

# Fondren Fellows

## Project Title

**65 Years of *SEL*: A Research Archive Project**



## Brief Summary:

The Rice University journal *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* has been a cornerstone of humanities publishing for over six decades. Today, *SEL* stands as a historical document, reflecting the evolution of humanities research, scholarly publishing, and global academic discourse. This inquiry-based project invites undergraduate Fondren Fellows to explore *SEL*'s archives—in the Woodson Research Center—and to investigate how editorial practices and intellectual networks have transformed over time. Coinciding with *SEL*'s 65th anniversary in AY 2025-26, this project proposes the *SEL* Research Archive Project, a hands-on learning initiative culminating in an exhibit and public event in Fondren Library.

## Project Description:

Coinciding with *SEL*'s 65th anniversary in the 2025-26 academic year, this project proposes the *SEL* Research Archive Project, a hands-on learning initiative culminating in an exhibit and public event in Fondren Library. *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* has been a cornerstone of humanities publishing for over six decades, shaping the field of historical and critical literary scholarship while serving as a vital platform for intellectual exchange among scholars worldwide. Today, *SEL* itself stands as a historical document, reflecting the evolution of humanities research, scholarly publishing, and global academic discourse. This inquiry-based project invites undergraduate Fondren Fellows to explore *SEL*'s archives—preserved in the Woodson Research Center—and to investigate how editorial practices, peer review, and intellectual networks have transformed over time.

Rice University and Fondren Library have played an essential role in *SEL*'s international prestige and continued impact. As the journal's institutional home since its founding, Rice has provided critical editorial, financial, and infrastructural support, enabling *SEL* to thrive as one of the most influential peer-reviewed journals in the humanities. This project will showcase how Rice and Fondren Library's commitment to scholarly publishing has helped shape a journal that now functions as an archive of intellectual history. By curating an exhibit and public event, fellows will highlight key moments in *SEL*'s editorial development, the shifting landscape of humanities scholarship, and the role of academic publishing in shaping global discourse.

This project aligns with Rice's strategic commitment to undergraduate education and scholarly communication. The Fondren Fellows will gain hands-on experience in archival research, preservation, exhibit curation, and digital humanities, learning how historical documents—such as *SEL* itself—are processed, contextualized, and made accessible. Their work will culminate in a public-facing exhibit and presentation, engaging faculty, students, and alumni while reinforcing Rice's leadership in research and humanities publishing.

The project is highly feasible, with strong support from *SEL*'s editorial team, Woodson Research Center, and Fondren Library staff, who will provide guidance on archival processing and exhibit

design. By bridging Rice's rich editorial history with undergraduate research opportunities, this project will commemorate *SEL*'s 65-year legacy while reinforcing the university's longstanding investment in scholarly publishing, archival preservation, and intellectual inquiry.

### **Outline the key tasks that the Fondren Fellow(s) would work on.**

Understanding that undergraduate students' skills might be limited and impact the amount of time it takes them to fulfill tasks, the following key tasks are offered as ideal goals for the work of the project. We are also aware that the Fondren Fellows program is designed to be completed in one year, and we have endeavored to indicate in what follows which of these tasks are likely to be completed within that time and which are aspirational.

1. **Archival Research & Processing (deliverables for Fall Term)**
  - o Conduct a preliminary **survey** of the *SEL* archives housed in Woodson Research Center.
  - o Produce a **list** identifying key materials that highlight the journal's editorial and scholarly evolution over 65 years.
  - o Develop a **system** for organizing, categorizing, and annotating selected archival materials.
2. **Exhibit Development & Curation (deliverables for Spring Term)**
  - o Select materials for a physical and/or digital exhibit on the history of *SEL* and produce a **list** for editorial review and selection.
  - o Write **descriptive captions and contextual information** for the exhibit.
  - o Assist in the planning and execution of the **65 Years of SEL Archive Project Event**, including collaboration with Woodson staff in preparing a presentation on their findings.
3. **Scholarly & Public Engagement (if time permits)**
  - o Draft blog posts or short articles summarizing research findings for Fondren library and *SEL* websites.
  - o Facilitate discussions with past *SEL* editors and contributors, potentially conducting brief oral history interviews.
4. **Digitization & Metadata Creation (if time permits)**
  - o Work with library staff to assess the feasibility of digitizing select archival materials.
  - o Create metadata for digitized items to enhance accessibility and searchability.
5. **Collaboration & Communication (ongoing)**
  - o Regularly meet with *SEL*'s editorial team and Woodson archivists to discuss progress.
  - o Participate in the Fall lunch with graduate journal staff (Hobby Editorial Assistants) to exchange ideas and build professional connections.

### **What qualifications would you expect from students working on this project?**

Applicants should be responsible, able to keep to an agreed upon schedule and attend training, project work sessions, and meetings with regularity and punctuality. Because much of the work will happen in the Woodson and in the *SEL* journal offices, applicants will need effective time management skills, communicating about scheduling issues in advance. Applicants should be able to read and reply to email communications, especially to request appointments and gather information. Applicants should possess an ability to read written and digital documents, handle

documents with care, and organize materials and information. Ideally, students will have technological literacy and familiarity with Word, Adobe Acrobat, and Excel.

Students with a background in literary analysis and history would be especially well suited for this inquiry-based project, as the content of the *SEL* archives are for a journal of literary criticism. Applicants may have an interest in humanities publishing, editing, scholarly writing, and/or archives—physical and digital.

### **What would students learn through their participation in this project?**

- **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.