

ENGL 245, Seminar in the Major, Writing Rivers
Dr. Caroline Gottschalk Druschke (she/her)
Fall 2021 / Meets: Tu/Th 9:30-10:45am Zoom
Student hours: online or phone by appt.
cdruschke@wisc.edu / headwaterslab.com



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 one 100-year and two 50-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 organizing of audio clips, analyses of interviews, 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! 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, former member of the Board of Directors at the Driftless Writing Center and founder of the Stories from the Flood project, as well as Community-Based Learning (CBL) intern Tanishka Jain and Writing Fellows Rhianna Prine and Esmerelda Rios. 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 will meet twice weekly by Zoom (link in Canvas) and all materials are posted to Canvas.

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 biweekly with the course whenever possible. 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 regular community-based learning (CBL) responses in good faith, you'll get full credit for that portion of the course. If you put a good effort into categorizing audio files for project one, you'll receive full credit for that. And if you complete multiple drafts of your group findings report (project two), *Rising* chapter (project three), 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 project one (do everything else) --> B

Skip/don't pass project two (do everything else) --> C

Skip/don't pass projects one and two (do everything else) --> D

Skip/don't pass project 3 (do everything else) --> B

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

Skip all major projects --> F <-- (don't do this!)

The translation:

Please prioritize the projects you're completing for our community-based partner! Your work categorizing audio clips (P1) is essential to creating a public-facing interactive map about Stories from the Flood, and your work on the findings report (P2) is essential to sharing the results of the project with participants and decision makers. 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 in the grand scheme of things 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 deadlines for P2 and P3 (details below), 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) You must submit whatever you have completed on Sunday, Dec. 19 at 11:59pm. We owe it to each other to let this semester 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 Dec. 19!)

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. Remember that COVID vaccination is offered for free on campus and throughout Madison, as well as COVID testing. Dr. Druschke is happy to connect you with resources if you have questions.

MAJOR PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Project 1 (P1): Categorizing Stories from the Flood audio files for the SFTF StoryMap (Due Th 9/30) We are working to create an interactive StoryMap featuring many audio clips from *Stories from the Flood*, and we need your help! This interactive map will be featured in the newly redesigned Visitors Center at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and will also be shared online with decision makers around the state of Wisconsin. The StoryMap needs to be complete this winter, and we need to categorize and transcribe the selected audio clips so that map users

interested to hear audio related to household flooding, infrastructure, personal safety, etc. can easily find what they're looking for in an accessible manner. In late September, your job will be to help "tag" and transcribe those clips to make them easier for users to find and use. (Details on Canvas.)

Project 2 (P2): Findings Report – Writing Fellows draft (Due Th 10/21), Final (Due Mon 11/8)

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 this small set of classmates to identify the most important conclusions and lessons from those oral histories. Each group of students will collaborate on a report that details their work that can be incorporated into an overarching Stories from the Flood project findings report to be created by Dr. Druschke and project partners this winter.

Project 3 (P3): *Rising* Chapter – Writing Fellows draft (Th 12/2), final (Su 12/19) 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 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 12/19) 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.)