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in loco parentis

To persuade parents and prospective students that freshmen will make a smooth transition into life at Oklahoma City University, the viewbook features nurturing images of professors taking a parental role in the learning process. This implied promise of treating students as sons or daughters comes from a tradition called “in loco parentis” which means that universities see themselves as serving “in the position of a parent” to the young adults who study with them. It is curious to me that in a time when students are supposedly coming into their own, entering the adult world, OCU would choose to portray itself as an institution having a parent-child relationship with its students.

The viewbook, entitled *Oklahoma City University, We're all about You* is sent to high school seniors to interest them in OCU. According to Shery Boyles, Director of



Admissions, the book did just that. It was first sent to high school students in 2002.

So freshmen entering during the fall of 2003 were the first to see the viewbook.

After five consecutive years of declining enrollment, the freshman class of 2003

brought an increase of 85 domestic

Note the maternal nature of this image taken from Meinders School of Business section of viewbook.

students, or 38%. The viewbook appears to be serving its purpose. To gain an insight into the book's representation of OCU, I have chosen to analyze one rhetorical strategy: the use of parental imagery.

The viewbook contains many full page photographs, representing many different aspects of life and learning at OCU. The image shown above features the Meinders School of Business. Using a variety of techniques, this photograph suggests a very nurturing, caring environment.

The viewer's eye-sequence follows the typical Z format, meaning the eyes move across the page in the shape of a Z from top left to bottom right. According to J. Thomas Russell and W. Ronald Lane, elements are strategically placed so that the eye starts at a focal point and travels a desired path throughout the page (453). The viewer's eyes first land on the teacher's face. It is the brightest, highest, and largest proportioned item on the page. Her face has a concerned mom appearance with minimal make-up, wrinkles not air-brushed away, and functional, low-maintenance hair. The teacher's expression is focused and determined to help the student. Right away the viewer has been introduced to this idea of a maternal figure. The viewer's eyes then follow the teacher's gaze down to the student. The student appears comfortable with the close proximity of her teacher. Her expression is questioning and intent on listening, not frustrated. The student looks fairly young for a college-aged individual and the teacher appears to be old enough to be the young woman's mother. This age gap again speaks to the parent-child relationship. Lastly, the viewer's eyes scan the bottom of the page, landing on the helping hands of the teacher.

The colors attract the viewer to the key elements of the image. The teacher, who draws the most focus, is the brightest figure on the page. Her red dress serves its purpose of grabbing the viewer's attention. The dress is not flashy or high-fashion but simply stands out. The student's shirt is also light in contrast to the dark background. This is all done to ensure the viewer's attention remain focused on the two primary characters, much as the teacher is so focused on helping the student.

The arrangement of the figures plays a very important role in projecting the desired parental effect. First, the figures are very close to one another. But they seem comfortable and familiar with their intimate position. Also, the teacher is higher than the student, signifying her position of respect and authority. However, she is bent over slightly, echoing her willingness to come down to the student's level and provide one-on-one attention.

All of these techniques work in harmony to communicate a nurturing relationship between students and faculty. This image is not the only one in which these techniques are combined to produce the desired effect. Notice the similarities in these two images taken from elsewhere in the viewbook.



Images taken from OCU student viewbook. Notice all images have focal point on teacher's face, age difference between student and teacher, and similar layout with teacher being the highest.

These two pictures follow a similar eye sequence, contain the same color/contrasting principles, and feature figures arranged much like the previously mentioned image.

All of these images contain elements of truth. At a small university, with small class sizes, professors are able to get to know their students. Many professors provide the type of one-on-one relationship the photographs are portraying. However, it has been my personal experience as a freshman at this university that these images are slightly posed. Professors would never likely be as close as the figures in the pictures, and while they are typically supportive they are not quite so protective and parental toward us. As a young adult, I am not looking for a parental figure but appreciate the mentor relationship I hold with several professors. By changing a few elements in the images from the viewbook, such as lessening the age difference and placing the figures level with one another, as equals, I believe OCU could project a pre-professional environment where teachers entertain genuine care and concern for students without promising to take the place of mom and dad.

Works Cited

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