

ENGL 245, Seminar in the Major, Writing Rivers  
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**honor sachs**  
@drhonor

Can we PLEASE stop calling what we are doing "ONLINE TEACHING" already?

We are not "online teaching." Why? Because we would never teach online courses unless we knew how to teach online courses.

We are crisis-driven-global-pandemic-emergency-response teaching. Big difference.

5:13 PM · Mar 17, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

**Greetings wonderful students!** These are insane times, and I'm wishing all of you and your families health, safety, and relative sanity. As I outlined in my previous emails, I think that course-based learning is **not** the most pressing concern for us at this moment. That being said, I'm guessing that many of you are eager for some of the stability and routine that your courses can offer right now. To that end, I've tried to adapt our syllabus to offer you an opportunity to continue to engage the ideas that interest you and to continue to offer a useful and important contribution to the Stories from the Flood effort. But do I expect perfection out of that? **HELL NO!** But here's something.

You'll see below that I've amended the grading contract to make completion of the baseline checklist an "A" (not "A/B"): amending the completion of (4) story collections to the completion of [1 story collection visit to the Kickapoo + 1 transcript quality control] OR [2 transcript quality controls], shifting our in-class participation to weekly written reflections on Canvas, and removing the creative project entirely. I've bumped back the deadline for writing project two to the end of the semester, and minimized the reflective portfolio to a single 2-3pg. written reflection. The idea is to make the remainder of the class reasonably fulfilling, slightly structured, and hopefully doable.

## REVISED GRADING CONTRACT

Students who complete all the following will earn an "A" in the course: <-- **THIS IS A CHANGE FROM "A/B"**

√	Pre-spring break: 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 to the Kickapoo Valley
√	Prepare an analysis of SFTF interviews by Thursday, March 5 (Pass/Fail)
√	Participate in an individual conference with Dr. Druschke (week of March 9)
	Post-spring break: Participate in class by checking in through <b>weekly</b> check-ins with your assigned <b>working groups</b> (see below), including written peer reviews, and completing <b>weekly</b> Canvas-based reflections (see below)
	Complete (1) trip to the Kickapoo Valley for story collection <b>AND</b> quality control (1) transcript (see below) <b>-OR-</b> Quality control (2) transcripts by <b>Tuesday, May 5</b>
	Prepare an individual or collaborative research report on a topic of interest by <b>Tuesday, May 5</b> (Pass/Fail)
	Prepare a 2-3 pg. written reflection on the class experience by <b>Tuesday, May 5</b> (Pass/Fail)

Students missing items on the checklist will earn a moderately adjusted grade. Best advice: do what you can!

## DAILY PLANS

Effective March 23, 2020, per university direction, we will cease in-person class meetings. Rather than continuing to meet as a class via an online interface like Zoom at our regularly scheduled class period, we will cease regular, synchronous, all-class meetings during our T/Th 9:30-10:45am class period. Instead, students will work independently in small research groups and check in weekly with Dr. Druschke through written reflections and small group updates (details below).

## WEEKLY WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

Each week, Dr. Druschke will post a writing prompt to Canvas on Monday morning. Students should draft a written reflection sometime that week in response to the prompt. Prompts will be posted each Monday AM, and should be completed by students by Friday PM via Canvas. Topics will vary, but will likely include reflections on moving from in-person to online interaction, the connections between the dread of COVID-19 and the specter of future flooding in the Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds, progress on research projects, etc. These written reflections offer a chance for sustained one-on-one interaction between students and Dr. Druschke.

### REFLECTION SCHEDULE:

Reflection 1: assigned Monday, March 23 -----> due Friday, March 27  
Reflection 2: assigned Monday, March 30 -----> due Friday, April 3  
Reflection 3: assigned Monday, April 6 -----> due Friday, April 10  
Reflection 4: assigned Monday, April 13 -----> due Friday, April 17  
Reflection 5: assigned Monday, April 20 -----> due Friday, April 24  
Final course reflection due Tuesday, May 5 (see "Major Project Descriptions")

### RESEARCH PROJECT WORKING GROUPS & WEEKLY CHECK-INS

Because synchronous online course meetings aren't a great option for this workshop-based class, we'll be making use of our relationships with each other and our shared interests to stay connected and motivated. Dr. Druschke is placing students into small working groups with shared research interests (see below) and will email each group to re-introduce everyone and encourage you to get started. We will be making use of these small groups to offer each other content-based and non-content-based support and to complete periodic peer reviews of writing project two through the remainder of the semester. Each group should plan to "meet" weekly by phone or other means. (Note: many students do \*NOT\* have consistent internet access right now, so phone meetings or groups emails are probably best.) Remember that it's perfectly fine at this point for groups or pairs to write **one** shared 8-10 pg. double-spaced paper with multiple sections, or to work individually. Do whatever works best for you and keeps you reasonably sane with this task. Some working groups may decide to do a good amount of coordinated work together. Other groups might simply check in with each other once per week to say, "Hey! Here's what I completed this week, and here's what I plan to work on next week." Do what works best for you.

I've placed students into working groups based on our conference conversations last week:

**Mental health resources:** Ellie, Hope, Ella, Rachel

**Communication and climate change denial:** Danyel, Maggie, Emily

**Water pollution and disease:** Cora, McKenna, Naomi

**Agriculture and land use:** Emma, Carl, Cooper, Julia

**Aspects of place (culture, sense of place, economics):** Jackson, Lacey, Mike

**Policy change (local, state, FEMA):** Sam, Mary, Sharon

I'll be emailing each group to re-introduce you to each other, to detail some of your shared interests, and to generally get you on your way! Each week, I expect you minimally to check in with your working group somehow (phone, email, Skype, Snapchat, TikTok, Google Doc, etc.) and offer a single group update to Dr. D. by the following Monday about group progress and questions.

### WORKING GROUP SCHEDULE:

Week 1, getting started: Monday, March 23 -----> Monday, March 30  
Week 2, sharing research materials: Monday, March 30 -----> Monday, April 6  
Week 3, peer writing workshop draft #1: Monday, April 6 -----> Monday, April 13  
Week 4, finalizing research materials: Monday, April 13 -----> Monday, April 20  
Week 5, peer writing workshop draft #2: Monday, April 20 -----> Monday, April 27  
Final research project due Tuesday, May 5 (individually or in groups)

THIS MEANS YOU'LL BE COMPLETING TWO FORMAL TASKS EACH WEEK VIA CANVAS:

1. Check in with your working groups in some way (shallow or less shallow!) and respond to Dr. Druschke as a group to update her on your research project progress and any snags you've encountered (every Monday)
2. Complete a weekly individual written reflection in response to a Monday AM prompt (every Friday)

AND BY THE END OF THE SEMESTER YOU WILL COMPLETE:

1. One or two quality-controlled transcripts (depending on whether you've already completed any in-person story collections)
2. A pass/fail research project report (individually or in groups)
3. A 2-3 pg. written reflection

## REMOTE OFFICE HOURS

I will work to remain as available as possible to students through the end of the semester, but this will have to happen flexibly. (I'm now in charge of the education of 40 mostly off-campus university students and two homebound elementary students. We're all doing our best!) I will respond to all students' weekly reflections, as well as to all working groups' weekly check-ins. In addition, I am happy to respond to individual emails and to meet any and all of you via one-on-one or small group phone/Skype/Google Hangout sessions. Email me to set them up, and we'll talk! Afternoons will likely be the best options for those meetings. I want to help support your learning and your whole persons as much as possible. Thanks for recognizing that my life has been seriously disrupted, too!

## MAJOR PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

***THIS HAS NOT CHANGED --> Stories from the Flood STORY COLLECTION (due by the end of the semester)*** Pre-spring break, students could work in pairs or small groups to conduct Stories from the Flood story collections.

***THIS IS NEW --> Stories from the Flood transcript quality control (due by the end of the semester)*** Post-spring break, students can "quality control" existing Stories from the Flood transcripts to be sure they are correct. This involves listening at an audio file while reading through the professional transcript and making changes to be sure the transcript perfectly reflects the audio file. FULL DETAILS ARE POSTED ON CANVAS AND SHOULD BE FOLLOWED PRECISELY.

***THIS HAS NOT CHANGED --> INTERVIEW ANALYSIS (6 pgs., double spaced, due Thursday, March 5)*** Students will listen to interviews from the growing Stories from the Flood archive and 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 illuminative quotes from particular interviews (with time stamps).

**ONLY THIS DUE DATE HAS CHANGED --> RESEARCH PROJECT with recommendations (8-10 pgs.-ish, double spaced, due May 5)** 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 consider 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! These will be important material to support the SFTF findings reports.

**THIS HAS CHANGED A BIT --> WRITTEN REFLECTION (2-3pg., single spaced, due May 5)**

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). This 2-3 pg., single spaced, written reflection should detail and reflect upon 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, 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, or your experience missing out on that activity as we dramatically altered the course and our lives during spring break. You might choose to write entirely about this COVID-19 experience, the suspension of in-person classes, your disappointment or surprise at how this work has unfolded. You might choose to think hopefully about what will follow in the wake of COVID-19, and the community engaged work you hope to do in the future. We have LOTS to process after our shared experience this semester. Here's a chance to do some of that.