

ENGL 245, Seminar in the Major, Writing Rivers
Dr. Caroline Gottschalk Druschke (she/her)
Mondays & Wednesdays 2:30-3:45pm
Classroom: Van Hise, Rm. 475
Office hrs: M 1:30pm (Van Hise lounge) & appt.
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WELCOME TO CLASS! Welcome to English 245: Seminar in the Major, “Writing Rivers.” This small, interactive, community-based learning seminar offers a chance for you to get to know more about the major, about writing, and about rhetoric, while collaborating with each other and a community partner—the Driftless Writing Center in Viroqua, Wisconsin—to contribute to a real-life community project: Stories from the Flood.

WHAT IS ENGL 245? The course catalog says that this small, 3 credit hour seminar offers students close instruction in the principles and practices of informed, engaged, critical reading and writing. While texts and topics vary, each seminar reinforces fundamental skills taught across the English major, strengthening students’ capacities to write and speak powerfully and to build convincing, original, well-organized arguments that persuade audiences of their significance. Students will meet with the professor in individual writing conferences and will write at least 30 pages, including drafts and informal assignments spread throughout the semester.

WHAT WILL WE DO IN THIS SECTION OF ENGL 245?

- Spend approximately 2.5 hours in class and 6 hours out of class on our work each week. Over the semester, at least 25 of those out-of-class hours will be spent participating in community-based service.
- Read. Think. Write. Talk. Go places. See things. Engage people. Write even more!
- Learn about rhetoric, writing, Wisconsin, rivers, flooding, resilience, public memory, and each other.
- Create timely, compelling analyses of personal stories, texts, river valleys, and life.
- Complete four major related projects on behalf of our community partner, the Driftless Writing Center.
- Contribute to the creation and preservation of Wisconsin’s history and think critically about that work.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO LEARN?

This semester, students will:

- Learn about writing, rhetoric, rivers, resilience, and Wisconsin history as it shapes the present.
- Engage with Wisconsin’s aquatic ecosystems and the humans who rely on them.
- Create original, coherent, and compelling analyses that push beyond summary to synthetic, independent, critical thinking.
- Apply the tools of rhetoric to solve problems and take action in the public sphere.
- Partner with others to address timely problems and create positive community change.
- Enact the Wisconsin Experience: cultivating empathy and humility, relentless curiosity, intellectual confidence, and purposeful action.

WHAT IS “STORIES FROM THE FLOOD”? Wisconsin’s Kickapoo River and Coon Creek watersheds have experienced five, 100-year-magnitude floods in just the last decade and climate forecasts predict this pattern to intensify. The worst of these floods, occurring just this past August, devastated homes, businesses, farms, and community spaces throughout some of the most rural and economically disadvantaged counties in the state. Dams were compromised. Residents were evacuated. Rivers rose above historical marks by more than two feet in some places. Communities were deluged, with many houses, businesses, and farm buildings condemned or abandoned. Farmers lost crops and acreage as topsoil washed downstream.

Following the flood, community members came together to clean out buildings and repair the damage. People donated money, food, clothing, shelter, and other essentials to help neighbors survive. State and federal agencies got involved. Villages along waterways discussed how to become more flood resilient, even if it meant moving every building to higher ground.

The flood's most dramatic impacts were shared on social media, in regional newspapers, and on local radio stations. But Vernon and Crawford Counties, where most of the devastation occurred, are sparsely populated and poor. They lack local media with sufficient resources to cover the topic in-depth over time. Residents continue to process what happened, rebuild, and worry about an uncertain future. However, no channel exists for them to record their complete stories and read or hear the stories of others. While the immediate aftermath of the August flooding in Vernon and Crawford counties made the state and even national news, external attention—and external funding—has turned elsewhere while residents continue the long process of recovery.

In light of this damage, The Driftless Writing Center launched Stories from the Flood, a project to collect and produce thorough accounts of what people, municipalities, and the environment have endured as climate change alters their lives and landscape. The collection, archiving, production, and distribution of these stories is a massive undertaking that will take support from individuals and institutions inside and outside the Valley. Stories from the Flood offers Valley residents a platform for working through their collective experiences, while offering a foundation for watershed-wide planning about future flooding in the Kickapoo Valley.

By contributing to the Stories from the Flood effort, Dr. Druschke's hope is that students in Writing Rivers will find yourselves equipped and inspired to engage with human and more-than-human communities in Wisconsin, to consider how the stories that are told and not told shape our sense of who and what matters in our state, and to practice how to engage with community partners to use writing for public good.

The Driftless Writing Center is thrilled to be working with our class this semester, and they need our help! Our class' contributions to the Stories from the Flood effort—through community interviews, interview transcription, and synthetic analyses—are essential to meeting the goals of the effort. Our entire course is based around Stories from the Flood, and your contributions to the project will be your primary mode of learning about and enacting your knowledge of English, rhetoric, and writing this semester.

This course will likely be very different from other courses you've taken, requiring commitment outside of the classroom, independent action, empathy, and collaboration with a range of partners. This course will push all of us in challenging and sometimes uncomfortable ways, but it may be one of the most consequential and rewarding things you've contributed to in your academic lives here at UW-Madison. It's great that you're here!

WHAT DOES DR. DRUSCHKE EXPECT OF US THIS SEMESTER?

- That you put in a serious amount of labor while committing to the spirit of the course.
- That you attend our classroom sessions, field trips, and community-based events.
- That you complete four related projects—community interviews, interview transcription, booklet analysis, and report analysis—that build to a final portfolio of your work that includes reflection on your learning process.

HOW WILL YOU GRADE THAT? We will co-create a grading contract in the early weeks of the semester that details expectations for each project and for the entire course. A grading contract is a way for students to participate in the process of determining what successful participation will look like and has been shown to offer a path to make student learning and faculty grading more equitable and reflective of student work. Dr. Druschke's general thinking is that students who attend all (or almost all) class meetings, participate in all out-of-class activities, and complete all assigned projects (interview, transcription, booklet report, final report, and

final portfolio) will receive a “B” in the course. Students who add an academic component to their end-of-semester portfolios—creating a more substantive argumentative or creative reflection on their work this semester with *Stories from the Flood*—will receive an “A.” We will discuss, revise, agree upon, and co-write the details of that grading system as a whole class.

WHY COULDN'T WE FIND BOOKS FOR OUR CLASS IN THE BOOKSTORE? The honest answer is that Dr. Druschke really, really, really doesn't want undergrads to buy textbooks if at all possible. Education is expensive enough, and requiring students to buy a costly texts if they're not entirely necessary doesn't help to ensure that all students—regardless of income—can fully engage in the course. Download course readings, read them, annotate them, and bring them to class on a laptop or tablet or in print ready to discuss.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION? If you have a disability that could impact your work in this class, please contact Dr. Druschke at the beginning of the semester so that reasonable accommodations may be worked out to support your success. You should also contact McBurney Disability Resource Center (702 W. Johnson Street, Ste. 2104 / 608-263-2741 (voice) / 608-225-7956 (text) / mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu) for support. Please communicate with Dr. Druschke about your needs!

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT RESPECT AND INCLUSION IN OUR CLASSROOM? I am committed to fostering a shared classroom community that is sensitive to the very different experiences and realities of our students, and that views our various forms of diversity as our greatest resources: differences of immigration status, gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, political affiliation, religion, and language, among others. I expect students to be relentlessly kind in their criticisms and open to learning from the perspectives of others. I am committed to using your preferred name and pronouns and invite you to introduce themselves with your preferred names. If these change during the semester, I invite you to let me know so that you can work together to develop a plan to share this information in a way that is safe for you. I want all of my students to know that I welcome you, and I hope to connect you to whatever campus resources you need (the LGBT Campus Center, the Multicultural Student Center, the Writing Center, the Black Cultural Center, and so on). I might screw up from time to time, but I hope you'll call me on it, and I will do my best to demonstrate that commitment in all of our activities this semester.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT POTENTIAL IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE) ACTIVITY ON CAMPUS?

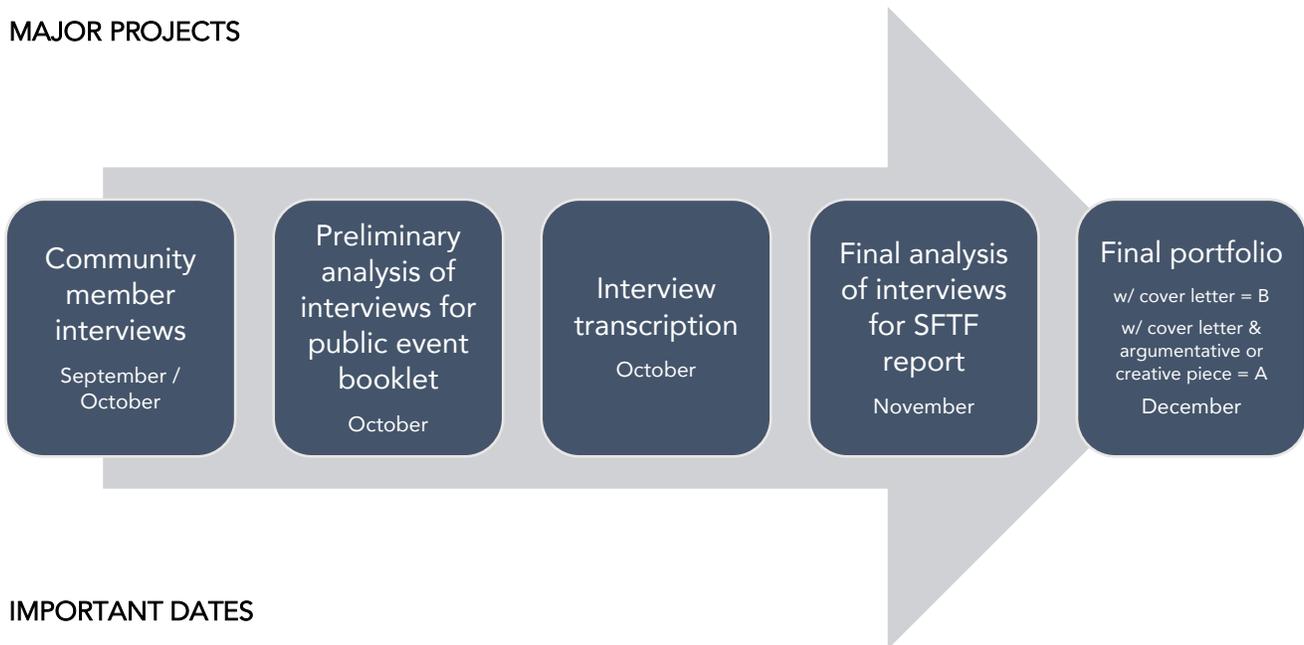
- UW-Madison will not provide information on immigration status of its students, faculty or staff unless required to do so under force of law.
- The UW–Madison Police Department (UWPD) will not participate in immigration enforcement actions conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers (ICE). Our resources are limited and such enforcement is not part of UWPD's mission.
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers must use appropriate legal processes if they are on campus and wish to contact individual students about enforcement-related issues. For example, they generally cannot enter an on-campus private residence without a proper warrant.

We encourage students seeking support to reach out to the Dean of Students Office in partnership with the Multicultural Student Center, a resource that provides assistance and support for the academic and non-academic success of DACA/undocumented students. For mental health support and assistance processing recent events, students are encouraged to connect with University Health Services. In addition, we encourage members of the campus community to contact International Student Services (ISS) or International Faculty and Staff Services (IFSS) if they have questions about international students or scholars. If you or anyone you know has been affected by ICE, Dane County Immigration Affairs Specialist Fabiola Hamdan is an available resource and may be reached at (608) 242-6260.

DO YOU EXPECT US TO REMEMBER ALL THIS? No, that's why it's written down! Consider this document a launching point for the work that is to come.

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE? This is a unique course, with an enthusiastic professor, and a fabulous community partner, that will allow us to do important, consequential work in the world. Embrace it!

MAJOR PROJECTS



IMPORTANT DATES

Saturday, September 14 (8am-5pm)

Class field trip to the Kickapoo Valley, including orientation and interview training with SFTF partners and a tour of flood sites throughout the Valley

Weekends from September 21 – October 13

Small groups complete two sets of Stories from the Flood interviews in the Kickapoo Valley

Wednesday, October 16

Preliminary report due to Driftless Writing Center to prepare Celebration booklet

Monday, October 28

Transcriptions due

Thursday, November 7 (optional)

Stories from the Flood Celebration (La Farge, Wisconsin)

Monday, November 25

Final report due to Driftless Writing Center to prepare for project report to funders

Wednesday, November 27

No class: Thanksgiving travel day

Friday, December 13

Final portfolios due by 11:59pm