

# Waterston joins OSU-Cascades

Award-winning author and poet Ellen Waterston has joined the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at Oregon State University – Cascades.

“We’re thrilled to bring Ellen’s literary voice and passion for writing and writers to the MFA in Creative Writing,” said Jennifer Reimer Recio, director of the MFA program and an assistant professor of American studies at OSU-Cascades. “She is a wonderful addition to our talented faculty authors and will be an inspiration to MFA students and alumni.”

Waterston will teach writing courses and mentor graduate student writers in creative nonfiction.

“As a former New Englander who came West to ranch decades ago, I look forward to sharing my love of writing, teaching, and this unique high desert landscape with OSU-Cascades students,” said Waterston.

Waterston has written three literary nonfiction titles, including most recently, “Walking the High Desert: Encounters with Rural America Along the Oregon Desert Trail.” Other titles include a collection of essays, “Where the Crooked River Rises,” and a memoir, “Then There Was No Mountain.” Of her four poetry titles, “Hotel Domilocos” is her most recent collection. Waterston adapted her verse novel, “Vía Láctea” to a libretto that premiered as a full-length opera in 2016 and is slated for a second staging in 2022.

Waterston founded, and for more than a decade directed, The Nature of Words, a nonprofit based in Bend that hosted an annual literary festival and offered year-round creative writing workshops.

She was instrumental in developing the MFA program at OSU-Cascades.

## Commentary...

# Resilient Sisters must be ambidextrous

By Mitchell Luftig  
Correspondent

I was entering Sisters’ Bi-Mart, holding the door open for a young man to enter. When he noticed that everyone else was masked, he grumbled that he would never shop at Bi-Mart again, and left.

He is among a minority of Sisters Country residents who view mask mandates as an assault on their personal liberties and an usurpation of power by state and local officials.

On an international level, some countries have fared better during the pandemic than others.

Michele Gelfand of the University of Maryland observes that nations with “tighter cultures” have an advantage over “looser cultures” in controlling the spread of coronavirus.

Tight cultures evolved in response to ongoing threats from natural disasters, famine, pathogen outbreaks, and invasion. People in tight cultures follow strict norms that enable them to coordinate their response to collective threats.

In Taiwan, for instance, Gelfand found that citizens willingly regulated their behavior in response to norms about physical distancing, mask-wearing, and avoiding large crowds, keeping infection and mortality rates low without entirely shutting down the economy.

China slowed the initial wave of coronavirus infections by imposing a strict lockdown on Wuhan, a city of over eleven million. High compliance with top-down control measures was largely due to citizens’ trust in government institutions, a form of social capital.

Loose cultures, such as the U.S., tend to have weaker social norms, which makes it challenging to coordinate a response to a collective threat. There is also a reluctance amongst some individuals to set aside their liberty, autonomy, and freedom in exchange for constraints and

rules necessary to prevail over a threat like the coronavirus pandemic.

It may be easier to effect change at the local level.

Social capital has been linked to greater trust in the relationships within a community.

A study of 2,700 U.S. counties looked at whether individuals who lived in counties with high rates of social capital would demonstrate more concern for the welfare of others as evidenced by good hygienic practices and social distancing. This proved to be the case.

Evidence was also suggestive that social capital was effective in slowing the rate of new infections.

The authors estimated that moving a county from the 25th percentile in its distribution of social capital to the 75th percentile had the potential to decrease the cumulative number of infections by 18 percent and deaths by 5.8 percent.

The delta variant has threatened to overwhelm health-care systems across our nation, including our own St. Charles.

But Gelfand is optimistic that Americans will learn how to communicate about collective threats better, that we will learn the best way to encourage others to follow situation-specific rules. She believes that we will not only learn to better understand the dangers we face, but we will feel empowered to deal with them through collective action.

“Really, I think we need to be ambidextrous, like, using the right and the left hand when it comes to tight-loose. And we need leadership to help us deploy tightness under the right circumstances and looseness under others.”

In Sisters Country wildfires pose our most consistent threat. When we are ordered by authorities to prepare to evacuate, we gather up our children and pets, valuables and mementoes, and prepare to flee, hoping that our home

survives the approaching inferno.

If a neighbor’s health or disability makes it challenging for them to follow evacuation orders, we lend them a hand without complaint.

Following evacuation orders ensures that vital resources aren’t diverted to check on our welfare and it contributes to a coordinated response to the wildfire threat.

Under these circumstances, most of us are willing to sacrifice a degree of our liberty, freedom, and autonomy to ensure that firefighters and first responders have the best chance of protecting lives and

property — our own and our neighbors’.

The pandemic is also a collective threat to Sisters Country, requiring us to make (temporary) sacrifices to protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

Resilient Sisters must be ambidextrous — tightening restrictions in the face of a collective threat and then loosening them as the threat passes.

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