

ENGL 245, Seminar in the Major, Writing Rivers
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Spring 2021 / Meets: online asynchronously
Student hours: online or phone by appt.
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WELCOME TO CLASS! Welcome to English 245: Seminar in the Major, “Writing Rivers.” This community-based learning seminar offers a chance for you to practice professional and creative writing, critical thinking, and collaboration, while coordinating with 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 ~135 hours on course content over the 14 weeks of this three-credit hour class, which is the university standard. At least 25 of those hours will be spent participating in community-based service, which will take a variety of forms.
- Learn about writing, Wisconsin, rivers, flooding, resilience, and the power of story.
- 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 recent 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, 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.
- Use writing 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”? Southwest 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 the indexing of oral history interviews, interview analyses, and research-based non-fiction 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, writing, and community engagement this semester.

This course will likely be very different from other courses you've taken—all the more so, working remotely and asynchronously! It requires independent action, empathy, and collaboration with a range of partners. This course will push all of us in challenging and sometimes uncomfortable ways, but Dr. Druschke hopes it will be a rewarding part of your UW-Madison experience. It's great that you're here!

WHO ELSE WILL SUPPORT OUR WORK? Community-based learning is absolutely a team effort. That's an extra challenge in this online, pandemically distanced moment, but it's still true. This semester, in addition to working with Dr. Druschke and your fellow students, you'll have the support of Tamara Dean and Jennifer Morales, members of the Board of Directors at the Driftless Writing Center and founders of the Stories from the Flood project, as well as Community-Based Learning intern Tarah Stangler and Writing Fellows Riley Preston, Kelley Schlise, and Peter Meyers. Our CBL intern will help you learn about and reflect on the community-based learning aspects of our course, and our Writing Fellows will offer feedback on the two major writing projects in the course. In addition, you can make use of free online writing assistance at The Writing Center during any phase of a writing project. Schedule online: <https://writing.wisc.edu/individual/makeanappointment/>

WHAT COURSE TEXTS DO I NEED? All course readings are available on Canvas except *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* by Elizabeth Rush (\$16). Please buy it!

WHAT ARE THE COURSE POLICIES?

Technology requirements: This course is typically taught in person, with a huge amount of discussion. That wasn't feasible this academic year, so we're doing something different. To allow for as much scheduling flexibility as possible, and to accommodate unequal access to high-speed internet, this course is entirely asynchronous and largely text based. This means that you will access course readings and activities each week on Canvas and upload weekly writing responses to Canvas. Dr. Druschke will respond individually in Canvas to these weekly writing responses in the comment feature. In week 5, students will be placed into small groups to support each other as you analyze a series of oral histories to support the creation of some Stories from the Flood related maps. Then, students will take what they've learned and work independently to draft a chapter of their own. Is this ideal? Maybe not, but it did work quite well in fall 2020, and the hope is to make the course as straightforward, evenly paced, accessible, and non-confusing as possible.

Credit hours: Students should expect to spend ~135 hours on course content over the 14 weeks of this three-credit hour class, which is the university standard.

Attendance and engagement: Students are expected to engage weekly with the course. Pacing and deadlines are scheduled the same way each week to help students follow along with the class. Weeks begin on Monday mornings, and typically feature a few themed readings and activities for the week, with weekly writing assignments due every Sunday evening. (By "Sunday evening," Dr. Druschke means Monday morning before 6am to accommodate night owls.) In the case of a student developing COVID-19 during the semester, the student should make a plan with Dr. Druschke about how to move forward. It's likely that we'll decide together that you skip the content from that time period, and rejoin the class when you're able, without trying to make up those missed weeks. We'll make it work.

HOW IS THIS WORK GRADED?

Completion-based grading: This semester, in light of all of the challenges, questions, and concerns we are facing, the course will rely on completion-based grading. The idea is that students complete what's asked of them with a "passing" mark, and they'll receive full credit on that project. So, for instance, if you complete most of the weekly community-based learning (CBL) responses in good faith, you'll get full credit for that portion of the course. If you index two Stories from the Flood oral histories, you'll receive full credit for that. And if you complete multiple drafts of your community profile, *Rising* chapter, and final reflection, you will receive full credit for those portions of the course.

The details:

Pass all projects --> get an A!

Skip/don't pass more than two weekly CBL responses (do everything else) --> B

Skip/don't pass SFTF indexing (do everything else) --> C

Skip/don't pass the community mapping profile (do everything else) --> C

Skip/don't pass SFTF indexing and the community profile (do everything else) --> D

Skip/don't pass the *Rising* chapter (do everything else) --> B

Skip the final course reflection (do everything else) --> B

Skip indexing, community profile, and *Rising* chapter --> F <-- (don't do this!)

The translation:

Please prioritize the two projects you're completing for our community-based partner!

Your work indexing oral histories (P1) is essential to deliver the full Stories from the Flood archive to the Murphy Library, and your work on the community mapping profile (P2) is essential to creating the online maps we have planned. The *Rising* chapter (P3) is a great chance to flex your non-fiction writing muscles and to put this work in a national context, but it matters less than the community-based learning components!

A note on due dates:

There is no way we're all going to escape some gigantic challenges this semester, and I know that this course is not your central concern in life. Because of that, I can be flexible with due dates, as needed. Please just give me a heads up, with no specific reason necessary. There are two exceptions to this: 1) if you miss the Writing Fellow deadline, you will not be able to get feedback from your Writing Fellow on the project. They are undergrads also and it's not fair to them to put pressure on their workflow with late submissions. 2) The final course due date of Sunday May 2. You must submit whatever you have completed on Sunday, May 2 at 11:59pm. We owe it to each other to let this academic year end!! (Remember that P3 is a lower stakes assignment and your final course reflection should require some thinking and reflection, but not a major investment of time. There's no reason not to submit something on May 2!)

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS?

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty Dr. Druschke of their need for instructional

accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Dr. Druschke will work either directly with the student or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. Please communicate about your needs!

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT RESPECT AND INCLUSION? Dr. Druschke

is 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. Dr. Druschke expects students to be relentlessly kind in their criticisms and open to learning from the perspectives of others. Dr. Druschke is committed to using your pronouns and preferred name and invite you to introduce yourselves that way. If these change during the semester, you are invited to let Dr. Druschke know so that you can work together to develop a plan to share this information in a way that is safe for you. I hope all students will feel welcomed on campus—even virtually!—and Dr. Druschke hopes to connect you to whatever campus resources you need (the LGBT Campus Center, the Multicultural Student Center, the Writing Center, the Black Cultural Center, etc.). Dr. Druschke also wants to be clear that she knows this is an extraordinarily challenging moment, and that those challenges are exponentially amplified for Black students and students of color more broadly. She hopes that we can use our community-based learning experience together this fall as a way to engage with questions of institutional harm, racism, and inequity; to consider our individual roles in those realities; and to thoughtfully engage with *Stories from the Flood* to put some good into the world in ways that honor and challenge the painful experiences of marginalized residents of the Kickapoo Valley and the UW-Madison community.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE ELEPHANT IN THE (VIRTUAL) ROOM: COVID?

The University of Wisconsin-Madison has suggested that students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms and get tested for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Student should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

MAJOR PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

CBL reflections (weekly) Every week, you'll be asked to complete a short written response that helps you make sense of the reading you've completed, consider its connections to community-based learning, and reflect back on your own experience. (Details on Canvas.)

Project 1 (P1): Indexing Stories from the Flood oral histories (First index due 2/14, Second due Su 2/21) The Driftless Writing Center is working to collect all of the audio files from each oral history, as well as the professional transcripts of each interview, to submit to University of Wisconsin-La Crosse's Murphy Library for safekeeping. Those oral histories can't be made available to the public until each of them includes a related Index, and you can help with that! Students in 245 will be asked to listen to two (2) oral history audio files, while reading along to the written transcript, to create an oral history index. (You'll be taught how to do this!) This work is essential to this community-based project! (Details on Canvas.)

Project 2 (P2): Community mapping profile – writing fellows draft (Due Su 3/14), final (Due Su 3/28) During week five, Dr. Druschke will place students into small working groups, each focused on a particular village in the Kickapoo or Coon Creek watersheds. Students will listen to a variety of oral histories, recorded from residents in each village, and then work with a small set of classmates to identify important places from those interviews and their related stories. Each group of students will create a report that details important places/stories and points to particular oral histories (with time stamps) that can be incorporated into a SFTF map that is underway. (Details on Canvas.)

Project 3 (P3): *Rising* chapter – writing fellows draft (Su 4/18), final (Su 5/2) We will be reading a book together this semester: *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore*. *Rising* is a beautifully written non-fiction text that focuses on the impacts of climate change, sea level rise, and hurricanes on coastal communities in the U.S. It is largely a book that highlights individual storytelling about floods with wider background research, and has many connections to the experiences of flooding in the Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds. Your final major writing project of the semester involves recreating a chapter of *Rising*, focused, instead, on flooding in Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Each chapter of *Rising* focuses on a specific coastal community, just as your *Rising* chapter will focus on the community you profiled in P2, integrating content from oral histories and background research to make a compelling argument about flood resilience in the Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds. (Details on Canvas.)

Final course reflection (Su 5/2) Students will be asked to complete a final course reflection about their experience. This is a 2-3 pg. 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. You might choose to address how community-based learning has impacted your educational experience this semester. You might focus on 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. The main idea here is that you are writing to a real audience: CGD! This is your chance to (re-)introduce your work this semester, to let CGD know about your learning process, and to reflect on how far you've come. (Details on Canvas.)