [UH] life is closely tied in with community affairs. Journalism students are on the Houston dailies, weeklies, and radio news service. The drama and music departments work in cooperation with Houston amateur and professional entertainment. Business courses are closely tied in with Houston firms, and are often taught by outstanding business authorities on a part time basis. Radio students do actual broadcasting work on professional stations. The whole aim of the university life is not of a cloistered academic nature, but rather of a living educational experience, brought about by close integration in community life. (43)

Cochran and other institutional figures from 1927 to 1950 did not single out particular writing courses to study relative to the desires that prompted the creation of HJC. However, the student writing that UH has retained from that period can be examined for how it supported college students’ assertions of their identities and needs, underscoring and furthering the actions of the mid-1920s high school students who met with Superintendent Oberholtzer to discuss the city’s non-existent public higher education options. If we view 1930s-1940s student writing from UH and its junior college predecessors as specific tactical moves (i.e., kairotic moves, in the sense used by McComiskey) to address Houston’s late recognition of and support for public higher education, we see that students used academic or otherwise familiar writing genres to contribute to Houston-area discussions about the identity and needs of city residents like them. Although it was common in the early 1900s for junior colleges to contribute to community discussions (Diener 9), cases from 1930-1940s Houston draw attention to genres by which a hitherto absent public college student demographic could make inroads toward influencing civic discourse.

Today, three sources remain that feature numerous writings from Houston’s public college students from 1927 to 1950. One of them, the student newspaper *The Cougar*, spans this entire period. A second source, an annual anthology called *The Harvest*, began in 1936 and showcased writing by HJC and later UH students who were enrolled in first-year composition and creative writing classes taught by Ruth Pennybacker. A third source, essays from 1930s-1940s seniors,

illustrates advanced research-based student writing from the Houston College for Negroes, the HISD-governed successor to the Houston Colored Junior College. (In 1947, the Houston College for Negroes would change its name to Texas Southern University to reflect its newfound status as an independent public institution.) Through all of its years as HCJC (1927-1934) and through most of its years as the Houston College for Negroes (1934-1945), this institution operated out of Yates High School, a public African American school a few miles away from the HJC-based San Jacinto High School. Because *The Cougar*, the first of the three sources that I consider here, contains the only full-text pieces from numerous HJC students in the wake of HJC's founding, I focus on articles published from 1927 to the early 1930s, when the college was most visibly settling on an identity. In the case of my second source, *The Harvest*, I focus on two of the longest and most vivid essays in which students described and explained their educational experiences. Finally, in the case of my third source, senior essays from the Houston College for Negroes, I analyze two essays from the earliest years available (1936-37), essays that gave students a forum for responding to the social conditions of the surrounding region.

In the student newspaper *The Cougar*, many of the articles published in the late 1920s read as near copies of one another because they concentrate on HJC's rising prominence relative to older and better-known colleges and universities near and far. Histories of the college, details about the college's growth, and calls for increased school spirit appear across the issues, frequently accompanied by pictures of Oberholtzer (in fact, the same picture of Oberholtzer) and pictures of other administrators and faculty members. But despite the uniformity of many of the articles, perhaps even due to this streak of sameness, the articles accomplished the important rhetorical work of spotlighting merits of HJC students and an HJC education for a city populace that was unaccustomed to supporting a public higher education accessible to workers.

A slew of late-1920s articles promote HJC's milestones and early 1930s articles promote HJC students' achievements, and in both cases, the articles cover students' potential to contribute to civic affairs. In addition to keeping HJC students informed, the articles provide facts and ideas that any reader could begin to associate with the growing institution, facts and ideas that I see as strategic selections in light of the context of HJC's founding—boosterism to counter past higher education absences. In the early 1930s, many front-page articles touted the performance of HJC students during debate tournaments with other institutions and during plays organized by the College's Dramatic Club. Repeatedly, these articles emphasize the wins and other successes accumulated by HJC students, often compared to students from older and established institutions, as in the article titled "Debate Squad to Challenge Ten Colleges," centered on

the front page of a 1933 issue. By the time of one March 1934 issue, the front page was dominated by articles titled, “H.J.C. Debates With Team from Tex. University,” “Dramatic Club Staged Farce at the College,” and “H.J.C. Debaters Against A&M in Debate.” By October 1934, some of the articles lauded specific HJC faculty members for their personalities and teaching styles, as Chapter Two discussed. At this point, the writing worked like advertisements to entice prospective students to attend classes taught by the faculty. For the similar task of singling out and lauding HJC students, the newspaper published a front-page article in 1934 that identified the high schools that each HJC student had attended. Readers accustomed to skimming newspaper pages starting from the upper left-hand corner would have found this article first and then proceeded to articles on dancing, a student advisory board, a student assembly, and a meeting of the Dramatic Club.

In the student magazine *The Harvest*, HJC and later UH students wrote in an array of genres and modes—descriptions, narrations, poems, reviews, fiction, much of it on topics observed or otherwise experienced in the social surround. So in addition to pieces on topics as varied as Richard II and the Earth’s past, students wrote descriptions and expositions on Houston scenes: working as a Houston bouncer, hitchhiking in Texas, witnessing a flood that damaged Houston. Beyond giving factual information about the city is the fact that many of these pieces, particularly those from the 1930s, conveyed details about the students’ lives: their employment, their life prospects, the sites and activities that they knew. The Houston that comes across for public consumption is a Houston that public college students who had many non-academic responsibilities knew well. As Ruth Pennybacker, the publication’s faculty sponsor, reported in her introduction to the first volume (1936), the students “write what interests them most” (“Part I” iv).

Personal essays that discuss education in relation to students’ other obligations do particularly important work in *The Harvest* because they highlight struggles that these students faced, and they insist upon the value of accessible public higher education in the city. This is clearest in two of the longer essays: “College Deferred,” by Hilda Long Lemon, published in 1938, and “I Live in America,” by Albert Farias, published in 1941. In the former, Lemon identifies herself as a nontraditional student from a community where marriage and childrearing went unquestioned as a woman’s top priorities. In response to a younger relative who called her “dumb” for taking thirty years to graduate from college after earning a high school diploma, Lemon details her return to education. She explains that during adulthood she resumed her reading, much of it out loud, in an attempt to favorably influence her unborn child—a caregiving approach that she discovered from her own reading (Lemon 1-2). After then describing

her years spent as a wife and mother who participated in social events, Lemon presents her choice to return to college as a gesture of non-conformity. “I was always a misfit,” she writes (2). Without female role models who had college degrees and without informing her family, she enrolled in college courses, an act that led her husband to question “the wisdom of her indulgence” (3).

Despite these hardships, Lemon describes her HJC and UH education in glowing terms. She writes that HJC “seemed more willing [than select institutions] to take a chance. It was new and inclined to concede the applicant the desire for an education” (3). She also refers to “certain new methods” that the General College of HJC wanted to explore, adding, “I enrolled there as the humblest of freshman, and it is not too much to say that we experimented together” (3). Reflecting on her college education as a whole, she writes,

If we [students at HJC and later UH] have lacked the staunchness of noble trees under which to rest, we have had the strength of courageous educational leaders upon which to learn. If we have lacked the inspiration of tradition, we have shared the vision of pioneers. *Our administration officials are men who do not look upon educational problems as solved.* The Vice-President came to us once a week during the first two years to discuss these problems. As he stood before us frankly submitting his ideas and honestly seeking our reactions, we gained a comprehension of what to teach youth and how best to go about it. My son was of high school age. If I had learned nothing else, the *clearer understanding of the questions involved in his schooling* would be worth the effort of the past four years. (Lemon 4, emphasis added)

To Lemon, an activity whose value transcends generations and deserves appreciation is co-investigation from students and administrators into educational problems. This is among the activities that she uses to push back against derogatory generalizations about college students like her, people who did not enter college directly from high school and who neglected to accumulate great wealth.

Shedding light not on gender inequality as much as ethnic diversity is UH student Albert Farias in his 1941 essay, “I Live in America,” in which he describes his childhood in rural Mexico and his eventual move to Houston with his mother and siblings (see Fig. 3). Besides explaining the strictness of his Mexican education and his later difficulties reading and writing in English, Farias discusses the concept of social class and its connection to education. After describing a marketplace scene that he remembers from Mexico, he comments, “I never knew what these poor people, the working class of Mexico, had in their minds

that made them look so quiet and untalkative. They are the peons of Mexico who struggle under the lowest standard of living. Their education is low, and some cannot even write their own names" (20). Although Farias never names the



Albert Farias

"Juanito, have you attended the burros to see that they have plenty of feed and water?" asked my father, Don Antonio. He was busily interested in his work of moulding earthen pottery to be taken to Patzuaro, a nearby town, on the morrow. My father was shortly built in stature, wore a round straw sombrero, a gaván--Mexican blanket--a pair of guaraches, and he felt quite proud of the small black mustache he wore above his lips. As for me, I was a boy of twelve years, but I had the intelligence to be helpful to both my father and my mother in the best way and manner I knew to help earn our living. I, too, had a pair of guaraches and a straw sombrero. My clothing was similar to that of my father; consisting of a pair of calsones--Mexican trousers of white linen--a white shirt and my colorful gaván. Margarita, my little sister of nine, helped our mother a great deal in doing house-work.

It was Saturday, and Father and I were moulding pottery of different sizes and shapes. It was about noon when we finally began to arrange the wares inside the adorno, which is an adobe structure built circular in shape. The structure was about six feet in height and ten feet in diameter and had no roof. Beneath was a furnace where we built a fire with wood to burn the pottery which was placed on iron railings above it. Having arranged the pottery accordingly, we built the fire and waited through the night as the pottery slowly baked. Occasionally my mother would bring us coffee to drink with some sort of sweet bread. Scenes would come before my mind of the market-place I would see tomorrow. I could hear Mother mention to Father the things she wanted to be brought back from town.

Having a few hours of sleep that night, I arose very earnestly the next morning, and as I looked out of the window, I could see that father had already loaded the wares on my burro and his. After eating a hurried breakfast of a glass of milk and a chunk of wheat bread, I quickly aided my father in completing our preparations. There was gladness within my soul because I would probably buy myself a candy caramel, a mango, a stick of sugar cane, or even a watermelon. You see, watermelons are available there the year round.

Figure 3. First Page of Albert Farias' "I Live in America," *The Harvest*, 1941. Courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, University of Houston.

social class that he identifies with, we can infer a working class affiliation from his story of earning low wages in Mexico, then moderate wages in Houston, along with his need to provide for his mother.

To conclude his piece, Farias shares that he and his family “gradually began to become acquainted with the new customs and ways of living in Texas” and that in time he graduated as salutatorian of his high school class (23). Next for him came UH where he studied “Business Administration, Aviation and Education” (23). However, rather than end his essay by reflecting on his personal achievements, as might be expected of a college student writing about lived experiences and personal observations, he broadens his comments about education by reflecting on the relationship between education and cross-cultural interaction: “I think there is a strong need for Mexican teachers who know English to teach in Mexico in order to bring a closer understanding and unity among the Americans in this tragic time of world conflict. I think there might be a place there for me” (23). His push for unity during worldwide turmoil doubtlessly responds to conditions surrounding World War II, but the fact that Farias locates the push in relation to Mexico and to English speakers also acknowledges a nearby intercultural surround—precisely the kind of surround experienced by growing numbers of Houston residents seeking an education relevant for life in the greater Houston area, including its transnational links. If an Anglo-dominated Houston of the early 1940s saw UH producing workers for the city, Farias reminded them that the city’s interests traverse linguistic and national borders, involving more people than some Houstonians realized. His essay joins Lemon’s piece and the many HJC-centric newspaper articles to contribute to what McComiskey calls “the flow of cultural production” (117). Not subversive in form, and tied directly to English or journalism coursework, this body of student writing nonetheless stood to influence the city population’s perception of Houston residents by virtue of appearing across classes, venues, and years.

Finally, if we remember that the Houston Independent School District (HISD) founded and governed UH’s predecessor, HJC, at the same time that the HISD founded and governed HJC’s African American counterpart, the Houston Colored Junior College, we avail ourselves of perspectives that reveal some of the educational needs of early African American college students in Houston. In 1934, the Houston Colored Junior College became the Houston College for Negroes, at which point its students could cap their four years of study with a research-based essay that needed approval from a faculty committee. From 1936 until the early 1940s, the English department of the Houston College for Negroes kept several senior students’ essays, which addressed canonical literary topics and education topics. Generally, this writing encouraged appreciation of famous works of imaginative writing or called for improvements to

learning opportunities for African American students in Texas. But regardless of whether the writing dwelt on texts or human subjects, it drew attention to a desired outcome of literacy education at the college: racial uplift. Below, I consider examples from the first two years of essays that have been retained (1936-37), a time period that set the tone for subsequent essays.

From 1936, there remains only one thesis, “An Enperiment [sic] in the Teaching of English in the Furney Richardson Rural High School of Teague, Texas, 1935-1936,” by Christine G. Kelley Howard, whose argument supports a theme stretching across many of the 1937 essays: mastery of language increasing one’s prospects of a successful life. Howard begins,

Good speech is the power that brings success to all of man’s activities, but this invaluable power is not yet a part of the fortune that fills the coffers of the Furney Richardson school community. Read with me if you will and watch our efforts, and the developments toward improving the conditions. After we have finished reading, give your suggestions for a more rapid progress. (1)

Not only does Howard link language education to one’s life prospects, but she also invites readers to study her insights and offer suggestions. Even if intended only for academic readers, this research encourages those readers to apply empirical knowledge in the name of “rapid progress”; it supposes readers who are actively engaged in supporting educational reform at nearby schools. After then mentioning that she has worked for ten years in the Furney Richardson area in east Texas, between Dallas and Houston (1), Howard discusses educational strategies implemented in that school district, including gains made by African American high school students after the students began reading literary pieces written by other African Americans (2-3). Also, at one point she discusses a class’s letter writing activity, explaining that the class’s best student letter was mailed to actual recipients; the students then studied the letter’s responses to examine different uses of punctuation (11). Here and in many of the other early HCN essays, mastery of surface features of language became a step toward giving marginalized students the type of resource discussed by David Gold in his study of Texas Woman’s College—“access to the language of power” (Gold 89), a recurring point in critical pedagogical research (e.g., Delpit 282).

From the next year, 1937, nine senior essays remain, and they address literacy learning, the Psalms as literature, the life and poetry of Langston Hughes, periodicals by and for African Americans, Shakespeare’s poems and plays, the African American poetic tradition, and sermons of African American ministers. For the first and most empirical of these essays, “A Survey of the English

Fundamentals Tests of the 1936 Seniors of the Houston College for Negroes,” student Magdalene Clinton administered a test to study the writing of her fellow students at the Houston College for Negroes. Like Howard before her, Clinton emphasizes solutions to the data that she gathered: “Since we have learned that language is largely affected by environmental influence we have tried to note carefully the results and have attempted to offer suggestions for possible solution in order that these, or a large number of the common, ordinary, and frequent errors in both speaking and writing English may be eliminated” (20). While undoubtedly Clinton directed her paper to faculty members who would grade it, she nevertheless supposed that faculty members would want to act on her insights at that institutional site.

Additionally, Clinton even more than Howard asserts links between mastering correct written and spoken English (cause) and improving one’s life and the standing of one’s racial or ethnic group (effect). Through her citations, Clinton demonstrates familiarity with both the *English Journal* and Adams Sherman Hill’s *The Principles of Rhetoric*, and like Howard, Clinton links correct language use to social and economic empowerment for African Americans. She connects nineteenth-century scholar George Herbert Palmer’s comment, “Whoever goes to his grave with bad English in his mouth has no one to blame for the disagreeable taste except himself; for if faulty speech can be inherited, it can also be exterminated” (qtd. in Hill 17), to training that will produce “tomorrow’s leader and citizen” (Clinton 21). Afterward, she connects a point from the *English Journal* about effective expression to her hope that “very soon the Negro race, especially the future leaders and members of social society, will have through the aid of conscientious teachers and will power to succeed, at least a fair command of this rich, expressive, and interesting language” (21). In the same vein, Clinton concludes by positing that the grammar and punctuation test that she administered to students as part of her study

told [the students] where [they] needed to concentrate. In turn, the intelligent and thoughtful student who wanted to qualify for his place in life and at the same time give himself justice, did not stop his research and study until he was thoroughly familiar with the fundamentals of English in both writing and speaking. (23)

In Clinton’s hands, perhaps as in the hands of many students educated at Houston College for Negroes, error correction and rule learning correlated to struggles for justice and enhanced quality of life. In other words, mastering formal rules of writing was viewed as a step to democratic participation and improved social status, an outlook similar to that of Professor Melvin Tolson at Wiley

College (Gold 59).

Once we recognize a version of *kairos* grounded in local response, collective involvement, and gradual change, we can begin tracking rhetorical action with sophistic ties in 1930s writing from African American students at the Houston College for Negroes and white students at Houston Junior College and the University of Houston. Directly or indirectly, across semesters or years, the student writing from these institutions countered a lack of public college student perspectives from Houston before the mid 1920s, and the writing championed new opportunities to educate the region's growing and diversifying body of workers and high school students. Also, contrary to what we might expect if using McComiskey's descriptor "subversive texts" (117), the students at these institutions wrote in forms that were well defined and presumably taught by faculty members, forms earning the students academic approval. As students upheld those forms—narratives, descriptions, empirical studies, newspaper articles—the students asserted their backgrounds and community needs. If students refrained from asserting their *personal* needs, as in the case of the earliest held student papers from the Houston College for Negroes, then the students selected people to study or discuss who resembled them, such as fellow African American college students in Houston. When viewed together, these very different pieces of writing across related institutions seem to say, repeatedly, *we are the growing population in Houston that needs public higher education, and here is why.*

ACADEMIC FORMS, PUBLIC ORIENTATIONS

If we view *kairos* less as thoughtfully timed utterances to single audiences than as strategic local responses to powerful discourses, we allow for some of the textual and organizational complexity that has characterized life for many students in American colleges and universities, institutions that in turn thrive, sustain, or decline for particular reasons. The Ohio and Houston, Texas, cases presented in this chapter show that whether one looks across several decades at a single institution or whether one looks across a few years at many connected institutions, one can ask, to whom—in addition to an instructor or college class—were students responding? What predated the student writing that might have mattered to the students given the historical texts that remain? Whether losing or acquiring people, assuming a marginal or central status, a geographical area's challenges permeate its public higher education institutions, and one manifestation of this influence is through student writing.

Furthermore, the cases from this chapter indicate that even the most formalized and academic of writing can help students respond to preexisting issues that they find persistently important. This is no small point given that it follows

generations of historical scholarship indicating that instructors' and textbook writers' reliance on form, via genre, writing formulas, or the modes of discourse, risked shutting down students' rhetorical awareness. Most famously, Albert R. Kitzhaber, in his study of late-nineteenth-century rhetoric, argued,

The effect of the forms of discourse [narration, description, exposition, argumentation, and sometimes persuasion] on rhetorical theory and practice has been bad. They represent an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum. They turn the attention of both student and teacher toward an academic exercise instead of toward a meaningful act of communication in a social context. (139)

Kitzhaber's study of rhetoric manuals yielded numerous examples of form operating for form's sake. However, in the student writing that I consider above, newspapers articles, anthologies, literary societies, research essays, and the like, students engaged with their surrounding circumstances in spite of, maybe even *because* of, the academic or popular forms that their writing took. Whereas composition scholar Thomas M. Masters saw the late-1940s-era essay assignment as "neutralizing" first-year composition students' passion about their topics (169-70), I saw pre-1950s students at OU and UH writing in essay and other forms that could channel the students' observations and convictions toward the appearance of respectability for readers.

In his study of student writing at Texas Woman's University circa 1900, David Gold observes approvingly that TWU students wrote for their institutional newspapers and magazines; the only students who wrote traditional essays judged based on grammar and punctuation were students in TWU's remedial classes (92). I share Gold's approval of a range of writing forms, and I would add that even formulaic essay writing completed in class or for class credit can have rhetorical value beyond the classroom. To return to a view of *kairos* that centralizes specific, strategic language moves as they respond to powerful discourses, we are left with the question of how strategy pertains to the student writing that I consider above. Initially, the fact that OU and HISD-governed students wrote what they were taught hardly smacks of strategy (at least on the part of students). Yet I posit that the very familiarity of the writing forms used by students worked in the students' favor: students could expect readers, including readers from older generations, to recognize the writing forms as sanctioned by academe, part of the knowledge of higher education institutions to disseminate. Thus legitimized, the student writing would have a chance of being heard and deemed intelligible, seen as products of study. The topics that students address and the forms

that their writing takes suggest an extra-academic current running underneath otherwise academic activity—academic work as public work. Mary Soliday has argued, “everyday school forms are (or could be) no less situated a writing practice than professional or workplace genres” (*Everyday Genres* 1). I would like to extend her position beyond comparisons of academic and professional writing by observing that we have a long way to go to understand and value the potential of familiar academic writing forms to help students reach audiences beyond college borders. If genre theorist Anis Bawarshi is right when he writes, “genres help organize and generate our social actions by rhetorically constituting the way we recognize the situations within which we function” (24-25), then historical OU and HISD-governed student writing in newspaper columns, poems, personal essays, senior essays, and so on can be valued for constituting students as learned, locally invested residents who, under the sponsorship of their higher education institution, could begin to refashion their relationship to community members.

Thus, one issue in play in the Ohio and Houston cases examined in this chapter is persuasion. Whereas college student writing in America between the Civil War and World War II has been associated with goals other than persuasion (Connors 49), early writing from OU and HISD-governed students persuaded via academically acceptable forms whose contents supported the interests of students and other university affiliates in a changing landscape or cityscape. Conceptualizing persuasion in this way does not disqualify present-day writing instructors from continuing to explore popular routes by which students enter and shape local arguments (e.g., Rivers and Weber). Instead, this perspective complements pedagogical initiatives grounded in public advocacy or service learning, highlighting the potential of even common academic writing modes, genres, and activities to shape students’ public personas. Activist writing need not always take the form of manifestos, editorials, websites, or pamphlets, this research shows. Kelly Ritter arrived at a similar point when studying a post-World War II women’s college anthology called the *Yearling*, which featured writing ranging from the creative to the expository. She notes that although she was not surprised that students submitted writing from many genres to the *Yearling*, she was surprised “that the chosen content was often quite compelling and current” (*To Know* 69). Further work remains to be done to understand what is uniquely advantageous about creative and other indirectly persuasive writing that fosters kairotic action by enabling students to speak back to regulatory conditions in their surroundings.

Tracking a kairotic sensibility in historical college student writing, while another way to locate the writing, stops short of preparing scholars to show how student writing has related to all other people and interests. Like an analysis of institutional nomoi, it peels back one more layer of the writing’s spatial work.

However, the larger process of building on sophistic outlooks on situated meaning, whether through *nomos*, *kairos*, or another concept, lets scholars and instructors specify how, and with what significance, student writing interacts with places. Continuing the process in Chapter Four, I examine the relationship between student writing and institutional campaigns to display student excellence to other higher education institutions. It is important to remember that when student writing was aimed at readers beyond campus borders, the writing could encounter members of other colleges and universities—or at least readers who carried with them perceptions of other colleges and universities. And before the 1950s, as today, perception mattered. So, complicating clean academic-public binaries, I consider this complex chain of interactions.