

# College Writing and Campus Values: The Nixon Library Debate at UC Irvine

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The UC Irvine image of being nothing but a scientist factory could have been erased. But no. Thanks to a small, but vocal, minority in the academic senate, a prized archives of knowledge, history and politics will not be located here.

—Warren Bobrow, “Faculty Goof”

In early 1983, UC Irvine (UCI) was embroiled in a debate over whether to serve as the host site for the Nixon Presidential Library. Richard M. Nixon, the 37th President of the United States, had no direct affiliation with the institution but had been born in Orange County. UCI, a young university seeking to establish a presence in the county, could acquire the presidential library of a native son. The implications were not limited to the campus and the region, as hosting any such landmark would alter UCI’s national and international standing. But Nixon was not just any president. How would the library of this particular president, at the time less than a decade removed from his infamous resignation, affect UCI’s image?

The debate crackled across the pages of the student-run campus newspaper, *The New University (New U)*, for nearly three months, with students, faculty, administrators, staff, and nearby residents weighing in on the benefits and disadvantages of siting the library at UCI. The first *New U* article to appear on the topic, published in early February 1983, reported that a phone survey of “prominent UCI faculty showed mixed initial reaction” (Casey, “UCI” 1). Even at this early stage, members of the campus community were wrangling with the major issues that would sustain the debate, such as concerns about the library’s purpose. “Most people,” Humanities Dean Kendall Bailes explained, “feel that if it is primarily a research library, under the control of the University, it would be a valuable resource” (8). As the debate intensified in late February, opponents voiced concerns about the “stigma” and the “taint” that would accompany the library (Casey, “Key” 9). They speculated that the library would attract tourists, protestors, and other undesirable visitors

whose presence was likely to disturb “academic life on campus” (9). Supporters, however, amplified claims about the library’s intrinsic worth. A *New U* article from early March reported that many in favor of the library believed that its “historical and academic value out-weighed the negative aspects” (“Library” 6). As Vice Chancellor William Lillyman quipped, “If Satan’s archives existed or if Stalin’s archives existed, I would want them. I think the historical importance of [Nixon’s] archives goes without saying” (6). Supporters like Lillyman were sure that the library, which would put UCI on a small list of campuses affiliated with these presidential landmarks, would be *of value* to the campus. Far less clear, opponents countered, was what acquiring the library would mean for UCI’s *values*.

Clearly, the Nixon library debate at UCI is not just about the Nixon library. The debate, which ended with the university rejecting the library, involves inhabitants of the campus and the surrounding area engaging in deliberations about the social and material makeup of UCI, and the record of the debate contained in the *New U* provides a glimpse at the literate activities that constituted these deliberations. As such, this record presents an opportunity to scrutinize the interplay between literacy and geography, between the word and the world. In the introduction to their edited collection, *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice*, Margaret Sheehy and Kevin M. Leander argue that, when we infuse literacy studies with a critical spatial perspective, “context is brought to the fore as an ongoing process and practice deeply tied up with the word” (3). This requires an understanding of geography as something more than a static backdrop or inert container. As critical geographer Edward W. Soja notes in the preface to *Spatializing Literacy*, a critical spatial perspective ensures that “space and the more concretely defined spatiality of human life are seen not just as built forms or materialized and mappable geographies, but also as active and formative processes developing over time” (ix). We are dynamically intertwined with the geographies we inhabit and so, too, are our literacy practices. “When we use words,” Sheehy and Leander assert succinctly, “we are always situating ourselves” (3). Importantly, this process of using literacy to situate ourselves is not about fitting into ready-made nooks and crannies. It is, rather, about appreciating the co-constitutive relationship we have with our surroundings and, ultimately, about claiming the ability to reaffirm and/or disrupt the social and material makeup of the geographies we inhabit.

This spatially sensitive perception of literacy foregrounds my analysis of the *New U* record of the Nixon library debate, an analysis that, in turn, I use to advance a spatially sensitive definition of college writing. A capacious, imprecise term, *college writing* typically denotes curricular literacy practices carried out by students at the direction of an instructor. But, especially if we choose to define college writing as an array of literacy practices that, in the words of Haivan V. Hoang, “requires engagement with academic disciplines *as well as* the politicized sites of college campuses” (W386), then I think it behooves teacher-scholars of rhetoric, writing, and literacy to study how cocurricular literacies, such as those sponsored by publications like the *New U*, enable engagement with ideologically fraught campus terrain. Though she does not make the connection herself, Hoang’s definition resonates with efforts by Nedra Reynolds, among others, to make geography matter to researching and teaching college writing. In her contribution to *The Locations of Composition*, an edited collection representative of the spatial turn in rhetoric/composition, Reynolds asserts, “Students at every college, no matter what the conditions, must negotiate the ideologies and values of their institution,

a task no easier or harder at Harvard than at Rio Grande College or West Chester University or Northeast Iowa Community College” (259). Inhabiting a campus is an education in negotiating ideologically fraught terrain, which makes literacy practices associated with the terrain similarly fraught. Framing the relationship between campus and inhabitant as a communicative scenario, Reynolds insists, “The values of an institution (not to mention the endowment) are communicated loudly and clearly through the conditions for teaching and learning and through the ways in which space is used or assigned” (260).

In arguing that a campus built environment functions as a legible expression of an institution’s values, Reynolds echoes a theory commonly advanced in literature about campus planning. Campus planner and architect M. Perry Chapman, for instance, conveys the theory in its most imperative form: “The character of the place must say something to its constituents about institutional values and why those constituents are joined in both the personal and the civic pursuit of those values in that place. It matters that the campus clearly expresses the identity of the institution to the community around it and to the world beyond it” (xxxi). Similarly, in the conclusion to his authoritative history of campus planning in the US, architectural historian Paul V. Turner argues, “the campus reveals the power that a physical environment can possess as the embodiment of an institution’s character” (305). This “power” assumes that “an institution’s character” can be distilled into an architectural vocabulary and made manifest in material form, and, furthermore, it assumes that, with relative ease, a campus built environment can be read as a uniform “embodiment” of the institution.

What about the other side of this communicative scenario? How do campus inhabitants and members of the surrounding community talk back to the campus built environment? In line with the definition of college writing outlined above, I am interested in how campus-based literacy practices reaffirm and/or disrupt the supposed ideological coherence of campus built environments. As inhabitants and others talk back to the terrain and, inevitably, talk with each other about the terrain, their literacy practices reveal the extent to which a campus is not a fixed, stable thing but rather an evolving, ongoing construction. Cases like the Nixon library debate at UCI demonstrate that “our human geographies . . . are not immutable or naturally given,” which “means that they can be socially changed, made into something better than they were through collective action” (Soja x). On campuses, college writing can figure prominently in the actions that inhabitants take to try to change their surroundings, a fact that becomes especially apparent when, expanding notions of what counts as college writing, we appraise campus newspapers and other cocurricular publications as equal to, rather than subordinate to, writing produced for curricular purposes.

Such an appraisal recaptures the spirit of Ken Macrorie’s 1963 encomium of campus newspapers, ironically titled “Spitting on the Campus Newspaper,” in which he calls on writing instructors to respect the vital immediacy of these public venues for writing on campuses. “Suppose we hold our venom in the back of our mouths for a while,” he argues, “and consider our dedication to writing. If we look for words alive in the campus paper, we will find them” (28). A campus newspaper is a notable public venue, and perhaps *the* notable public venue, for sponsoring debates about campus values. So, just as much as “words alive,” these publications afford glimpses at campuses alive. In this article, I use my *New U* source material to undermine the theory that a campus built environment

functions as a uniform manifestation of an institution's values. Admittedly, campus values are most commonly encountered as a slate of vacuous, inoffensive slogans on an institutional website or in a promotional brochure. I demonstrate, however, that campus values are anything but uniform,

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vacuous, or inoffensive when, scattered across the pages of the campus newspaper, they are contested by students, faculty, administrators, staff, and nearby residents in debates about campus planning. More than a supplemental account of campus

values, the *New U* record of the Nixon library debate documents inhabitants and others communicating their interpretations of campus values, simultaneously situating themselves in relation to the campus terrain and revealing its ideological fault lines.

In the next section, aligning my study with a strand of historical research on cocurricular publications (Gold; Jarratt; Shepley), I summarize the record of the Nixon library debate that I have gleaned from the pages of the *New U*. This summary, intended to provide a descriptive overview of the debate, lays the groundwork for my analysis that follows. In the two subsequent sections, I analyze my source material: eleven issues of the *New U* published in the winter and spring of 1983, and particularly three letters to the editor and one opinion column. In the first of these two sections, I delineate three ideological fault lines: the academic value of the library, the regional values reflected in UCI's connection to its surroundings, and the civic values that UCI evinces as a public institution. These fault lines emerge within the deliberative ecology, as participants wrangle over UCI's values. In the second of these two sections, I consider the outcome of the debate, the rejection of the library based on decisions made by a small group of faculty. This outcome, which, as exemplified in the epigraph from Warren Bobrow, frustrated supporters of the library, belies the theory that campus built environments can adequately represent the values of various campus constituencies. I argue that, collectively, all contributions to the *New U* record of the Nixon library debate function to unsettle the supposed ideological coherence of the campus. Cultivating layered, conflicting accounts of campus values via sources like the campus newspaper and using these records for research, pedagogy, and other curricular and cocurricular ends can help to sustain and diversify what it means to research and teach college writing.

## Finding the Nixon Library at UCI

The Nixon library does not exist at UCI in the sense that there is not an entry for it in the record of the campus built environment. Presumably, then, it has no part to play in what M. Perry Chapman describes as the “unalloyed account of what the institution is all about” (xxiii). But the campus built environment is only one account of campus values. A more comprehensive exploration rooted in recognizing the social as well as the material dimensions of a campus requires a methodology that can find what goes unaccounted for in the built environment. The Nixon library does exist at UCI in the sense that it can be found in the pages of the campus newspaper. Published weekly during

the school year, the student-run *New U* started publication in 1968, three years after the university opened. Thus, the publication has been poised to capture much of UCI's fifty-year history. The Online Archive of UCI History, maintained by UCI Libraries Special Collections & Archives, contains a digitized collection of *New U* issues published between 1968 and 2003, amounting to an impressive 1292 items. Seeking to read the campus in a manner that appreciates what is not there, I rely on this archive for source material. Specifically, I rely on eleven issues of the *New U* published from February 1983 to May 1983 that include references to the Nixon library.

In accordance with the expanded definition of college writing that I outlined in the introduction, I aim to draw out the rhetorical and spatial effects of my source material. By rhetorical effects, I refer to what Susan C. Jarratt identifies in her study of archival materials from three historically Black colleges and universities as “the viability” of a cocurricular publication to serve “as a contestatory public space” for students and others connected to the institution (141). Similarly, analyzing an archive of a literary magazine from Texas Women's University (TWU), David Gold suggests that what is noteworthy “in TWU student writing is not the individual political positions students hold but the clear assertion of political opinions on controversial topics in a public forum” (275). While cocurricular publications can contain texts that originated in whole or in part as curricular products, the rhetorical significance of these texts shifts as they see publication, reach more readers, serve new purposes, and interact differently with the spaces through which they circulate. By spatial effects, I mean what Nathan Shepley identifies in his study of archival materials as “the writing's spatial work” (74). Considering a range of curricular and cocurricular texts, as well as documents such as course catalogs and publicity materials, from Ohio University and the University of Houston, Shepley argues that the materials show “that shapers of composition practices included savvy instructors, administrators, and students (people usually highlighted in studies of historical student writing), as well as civic clubs, city leaders, physical infrastructure, state politicians, and K-12 and other postsecondary education organizations” (17).

Compelled by the archival methodology of these studies, especially Shepley's impulse “to theorize place through historical studies of college student writing” (14), I use my source material to piece together the layered, conflicting account of campus values that emerged during the Nixon library debate. In the pages of the *New U*, the debate peaked in intensity in late February and early March of 1983. While mostly filled with the voices of UCI undergraduates, the *New U* record does contain other voices, reflecting the broad-based deliberative ecology that the newspaper sustained over the course of the debate. Six news articles, penned by staff writers Jim Casey (“UCI,” “Key,” “Library”) and Tom Davey (“Group,” “News,” “Faculty”), contain information about the proposed library, responses from members of the campus community, and updates on both the negotiations taking place between UCI administrators and Nixon Foundation representatives and the discussions among faculty in the Academic Senate. The *New U* ran three editorials on the Nixon library; all appear early in the debate. In addition, the newspaper published three letters to the editor: one from a resident of Irvine, who ardently opposes the library, and two from UCI undergraduates, who support it. A guest opinion column, written by *New U* staffer Andrew J. Hoffman, appears in the February 8 edition. In this well-crafted reflective essay, Hoffman contemplates how Nixon, a

ghoulish specter of his childhood, has transformed into a fascinating object of study, and, for this reason, he supports the library. There are six other references to the Nixon library, including news bulletins on the status of the negotiations and published minutes from meetings where the student government voted on resolutions related to the library.

*New U* news articles provided the UCI community with its first glimpses at how the Nixon library would change the makeup of the campus built environment. Evident in these initial descriptions is the effort by administrators to articulate how the library could be a scholarly asset to UCI, a line of argument that supporters would go on to champion. But these *New U* articles also hint at the aspects of the library that would draw the ire of opponents. Based on documents shared by Chancellor Dan Aldrich and UCI's Office of Physical Planning, an article from February 22 explains that “[t]he library building . . . [would] be two stories of steel and concrete with approximately 100,000 square feet of usable space,” and it “would be located on 12 to 13 acres of university property near the corner of Campus and Culver drives” (“Key” 9). Notably, this location is on the northeast corner of campus at the threshold between town and gown, between the city of Irvine and the campus of UCI. Town-and-gown relations would feature prominently in the debate. The February 22 article also describes the proposed complex as both a site for research and teaching and a museum for exhibits and gatherings, noting that the library would contain an archive of “over 4,000 hours of taped White House conversations” and various other materials from Nixon’s time in the Oval Office (9). The library’s purpose and these holdings became key sources of controversy, as opponents, citing Nixon’s predilection for secrecy, expressed their concerns about transparency.

By late March and April, the newspaper’s coverage of the debate shifted largely to tracking a group of faculty members who, on behalf of the Academic Senate, assessed the prospect of hosting the library. There is also an article from April 5 reporting on the media blackout imposed by Chancellor Aldrich in response to reporting from the *Los Angeles Times* that, in his estimation, impeded deliberations (“News”). This reveals that, though I focus on the *New U*, the debate gained traction beyond the campus, circulating in the local and regional media. In mid-April, the Academic Senate voted 72-1 to pursue an agreement with Nixon Foundation officials. However, as reported in the *New U* on April 19, faculty members attached stringent conditions, foremost among them a requirement for Nixon “to relinquish all control over his presidential papers,” that many felt were designed to “kill” the prospect of UCI hosting the library (“Faculty” 1). And that is exactly what happened. The faculty’s proposition was a non-starter, and, in late spring, the Nixon Foundation announced plans to site the library elsewhere in Orange County.<sup>1</sup>

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Documenting a contentious moment in the history of the development of the UCI campus, the *New U* record of the Nixon library debate renders visible the interplay between literacy and geography, and reveals the ideological conflict that stirs just below the concrete-and-asphalt contours of the UCI campus, just below what Chapman all-too simplistically describes as “an unalloyed account of what

the institution is all about.” As one of those components that was considered but never built, the Nixon library is a key component of UCI’s unbuilt environment that has as much to say about the institution as any other component of the campus. Reading what isn’t there is about scrutinizing the fault lines that run beneath the relatively staid, still landscape projected by the current configuration of the campus built environment. These fault lines are evidence that campus values are, much like the campus itself, an evolving, ongoing construction to which college writing has much to contribute. I analyze some of this writing in the next section.

## Writing the Ideological Fault Lines of a Campus

In this section, I delineate three major fault lines that emerge within the deliberative ecology of the Nixon library debate: academic value, regional values, and civic values. I preserve chronological continuity as much as possible in an effort 1) to maximize the clarity of my analysis and 2) to provide a sense of the ebb and flow of the debate as it unfolded in the *New U*. I demonstrate that, although sparked by the Nixon library, this debate is more about the social and material makeup of the UCI campus, and, as such, it offers contributors to the debate an opportunity to engage with each other to express and contest their interpretations of the geography they share. Though I maintain that the debate reveals more about the campus than the library, I refer to literature on presidential libraries as necessary to enhance my analysis. I turn now to some of that literature to contextualize the *New U* record.

Presidential libraries are relatively recent additions to the civic fabric of the US. In *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, a critical history of presidential libraries, Benjamin Hufbauer provides the following overview:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that a living ex-president would have a huge memorial building featuring a substantial museum, a vast archive with millions of items, and a staff dedicated to perpetuating that president’s memory would have seemed un-American, but since 1941, self-commemoration has become an integral part of the modern presidency. (178)

As a matter of interest for political science, Hufbauer construes this development as an indication of the increasingly powerful role of the executive branch in the US government. The brief history of presidential libraries is also a matter of interest for campus planning. Hufbauer credits John F. Kennedy and those who worked to establish his library with the concept of linking a presidential library with a college campus (71). JFK’s library, affiliated with the University of Massachusetts, Boston, opened in 1979 after many years of planning. During this period, Lyndon B. Johnson’s library opened in 1971 at the University of Texas, and, therefore, it is technically the first presidential library to claim a university affiliation (68). Since then, such an affiliation has been a common feature, with two notable exceptions: the Nixon and Reagan libraries, both of which are located in Southern California. Hufbauer writes that, largely in response to Reagan’s library opening without a university affiliation, “The Office of Presidential Libraries in Washington, D.C. [ . . . ] now actively encourages the university model” (181).

The history of presidential libraries, brief though it is, is marked by notably acrimonious debates, and the model of associating a library with a campus seems only to intensify the acrimony.<sup>2</sup> That it entails claiming a prominent role in the civic fabric of the nation makes a debate about siting a presidential library on a campus that much more likely to engender ideological conflict. Yet, for all the potential complications, early in the debate over the Nixon library at UCI, supporters of the library portray the arrangement in advantageously straightforward terms. The *New U* editorial from February 1, which contains a wholehearted endorsement of efforts to acquire the library, explains that there “appear to be no drawbacks to this deal for UCI” because the only thing “required of the University is 13 acres [of land]” (10). Supporters combine this portrayal of the arrangement with claims about the library’s scholarly import. In a guest opinion column published February 8, Andrew J. Hoffman, an undergraduate studying English, muses: “What are the potential drawbacks? A little temporary heat from those who would rather sacrifice the academic value of a collection of presidential papers than have anything to do with Nixon” (13). Supporters of the library rely on appeals like this throughout the debate, sometimes using appeals to academic value to de-Nixonize the debate. For instance, drawing comparisons to the JFK and LBJ libraries, the *New U* editorial from February 1 deems the Nixon library “a priceless scholarly treasure . . . [that] would act as a magnet to distinguished historians and political scientists” looking to study recent US history and politics (“Of Course” 10). Such appeals, like Lillyman’s quip about accepting the archives of Satan or Stalin, shift the focus away from Nixon and towards the benefits of linking UCI with the small, exclusive network of campuses associated with a presidential library.

This is, though, what makes Hoffman’s opinion column a notable early contribution to the debate and, indeed, one of the best illustrations of the first ideological fault line. Rather than ignoring Nixon’s legacy, Hoffman engages with it in order to accentuate the academic value of the library. He opens by reflecting on his experience as a twelve-year-old watching Nixon’s resignation on television. For Hoffman, as for most of the students contributing to the debate, Nixon is not a figure from the distant past. Importantly, this forestalls dismissing these student voices as uninformed. “Nixon [is] associated with Watergate, but also with Vietnam, social and political intolerance and the beginnings of high inflation,” Hoffman concedes. “But it is precisely these associations that make a Nixon Library so intriguing” (13). Hoffman interprets UCI as an institution that is poised to confront the knotty problems of history. Although Hoffman, as a student, might have little involvement with UCI’s future, he takes up the long-range implications when he concludes, “It will be a long time before the secrets of the Nixon administration are completely uncovered. I hope they’re uncovered at UCI” (13). By confronting the legacy of Nixon directly, Hoffman is able to speculate about what this particular library could mean for UCI as an academic institution, in effect suggesting that the UCI campus can incorporate the Nixon library without becoming the Nixon library.

While supporters assume that the Nixon library’s purpose is consonant with UCI’s values as an academic institution, the history of presidential libraries is more ambiguous in this regard. Presidential libraries have a place in the civic fabric, but the purpose of that place is not clearly defined. “A presidential library is a monument,” Hufbauer explains, “but also a history museum and an archive” (1). This malleability is on display in the Nixon library debate at UCI, with supporters



and opponents offering interpretations of the library's purpose that, not surprisingly, accord with their respective stances, stances that ultimately reflect how these contributors to the debate perceive the campus. In the *New U* record, the most common objection raised by opponents is that the library will venerate the former president by acting as "a monument or mausoleum to Nixon personally and a big tourist attraction" (Casey, "UCI" 8). The assumption that the library-as-monument will bring unwanted attention is captured in the following comment from "one prominent and influential faculty member who wished to remain unnamed": "A campus based in Orange County without a broad-based academic reputation already suffers from the image of being too conservative. The placement of the library here [at UCI] would perpetuate that image" (8). This argument introduces the second fault line I explore in this section, regional values. By imagining the institution and the region as two distinct entities locked in divergent orbits, this argument throws UCI and Orange County into sharp contrast. In so doing, this argument plays into longstanding concerns about the divide between town and gown.

A letter to the *New U* published on February 22 develops further this regionally minded opposition to the Nixon library. Titled "Nix Nixon," the letter is signed by Marybeth Webster, a resident of Irvine unaffiliated with the university. Webster's standing as a resident of the town makes her letter a noteworthy addition to the *New U* record of the debate because it serves as a reminder that the inhabitants of a campus are not the only ones concerned with its development. In composing this letter and submitting it for publication, Webster, too, is engaging with the ideologically fraught campus terrain. Webster, too, is engaging in college writing. In her letter, Webster questions the library's academic value by expanding the scope of its impact, writing that the Nixon library "implies an honoring of a master betrayer . . . [And] it advertises to the world an image of UCI, the UC system, and of Orange County quite repugnant to large numbers of residents, faculty, students—and prospective students" (14). Rejecting supporters' claims about the beneficial impact of such a landmark, Webster frames the library as a monument dripping with the duplicity that marred Nixon's presidency.

Webster bolsters her passionate opposition by proposing a conspicuously ideological vision of the region and of UCI's place within it. She writes about recently moving to California and about her desire to be "proud" of her new home. The library would prevent this, she argues, because it would stand as "[a] morally objectionable addition to an area of this state that has already been shamed quite enough by producing Nixon and other unsavory politicians" (14). Webster hopes that, by rejecting the library, UCI can project an image that distinguishes it from its regional surroundings. Douglass Reichert Powell's scholarship on critical regionalism provides insight into a regional appeal like the one composed by Webster. "Regions," he explains, "are not so much places themselves but ways of describing relationships among places" (10). For Powell, regions are fundamentally rhetorical and an appeal to a specific region "is always at some level an attempt to persuade as much as it is to describe" (21). Webster's regional appeal is a subjective characterization of the relationship between UCI and Orange County. According to her, UCI should serve as a countervailing and, if need be, antagonistic force in the region. This is surprising coming from a resident of Irvine. Essentially, in this letter, a member of the town is begging the gown to keep its distance. Granted, Webster is only one resident

of the town. Her views might be an exception, which could explain why she sought to get her letter published in the *New U*. Still, by so fiercely contrasting the campus with the surrounding region, Webster risks promoting the image of UCI as an ivory tower, which is its own kind of monument.

Webster's regionally minded opposition can also be construed as a claim about UCI's civic values. She encourages UCI to define these values through negation, insisting that the institution's rejection of "the Nixon Library would begin the healing of lost faith in American leadership" (14). A letter to the editor penned by an undergraduate suggests that this "healing" can best be achieved by taking the opposite course of action. Published on March 1, Barbara Bunsold's letter summarily dismisses Webster's claims, in the process opening up the third and final ideological fault line that I consider in this section. "While Ms. Webster may still hold fast to her opinion along with many others who share her beliefs," Bunsold writes, "I think she should first understand the context" (12). In effect, Bunsold, a political science student, contends that opponents have jumped to conclusions without doing their homework about presidential libraries. This direct engagement with others underscores "the viability" of a cocurricular publication to serve "as a contestatory public space" (Jarratt 141). Writing for such a publication is not practice for participating in public debates; it *is* participation in public debates.

Augmenting claims by Hoffman and other supporters about the Nixon library's academic value, Bunsold uses her letter to address the thorny issue of presidential library governance. In so doing, she articulates how acquiring the library can strengthen the civic values of UCI as a public institution. Making Bunsold's letter even more compelling is the fact that presidential library governance is anything but straightforward. "Because federal presidential libraries are created and partially supported by private foundations [ . . . ], but run by the National Archives and Records Administration, there is a tension," Hufbauer explains, "between authenticity and reproduction, between education and entertainment, and between history and 'heritage'" (1).<sup>3</sup> Bunsold's courage to tackle the legislative minutiae of presidential libraries makes her letter a significant contribution to the debate. No other piece of writing in the *New U* addresses the topic of governance with the same vigor. Perhaps relying on her training in political science, Bunsold references the congressional legislation that, at that point in 1983, dictated the governance of presidential libraries. After citing a lengthy section from a Joint Resolution of Congress in 1955 that established basic rules for the collection of presidential materials, Bunsold rebukes opponents' claims that the library will venerate Nixon: "The intent [of the legislation] . . . is to make available to anyone interested the papers of any President that can serve to illuminate the surrounding circumstances of the actions taken by previous administrations. It nowhere states that it is to be a monument to the individual" (12).

On top of this, Bunsold argues that those who loathe Nixon should be doing all they can to secure the library and the materials that come along with it. "As a matter of fact," she contends, "it will be those who disagree with him the most who stand to gain the most from the library, using it to research his ignoble conduct and misuse of prerogative power, hopefully even being able to offer solutions to the gaps that still exist allowing for further and future abuses" (12). She concludes her letter by suggesting how the Nixon library could be of immediate civic relevance. Referencing contemporaneous scandals roiling President Reagan's Environmental Protection Agency, Bunsold

argues that researching the uses and abuses of executive power “seems to me to be of critical importance in light of who currently occupies the oval office” (12). From a contentious debate at her institution to a letter from a community member, from congressional legislation to national political scandals, Bunsold’s letter reflects the various “shapers” of college writing (Shepley 17). Importantly, though, more than merely a passive reflection of these influences, Bunsold’s letter responds to them, attempting to (re)shape the influences that bear on the deliberative ecology in which the letter circulates.

Taken together, the letters of Hoffman and Bunsold advance the interpretation that, by acquiring the Nixon library, UCI can be a public institution that promotes civically relevant inquiry into the

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controversial legacies of figures like Nixon.<sup>4</sup> Both Hoffman and Bunsold are interested in what Chapman describes as “the *civic relationship* that U.S. campuses have with their communities, regions, and states, indeed with the nation and the world.” Chapman goes on to write,

“Despite popular notions (and the insistence of many academics) that the campus should be an intellectual ivory tower, the American version has always been a working part of the world around it. It is in the academy’s self-interest to be integrated with society” (xxxiii). Rather than the negation strategy proposed by Webster, which potentially distances UCI from the spaces and places beyond its borders, Hoffman and Bunsold frame the acquisition of the Nixon library as a way to bring UCI into more meaningful contact with these spaces and places.

Bunsold’s letter is essentially the last substantial contribution to the debate. In general, the trajectory of the debate as reflected in the *New U* record, while by no means a representative sample of opinions, suggests that, over the span of nearly three months, there was growing support for the library. Supporters, especially students, were aware of Nixon’s legacy and they felt that, by acquiring the library, they could scrutinize this legacy and, in the process, affirm UCI’s values as an academically rigorous and civically engaged institution. Supporters of the library, however, did not prevail. In the final weeks of the debate, the broad-based deliberative ecology that had emerged, an ecology that, at its most intense, involved various campus constituencies, narrowed considerably to a small committee in the Academic Senate. This committee quashed the prospect of UCI acquiring the library. Certainly, these details call into question the extent to which the Nixon library debate can be appraised as an open, fair deliberative process. Yet, neither the process nor the outcome entirely negate the engagement of contributors and the effects that stem from their engagement. I consider these effects further in the concluding section and I offer some thoughts about what this archival study of college writing and campus values can mean for teacher-scholars of rhetoric, writing, and literacy.

## College Writing and Its Effects

Those who supported the Nixon library via contributions to the *New U* failed to effect the change they wanted to see on their campus. Interestingly, Haivan V. Hoang's article, cited in my introduction, also centers on a failed effort to effect change on a college campus, and, as part of her article, she chooses to deduce why the efforts of the student group she studied failed and "to reimagine a productive conversation" about the topic with which the students were engaged (W387).<sup>5</sup> I want to mark this as a point of contrast. Rather than offering a corrective for what, if anything, supporters of the Nixon library did wrong, I choose to see the debate as "productive" for supporters and opponents alike. In fact, if cocurricular publications permit "critical exchange about questions of collective concern" (Jarratt 141), then part of the benefit of these publications is surely the fact that they afford contributors opportunities to experience both the successes and the failures of deliberating with others about the ideological fault lines of a shared geography. Pushing beyond a stark, simple understanding of what it means to win a debate, I begin this concluding section by considering the effects of one letter to the editor that, though published after the debate ended, casts a shadow over the entire process, in turn demonstrating the role that college writing can play in unsettling the supposed ideological coherence of a campus built environment.

Published on April 26, Warren Bobrow's letter to the editor contains a harsh condemnation of the planning process surrounding the Nixon library. An undergraduate studying psychology, Bobrow uses his letter, unambiguously titled "Faculty Goof," to express his lingering resentment with those he holds responsible for the outcome of the debate. He laments, "The UC Irvine image of being nothing but a scientist factory could have been erased. But no. Thanks to a small, but vocal, minority in the academic senate, a prized archives of knowledge, history and politics will not be located here" (12). With the time for deliberation having passed, Bobrow's letter is unlike previous contributions to the record. It is epideictic in nature and seeks to blame those responsible for rejecting the Nixon library and, thus, for rejecting the opportunity to redefine UCI as a more multidimensional university. Bobrow's letter reveals how cocurricular literacy practices like those sponsored by the *New U* allow students to negotiate their affiliation with the institution. Though a cocurricular publication can serve as "an enculturating tool" by introducing students to institutional "norms," it can also be used to "maintain a spirit of solidarity against institutional authority" (Gold 272). Bobrow's letter is a reminder that enculturation via college writing need

***"More than merely a 250-word chunk of undergraduate venom, Bobrow's rancorous letter casts a shadow over the entire deliberative ecology."***

not be conflated with acquiescence to the institution. In his letter, suspecting nefarious intentions, Bobrow insists that the faculty rejected the library in an effort to "get their last two cents in and embarrass the former President more" (12). According to Bobrow, the efforts and arguments of supporters did not fail. Rather, the planning process failed, having been coopted by a group of liberal faculty intent on expressing their displeasure with a conservative ex-president. Bobrow uses his letter to provide a retrospective evaluation of the process, characterizing the debate as a restrictive and restricted affair. More than merely a 250-word chunk of undergraduate venom, Bobrow's rancorous

letter casts a shadow over the entire deliberative ecology.

While some opponents worried that, if acquired, the Nixon library would blemish UCI's image, Bobrow's letter leaves a blemish all the same. It mars the ideological coherence of the campus, ensuring that, if people care to look beyond the record of the superficially uniform built environment, they can find other records where the absence of the Nixon library is acutely conspicuous, an enduring rupture in the social and material makeup of the campus. Towards the end of his letter, Bobrow provides the following summary: "UCI has lost an invaluable educational resource, the potential of drawing some famous scholars in the fields of humanities and political science, [ . . . ] and a lot of school pride and recognition" (12 ). In this, there are echoes of the major claims advanced by supporters, who, though they failed to see their interpretations of campus values manifested in the built environment, succeeded by seeing these interpretations manifested in the pages of the campus newspaper. It is not the outcome they hoped for, but it is an outcome that is constructive nonetheless. The UCI campus did indeed change because of the Nixon library debate. The change, though, was wrought in writing and rhetoric rather than in concrete and asphalt.

The deliberative process of campus planning is intended to resolve, or at least alleviate, conflict to the point where practical decisions can be made about how a campus built environment will evolve. But, in instances where, for reasons nefarious and otherwise, campus planning initiates or aggravates conflict and leads some campus constituencies to believe that their views have been neglected, perhaps we would do well to make the fault lines a more visible part of the terrain. One way to do this is to pay more attention to how college writing, as an array of literacy practices associated with the ideologically fraught campus terrain, "has related, and may still relate, to its surroundings" (Shepley 122). In particular, as indicated by my study and by some of the scholarship cited in this article, archival collections can provide unparalleled insights into how campus inhabitants and members of the surrounding community have talked back to the campus built environment. To that end, I want to close by considering two ways that archival collections can be used to construct layered, conflicting accounts of campus values. First, I address recent scholarship on archival pedagogies for rhetoric and writing courses and, then, I reflect on my experience curating an exhibit of student publications at UCI. My hope is that, by opening up my site-specific inquiry in this way, I can suggest how this type of inquiry can be pursued in other ways at other sites.

Given the prominent standing of archival research in rhet/comp and writing studies scholarship, it is not surprising that, recently, some teacher-scholars like Wendy Hayden and Matthew A. Vetter have pushed this methodology into the classroom, asking students to explore archival collections and to read and write about the materials they find. I am drawn to the pedagogies of Hayden and Vetter because both ask students to inquire into the social and material makeup of a campus and its environs. For Hayden, this takes the form of "an archival research project in . . . undergraduate rhetoric courses, where students recover the rhetorical activities of Hunter College women," especially activist figures (402). For Vetter, teaching at Ohio University, this takes the form of students "perform[ing] original research in the university archives and special collections to discover materials regarding a university-related topic and then edit[ing] a corresponding article on Wikipedia" (37-38).

Inevitably, these projects involve students confronting campus values. Though Vetter is careful

to explain how his project served his interests as a writing and rhetoric instructor, he notes that it also garnered strong support from archivists interested in “mainstreaming and raising awareness of library archives and special collections” (49). In this way, the work that Vetter asks of his students has rhetorical and spatial effects in terms of publicizing aspects of the institution’s history. This increases the likelihood for conflicts of interest among students, instructors, and archivists. Might a situation arise where a student’s chosen topic is at odds with what archivists want to publicize about the archival materials? Might instructors encourage scrutiny of archival materials that clashes with how students want to approach the materials? Early on in such a project, I think facilitating a discussion about campus values would be helpful for addressing these and other similar questions. If negotiating conflicts of interest is appreciated as a necessary part of the project, then students, instructors, and archivists can enter into the project more aware of how their participation might expose ideological fault lines and more aware of how it might influence their perception of the campus terrain.

To this point, Hayden focuses on how her project affects the way that her students relate to their institution. Observing their general enthusiasm, Hayden explains that students, when reflecting on their participation, also “cite learning about Hunter [College] as a benefit of the project” (415). “This project,” she goes on to state, “helps them to establish a connection with and pride in their school” (416). There is the strong possibility that reading and writing about the history of one’s institution will result in greater appreciation for it, a fact to which I can attest. However, while I do not dismiss

*“Any archival project that involves students researching their own institutions should include moments for students to reflect on and question their motivations for and responses to carrying out the project.”*

institutional pride as a possible outcome, I believe that other responses, even ambivalent ones, should be encouraged. Any archival project that involves students researching their own institutions should

include moments for students to reflect on and question their motivations for and responses to carrying out the project. More specifically, if we ask students to explore archival collections of cocurricular publications, we can conduct discussions about how literacy practices have interacted with the campus built environment over time, a task that resonates with the definition of college writing I have been interested in advancing with my analysis of the *New U* record of the Nixon library debate.

As we partner with archivists to design curricular projects, we can also use archival collections to carry out cocurricular projects such as events, workshops, and exhibits. I coordinated just such an exhibit in the spring of 2016. In conjunction with the campus-wide celebration of UCI’s fiftieth anniversary, I spearheaded a partnership between the Office of the Campus Writing Coordinator and UCI Libraries Special Collections & Archives that entailed working with archivists and a group of current and former grad students to comb through a collection of student-generated writing.<sup>6</sup> Early on, we made two curatorial decisions to give the exhibit, “Speaking Up: Fifty Years of Student Publications at UCI,” a unifying aim: we included only writing that was publicly circulated and we mostly eschewed the campus newspaper in favor of showcasing alternative publications. The latter choice was made in large part because of the digitized *New U* collection in the Online Archive of UCI History. With that collection widely accessible, we wanted to highlight other publications, not all of

which were institutionally sanctioned and many of which dealt with ideologically fraught subject matter.

After a few weeks of reading through the materials and discussing the artifacts that caught our attention, the curatorial team chose a set of artifacts that best represented how a diverse assortment of students and student organizations made their voices heard on matters of social, cultural, and political importance over the course of UCI's history. At the outset, especially upon deciding that the exhibit would feature materials likely to highlight some of the institution's ideological fault lines, I was leery of potential conflicts of interest. I recall discussions about the extent to which we should worry about UCI's public image. The archivists advised us throughout the curation process to go with the most intriguing pieces of writing no matter what the subject matter, and, following their lead, our primary motivation was to showcase the college writing and not necessarily the college.

During the subsequent weeks that the exhibit was on display in the main campus library, I took stock of how my involvement affected my perception of UCI. As we selected materials for display, we found that they could be arranged by geographical scale. One grouping of publications focused on campus matters, another focused on local and regional matters, and another focused on national and international matters. For instance, a memorable artifact from the second grouping was an African-American student group publication from the early 1990s that dedicated an issue to the civil unrest roiling Los Angeles in April and May of 1992. Also, on a national and global scale, the Muslim Student Union publication of the early- and mid-2000s featured various pieces of passionate writing about identifying as a Muslim in post-9/11 America. For me, the curation process and the organization of the exhibit reaffirmed and, in fact, helped me understand better how college writing interacts with the distinct geography of the campus while simultaneously seeping beyond the campus borders to shape and be shaped by regional, national, and international flows.

If we choose to see college writing in this way, then college writing cannot be reduced to a standardized enterprise or, as Nedra Reynolds derisively puts it, "a 'universal' or placeless experience" (259). Instead, we as researchers and teachers need to ensure that these campus-based "acts of writing... [are] as diverse as the places from which they are generated" (260). This involves emphasizing not only *what* and *who* college writing involves but also *where* it takes place and *how* it interacts with that place. And it involves recognizing how college writing contributes to ideological diversity among campuses and also within campuses. Whether via research, pedagogy, or curation, engaging with archival collections of cocurricular publications can go a long way in promoting college writing as something more than the writing that gets produced for curricular purposes. Such engagement might encourage students to seek out and contribute to the "words alive" in campus newspapers and other cocurricular publications (Macrorie 28). It might encourage them to recognize that "[s]pace, as a noun, must be reconceived as an active, relational verb" (Sheehy and Leander 1), and, furthermore, it might encourage them to recognize that their own campus-based literacy practices can affect the terrain, though not always in the most immediate or obvious ways.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The *New U* for May 3 reports that the Nixon Foundation planned to construct the library in San Clemente, a beach community roughly twenty-five miles south of the UCI campus. After resistance in San Clemente, the library opened in 1990 in Yorba Linda, Nixon's birthplace, a city just over twenty miles north of UCI.

<sup>2</sup>See Mitchell and Kirk for more on this topic, including a rhetorical analysis of the debates surrounding the failed efforts to site the Nixon library at Duke in the early 1980s and, a couple of years later, the Reagan library at Stanford.

<sup>3</sup>Governance is a key issue in the debates that Mitchell and Kirk analyze. Regarding the Nixon library debate at Duke, Mitchell and Kirk offer the following summary, which could just as easily apply to the debate at UCI: "Common points of concern included the possibility of limited access to President Nixon's presidential papers and . . . the university's affiliation with a museum that would somehow glorify Nixon's presidency" (217).

<sup>4</sup>I write this in the wake of the 2016 US presidential campaign where one candidate, Donald Trump, embraced aspects of Nixon's legacy (Avlon), while another candidate, Hillary Clinton, embraced the legacy of Nixon's Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger (Norton). I have no doubt that Nixon's contemporary relevance contributes to my affinity for the arguments advanced by Hoffman and Bunsold.

<sup>5</sup>Hoang's article is based on a case study of a Vietnamese-American student group and their unsuccessful efforts to counteract the defunding of a high school outreach program. She connects her study to the civic mission of rhet/comp, which, as Hoang explains, "continues to resonate for many of us who believe that teaching writing is about preparing students to critically express themselves within public forums, including universities" (W386). Pushing this further, I suggest that if we take seriously the idea that campuses are "public forums," then we should not describe the engagement of students on campuses as preparatory. To describe it as such is to risk diluting it, making it something less than actual public engagement.

<sup>6</sup>I am grateful to Steve MacLeod, Public Services Librarian, and Laura Uglean Jackson, Assistant University Archivist, for their interest and guidance in curating the exhibit. Also, without assistance from Allison Dziuba, Maureen Fitzsimmons, Lance Langdon, and Jasmine Lee, the exhibit would not have been possible. And thanks to Jonathan Alexander for providing support in his role as Campus Writing Coordinator. Let me also take this opportunity to express my gratitude for Jonathan's feedback on the contents of this article and for the feedback I have received from Daniel M. Gross and Susan C. Jarratt. Finally, thanks to Jerry Won Lee and his undergraduate English 105 class for listening to a version of this research in the spring of 2016.



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