

Subject: Welcome to SAA 2018: First-Generation Shakespeare

Dear Seminar Members,

Welcome to the SAA Seminar “First-Generation Shakespeare!” I am eager for our conversation and grateful for your participation. We are a very full seminar, a fact I find both reaffirming and inspiring.

I want to share the full seminar proposal description, which includes more detail than what you saw in the bulletin. I know our discussions will take directions I did not anticipate, and that might be what I am looking forward to the most. I also include, at the close of this email, the brief bio I submitted, in case you’re interested in the contexts in which I have been thinking about and advocating for first-gen issues. (About 25% of the students at my institution, which is a public Land, Sea, Space, and Sun Grant university, identify as first-gen.)

Many first-generation college students are drawn to the cultural capital promised by the study of Shakespeare; at the same time, Shakespeare’s iconic status can compound the intimidation some students feel as they attempt to identify and navigate academic conventions. This seminar will brainstorm about the ways our courses and scholarship can more effectively support all students, and especially those who are new to college and/or underprepared for college. We will also think about why the traditional Shakespeare survey may be particularly well situated to support and promote larger university initiatives designed to create more inclusive academic communities. Papers might, for example, address one of the following topics:

- 1) Best practices for helping academically trailblazing students become more confident and rigorous readers of Shakespearean and other texts, as well as more vocal participants in conversations about the playwright’s ongoing influence. How, for example, do Shakespeare courses offer unique opportunities to incorporate pedagogical practices known to increase student retention, such as experiential learning; emphasis on personal relationships; and transparency of expectations, as demonstrated by rubrics, discussion modeling, and other techniques?
- 2) Shakespeare’s own status as a working-class poet and his grammar school legacy. To what extent is this biography useful for increasing student engagement, and to what extent might Shakespeare’s reputation as one who had “little Latin and less Greek” also obscure or minimize issues of class in his works?
- 3) The particular challenges and rewards of being a first generation student/scholar. When in the career of an early modernist does a working class background feel most conspicuous or intersect most powerfully with other identities? What methodologies are most attractive to first-generation scholars? What inspires us to advocate for ourselves and others who identify as “first,” and what holds us back?

I also want to establish our seminar deadlines from the start, since pre-circulated work is a requirement for inclusion on the conference program. This work will provide the jumping-off point for our conversations in Los Angeles.

20 OCTOBER 2017

Reply to this e-mail, so that I know that you received this information and expect to participate in the seminar. Please also let me know if you prefer a different email address or your contact information has changed.

13 NOVEMBER 2017

Send an e-mail to the whole group by using “reply all” that contains:

1. The projected topic and/or working title for your seminar paper/project and, by way of brief self-introduction, how it relates to your research/teaching interests or experience in academia or other professional activities.
2. Your own definition of “first-generation” as it pertains to your seminar project. This might be the specific definition employed by your institution, but it might not.
3. One hope you have for our seminar: What would you like to experience, achieve, or take away?

8 JANUARY 2018

Please send me a 100-word abstract for your paper and at least 2 works to add to a seminar bibliography.

31 JANUARY 2018

Please submit your essay or project to our Google Drive Folder.

(If you encounter any technical difficulties, please e-mail me your document in time to meet the deadline!)

The work you share with the group can take the form of a traditional seminar paper or a creative or pedagogical project accompanied by an explanation/analysis. Examples include:

- Traditional seminar paper making a scholarly argument grounded in textual evidence, 2,500-3,000 words
- A personal essay or work of creative nonfiction, not to exceed 3,000 words
- Lesson plan, assignment, or syllabus designed specifically with the particular needs of first-generation students in mind, accompanied by a 750-1,00-word explanation/analysis

This deadline, set by the SAA, is the most important to meet: only participants who have completed the work of the seminar by February 1 will be included in the Meeting program.

9 FEBRUARY 2018

I will let you know the subgroups into which I have divided the group.

20 MARCH 2018

Please send about a page of specific, helpful suggestions, questions, or additional feedback to each member of your subgroup, and please copy me on these short responses, as they will provide a starting point for our seminar discussion in Los Angeles.

SPRING TBA

As soon as I know when our seminar has been scheduled, I will let you know. Again, the 2018 meeting will take place in Los Angeles March 28-31.

For now, I wish you all well. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions, suggestions, or concerns.

Looking forward to meeting you,
Rebecca

Rebecca Olson is Associate Professor of English at Oregon State University. She is the author of *Arras Hanging: The Textile That Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama* (2013) and has published a number of articles on Shakespearean drama, early modern textiles, and the teaching of early English literature in journals including *Word and Image*, *Modern Philology*, and *Pedagogy*. A first-generation college student and former participant in the U.S. Department of Education's Talent Search program, she is actively involved in Oregon State's FIRST! initiative, which facilitates relationships between first generation students and faculty.