

Project Title Exploring Documents, Institutions, and Texts (EDIT)

Project Summary SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900, published at Rice for over six decades, functions not only as a scholarly journal but also as an archive of editorial practice and intellectual exchange. Building on successful projects completed by 2025–26 Fondren Fellows, this initiative invites undergraduate researchers to explore SEL’s archival collections in the Woodson Research Center to investigate themes such as scholarly gatekeeping, editorial labor, and institutional publishing history. Fellows will conduct original archival research, develop individual projects, and contribute to public-facing outputs that illuminate how scholarly publishing shapes academic knowledge and professional communities.

Project Description This project continues and expands the SEL research developed by Fondren Fellows in AY 2025–26. During that year, two Fondren Fellows conducted independent research using the SEL archives: one examined gatekeeping practices in scholarly journals through founding documents and correspondence, while the other investigated the roles of women employees and editors in the SEL offices. Their work demonstrated that the SEL archival holdings contain rich, underexplored materials capable of supporting multiple distinct student research projects.

For AY 2026–27, the project will invite new Fellows to undertake original archival inquiry into SEL’s editorial history and scholarly publishing practices. Fellows will survey the archive, identify a focused research question, and develop an individual project that contributes to understanding how academic journals function as institutions—shaping intellectual networks, professional norms, and disciplinary history.

The project’s goals are to:

- Provide undergraduates with hands-on experience in archival research and scholarly inquiry
- Introduce students to the processes and politics of academic publishing
- Encourage original research grounded in primary institutional materials
- Produce public-facing outputs (presentations, blog posts, exhibit materials, or reports) that make the SEL archive more visible and interpretable

Key Tasks

- **Archival Research & Processing (deliverables for Fall Term):**
 - Conduct a preliminary survey of the SEL archives housed in Woodson Research Center.
 - Develop a system for organizing, categorizing, and annotating selected archival materials.
- **Exhibit Development & Curation (deliverables for Spring Term):**
 - Select materials for a physical and/or digital exhibit on the history of SEL and produce a list for editorial review and selection.
 - Write descriptive captions and contextual information for the exhibit.

- **Scholarly & Public Engagement (if time permits):**
 - Draft blog posts or short articles summarizing research findings for Fondren library and SEL websites.
 - Facilitate discussions with past SEL editors and contributors, potentially conducting brief oral history interviews.
- **Digitization & Metadata Creation (if time permits):**
 - Work with library staff to assess the feasibility of digitizing select archival materials.
 - Create metadata for digitized items to enhance accessibility and searchability.
- **Collaboration & Communication (ongoing):**
 - Regularly meet with SEL's editorial team and Woodson archivists to discuss progress.
 - Participate in the Fall lunch with graduate journal staff (Hobby Editorial Assistants) to exchange ideas and build professional connections.

Anticipated Project Outcomes

- Provide undergraduates with hands-on experience in archival research and scholarly inquiry
- Introduce students to the processes and politics of academic publishing
- Encourage original research grounded in primary institutional materials
- Produce public-facing outputs (presentations, blog posts, exhibit materials, or reports) that make the SEL archive more visible and interpretable
- A new collection and exhibit documenting the history of SEL
- Produce outputs that enhance understanding of the library's collections and their historical significance

Qualifications

- Responsible, able to keep to an agreed upon schedule and attend training, project work sessions, and meetings with regularity and punctuality.
- Effective time management skills, communicating about scheduling issues in advance.
- Ability to read and reply to email communications, especially to request appointments and gather information.
- Ability to read written and digital documents, handle documents with care, and organize materials and information.
- Ideally, technological literacy and familiarity with Word, Adobe Acrobat, and Excel.
- Students with a background in literary analysis and history would be especially well suited.
- Interest in humanities publishing, editing, scholarly writing, and/or archives—physical and digital.

Learning Outcomes

- **Archival Research Skills** – How to handle, organize, and interpret historical documents in an academic setting.
- **Editorial & Publishing History** – Insights into the evolution of scholarly publishing and editorial practices over the past six decades.
- **Exhibit Curation** – Practical experience in selecting, describing, and presenting archival materials to diverse audiences.
- **Event Planning & Public Speaking** – Experience organizing an academic event and presenting research findings to a professional audience.
- **Digital & Physical Preservation** – Understanding how archival materials are maintained and made accessible over time.
- **Collaboration & Networking** – Opportunities to engage with faculty, editors, archivists, and scholars in the field.