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## When The Margins Move: Lessons from the Writing of One University's First Female Graduate

IN THE INAUGURAL ISSUE of *Open Words* (fall 2006), contributor William DeGenaro called for scholars to study the politics and history of basic writing at specific institutional sites. Spurred by Mary Soliday's research at the City University of New York and aware of teaching challenges unique to other institutions, DeGenaro argued, "We need to localize the history of basic writing and locate the origins of English remediation at our own institutions" so as to better understand the relationships between higher education institutions and surrounding community members (57). Since then, scholars such as Kelly Ritter, Nicole Pepinster Greene, and Patricia J. McAlexander have produced local histories that describe college writing programs designed to reach students whose writing has been labeled, somehow or other, "basic"; and this body of work has produced institutionally flexible and widely accepted program goals. Among the characteristics of "the successful writing program" envisioned by Greene and McAlexander in their introduction to *Basic Writing in America: The History of Nine College Writing Programs* are the following (here summarized):

- The program's students have been accepted to the institution.
- Diverse student populations are represented in the program.
- The program's work is integrated into the institution.
- Faculty support the program's goals.
- The program's leaders adapt writing instruction to changing needs.
- Experienced and reliable faculty members teach in the program.
- The program is not stigmatized by alienating labels. (17)

To my knowledge, all of the characteristics above, particularly the push to include basic writing in institutionally recognized courses and programs (DeGenero 57-58; Ritter 91), have the general support of writing teachers and researchers. Furthermore, it takes only a small step to adapt Greene and McAlexander's goals to the teaching of marginalized students, by which I mean students who, due to structural inequalities in education (see Ritter 140) or inequalities attributed to identity markers (e.g., race, gender, or age), must leap more hurdles than most students in order to satisfy academic requirements. Studies showing a need for targeted student support and

dedicated faculty now flourish in local studies of *marginalized* student writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hobbs; Welsch; Gold; Kates).<sup>1</sup>

But what I find most striking about Greene and McAlexander's characteristics of "the successful writing program" is that as with many pedagogical and administrative recommendations supported by local historical research, the characteristics could apply to the case of a student named Margaret Boyd, who in 1873 made institutional history by becoming the first female graduate of the 1804-founded Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Boyd had been accepted formally to Ohio University. Her gender identity was acknowledged in college catalogues after her first year as a student. She worked alongside her male peers in classrooms taught by male professors, inaugurating a period of gender diversity that would blossom thereafter at her institution (Davis 10). Her educational needs were noticed by at least one prominent professor who advised her in informal settings. By the time of her graduation, Boyd appeared anything but stigmatized; her peers were instructed to view her graduation as an honor to their university and graduating class.<sup>2</sup> However, for all this inclusion and attentiveness, Boyd emerged from her university a writer exceedingly well prepared to continue writing at Ohio University. Soon after graduating and relocating to an employment site where different expectations and interactions structured her daily life, she exhibited few signs of adapting and her writing grew narrow in focus, flat in tone, and brief to the point of nonexistent.

Thus, in this essay I use the case of Margaret Boyd to propose an amendment to insights gleaned from histories of basic writing programs and marginalized writers. Whereas previous local histories have pluralized notions of students, teachers, and institutions (Moon 4) and have established reasons for current writing instructors to think about institutional particularity (Ritter 9; DeGenero 57), I argue that our historical studies, if they are to inform our current writing classes and programs, should also explore the significance of students' *movements across institutions*. In Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon's edited collection *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, Kathleen A. Welsch comes closest to such a study when she analyzes college student Mahala Jay who in the 1850s attended Oberlin College followed by Antioch College. Yet after summarizing differences between Midwestern and Northeastern attitudes toward higher education, Welsch focuses on the influence of Richard Whately and Samuel Newman's rhetoric manuals

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1. As I widen my scope to include marginalized student writers, I heed Mary Soliday's point that in the 1980s-90s, owing to problematic impulses that diverted attention away from economic inequality, many colleges and universities conflated the terms *basic* and *remedial* with ethnic minority students (112). One reason that I use the category *marginalized writers* throughout this essay is that I see the term accounting for students who were categorically denied equal educational and occupational opportunities in the mid-late nineteenth century, my primary period of focus.

2. Also, Boyd had been enrolled in Ohio University's Preparatory Department during 1868-69, her first academic year at this institution (Ohio University). Preparatory departments operated as precursors to developmental education and a way for nineteenth-century colleges and universities to offer "subfreshmen coursework to sustain enrollments" (Soliday 27).

on Jay's college writing (17). Still deserving detailed study are the specific kinds of interaction that differentiated the daily Oberlin College experience from the daily Antioch College experience, and ways that Jay prepared or didn't prepare at Oberlin for a rhetorical education at a differently configured institution. Nowhere can we see the effects of these factors as clearly as through the writing of a student's dealings with one institution followed by another.

I pick up with this concern, albeit by focusing on a student at a different pair of institutions, one academic and the other occupational. Although Margaret Boyd was but one student, her movement from college to a post-college workplace is a characteristic applicable to the lives of many students, past and present, and a characteristic that should help those of us teaching today use "local conditions both on and off campus" (DeGenero 66) to fine-tune our writing pedagogies. In 2006, DeGenero worried that insights taking the form of individual literacy narratives fail to engage with systems of power, with "the broad social context of literacy" (55). But as I explain in the next section, Boyd's words, emerging from and describing her growth at two institutions, invite analyses of institutionally facilitated relations that structure everyday life. Her case suggests that unless buttressed with sensitivity to institutionally specific influences, generous academic support given to marginalized writers and the full integration of marginalized writers into composition programs may lead the writers to conclude that mastery of course expectations equals mastery of rhetorical awareness—or, more bluntly, completing coursework equals success. Moreover, Boyd's case alerts us to the need to view marginalization itself as contingent on intra- and inter-institutional factors. For one thing, Boyd's status as female gave her difficulties at Ohio University and at the high school in Monroeville, Ohio, where she then taught, but it was only at the former site where, nurtured by a certain support system, her commitment to her writing improved. For another thing, her gender, which I argue is directly related to the challenges that she faced, worked in conjunction with other factors at Ohio University and the Monroeville High School to affect her writing experiences.

Even if modern-day students continue to be marginalized in various ways within and across institutions, one factor linking many of them to Margaret Boyd is their status as academic firsts. Perhaps, like Boyd, they are the first female student to attend and graduate from a particular university, or more likely the first student in their family or neighborhood to enroll in college, the first student of color at their college to receive a certain scholarship, the first out-gay or -lesbian student at their college to obtain a campus leadership position. If our work to assist writers from previously excluded or unrecognized groups attends to the influence of multiple institutional sites on rhetorical practices learned in college, we stand to help the writers plan for difficulties of the kind that ensnared even a student who made history by destroying gender barriers at her university.

## Method and Justification

The writing that Boyd left behind constitutes a diary in which she recorded her thoughts about her immediate surroundings from January to December 1873, a period encompassing the

second half of her senior year at Ohio University (when she took an elocution class that completed her rhetorical education) followed by her first term as a high school teacher in Monroeville, a few counties north.<sup>3</sup> While this diary was not a composition in the sense of a piece of writing completed for college credit, it was a document that Boyd treated as a record of her writing progress and her social and intellectual development. In her first entry, from January 1, 1873, she wrote, "This book was given to me Dec. 25th by sister Kate [i.e., Catherine Boyd, Margaret Boyd's older sister]. I must try and write every day. In after years it may be nice to look over. I must try to improve a great deal this year, every way" (her emphasis). For my purposes, her diary entries provide important information in two ways: (1) by showing local interactions that bore on Boyd's outlook on her writing and her intellectual development at Ohio University and at the Monroeville High School, and (2) by illustrating changes in her writing's focus, tone, and regularity after she moved from one site to another. I examine the latter point in reference to her Monroeville-based diary entries because these show stark differences from her earlier university-based entries.

The main interactions Boyd discusses that affect her outlook on her writing and her intellectual development entail the presence of a mentor whose influence extends beyond a single venue, guidance from multiple sources about how to handle new problems, and the availability of peers willing to speak up on her behalf. At Ohio University, these factors assumed the form of a professor who also acted as a minister and administrator, a professor and several classmates and friends who offered her advice, and classmates who showed support for her even if faculty did not. At the Monroeville High School, comparable versions of these factors are nearly absent, limited to occasional interventions from an apparently well-meaning colleague and brief visits from out-of-town friends. In tracking the rise and fall of these kinds of interactions in Boyd's diary, I heed the well-supported point that many nineteenth-century college students were taught to value abstract, impersonal writing (Welsch; Simmons) and not diary writing, which was coded as feminine (Johnson; Miller). However, if we take seriously the claim that for many nineteenth-century women, literacy was "life, for in their diaries they could shape and control their experiences by means of mastering language" (Temple and Bunkers 198, their emphasis), then we should examine a female student-turned-teacher's diary writing for the clues it offers about a writer's commitment to, and feelings about, her writing. Boyd's own words, then, provide the focal point for my analysis, with other primary and secondary sources providing contextual detail.

To focus, via a writer's writing, on institutional issues as I'm doing is to evoke the role of *nomoi*, or the singular *nomos*, in determining one's rhetorical effectiveness. In her 1991 book *Re-reading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, Susan C. Jarratt explained that *nomos* "designat[es] the human, and thus necessarily discursive, construction of changeable codes" (74), which pertain

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3. The original copy of Margaret Boyd's diary is held in Series 2, Box 1, Folder 17, of the Boyd Family Collection (MSS 15), Robert E. and Jean R. Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Alden Library, Ohio University, Athens, OH. My first exposure to Boyd's diary was through this archive. For subsequent reviews, I used the Ohio Memory Digital Collection's digitized version of the diary.

to communication and other areas of life. Jarratt stressed that “by implication the term could be taken to deny the possibility of any discourse—‘literary’ or ‘philosophic,’ for example—isolated from the operation of social customs and political power” (74). In my study, I find that Boyd did not manage to change the *nomoi* of her post-graduation place of employment, yet the modern-day work of tracing others’ influences on her, discerning the forms and locations of that influence, cultivates awareness of how intra-institutional customs shaped her writing.

Although gradually they have been subsumed by recent and expansive discussions about writing ecologies and economies, Jarratt’s and other scholars’ rehabilitations of *nomoi* (e.g., Lindblom) continue to offer a helpful frame for analysis. *Nomoi* might be understood generally, for example, as “socially relative customs” (McComiskey 33), but they also might be conceived more precisely as “continuously renegotiated agreements for the making of meaning that constitutes the discourse work of a particular community” (Lindblom qtd. in Gillam 55). Ken Lindblom’s emphasis on social conventions as made and remade from community to community applies to my study because the interactions that Boyd discusses were constructed and reconstructed based on each web of human activity in which she participated, each institution in which she claimed membership. By looking at Boyd’s writing during and after college, we do the important work of exposing the danger of focusing on only one of those social webs—for Boyd, to be sure, but also for writers today who navigate various discourses as they write their way through college and hopefully beyond.

## Outsider and Insider: Margaret Boyd at Ohio University

In addition to being the first female graduate of Ohio University, Margaret Boyd was the first female student enrolled at the University, and during her first year at this institution, catalogues listed her as the gender-ambiguous “M. Boyd” (*Ohio University*). This is to say that her gender mattered, a point reiterated each time a twentieth- or twenty-first-century historian remembers her because she was female in a certain time and place.

In order to see more clearly how gender marginalized Margaret Boyd at Ohio University, we must first understand the degree to which identity factors besides gender worked in her favor for this site’s administrators and faculty. In terms of geography, age, and family background, she was very much an insider. She grew up just a few miles east of Athens, and shortly after her father’s death in the summer of 1867, her family moved to the middle of the town. Her admission to Ohio University in 1868 made her twenty-three years old, easily old enough to avoid justifiable accusations of immaturity. But perhaps most important is the fact of her family connections. Many of Boyd’s siblings had strong ties to Ohio University or to the high school closest to it. One of her brothers, Hugh, graduated in 1859 from the University, became a minister and professor, and “was at one time offered the Presidency of Ohio University,” according to the recollection of one of Margaret Boyd’s classmates (Davis 9). A second brother, William, assisted Ohio University’s chair of the Preparatory Department in the mid 1860s (Hoover 135) and graduated in 1866 from the University (Hoover 139). And Kate, the sister who had given Margaret Boyd her diary, exerted

lower-level educational influence by becoming principal of Athens High School in 1865 (Davis 9). A broader though no less relevant point concerns the fact that in 1842, Margaret Boyd's maternal uncle, Dr. Charles Elliott, co-founded Ohio Wesleyan University where he worked with Solomon Howard, President of Ohio University from 1852 to 1872—a period encompassing all but Boyd's final year of college. Besides this advantageous connection, Dr. Elliott exerted statewide influence through his editorship of a Methodist newspaper (*The Western Christian Advocate*) and his articles on popular issues of the day (e.g., slavery) (Davis 8). Too, the Elliotts were prominent Methodists, as were many of Ohio University's leaders and supporters at that time. By heeding these details, we see that Margaret Boyd's ties to Ohio University leaders failed to save her from extensive, perhaps exceptional, criticism and hardship during college. Based on her diary entries, her gender continued to attract special challenges.

During the first half of 1873 (the last half of her senior year at the University), Boyd referred repeatedly to the influence of her professor, William Henry Scott, who taught several classes, including rhetoric, and who had recently become president of the University. His multiple duties, including unofficial roles such as counselor and advisor, give us a sign of institutional *nomoi* that structured Boyd's experiences. In early 1873, Scott served as professor of Boyd's elocution class,

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which involved students writing and then presenting orations before Scott and the rest of the class members. (As Gerald Graff and James A. Berlin have noted, in the early 1870s, required composition courses were not yet established at most colleges and universities. Rather, much of the in-class and out-of-class writing that students did was designed to prepare the students for public readings and debates.) This dynamic is noteworthy because even if, as Wendy Hayden has found, "The woman speaker was less of a novelty or rarity

by the 1870s" (451), descriptions from Boyd's diary suggest that her experiences in a male-dominated public speaking class still challenged the class's conventions and pushed Boyd to perform in a forum that was well outside her comfort zone. As we shall see, the gendered spatialization that Nan Johnson describes in *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*, which marked "orations, serious literary poems, and essays on intellectual and political issues...[as] the province of men" (34), inflicted a high degree of social stress on Boyd, producing a situation that makes the general sense of spatial transgression experienced by many marginalized writers particularly visible.

The difficult matter of elocution class aside, Professor Scott's involvement in Boyd's life extended to a range of activities inside the classroom and out—and this too is noteworthy as an aspect of *nomoi* that characterized Boyd's late-college life, helping her to reflect on her experiences and see how particular communication challenges pertained to each kind of campus activity. In her

diary, Boyd alludes to sermons given by Scott, visits from Scott to her home, and the occasional appearance of Scott at literary society meetings in which Boyd participated. Readers of her diary will find that Professor Scott, who at times caused her stress, especially during January and February of 1873, just as often served as a source of guidance and inspiration. Thus, in her senior year, a large part of Boyd's rhetorical education, that is, the instruction she received concerning how to speak and write effectively, revolved around Professor Scott and the many spheres of student life that he entered. Overspilling the boundaries of coursework, Boyd's rhetorical education took a whole-person cast fitting Arthur E. Walzer's definition of rhetoric: "Historically, rhetoric is a complete art for shaping students—influencing how they think...how they express themselves...and how they move and sound" (124). Boyd did "try to improve a great deal" in her writing, as she wrote in her diary on January 1, but that work served as one component of a larger process of performing as a member of a male-dominated environment.

However, the existence of support at Ohio University did not negate adversity. Boyd's expressions of pain include shame at not keeping up with her peers academically, as when she wrote, "I study hard and do not like to miss any thing and when I do I can hardly keep the tears away from my eyes" (January 16). The painful feelings she discusses include fear of disapproval concerning her writing and speaking specifically, as when she wrote,

Read a selection in reading elocution class this morning. I am to be no [sic] essay next Saturday. I am getting so I fairly dread to write. It seems to me that I can not write as well now as I could one year ago. Prof. Scott is so critical I am afraid to let him see or hear any thing that I write. —I study some today. (January 18)

Perhaps her fear was justified in light of other entries from January and February that link Boyd's discomfort to Scott's physical or intellectual presence. For example, one day she wrote, "Prof. Scott lectured [at a church service], [sic] He spoke on the importance of having a sound body. I feel lonely today" (January 26). And: "Raining and very slippery today. I do not need to go [out] this afternoon[.] Scott is away, I am so glad" (February 3). Then, after days of referencing her fatigue and her diligence in preparing an oration for elocution class, she noted an in-class failure whose details go unspecified but whose effects seem to her very real: "I speak my oration this morning. O! how I felt. I could not keep from crying all the way home. O dear!" (February 8). Such outpourings appear most commonly in the opening two months of Boyd's diary entries, though comments about her struggles did not vanish with the approach of her June 26 graduation date.

These and other entries assume another level of meaning because despite whether Boyd always *states* a connection between gender and her perception of her academic problems, such a connection is made for her by the fact that no woman prior to her had attended Ohio University. Too, her awareness of institutional lag time in the journey toward gender equality would have been compounded by any exposure she had to nationally circulating advice literature linking "success with manhood" and extra-domestic "failure with womanhood" (Hilkey qtd. in Johnson 50), to say



nothing of influential faculty and administrators at other colleges and universities who portrayed women as "too weak" for college and likely to "weaken higher education by their feminization of it" (Ricks 62-63). So when, after receiving her exam grades, Boyd wrote, "No wonder I am not marked as well as the boys. I could do as well as they if I were as strong" (June 7), we should see her acknowledgment of a hierarchical gender binary as more than a throwaway remark. Shortly thereafter, a mere ten days before graduation, she shared, "Prof. Scott shows me my diploma today. I do not like the masculine endings. What a sad thing it is to be a girl" (June 16), thereby reacting to her gendered otherness in a document meant to serve as the culminating symbol of her academic achievements. Finally, when preparing for her commencement ceremony itself, which in that time period could involve days of oratorical events, she commented that she met her friend and classmate John Merrill Davis to prepare: he read his "oration" to her while she, as a female, read her "essay" to him (June 25). These moments underscore the fact that even as the well-connected first female student enrolled at Ohio University, she never fully transcended gender-based restrictions, and the effects of those restrictions permeated her diary entries.

If viewed beyond the context of her institution, Boyd's difficulties seem still more considerable and her triumphs somewhat modest. After all, she became the first female graduate of her university many decades after female students began graduating from nearby Oberlin College on a yearly basis. She left her university with less visual grandeur than did the congress gaiters-attired Lydia Short, the second female graduate of Indiana's Butler University, over a decade earlier (Weidner 259). And her graduation year places her on the eve of the largest demographic change to have affected American higher education in that era: the rise of female students (Soliday 45-46). So I must stress that in this study I am tracing signs of the supportive (and constraining) interactions that structured the writing and educational outlook of a student in a particular institutional context. At Ohio University, a classical education in the tradition of early nineteenth century educational ideals still reigned, and, contrary to the growth found at newer agricultural and mechanical universities, enrollment stayed low and local through the 1870s. Boyd's peer John Merrill Davis recollects that the class of 1873 consisted of seven students (10). Thus, small accomplishments for a student such as Boyd may be read as breakthroughs, and the fact that Boyd recorded struggles as she referenced supportive figures and positive changes of attitude gives us much to consider.

Entries from January to June 1873 that showed Boyd meeting others' approval and experiencing academic progress increasingly countered her negative entries. More importantly, these entries expanded in detail and came to constitute the bulk of her comments as she finished her coursework. The entries, which highlight *nomoi* concerning the depth and breadth of her support system, allude to female companions who were beginning to take part in university life, supportive male peers who in time appeared to constitute most or all of her elocution classmates, and gradually Professor Scott himself. An early example appeared after a week of negative entries, when she shared that a female friend assisted her by sharing a quote that read, "No real progress without pain & labor" (February 25). Boyd referred to this friend and similar people as her "sisters"



and expressed appreciation for their kindness. Additionally, in some of her February entries Boyd mentioned moments of in-class laughter and restorative visits to friends. Concerning her male classmates, Boyd began noticing their support as early as January when she wrote, "Scott wants to know if I ever speak orations. I say, 'no.' He says he would like to have me speak an original oration two weeks [from now] if I will. The boys say yes I must" (January 25). Although we now know the anguish that she experienced on February 8 when she delivered her speech, it is worth remembering that initially she, a woman in what for 1873 was still a male-dominated space, received encouragement from both her male professor and her male peers.

Looking ahead to Boyd's last few weeks as a student, we see two types of support from her peers, support that points to features of *nomoi* that her post-graduate web of social activity would fail to reconstruct. The first type of support coexisted with the limitations that she experienced as a woman and gave her signs of shared peer resistance to established rules; the second type of support yielded opportunities to overcome her setbacks. The former type appeared on May 24:

I do not debate as the boys want me to. Scott requests me to write an essay. The boys do not want me to do it but I guess I must, [sic] I think myself that Scott might tell me what...he does expect of me, but I will do the best I can any how. I would not have cared so much if the boys had not taken it up so quick[.] They are good & I like them.

Despite the fact that Scott asked her to write an essay, presumably unlike his request to his male students to debate, Boyd's male peers wanted her to join them in debating as they do. Their support, whatever its exact form, was sufficient to make her care more about this gender-based difference in expectations. Furthermore, beyond mere support, the input of friends resulted in a changing of gender restrictions in at least one important instance. On June 17, a day after she noted her sadness about her diploma's masculinized word endings (this document would have been written in Latin), she wrote that two friends, at least one of whom was male, accompanied her "to Scott's room." She added, "I tell Scott I do not want a diploma with masculine endings and he says he will have it fixed. We four look it over together and find there are only two words that need changing." Given the gender distinctions that color many of her other interactions, I suspect that the gender of at least one of Boyd's friends, rather than her group's size, gave her thoughts about her diploma an effect that they would otherwise lack for a professor who was accustomed to graduating male students.

Her evolving relationship with Scott became more apparent around the same time. By the semester's final weeks, we find a turnaround in Scott's responses to her orations. On May 10, with a note of surprise, Boyd recorded, "Scott rather praised me." Weeks later she attended a class party at Scott's home where she shared that she had "a nice time" (June 10). On June 18, eight days before her graduation date, she wrote, "Had a long talk with Scott today, get back my essay. He says I need not fear about it" (June 18). It is worth remembering that this assurance about her essay came soon after her June 7 entry in which she worried about not being "as strong" as her male

peers. Then, only four days before graduation, she remarked on a public lecture that she heard at church, a lecture whose speaker goes unnamed, though it is likely to have been Professor Scott in his role as university president. She wrote, "[The lecturer] tells the boys that they may well be proud that they belong to the class that contains the first lady graduate. I can hardly keep the tears from my eyes such a day" (June 22). In this formal venue for guidance—a venue that Boyd treated as a regular and significant site of instruction, her diary entries suggest—the lecturer framed Boyd's status as a point of pride for Boyd's class as a whole. Here, prior to the commencement day's events, we find a public and authoritative endorsement of Boyd's part in the University, a reversal in the *nomoi* of the University's earlier (1868-69) masking of Boyd's gender.

However, it was her graduation-day entry that most vividly conveyed the status she had attained after completing her elocution class, among others, and becoming her university's first female graduate. On this day she referenced speeches given by other students and the essay from which she, as a woman, read. But signs of her difference as a woman and lingering doubts do not trump her feelings of worthiness upon seeing and hearing others' support:

Day of all days—Commencement day for the class o [sic] .73 [sic] They all do well. Do not forget any of their pieces. I was so very tired frightened before I went up on the stage that I thought I would fail completely. I did much better than I feared. They cheered me as I went up and I think that helped me. I received two boquets [sic] one from Ema and one from Kate Dana. After we are dismissed so many come to congratulate me. I get tired of it. (June 26)

If Boyd had reservations about her university or knew of reservations that her university had about her, she made no mention of them. Instead, she noted the crowd's cheering, the bouquets awarded her by female supporters, and the apparently exhausting number of people who congratulated her. This entry combined with the validation of an authority figure four days earlier in the presence of her male peers demonstrates Boyd's newfound comfort within her cohort: not only had she advanced in her studies and graduated from a previously all-male institution, but she would leave a historic example to future generations of students at Ohio University.

Beyond recording a marginalized writer's rise to local prominence, Boyd's early 1873 diary affords an intimate archive of factors that accompanied her academic progress, factors that may warrant updates as they are applied to higher education institutions today. Evident in the *nomoi* structuring her rhetorical education in that time and location were her guidance beyond classroom walls, guidance from people with the power to influence university customs, and the contributions of students who valued their first female member. These at least overlap modern-day compositionist Sara Webb-Sunderhaus's defense of the "personal connection" students in basic writing classes feel when the students talk with their instructor and write about their "thought processes and feelings." Also, the cross-venue emphasis in factors that constructed Boyd's connection to her writing at Ohio University is echoed in Webb-Sunderhaus's desire for "multiple support structures that go

beyond a writing program" (111).

However, I think the most important lesson from Boyd's diary for those of us who work with writers from underrepresented groups in our composition classes is that our ongoing focus on student achievement at the university level may lead us to overestimate our students' preparation to tackle complex communication challenges at non-academic occupational sites. As the second half of Boyd's diary shows, even the most vivid of college success stories—and Boyd's case was touted by those who knew her in college as precisely that (Davis 10)—can, if followed beyond graduation, expose disconnects between university success and other site-specific successes.

## When the Margins Move: Margaret Boyd in Monroeville, Ohio

In order to appreciate the role that the Monroeville High School played in changing Margaret Boyd's newly triumphant attitude toward her development, we should first notice the scant attention paid to this period in histories that commemorate Boyd for future generations of Ohio University affiliates. Thomas Nathaniel Hoover, author of *The History of Ohio University*, references Boyd's experiences teaching in Cincinnati (139) but not Boyd's immediate post-college employment in the small town of Monroeville. Betty Hollow, author of a more recent institutional history, *Ohio University, 1804-2004*, refers to Boyd only in the context of the University (62). Before the publication of these books, alumni articles had developed a habit of focusing on Boyd's achievements and skipping or minimizing coverage of her time in Monroeville. For example, one 1941 article mentions only the fact that Boyd taught at Monroeville for two years before then describing her later teaching experiences at Wesleyan Female College, complete with this college's ties to Boyd's uncle; the article then discusses Boyd's subsequent return to Athens, Ohio (Jones 3). Contrary to these accounts, I turn now to fall 1873, the time of Boyd's first experience as a teacher and the time of her dramatic shift in attitude toward her writing and her social and intellectual progress.

In light of nineteenth-century trends regarding women and work, Boyd's transition from gender-trailblazing college student to schoolteacher—a new professional identity—should have placed her in the position of experiencing less opposition and more support than she had known in college. Scholars of gender and education have shown that by the 1880s, women constituted a majority in the teaching profession (Biklen 50), perhaps owing to the fact that generally, female teachers were paid less than their male counterparts (Kaufman xxi). As a female teacher in 1873, Boyd would have been unlikely to give her employer unwanted expenses and even less likely to surprise her fellow townspeople. In fact, by the early 1870s, the appearance of a schoolmistress in small-town America had become so common that it was a source of stereotypes. From the East Coast came the image of the female teacher shrouded in "genteel poverty, unbending morality, education, and independent ways," and as this figure traveled west she was perceived as "moral, self-sacrificing, discreet, dedicated to the welfare of children, and capable of bringing out the best in men. She [was] unconcerned with personal goals or needs" (Kaufman xvii). On a basic level, such an image may have applied to Margaret Boyd in the great swath of land between the East

Coast and the pioneer. However, Boyd's diary entries indicate that despite entering a profession where women were expected and approved, she found few relationships at her new workplace to help her overcome work-related problems; and her diary, a record of her writing commitment and overall development, took a jarring turn before the year's end.

One difference between the stereotypical 1870s schoolmistress and Margaret Boyd was that her diary shows Boyd to have been immensely concerned with her personal goals and needs, finding few such fulfillments at the Monroeville High School where she spent her days and where, in the evenings, her thoughts returned. While giving lessons and helping her students pass exams, she craved people with whom she could express her doubts, seek consolation, and develop perspective on her occupational challenges. Another difference between Boyd's teaching experiences in Monroeville and the work of other female teachers concerns motivation for entering and staying in the profession: many nineteenth-century American women taught because teaching offered some combination of financial compensation, humanitarian service, intellectual development, independence (Biklen; see also Kaufman xvii). In light of the accomplishments of Boyd and her family members, I find financial gain an unlikely driving force behind her teaching (though when enrolled at Ohio University Boyd did express the widespread student desire to graduate and live without financial worry). Independence seems at best secondary for her given the prevalence of family and friends in her diary entries and her eventual return to Athens High School where she worked with her sister. That leaves the motivators of intellectual stimulation and service to others, signs of which scarcely appear in her fall 1873 diary entries. Boyd's teaching experiences in Monroeville were a far cry from the portrait of female teachers sketched by education scholar Sari Knopp Biklen, who writes, "While some teachers picked up methods of teaching from teachers' institutes or from their normal school training, others observed children, talked with colleagues, or corresponded with friends who taught at other locations. Thinking and talking about such concerns created great satisfaction" (59). By contrast, Boyd's fall 1873 diary entries show a dearth of support from intra- or inter-site networks of female (or even male) teachers. No figure with various kinds of influence and few peers showing unfailing support for her emerged here.

During the first few months of her job as a high school teacher, that is, from September to December 1873, Boyd described an occupational context in which her needs quickly exceeded the social support available. Here, the *nomoi* that had offered her well-defined and understandable roles as a student were unavailable, and whatever *nomoi* existed in this new environment remained either invisible or inaccessible to her. Boyd did befriend a colleague named Michael, receive visits from Athens-area friends, and write of occasional happy outings, such as on October 17 when she reported having "quite a social time" at a local parsonage. In other words, the mere fact of social contact does not vanish during her Monroeville days. But more often, particularly as she focuses on her work at the Monroeville High School where she redirected the energy that she had put into her past college classes, her diary's tone grows morose, and she bookends any expressions of satisfaction with comments about her loneliness and her deteriorating relationship with her

students. Additionally, by November her diary entries themselves grow shorter even as she adopts a tendency to stop writing for days at a time—a decided departure from her writing habits when a university student. Both the meager professional support that she alludes to and the lackluster force of her diary entries themselves point to an occupational experience that terminated her January I hope of improving her writing throughout the year.

Readers today who have experienced the transition from undergraduate college student to high school teacher may find some of Boyd's feelings familiar, yet I would point out that this familiarity fails to negate the need to consider Ken Lindblom's "continuously renegotiated agreements for the making of meaning." Whereas "[Boyd] herself changed [Ohio University], questioning traditions with her determination" (Hollow 117), no such change occurred in Boyd's time at her new workplace. As early as a Saturday in mid September (13), she shared her first specific comment about one of her students, noting that a student delivered a recitation in Latin. Two days later, Boyd wrote, without explanation, "Beginning a new week. The third week of school too. Good. I am about sick" (September 15). Preventing us from interpreting her "sick" comment as simply a reference to her physical condition is a string of worries and disappointments that she associates with her students. On September 29, she wrote, "I start to school today feeling somewhat down. One month is up and I feel a sort of dread to begin another weeks [sic] work. My examination papers were some of them poorly done and I can not help but blame myself somewhat though I did the best I could, Oh dear." The next day her entries took an even more dismal turn: "The big boys are so ugly I can not tell how to govern them. I have been trying to lead them but they do not lead very well I must try and compell [sic] them after this. I never can tell how to govern a boy any how" (September 30). Although she had overcome many gender-based difficulties as the first female graduate of her state's oldest public university, she struggled when attempting to manage her male pupils at the Monroeville High School. We should notice, too, that in her September 30 entry she characterized herself as struggling alone, neglecting to mention anyone whom she consulted for support or solutions. Her correspondences with friends and her visits from others continued, but in her diary she wrote nothing to indicate that she brought her teaching problems to their attention, as she used to bring her academic difficulties to Professor Scott's attention at Ohio University.

Shortly after dwelling on the difficulty of managing male students—students who seem to have been a far cry from her male college classmates, who had received instruction about how to view her place among them—Boyd wrote of teaching duties and occupational scrutiny pervading much of her daily life. On October 6, she commented on her role as a teacher extending into the evening: "I had to keep the boys tonight to get their lesson in Arithmetic[.] Michael very kindly stays till they are dismissed." This was followed the next day by an entry that concludes, "I stop to talk with the 'judge' [reference unknown] tonight after school. It does me so much good. *He is the only one that I can talk to and feel that I am not watched*" (October 7, my emphasis). Surely Boyd would have been accustomed to standing out and receiving public scrutiny at Ohio University; recall, for instance, the diary entry from her graduation day. But at her workplace in early October,

the scrutiny that she faced rang differently.

In late October, she commented repeatedly on the behavior of her students, male and female, and sometimes her criticisms about students' behavior extended to younger boys in the town at large, as when she shared that after attending a wedding with a female companion, "We come home through town I get so vexed at some little boys, Monroeville manners" (October 22). One striking feature of this comment is that it has no counterpart in her diary entries from the first half of 1873; at Ohio University she did not use her diary to express frustration at the manners of college students or others around her. After October 22, her interactions with her students became a source of continual tension, even if she experienced occasional satisfaction from a lesson well handled. For instance, on October 23 she commented on Michael's temporary absence from work and her discomfort as she anticipated the next few days at school: "Michael leaves today before recess in the forenoon. I am to run the affair for the rest of the week. I feel so very uneasy. I hope things will pass off well." The next day did go well, with the students passing their examinations (on an unspecified subject). On this day, Boyd wrote, "The scholars are all good," and added, "I like them for it." However, her fatigue from this day is equally evident: "I am so tired at night that I can hardly stand. In fact I came nearly falling off my chair After I was left alone in the school room" (October 24). Five days later we find,

The boys were running in the hall today and Mr. Michael told them (four of them) that they should remain in at recess all the rest of the week. In the afternoon he went to a funeral and left me alone. Those boys would not mind me one bit. I felt so very bad. I do not think Michael did just right to go off and leave me alone with those four big boys to look after at recess." (October 29)

Lest we conclude that Boyd struggled exclusively with her male students, we should consider her entry from two days later: "Today my girls in the Physiology class did not have their lesson in the afternoon and I kept them in at recess. Still they would not recite and I keep them there after school till about six and then leave and tell them I will hear them recite on Monday at recess. Michael kept Fred Martin too so I had company Fred rather saucy" (October 31). This time she had Michael nearby, but tellingly, she wrote nothing to suggest that he helped her cope with or resolve her problems even though he appears perfectly capable of handling his own students. Rather, she was thrown back into her frustrations and self-doubts, now while occupying a role that, by the gender standards of her time, should have given her opportunities to channel her knowledge and grow by helping others.

By mid November, Boyd's silences rivaled her words for prominence in her diary, and at this point I quote more frequently to emphasize her entries' brevity and narrowness of focus. On November 10, she described feelings that persisted over the next few weeks, writing, "I do not feel very well today Do not go to hear Miss H. recite I have so much else to do. A letter from Lucy." Then, after alluding to writing that she did complete: "I go to hear Miss H. tonight after I come



home I write a peice [sic] on the 'Casket,' A paper Clara and Laura Fish are getting up for next Friday. *Somehow I do get so little time for writing. Or any thing else for that matter*" (November 11, my emphasis). Now I ask readers to picture diary pages ordered by date, one full page per day, on which the following comments appear (I include the entirety of Boyd's entries from November 17 to November 25):

- November 17: "I do not go to hear Miss H I am not feeling well."
- November 18: "Still feel badly."
- (No entry on November 19.)
- November 20: "A letter from Emma Dana."
- November 21: "A letter from Yarnell."
- November 22: "Work hard."
- November 23: "Go to church in the morning but stay at home at night."
- November 24: "The same old story."
- November 25: "A letter from Emma D."

While Boyd reported a pleasant Thanksgiving break, her comments thereafter—the final handful of entries in her diary—suggest a troubling, unsupportive work environment. One day she wrote, "The boys are awful ugly today. I go to prayer meeting but do not take a part. It is all I can do to choke down the big sobs that will rise all I can do" (December 4). This entry hearkens back to February 8 when, after delivering an oration in Professor Scott's elocution class, she cried all the way home. But in early December, her reference's proximity to ever-growing silences and brief expressions of unease points to a general shutting down of her writing. Also, contrary to religious meetings that she had attended in the spring, the prayer meeting at Monroeville did not appear linked to an influential figure from the institution where she spent most of her time. Her December 4 entry is followed the next day by the comment, "Michael talks to me this morning and I was so foolish as to let the tears come into my eyes. I am sorry I was so weak. Wonder if I will ever be strong and able to controll [sic] my feelings." Again, her words echo the self-doubt that she experienced around Professor Scott at Ohio University, but this time she neglected to mention a solution and failed to show signs of reassurance after interacting with her male colleague. Finally, amplifying the effect of these entries is the fact that the next five days produced no diary entries; the reader finds blank pages for nearly a week.

Here we arrive at Boyd's last four entries of 1873, each of which I find suggestive enough to share in its entirety. The first consists only of "A letter from Kate Hoyt" (December 11). The next is a casting of herself as a non-writer: "The scholars were extra good today I am glad for I am so tired. I somehow do not write any more in my diary or any place else either" (December 12). The day after this: "I sleep more than half the time today I feel sick and tired and disappointed I did



not get any letter from home this week" (December 13). Her last entry consists of a carelessly presented review of her daily actions: "Just the same old thing over again, Not Sunday I do not mean but Sundays work I am glad to have Sunday come [then after a skipped line] I write to day to Lucy at Carthage, Ella at Athens Kate..Mansfield. Berry..Delaware an C.R.L. Rossville Shawnee Co Kansas" (December 14). While ordinarily I refrain from judging Boyd's diary entries on the basis of mechanics, grammatical correctness, and logical connections, the ubiquity of these issues in her last entry is undeniable, a conspicuous contrast from her January 1 entry when she hoped to improve in all ways a "great deal." After transitioning from Ohio University student to Monroeville High School teacher, her diary entries grew inconsistent and her attitude toward her writing and intellectual development showed few signs of improving.

Then there are the facts of Boyd's post-Monroeville life. We know that she taught in Monroe-ville for only two years, after which she moved to Cincinnati and taught for four years at Wesleyan Female College, "a school established largely through the influence of her uncle, Dr. Elliott" (Jones 3). This transition is important because it shows Boyd accepting a demographic shift, from teaching male and female students to teaching only female students, and a familial shift, from taking a job outside her family's immediate influence to taking a job partly created by her uncle. After Wesleyan Female College, she served as a high school principal in Martinsville, Indiana, for four years and then moved back to Athens, Ohio, where for the rest of her professional life she taught and worked as assistant principal at the Athens High School, mere blocks away from Ohio University. During the same period her sister Kate served as principal of Athens High School (Davis 9). So in Margaret Boyd's return to Athens we see a return to her sister, one of Margaret Boyd's supporters from spring 1873. Although both Ohio University and the Monroeville High School had challenged Boyd, it was to the doorstep of the former site, complete with its faculty and peer support and its adaptations to her needs, to which she returned.

## Preparing for Movements Across Institutions

As historians of marginalized writers and remedial writing have shown, local and historical information may prompt us to take another look at conditions surrounding the teaching of writing or the administration of writing programs today (e.g., Soliday 10; DeGenero 55). The case of Margaret Boyd follows suit. While writing and learning support programs at various universities can be compared for how they reach different students, and such work can persuade us to localize our goals for writing programs and classes (Donahue and Moon; Ritter), Boyd's movement across institutional sites urges us to examine how well our pedagogies enable students to write for enriching purposes at institutions governed by different *nomoi*, and her case opens up room for comparing the significance of students' movements as they involve different aspects of identity or background. By emphasizing this dimension of students' writing lives, I am not looking at students' movement across *communities*, a concept that has been shown to mean any number of unproblematic social configurations (see, e.g., Butler; Harris), but, more specifically, at students' movement across insti-

tutional buildings or campuses that draw in, and dispense expectations to, designated people, and that evolve from distinct histories, purposes, and interests.

Highlighting writers' movements across institutional sites is all the more important for those of our students who come from underrepresented groups and who face exceptional academic challenges, especially if these students are the first within a demographic group to reach a particular milestone. Like Boyd, such students may receive a shock upon discovering that environments that ameliorate social discrepancies can disappear at the boundaries of their college campus. Additionally, focusing on cross-site movement encourages us to frame an institution's formally or informally recognized margins as movable, contingent on institutional factors. Much as Kelly Ritter argues that we "cannot speak about composition at the first-year level as if it were always a static, universal course common to all institutional types or all institutional missions" (16-17), I argue that we cannot speak about marginalization as if its effects are predictable from one site to the next. If they were, then we would have falsely assumed that Margaret Boyd was entering a safer, better-supported work environment upon leaving the male-dominated Ohio University and beginning work as a teacher in a public Midwestern high school.

The reexamination that I am proposing is no small feat. If initiated at an administrative level, it could involve discussions about the work environments in which we expect our students to write (Scott) and the degree to which college courses should encourage on-the-job training in writing (MacKinnon 421), discussions underway in critical pedagogy and professional writing. However, we may instead advance the discussions that we need to have by starting from the ground up, that is, with small pedagogical changes that suggest directions for future course changes. As a starting point, writing instructors could use Gina Hunter's institutional ethnography assignment to help students expose codes that construct outlooks and actions at the students' academic institution. Her approach "requires learning to 'see institutionally' and to question the stylized facts and accepted categories used by the institution" (Hunter 25). For example, her students might analyze the makeup of student organizations or institutional policies and procedures (Hunter 28). Or we could begin smaller, by analyzing negotiated and renegotiated uses of a campus buzzword like "success" at the students' current college or university. Lisa Mahle-Grisez has defended such an approach, having her students interrogate success, education, and material conditions, and finding that doing so "requires asking [students] to critically investigate their own language use and their membership in the myriad social and cultural networks surrounding education" (64). One way to make Mahle-Grisez's approach applicable to present-day versions of Margaret Boyd is to have students explore changes that accumulate as the students track the effects of one kind of social and discursive code—a policy, expectation, or keyword—from one institutional site to another. The immediate goals would be to unpack what does not translate from site to site, interrogate what is at stake in modifying one's language accordingly, and practice making the desired changes—or practice proposing communication changes to the site's members. A broader goal would be to instill in our writing classes the expectation of new writing experiences (e.g., new factors affecting writing pro-

cesses and new factors affecting the uses and effects of texts) based on even short moves beyond the confines of the students' current academic institution.

The rhetorical sensitivity that I am endorsing does not have to be the exclusive province of upper-level rhetoric classes. It deserves attention even as students learn what language moves hold power at their academic institution as opposed to other sites, and why, so that these language moves retain their status as institutionally mediated constructs. In the long run, no one wins if, after graduating or otherwise leaving college, motivated students find themselves silenced, unheard, or unable to effect change at an institutional site.

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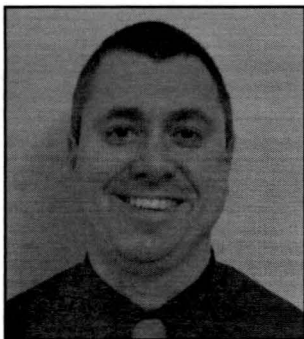
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