

## **Advice from the SAA Office**

Several pages of the SAA website are dedicated to how SAA seminars and workshops work. These are intended for new members to the SAA, but you may find it useful to consult them as well. They will give you an idea of what your group members will expect.

As you organize your program, you will need to keep in mind some major deadlines.

- You are entitled to invite up to four persons to take part in your seminar or workshop. Those names must be submitted to us by 1 September if we are to hold places for them. You are not required to invite participants; any spaces not reserved will be filled by our open enrollment process.
- By 1 October, you will receive a list of those who have enrolled for your seminar or workshop. The list will include those you have invited as well as those who have enrolled with us. For each seminar there is a maximum enrollment of sixteen participants. This number cannot be exceeded.
- By 31 October, your seminar or workshop members should hear from you with guidelines and deadlines for the work they will do in advance of the Annual Meeting. Previous program leaders have shared some of their correspondence with us; you will find it posted on the SAA website.
- Some weeks before the conference, you must notify us of those members in your group who have completed your assignments. SAA policy is that no one can be listed in the conference program who has not met your requirements. This deadline changes each year, depending on the date of the Annual Meeting and the print schedule for the program. You will wish to set a deadline with your group that allows you to meet the deadline with the SAA office.

An important decision for every program leader is how to structure the seminar or workshop. Past program leaders have suggestions that you will find posted on the SAA website. One of the most controversial is the use of respondents. In many instances you will find that those you wish to invite to take part will do so only if not expected to write a paper. How then to incorporate them into the seminar? A good respondent can be an expert facilitator of group discussion. But we have also received complaints when one or more respondents have monopolized too much of a program's discussion time.

Please remember two things. First, SAA programs are intended to be egalitarian experiences. They work best when junior scholars and senior scholars are able to exchange ideas on an equal footing. Hierarchy is not conducive to discourse in the SAA spirit. Second, your objective should be for every member of your group to have an opportunity to take part in the conversation. A few dominant voices can inhibit exchange, whereas the structure you create should encourage it.

Thus, you should consider that not everyone in a seminar needs do the same type of task. Research seminars require written work from everyone, but that does not necessarily mean a critical paper from everyone. Literature reviews, concept papers on key terms, prospect papers on the future development of a particular field, responses to others' work—these are all acceptable forms of participation and may play to the varied

strengths of your seminar participants and to the objective of including a respondent in productive work.

SAA seminars are strictly capped at sixteen members maximum. This policy is intended to make the workload of the seminar manageable. Every one of your participants should have read the work of others in the group and be prepared to discuss it. At this size, you will not necessarily need artificial structuring devices and sub-groupings. While the goal is an intellectual experience that has shape and intensity, too much structure and control can be as deadly as too little.

With a deadline in mind for completion of advance assignments, you may want to assign some interim deadlines for the circulation of topics, abstracts, reading lists, or other exchanges. These incremental assignments can help build a sense of group identification in the months leading up to the Annual Meeting. Some seminar leaders organize chat rooms and listservs and other forums for discussing issues in advance of the seminar; others ask seminar participants to comment on one another's papers.

Do bear in mind, though, how busy most SAA members are. Some will bring a great deal of energy and commitment to the seminar or workshop, but many will have time for only one or two tasks in connection with it. You should think carefully about what sort of assignments will be most productive. The focus of your seminar or workshop should always remain the shared experience at the conference.

### **Professional Behavior and Inclusiveness:**

The seminar or workshop leader plays an important role in establishing an atmosphere of productive exchange, respect, and inclusiveness.

A thoughtfully prepared seminar structure helps to foster productive conversation and diminishes the chance of marginalizing participants. Creating an opportunity for seminar members to meet informally before the seminar can also help to generate a congenial climate.

Seminar leaders are encouraged to set protocols for conversation, both for the online exchange of work and for the seminar meeting itself. Taking a moment at the start of the seminar to make introductions and to encourage participants to address one another on a first-name basis helps to level professional hierarchies. The seminar leader might also begin the meeting by establishing some ground rules for etiquette, for instance, requesting that participants not speak among themselves when someone else has the floor, that they not check electronic devices, that they raise hands to speak. Leaders should be prepared to rehearse these rules in the case of infractions.

Unprofessional conduct includes any form of disrespectful, dismissing, patronizing, bullying, or harassing behavior. Some obvious examples of improper behavior include addressing a seminar member in an overly unfamiliar manner (e.g., as "honey"); making overtly contemptuous, sarcastic, or dismissive remarks; interrupting other speakers; or inappropriately commenting upon a seminar member's gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, etc. In such instances, the seminar leader needs to intervene to discourage such behavior and to establish an appropriate tone for discussion going forward.

In the vast majority of cases, seminar members will behave appropriately (particularly if guidelines have been established) and the seminar leader will not need to interrupt the conversation to address matters of decorum. In some cases, a gentle reminder about discussion etiquette is necessary. In the rare case that a seminar member exhibits openly disrespectful, disruptive, or harassing behavior, a stronger intervention might be necessary. Any behavior that rises to the level of substantially disrupting the meeting should be reported to the SAA Board of Trustees or Executive Director.

The SAA Office stands ready to help with any questions or problems that arise in the course of the months leading up to the conference. Seminars and workshops are the heart of the SAA program.

Lena Cowen Orlin  
Executive Director