

**ENGL 245, Seminar in the Major, Writing Rivers**  
**Dr. Caroline Gottschalk Druschke (she/they)**  
**Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-10:45am**  
**Classroom: Psychology, Rm. 134**  
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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, three 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 writing 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 how that work connects to planning for the future.

**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 freshwater 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 at least three, 100-year-magnitude floods in just the last decade and climate forecasts predict this pattern will intensify. The worst of these floods, occurring in August 2018, 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 2018 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 oral history interviews, interview analyses, and research-based writing—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, writing, and community engagement 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 I hope it will 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 activities.
- That you complete four related projects—community interviews, interview analysis, a research report with policy recommendations, and a creative project—that build to a final portfolio of your work that includes reflection on your learning process inside the classroom and out.

**HOW WILL YOU GRADE THAT?** Because of the community-based nature of our work this semester, we will rely on a grading contract that details expectations for successful participation in the course. A grading contract is a way for students to consider the effort that will go into engaging the work of the class and has been shown to offer a path to make student learning and faculty grading more equitable and reflective of student work.

## GRADING CONTRACT

- Students who complete all the following will earn an "A/B" in the course:

	Miss not more than two course meetings*
	Consistently participate in all course meetings: completing assigned reading & writing, actively & respectfully listening, & contributing to large and small group discussions*
	Attend class field trip/orientation (2/8) or alternate class field trip
	Complete four interviews (4 interview sessions, regardless of number of interviewees)*
	Participate in an individual conference with Dr. Druschke (week of March 9)
	Prepare an analysis of SFTF interviews by Thursday, March 5 with a grade of "Pass"
	Prepare a research report with recommendations by Tuesday, April 14 with a grade of "Pass"
	Prepare reflective portfolio w/ cover letter by Tuesday, May 5 with a grade of "Pass"
	Prepare a creative project submitted by Tuesday, May 5 with a grade of "Pass"

- Students can bump their grade up to an "A" by adding any one of the following components:

	Transcribe a SFTF interview (can be completed multiple times for additional credit)
	Complete an additional SFTF interview (can be completed multiple times for additional credit)
	Earn a "high pass" on the interview analysis project
	Earn a "high pass" on the research project
	Deliver your creative project to a meaningful and appropriate Kickapoo-based audience

- Students missing items on the checklist will earn one lower grade level per missed checklist item (A/B to B, B to B/C, etc.).

- Students missing class meetings beyond the two allotted absences will earn one lower grade for the third absence, then fifth absence, then seventh absence, and so on (A/B to B, B to B/C, etc.).

- Students can supplement \*absences, \*low participation, or \*missing interviews back to an "A/B" by adding one of the following components:

	Transcribe a SFTF interview (can be completed multiple times for additional credit)
	Complete an additional SFTF interview (can be completed multiple times for additional credit)
	Earn a "high pass" on the interview analysis project
	Earn a "high pass" on the research project
	Deliver your creative project to a meaningful and appropriate Kickapoo-based audience

- A "pass" includes meeting the standards of each writing project. A "high pass" indicates an exceptional depth of research and thought, great organization, and polished writing.

**WHY COULDN'T WE FIND BOOKS FOR OUR CLASS IN THE BOOKSTORE?** The honest answer is that Dr. Druschke 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](mailto:mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu)) for support. Please communicate with Dr. Druschke about your needs! Note: we will be listening to a lot of audio in this class – please let Dr. Druschke know if this poses any challenges for you, so we can anticipate and work around them. This class also poses some physical challenges in terms of car travel and a walking tour of La Farge. Again, contact Dr. Druschke if we need to amend this plan in any way!

**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!

### SEMESTER TIMELINE



#### **Saturday, February 8 (8am-5pm)**

Class field trip to the Kickapoo Valley, including orientation and interview training with SFTF partners

#### **Weekends through February, March, and April**

Students complete four (4) Kickapoo Valley-based Stories from the Flood interviews in small groups

#### **Thursday, March 5**

Writing project one: Interview analysis due

#### **Tuesday, March 10 and Thursday, March 12**

No class: Conferences with Dr. Druschke

#### **Tuesday, March 17 and Thursday, March 19**

No class: Spring Break

#### **Tuesday, April 14**

Writing project two: Research report w/ policy recommendations due

#### **Saturday, April 25 (optional)**

Beyond the Headlines Wisconsin's Water Future Event (La Farge, Wisconsin)

#### **Tuesday, May 5**

Reflective portfolios AND creative projects due to Canvas by 11:59pm

## MAJOR PROJECTS

### **Stories from the Flood interviews (due by the end of the semester, but better to complete them early!)**

Students are expected to work in pairs or small groups to conduct four (4) Stories from the Flood interviews this semester. CGD's expectation is that students will likely complete two (2) group day trips to the Kickapoo Valley, conducting two (2) interviews on each trip, but those details are flexible. These interviews will be scheduled by Carly Frerichs, Program Manager for the Stories from the Flood project, and students will use UW-Madison Fleet vehicles, funded by the Morgridge Center for Public Service, to travel to and from the Kickapoo Valley. Professional quality audio recorders will be loaned out to students by Dr. Druschke. Interviews typically last 20-90 minutes, and travel to and from the Kickapoo Valley can be a great chance to get to know your fellow students, work on homework, discuss course readings, reflect on your experiences, and nap.

**PLEASE** complete a driver authorization during week one so that everyone can share in the responsibility of driving. Logistics are a challenge with a community partner almost two hours from Madison, but past students have pointed to these interviews as the highlight of their semester.

**Interview analysis (6 pgs., double spaced, due Thursday, March 5)** During the first half of the semester, students will listen to a number of interviews from the growing Stories from the Flood archive and then analyze them as a first step towards research projects later in the semester. Students will prepare a ~6 pg., double spaced report that features a coherent summary and synthesis of the major themes that emerge in the interview archive, pointing to specific interviews that reference major themes, including a list of specific, powerful, illuminative quotes from particular interviews (with time stamps). Dr. Druschke will assign a set of ~10 interviews to each student to incorporate in their analyses. These projects will help students to focus their interests for the research project later in the semester. These analyses are also incredibly useful to the Driftless Writing Center as they work to promote the project, create reporting documents for funders, and translate these interviews into policy changes that benefit residents of the Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds.

**Research project with recommendations (10 pgs., double spaced, due Tuesday, April 14)** Once the SFTF interview analysis project is complete, the class will move into a research-based report, based in the archive of Stories from the Flood interviews and built from your own original research. Your research topic should be based on your own interests, but could build from and extend projects begun by students in fall 2019's section of Writing Rivers focused on:

- the need for physical and mental health resources in the wake of a flood
- educational resources and lesson plans to connect with young people in the watersheds
- the creation of an "oral history toolkit" for communities interested in replicating SFTF
- spatial analyses of SFTF interviews and flood risks

Students are free to work alone or in small groups for this project. Because these reports will have tangible use for our community partner, it makes sense to pool your brainpower and time!

Each report must include original research, though research can take many forms: library sources, census data, phone interviews with SFTF staff, careful reviews of other oral history programs, web and news media research, close readings of organizational documents, inquiries into existing data layers, conversations with local educators and environmental managers. **Each report must use that original research, coupled with text from the oral history archive, to build to specific policy recommendations related to flood recovery and resilience in the Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds.** Remember: we are hoping for use value. Make your work clear, thoughtful, careful, digestible, empathetic, relevant, and persuasive. You have a real audience after all: decisionmakers in the Kickapoo Valley!

**Reflective portfolio w/ cover letter (cover letter = 2-3pg., single spaced, due May 5)**

Every other week, we'll take time at the end of class for reflective writing about your development as a student, writer, and community-based learner. Reflection is a central component of community-based pedagogy, allowing students to critically reflect upon their engagement experience. As the Morgridge Center for Public Service details, "Structured opportunities for reflection can enable learners to examine and form the beliefs, values, opinions, assumptions, judgments and practices related to an action or experience, gain a deeper understanding of them and construct their own meaning and significance for future actions" (Moon, 1999, as cited in Conner & Seifer, 2005). Your job will be to collect these reflective pieces of writing through the semester, and then gather them in an end-of-semester portfolio. That portfolio will begin with a 2-3 pg., single spaced, reflective cover letter, addressed to Dr. Druschke, that details and reflects on your development as a writer, student, and human this semester. You might choose to consider how you met some or all of our specific course outcomes, to address how community-based learning has impacted your educational experience this semester, how your writing has progressed throughout the semester, or your knowledge of Wisconsin ecosystems, or your awareness of the community-based impacts of climate change, or of how your views have changed throughout the course. You might describe your experience interviewing someone about their flood experience and how that interview experience in turn shaped you. The main idea here is that you are writing to a real audience: CGD! This is your chance to (re-)introduce your development this semester, to let CGD know about your learning process, and to reflect on how far you've come.

**Creative project (any format, due May 5)** Quite simply, the sky is the limit on this project! This is your chance to take what you have learned and been exposed to this semester and turn it into something new. You're welcome to work solo, in pairs, or in a class-sized group. Your project could be written, visual, spatial, performative, online, interactive. It should build in some way from the SFTF oral history archive and your experience working with it and should have a purpose for existing in the world – that's about it! Consider what strengths and curiosities you bring to this class, what resources you/we can muster, and what creative interventions you might make. Dare to be great! This is a pass/fail project, meant to encourage you to translate all of your hard work this semester into a creative intervention that celebrates all you've done. Past students have drafted poems, written and performed original songs, created science fiction narratives, designed watershed-based artwork, and curated flood-related playlists. Remember that the creative project also offers the possibility for you to "level up" your course grade, if you can find a meaningful way to engage with a real-life audience for your creative project.