

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPOSITION ON DISPLAY: STUDENTS PERFORMING COLLEGE COMPETENCE

By broadening institutional expectations for student behavior and reminding readers of underrepresented places and people, pre-1950s student writing at OU and UH did significant rhetorical work. But lest I shut down opportunities to further unpack spatial dimensions of student writing, I continue to endorse *dissoi logoi*, literally meaning opposing words or arguments, but perhaps better explained as “a means of discovering *a* truth” rather than *the* truth (Jarratt, *Rereading* 49). Too, I heed philosophy scholar Christopher W. Tindale’s explanation that *dissoi logoi* does not mean that one takes all sides of an idea to be equally true, but that the one shows how multiple sides can be taken and then, with that knowledge, how to take the side that one finds most prudent (103). At issue is how one acts after one considers multiple perspectives, a point taken up by Susan C. Jarratt when, in an analysis of Plato’s *Theaetetus*, she argues that because every idea can be understood differently, what matters is to negotiate “action for groups of people given their varying perceptions of the world” (*Rereading* 50). For my project, action belongs to the reader of this book given the conditions (e.g., type of institution, kind of historical texts available, time to devote to historical research) experienced by the reader and that make any one of my analyses of historical student writing more applicable than the others to the reader’s location. Thus, to some but not all readers, this chapter may provide the most useful way to analyze student writing at some institutions, but neither this chapter nor the surrounding chapters pretends to illustrate all of the spatially nuanced rhetorical work of student writing.

In this chapter I examine another interaction that weaves through historical records at OU and UH: the interaction between early student writing itself and displays of the writing targeting audiences on and off campus. Whereas in Chapter Three I showed that pre-1950s OU and HISD-governed students engaged public issues by writing in innocuous academic genres, I now consider how student writing supported *other* people’s arguments—campus leaders’ campaigns to portray academic excellence to audiences near and far. Through their involvement with and presentation of student writing, campus leaders such as administrators and influential faculty members favorably compared students at

their institution to students at other postsecondary institutions, and in effect, the leaders re-presented the value of their institution's students. From this angle, writing that bears students' names can be seen as carefully packaged products that non-students held up for outside acclaim, a situation reminiscent of the epideictic tradition.

Today, epideictic language is usually associated with Aristotle and equated with speeches whose primary purpose is to praise or blame, or, more generally, equated with ceremonial language used to portray a topic positively or negatively. However, I want to consider an earlier, more provocative version of epideixis grounded in First Sophistic sensibilities and discuss how this version can help us situate college student writing in relation to its surroundings. We glimpse some effects of specific sophists' epideixeis in Hippias of Elis' remark that he "made a great reputation" in Sparta by "discoursing on noble pursuits that a young man should follow," followed by his comment about his lecture's popularity in Sparta and probable popularity in Athens (Plato, "*Hippias Major* 286A"). The stress that Hippias' places on his range of knowledge also appears when he says, "I . . . always go up from my home in Elis to the congress of the Greeks at Olympia at the time of the festival, and also submit myself to the sacred precinct to speak on whatever subject anyone may choose from those that I have prepared for a display, and to answer whatever questions anyone may wish to ask." After then mentioning Socrates, Hippias—as described by Plato—adds, "For never, since I began to compete at Olympia, have I met anyone superior to myself in anything" (Plato, "*Hippias Minor* 363C-D, 364A"). Regarding other sophists, we glimpse comparable effects in Socrates' announcement, "Our comrade Prodicus here [a sophist] has often in the past come to visit in a public capacity; but just recently, when he came here from Ceos on public business, he gained the greatest renown, both in speaking before the council and in giving private lectures" (Plato, "*Hippias Major* 282C"). As these examples suggest, the desired outcomes of some sophists' epideixeis began with an enhancement of their public image so that they could attract wider audiences.

Additionally, the early sophists' epideictic tradition rested on the idea that the ornate, self-aware language of theater reminded audiences of language's constructed qualities, and that even so, theatrical language produced effects capable of changing perception and spurring action. This outlook contrasted the notion that language primarily transmits consensually held facts (what present-day compositionists would call transactional rhetoric). As obvious as the sophistic perspective seems when applied to *theater*, certain sophists also applied it to domains of human activity outside of theater, domains such as the court. John Poulakos explains,

When the sophists converged on Athens, the most accomplished form of spectacle was the drama of the theater. As in

the case of competition, this institutionalized form of cultural activity shaped sophistical rhetoric in its image, making public discourse a matter of performance and exhibition. In turn, sophistical rhetoric took exhibition outside the boundaries of the theater and into the forums of legal and political speaking. In so doing, it helped create the awareness that words do more than call forth the world the way poetry had done; they also create it, display it, and exaggerate some of its features and understate others. In other words, words are not only instruments of representation or vehicles of meaning but also actions performed on stages of their own making. (*Sophistical* 39)

Poulakos' account privileges the concepts of exhibition, or a publically oriented demonstration of selected language moves, and spectacle, or a representation that is consciously crafted from exaggeration and understatement. Both concepts carried over from theater to the domains of law and politics, and I would add that the concepts help us discern another layer of the rhetorical work of early-twentieth-century college student writing. Poulakos explains the ancient carryover from theater to law as "expand[ing] the field of the spectacular from the theater to the courtroom" and as "theatricaliz[ing] rhetorical discourse" (*Sophistical* 43). Likewise, via the concepts of exhibition and spectacle, I see movements to publicize college student writing before the 1950s as theatricalizing the writing, and I argue that this perspective has significance despite whether the people involved in publicizing the writing viewed their work in sophistic terms.

According to Bruce McComiskey, First Sophistic perspectives on epideictic language should be updated if they are applied to a contemporary context characterized by intertextuality and competing interests. Building on James Berlin's and Takis Poulakos' work on social class, he argues that today, "Epideictic oratory ... represents, always in political language, *perceived* values; and rhetors of any cultural group have the potential, realized or not, to represent social values as they perceive them, whatever the *status quo*" (91). McComiskey terms the resulting possibilities for discourse *graffitic immemorial*, *graffitic* because they lean on sociocultural context for meaning and *immemorial* because they re-present what has been repressed or excluded by earlier, dominant representations (93). For example, he mentions bumper sticker parodies of dominant cultural symbols, parodies that gain meaning by building on previous debates and discussions (*graffitic*) and that expose the perspectives of those seeking to challenge the status quo (*immemorial*). Although in the remainder of this chapter I examine collections of pre-1950s student writing at OU and UH, not a bumper sticker or a slogan from the digital age, I too analyze the growth

of texts (student writing) within a context that was evolving as it introduced audiences to new perceptions of students and places. Furthermore, my analysis heeds the sophistic amalgamation of theatrical and non-theatrical discourses, the tradition of creating memorable public impressions by emphasizing and deemphasizing carefully selected points.

Here I track how institutional leaders at OU and UH used student writing from writing classes to promote an image of the leaders' institutions and students that leaders directed largely to off-campus audiences. At OU, late-1940s faculty and administrators collaborated to support and present a class of first-year composition students' writing, creating a public statement about the potential and accomplishments of first-year students at this institution. At UH, faculty members and administrators collaborated from 1936 to 1950 (and beyond) in a remarkably similar fashion when they worked with students to produce their institution's first literary magazine, *The Harvest*, which displayed a range of communication skills attributed to the students. Student writing supporting institutional public relations, we might call these two institutional cases. While I am unable to identify the primary reader or group of readers targeted by each of these collections of student writing, I can, if tracking endorsements and other contributions to the writing, show that non-students turned the writing into spectacles designed to impress readers other than students.

FIRST-YEAR OU STUDENTS AS SCHOLARS

The OU student writing that I examine in this chapter appeared in three volumes, *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History* (one volume) and *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History* (two volumes), all of which were published in 1950. The essays that filled each of the volumes were presented as the work of students from a 1949 honors first-year composition course taught by English professor Paul Kendall; however, closer analysis shows that non-students (faculty, staff, and administrators) influenced the essays' presentation and content. As I review these writings, I argue that they did more than describe early twentieth-century Ohio University. The writings presented OU in terms that compared it favorably to a higher education found elsewhere, thereby creating a public statement about the quality of OU students. Positive depictions of OU and its students appear most saliently in the front matter of the three volumes, so it is significant that for the two volumes after *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History*, an OU president penned an introductory note. After I examine the front matter, I look at the student essays themselves to see how influences from faculty, staff, and administrators shaped the perspective given of OU.

Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History contains two consecutive introductions, the first introduction written by student Mary Lou Drum and focusing on 1920, the second introduction written by student Kathryn Morris and focusing on 1929. Drum says nothing about the purpose of the volume, but her focus reveals an interest in showing how OU had grown from 1920 to 1950. For example, she begins her introduction with a comparison: "Ohio University in 1920 was very much smaller and less complex than it is today. In curricula, faculty, student body, cost, and facilities Ohio University has grown immensely." The comparative focus strengthens in the next introduction, by Morris, who associates growth with the idea of importance. Morris begins, "The change in the appearance of the Ohio University campus and in the school itself between the years 1920 and 1930 all indicated growth and the increasing importance of Ohio University among the universities of the country." In her concluding paragraph, Morris begins, "In 1920 Ohio University was a small insignificant college which existed principally for the training of teachers; by 1929 it had grown in many ways." After then giving examples, Morris leaves readers with the comment, "In general everything seemed to point to the fact that Ohio University was rapidly becoming a school which might be compared favorably with any of the better universities of our state" ("Introduction—1929"). If readers opened *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History* with the hope of acquiring details about 1920s learning and campus activities, then before reaching those details, readers encountered introductions that emphasized growth, tied growth to betterment, and positioned OU as rising in prominence compared to other universities in the state or country. While brief, these moments recall the image-enhancing comparisons of the sophist Hippias and keep readers' attention on the proposed value, not just the factual descriptions, of Ohio University.

The tendency to associate student writing with public statements about academic excellence only intensifies in an introductory note written by OU President John C. Baker and appearing before a student-written introduction in the next two volumes, *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*. Baker writes,

Many favorable comments were made about the first manuscript [Ohio University in the 1920s], and it is believed this second document will have even wider appeal. These studies are excellent examples of the latent ability in student groups if their efforts are properly directed and stimulated. Both Professor Kendall and his students deserve the thanks of the University for the tremendous amount of work they devoted to this project and the scholarly and effective way in which

they presented their material. (1)

The president's evocation of consensus—"Many favorable comments *were made*," "it *is believed*" (emphasis added)—does not clarify the individuals who championed the student writing and does not specify what about the writing elicited positive reactions. But it does convey an idea of all-encompassing support, tying him and OU as a whole to the writings. Baker also reveals a connection between the student writing and someone else's standards when he says, "if [the students'] efforts are properly directed and stimulated" and "the scholarly and effective way in which [the students] presented their material." If the students' abilities were "properly directed," as President Baker claims, and if the students' writing was indeed "scholarly," then he implies that the goal of effective student preparation was for students to write like scholars, a goal that his institution could be seen as achieving. Despite whether the student writing in these volumes was originally intended to fulfill course requirements, the writing now formed part of a larger display of student achievement and institutional value, a display likely to interest readers capable of steering higher education institutions toward future prominence.

On a separate and subsequent page, accompanying idea associations are used to frame volume one of *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History* when a passage is quoted from English writer John Masefield's poem "A University, Splendid, Beautiful and Enduring." The passage contrasts ominous forces such as "broken frontiers and collapsing values" with a university that "stands and shines; wherever it exists, the free minds of men urged on to full and fair inquiry, may still bring wisdom into human affairs." Thus ends the quoted segment, encouraging readers to see "a university," presumably Ohio University, as the force that "urge[s] on to full and fair inquiry" the minds of students (qtd. in *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century* 1). However, as the volume's student-attributed essays show, "full and fair inquiry" comes to resemble inquiry that supports faculty and administrators' visions of OU history, an echo of McComiskey's point that "epideictic oratory [or more broadly, epideictic rhetoric] ... represents, always in political language, *perceived values*" (91).

While not all of the pieces attributed to students in the three-volume history of OU draw heavily from the opinions or words of faculty and administrators, the tendency as the volumes proceed is for students to use personal interviews with faculty and administrators to confirm what really happened in OU's recent past. The tendency is least pronounced in the first volume, *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History*, which includes a few citations from faculty; there, students rely far more heavily on student newspapers for support. However, after the apparent success of *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History* (Baker), students regularly mix personal interviews with print sources, and some of the

students lean decidedly on personal interviews. What then occurs helps us to see the essays as tools with which non-students promoted a strategic vision of OU: 1) students give information from faculty and administrators without expressing reservations about the information's veracity, and 2) sometimes, by placing attributive tags in footnotes at the end of paragraphs, students neglect to specify exactly how much information comes from them and how much information comes from their sources (faculty and administrators).

Kathryn Morris' introduction to *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History* (volume one) eventually leans in this direction, providing a mild version of the influences that I describe above. After citing an early catalog, the Athens Board of Trade, an institutional history by OU history professor Clement L. Martzoff, and a student newspaper, Morris reaches her penultimate paragraph, whose main idea and most important language come from Dean Edwin Watts Chubb. The full paragraph reads,

The college [OU] was so small in 1900 that the faculty-student relationship was much closer than it is today. This feeling was very important because as Edwin Watts Chubb, Dean Emeritus of the College of Arts and Sciences, has said, "A Great deal of the success of a university depends on the harmony between faculty members, between students, and between the faculty and students." (Morris, "Introduction—1900")

At the end of the paragraph is a footnote reading "Personal interview." In this example, the paragraph is brief, and quotation marks appear around the cited administrator's words. I share the paragraph because it is Dean Chubb's wisdom about the ingredients needed to create university harmony that allows Morris to convey the significance of 1900-era closeness between faculty and students. In a sense, Chubb's contribution allows the student to turn a single observation (which might have also come from Chubb) into a paragraph. However, many of the student writers whose essays follow Morris' introduction rely more extensively on ideas or language from institutional leaders, at times blurring boundaries between the students' contributions and faculty and administrators' contributions.

We begin to gain a wider view of the indebtedness of students in *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History* to faculty when noticing that in addition to taking a key analytical point from Dean Chubb, Kathryn Morris quotes Professor Martzoff as saying that one early 1900s OU president "ushered in the Greater Ohio University" (qtd. in Morris, "Introduction—1900")—no small claim. In a nearby piece about student clubs, another student recognizes

English professor Hiram R. Wilson for providing information about the founding of a student organization called the Booklover's Club. Later in this piece, the student acknowledges, in the essay proper and in a footnote, English professor Clinton N. MacKinnon's work to organize an honorary fraternity (Scott). Then another student mentions a recitation from Professor Paul Kendall at a play produced by the Ohio University Theatre (M. Anderson), adding no mention of the fact that Kendall was overseeing this student's writing and the writing of her peers. The possibility that these faculty members misremembered events or shared information selectively, much like the possibility that other kinds of sources could portray a university event in a different light, goes unacknowledged. The essays function as if the words of then current faculty members amount to consensually held truth.

More arresting, of course, is the tendency of faculty and administrators to contribute analysis or commentary as opposed to historical detail, as in the previously cited introduction of student Kathryn Morris. In *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*, student Shannon Meeker incorporates faculty contributions of this kind when, spanning four paragraphs near the end of her essay "Campus Politics," she shares detailed comments from interviews that she conducted with two deans, one assistant dean, and an English professor—in contrast to a shorter version of this essay which appeared in *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History* and which lacked interview-based support. The institutional authority figures provide concluding, analytical comments about what campus politics means as well as prescriptions about what it should mean for students in 1950. For example, the dean of the University College is quoted as saying, "Despite the fact that the political campaigns on the campus sometimes result in a loss of noon hours and class time, students at Ohio University ought to take an earlier interest in politics. Furthermore, students should learn that politics are as they are, but should, however, desire and strive to improve them" (Starcher qtd. in Meeker). Meeker provides little analysis of her own concerning the four outside perspectives, merely reporting that her interviewees "have their variances of opinion" about the role of politics on campus. This essay and others reveal a theme of administrators and faculty members not only supporting but also guiding writing that was attributed to students.

The effect of incorporating institutional authority figures' analyses into a student essay can be felt more forcibly in the following piece, "Special Days and Celebrations," by Jean Davidson, a piece which reveals insight into the attitudes—the very mindsets—of earlier generations of faculty and administrators. Writing about a pre-1920s celebration called University Day and held in Athens by and for university members, Davidson describes the celebration's events, which included a parade, and then discusses the celebration's meaning to dif-

ferent university insiders. She ends one paragraph with a footnote that reads, simply, “Professor Clinton C MacKinnon, Professor of English,” a paragraph that is as follows:

Such a parade, as might be expected, was quite a spectacle for not only did it stretch endlessly around the town, but also it [sic] participants—*bored* college students and *begrudging* professors, sprinkled here and there with *a few who enjoyed the celebration* to the extent of wearing fancy dress in it—added to its hilarity. *Certainly this parade did not suggest the scholarly achievement befitting a university. Its death with the change of university presidents was no doubt a relief to all concerned.* (Davidson, emphasis added)

Here as in other passages, faculty names appear at the bottom of the page while information with which the faculty members are associated conveys nuanced sentiments that most first-year composition students from 1949-1950 could not have felt firsthand. Students could have researched earlier newspaper articles and other campus records to pinpoint dates, stated purposes, and perhaps general or isolated reactions to campus events. (Davidson’s earlier citations indicate that she did so.) But it would have been quite another feat for a first-year composition student from 1949-1950 to describe the various feelings of people who attended a pre-1920s event and then unpack the event’s significance in comparison to university standards from that time period.

Moments of ambiguous faculty contributions scarcely appear in the first of the three volumes of OU student writing. By *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History*, which broadens the time period covered by four decades, the students write longer pieces and faculty and administrator knowledge takes more central roles. Something of a push-pull surfaces, then, between students who write more as the volumes progress and faculty members who demonstrate more ways to shape the volumes as a whole. Based on these three volumes, the evolution of faculty influence at OU was not offset by moves from students to document sources, and faculty and administrators who wished to advance a certain perspective and interpretation of OU’s achievements could do so. Faculty and administrator contributions gained importance by their placement and recurring appearance in the volumes, not unlike the selective emphasis that characterized the early sophists’ theatrically informed epideixeis. Readers could be told that OU students write in a scholarly way (Baker), and faculty and administrators could uphold that vision by strengthening students’ historical information and accompanying analyses. Though the student essays in these three volumes, particularly the final two volumes, extended an institutional portrait

begun by Professor Kendall and university leaders, the essays reinforced rather than re-represented that portrait. In other words, the student essays were *graffitic* but not *immemorial*.

CREATIVELY COMPETITIVE STUDENTS AT UH

Founded in 1936, *The Harvest* was an annual magazine featuring UH student writing from the creative to the modal, at first student writing from Professor Ruth Pennybacker's creative writing and first-year composition classes. Here I consider the growth of the magazine from 1936 to 1950, and I examine how people other than students framed the magazine's writing so as to craft a public statement—which in turn evolved—about UH's writing programs and students. Especially through the magazine's front matter and editorial contributions, faculty and administrators exhibited an image of diverse students who, because of their backgrounds, were transforming UH into a writing hub worthy of widespread acclaim in and beyond academe.

Until the early 1940s, *The Harvest* was overseen by Ruth Pennybacker, whose doctoral work had been in literature and who went on to teach first-year composition and become associated with creative writing. The magazine's early issues name Pennybacker as their faculty sponsor, and in her introductions, Pennybacker endowed these issues with many layers of meaning. In Part I of the inaugural (1936) issue, she made the following points: impressive student writing comes from first-year, not only advanced, students; her writing classes accommodate students' various interests and ways of learning; she encourages students to produce writing that fits specific genres (arguably a contradiction of the previous point); and UH students are standouts, not like students found elsewhere. In fuller detail, she posits:

- Most of the magazine's writing (prose and poetry, imaginative work and informative pieces) "are by Freshmen and Sophomores of the General College of the University of Houston," with creative writing students contributing the bulk of the writing in Part I of issue one and other students producing the bulk of the writing in Part II of issue one.
- The student contributors write in flexible environments. Her courses have optional attendance, and "no definite assignments are made; the [students] write what interests them most." For this, she thanks UH, naming two upper-level administrators who let her "teach a writing class in an experimental way."
- She wants her students to produce "dramatic and literary reviews" because she believes that "the ability to criticize dispassionately is lacking

in many Americans and should be cultivated.”

- She has “great faith in the type of student that the University is attracting,” students who she says “are capable of unusual work.” Some of the students contributed to the typing, illustrations, and editorial work of the first issue. (“Part I,” 1: iv)

Stressing pedagogical flexibility, faculty influence, and a range of students, each one unique, Pennybacker establishes a starting point from which to frame UH students and the students’ writing.

In Part II of the first issue, Pennybacker provides another introduction, now elaborating on her point about the unique and diverse student population and using this point to defend the value of teaching first-year composition at UH—a defense implying that her experiences are more positive than the experiences of writing instructors elsewhere. After adding that Part II features “twelve authors” who took her first-year composition class, at that time called Freshman English or Freshman Composition, she writes,

I have never been able to understand why many instructors consider the teaching of Freshman Composition drudgery, and many students find it dull. Each of my thirty-eight Freshmen [the total number of Freshman English students whom she taught that year] has at some point turned in an interesting paper. Often their sketches reveal some significant fact about the writer’s temperament, background, or literary ability. (Pennybacker, “Part II” 1)

Next, Pennybacker supposes that the fact that many of her students work to support themselves renders the students’ “experiences too actual for their opinions to be cast in any mold” (ibid). She concludes, “Teaching them has been an enlivening experience” (ibid). One effect of this introduction is that readers were directed away from doubts that they may have had about the writing abilities of first-year composition students, and the readers were encouraged to see the students’ nonacademic backgrounds as raw material with which the students enriched their writing. That is, Pennybacker’s display of her students inches toward the early sophistic interest in spectacle, as Poulakos describes it (*Sophistical* 39), by including words that accentuate some features of her students or their writing (“enlivening,” “interesting”) and by downplaying the applicability of other available terms to her classes (“dull,” “drudgery”). She suggests that although her students took classes at night because many of them worked during the daytime, what is most important for her readers to remember is that her students’ experiences add value to their writing.

In her introduction to the following year’s issue (1937), Pennybacker adds

two explanations:

- When discussing the creative writing classes that she teaches, she not only shares that her students write what interests them, but also notes that “some [students] take the course for credit; others do not. The latter attend when they like and write as much as they like.”
- When commenting on the diversity of her students, she not only claims that her students are capable of good work. Now she explains that the students’ “actual contact with life ... makes them less conventional-minded than the average college person. They are individuals, not types.” (Pennybacker, “Introductory Note,” *The Harvest* 2)

A comparison of the first two issues of *The Harvest* shows that by the second issue, Pennybacker allows students to attend her classes despite the students’ intention or ability to obtain college credit; in 1937 she highlights a spectrum of learning options that were not touted a year earlier. Also, from issue one (1936) to issue two (1937), Pennybacker goes from calling attention to her students’ “unusual” abilities to, more specifically, praising her students’ transcendence of conventions that control “the average college person.” This added comparison of her students to “the average college person” is noteworthy, for comparisons to college students at other institutions appear more forcibly in later issues. UH students were not simply hard working and creative, the idea went; they were *more* hard working and creative than other college students.

In 1938, Pennybacker’s point about the diversity of her students had also expanded, now filling a thick paragraph in which she observed that her students “hail from various parts of the world,” come from “different racial and social groups,” work in various capacities, and demonstrate an ability to share experience-based information on any topic, “from wheat-harvesting in Nebraska to mourning customs in France” (Pennybacker, “Introductory,” *The Harvest* 3). To conclude this description, she writes, with bolder praise than she had used earlier, “Teaching [at UH] has been one of the broadest educational experiences I have ever had” (ibid). By 1939, she describes her students as entirely from her creative writing class (which was not the case every year), yet she nonetheless shares that her students include “a social worker, a broker’s secretary, an artist, a real estate salesman, a nurse, and men employed by the oil refineries, in addition to the regular full-time students” (Pennybacker, “Introductory,” *The Harvest* 4). This information would not have been news to her students, but it would have been news to readers who, using other colleges and universities as their benchmark, perceived college students as a single type of person.

In addition to crafting an ever more elaborate picture of UH students as diverse and hard working, the presence of administrative guides and supporters grew in and after 1939, a change that encourages readers to see *The Harvest*

as representing UH as a whole and not one group of students. One sign of this comes when, in 1939, Pennybacker increased the number of administrators whom she thanked from two to three, one of the three a dean and another of them an assistant to the president. Then, in 1941, the front matter of *The Harvest* featured an additional page that listed numerous people involved in that year's issue. Here appears the announcement "Sponsored by the English Department of the University of Houston," with thirteen people, including Pennybacker and one of the administrators whom she had thanked in previous issues, listed underneath ("The 1941 Harvest," 6: ii). After this is the heading "Editorial Board" with Ruth Pennybacker listed as editor-in-chief, four other people listed as assistant or associate editors, and one person listed as the art editor (ibid). Pennybacker again wrote the 1941 issue's introduction, but now her institutional status changes from faculty member to administrator because her title by this point is "Chairman [sic] of the English Department" (Pennybacker, "Introductory," *The Harvest* 6). Whatever influence she then exerted would be associated with her job as a department administrator. Yet another sign of growing administrative influence over the 1941 *Harvest* is that, for the first time, Pennybacker thanks entire campus departments by name: the Department of Fine Arts and the Department of English. She thanks Fine Arts for providing an entire class of student illustrators (nineteen people in all) to help. About the English department, she writes, "The Harvest [sic] could never have attained its representative character without the loyal working together of the whole English department. The Editorial Board has spent a good many week-ends reading, assembling, and proof-reading material" (ibid). Thus, the student writing published in *The Harvest* by 1941 carried with it a stamp of approval associated with the UH English department and with selected upper-level administrators. The publication's image had changed so that *The Harvest* more obviously represented the "perceived values" (McComiskey 91) of an institution, giving us reason to suppose that the publication could have been renamed *The University of Houston Presents the Harvest*.

If the appearance of endorsements from entire departments failed to portray 1941 UH students as the diverse, compelling individuals that Pennybacker and UH leaders thought them to be, a new section in the back matter, "About the Authors," created another opportunity to publicize the students' varied backgrounds. Here readers could find biographical sketches of each student whose writing was featured, the sketches mentioning where the writers had lived (e.g., Tulsa, Oklahoma; Houston and Galveston, Texas; Zacapu, Mexico) and what the writers had experienced (e.g., marriage, service in the U.S. Navy, employment in a local shoe store, employment as a laboratory custodian). If readers had previously doubted Pennybacker's comments about the range of her students'

experiences, the readers could turn to this section to find support for her claims.

The year 1942 marks a turn for *The Harvest* because Pennybacker went on a sabbatical, and a UH student assumed the position of editor-in-chief and wrote the issue's introduction. However, lest these changes lead us to conclude that students took control of the magazine, we should consider the 1942 students' hope to meet Pennybacker's standards: "Miss Pennybacker has in the past six years set a standard of excellence for **The Harvest** which this year's student board has worked to maintain" (Hicks et al.). More importantly, faculty and administrators enhanced their surveillance of *The Harvest* between 1942 and 1950. The year 1942 saw the formation of a "student editorial board" that would be "assisted by a faculty advisory committee" of three people (ibid). Where there was once one named faculty advisor, there were now three. And by 1946 there appeared a panel of judges comprised of faculty members to whom students should send their submissions for publication consideration ("Preface," *The Harvest* 11). The following year, Ruth Pennybacker, now with experience as a department administrator, returned to sponsor the magazine and join other faculty in judging the submissions ("Preface," *The Harvest* 12). So even though issues from this time period listed students as authors of the introductions, new forms of oversight circumscribed the students' influence.

Two other changes in the front matter from 1942 to 1950 indicate how influences from students, faculty, and administrators converged. First, the issues made stronger comparisons of UH students both to one another and to students from other institutions. Second, the issues showed awareness of the effects of UH student writing during wartime suffering. If examined for what these new developments display for public consumption and what, through selective emphasis and de-emphasis, the developments make into a spectacle, we find much to consider. If any definite argument can be extrapolated from the front matter of the 1942-1950 issues, it is that UH students and their writing can and should impress audiences outside of UH and the Houston area. Concerning comparisons of UH students to competition within and beyond UH, issues from the mid and late 1940s frame student writing in terms of writing contests; increasingly, the writing published by *The Harvest* was writing that faculty judges had already deemed winners. The preface of the 1946 issue lists two winners of a short story contest and three winners of a poetry contest (one of whom, Vassar Miller, would later acquire a national reputation) ("Preface," *The Harvest* 11). The prefaces of the 1947 and 1948 issues mention a "Harvest Contest" that involved a panel of faculty judges. If before 1946 some of the students' contributions had been deemed winners of a contest, then that information would have been less apparent, located in the back matter as opposed to the front matter. Also, in the 1948 issue, UH student writing was discussed in terms that framed

it in relation to student writing from other sites. The introduction from that year states, “We believe it our duty to call attention to the growing excellence in writing at the school. Our vision is to make the University the hub of the literary and intellectual wheel of the Southwest” (“Preface,” *The Harvest* 13). Following this announcement of a regional “vision” for UH, a new paragraph begins with students thanking the president’s assistant for his “encouragement and financial arrangements through the University Book Store” (ibid). Given its source of financial backing and its expression of UH’s value via a regional academic hierarchy, *The Harvest* was operating as a marker of success, a platform from which students, faculty, and administrators could build a case for institutional excellence. Although more multifaceted a case than the speech of an individual sophist like Prodicus, who “gained the greatest renown” through his language (Plato, “*Hippias Major* 282C”), *The Harvest* of the late 1940s reveals that a step students, faculty, and administrators could take to pursue a goal like “the greatest renown” was to exhibit their goal for others’ consideration.

During roughly the same time period (1942-1950), UH student writing in *The Harvest* came to be presented as support for an argument for cultural and artistic freedom in the face of oppression. The 1942 issue’s introduction consisted of uncharacteristically abstract and grandiose language to defend imaginative writing against the specters of censorship and despair. This introduction defends “understanding of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life,” which requires “the expression of one’s self and ... the interpretation of other selves,” against the threat of “conflict, chaos, and destruction” (Hicks et al.). By 1943, references to World War II become more direct: “In this period of total war, we are told on every hand that all activities which occupy our time and efforts must be justified in terms of their contribution to the war effort” (“Staff,” *The Harvest* 8). In contrast to book burning and the suppression of “intellectual liberty,” the editors “offer ‘THE HARVEST of 1943’ as [their] contribution to total victory” (ibid). By 1944, several of the student contributions to *The Harvest* comment directly on the war while other contributions attempt “to escape from the war through humor” (“Preface,” *The Harvest* 9). That year’s issue was used to “throw a few rays of light upon the Human Miracle in its moment of trial” (ibid). The 1945 *Harvest* acknowledges both the crumbling of Fascism and the prominence of “escape literature” in its pages (“Preface,” *The Harvest* 10). That year’s student writings are presented as promoters of “the human mind and soul,” in contrast to the goals of military aggression (ibid). By 1947, *The Harvest* featured writing from many World War II veterans, the issue’s editors feeling “justified in publishing such material since over two-thirds of [the UH] study body are veterans, and many of them wish to write about their experiences while they are still fresh” (“Preface,” *The Harvest* 12). Cumulatively, these references promote *The*

Harvest as a symbol of free expression despite the many filters through which student submissions passed before receiving public backing of faculty and administrators. If the 1940s saw *The Harvest* used as support for institutional value, it also saw *The Harvest* used to support a pro-democracy statement, yet another enhancement of the *Harvest*-UH image.

STUDENT WRITING, INSTITUTIONAL PUBLICITY

In a study of one Wisconsin normal college's student essays written in 1898 to commemorate state history, Kathryn Fitzgerald explains that writing assignments rooted in epideictic exigencies can lead to uncritical accounts of local history (123-24) and erase depictions of diverse people (131-32). She reminds us that normalizing influences of writing assignments that directly or indirectly encourage praise must always be scrutinized. Bearing in mind these and other risks of using student writing to demonstrate state (or institutional) value, I would add that we lose a powerful source of analysis if, from suspicion of epideixis, we neglect to study—and ask our students today to consider—uses to which student writing is put.

The examples that I review above come from student writing that was originally in or for undergraduate writing classes, yet for all of its ties to the classroom, the writing was also held up to impress extracurricular audiences. That action itself and the play of discursive emphasis that it involved become visible as strategic moves with multiple outcomes (to enhance students' reputations, to support institutional leaders' existing perceptions, to broaden understandings about what an institution does) once we view them via sophistic epideictic practices that scholars like Poulakos and McComiskey have analyzed anew in light of contemporary rhetorical concerns. At OU, faculty and administrators who wished to preserve a certain perspective of local historical events and portray a respectable scholarly image of first-year students could use students' three-volume institutional history to do so. At UH, faculty and administrators who wanted to build a case for diverse local talent at their institution could present students' writing to illustrate this. Obviously, students at OU and UH wrote more than the work that appeared in these publications, but the fact that details from these as opposed to other texts remain to contribute to institutional memory sends a message. Presented as they were, these student writing collections suggest that although their host university may have sought to improve the intellectual skills of students, another goal of the university was to maintain or enhance its institutional reputation. Student writing taken, it would appear, from the institution's writing classes proved a useful tool with which campus leaders could create displays of student value—of students who wrote like schol-

ars or students whose varied life experiences fueled uncommonly gripping writing. By examining interactions between student writing and outwardly looking faculty and administrators, I create a space for classifying student writing as institutional public relations work, a twentieth-century parallel to early sophists' efforts to theatricalize, through careful selection and showing, the seemingly non-theatrical.

A constraint of this line of analysis is that I cannot identify who *actually* read OU's *Ohio University in the 1920s: A Social History* and *Ohio University in the Twentieth Century: A Fifty-Year History* and UH's *The Harvest*. But I contend that we nonetheless gain insight by gathering signs of these works' *intended* audiences, what Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford call the "audience invoked" (156)—or in the case of my analysis, the reader or readers imagined by faculty and administrator editors who influenced the student writing. While we cannot know every person whom faculty and administrators at OU and UH hoped to reach through the student writing that they sponsored, contributions from faculty and administrators reveal *kinds* of readers who were sought: readers who had familiarity with scholarly writing and readers who knew about the conditions of student writing at multiple universities. Whatever their exact constitution, the audiences envisioned by faculty and administrators matter, revealing clues about the motivations and strategies of institutional literacy sponsors in shaping student writing. Moreover, the fact that students at pre-1950s OU and UH may not have had the same audience awareness as their instructors and administrators deserves attention. Even if, as historians or instructors, we detect signs of an intended audience of people with knowledge of many colleges and universities, the students whom we study or teach may make sense of their writing, as well as their writing's influences and outcomes, through a far narrower frame of reference. Future studies focused on the relationship between student writing and institutional public relations statements might track signs of audience awareness both from students and from non-student literacy sponsors. From a sophistic epideictic tradition, I propose asking oneself (and in teaching situations, one's students), who is and who is not seeing, as well as who is and who is not supposed to see, any given display of institutional worth? Inquiry along these lines can productively complicate the notion that spectacles are created for a singular audience and produce a singular effect.

A more basic question that instructors who take up this analytical thread for present-day pedagogical purposes might ask is, in what ways do our students' papers lend themselves to showpieces that others can use to represent institutional success or excellence? Once we consider how student writing is presented (with whose endorsements and interpretations?) and distributed (to what actual or intended audiences? to what audiences that students know about?), we can

begin to understand what the relationship between student writing and institutional public relations means for our students and institutions as the student writing circulates in a glocal environment. For students, it becomes one thing to write, another thing to be assisted and promoted, and yet another thing to reach audiences selected by others. Each of these activities reshapes the writing's spatial and rhetorical work.