



THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

SPRING 2025



THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

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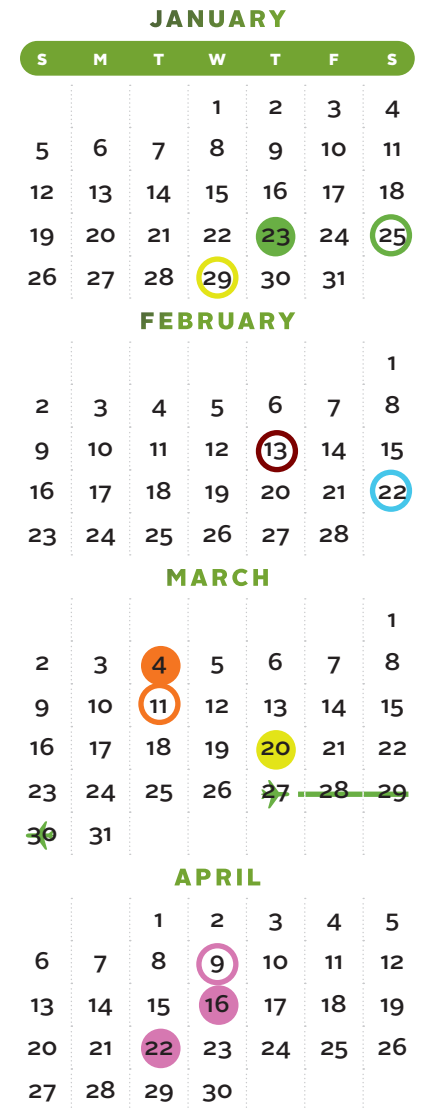
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The Houston Seminar was founded in 1977 for the purpose of stimulating learning and cultural awareness. Each spring and fall the nonprofit group offers lectures and study tours focused on varied topics that may include art, architecture, literature, music, theater, history, politics, philosophy, psychology, religion, the natural environment, and current trends and events.

Spring 2025

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French Twist: Exploring the Acadian Region of Louisiana

Thursday, March 27–Sunday, March 30

✈️ STUDY TOURS

Join the Seminar for a four-day motorcoach tour of the Cajun-Creole country in southwest Louisiana. We will explore the rich cultures—architecture, cuisine, music—and the natural environment of this historic bayou country in the heart of Acadian Louisiana. Highlights include a visit to the historic Cajun-Creole village of Vermilionville and tours of Avery Island’s Tabasco Sauce Factory and Museum and Jungle Gardens bird sanctuary. We will also make stops at the Shadows-on-the-Teche historic home in New Iberia and the Acadian Memorial and Evangeline Oak Park in St. Martinville. A swamp boat tour on Lake Martin will take us into the heart of this unique nature preserve and aviary rookery and will be followed by a “Secret Supper” underneath the oaks at Maison Madeleine. The tour will be led by Louisiana cultural historian and naturalist **Charles Chamberlain** and architectural historian **Stephen Fox**.

Charles Chamberlain is a professor of history at the University of New Orleans, concentrating on Louisiana studies and music history. He received his PhD in U.S. history from Tulane University, and his upcoming book *Gumbo Ville* (LSU Press, 2025) covers the complete history of New Orleans. Professor Chamberlain has worked as a museum professional, curator, and consultant on numerous exhibits throughout Louisiana and Mississippi. Since 2014, he has served as a licensed tour guide for the City of New Orleans. As an active musician, he performs a variety of styles— jazz, blues, American roots, and traditional French music.

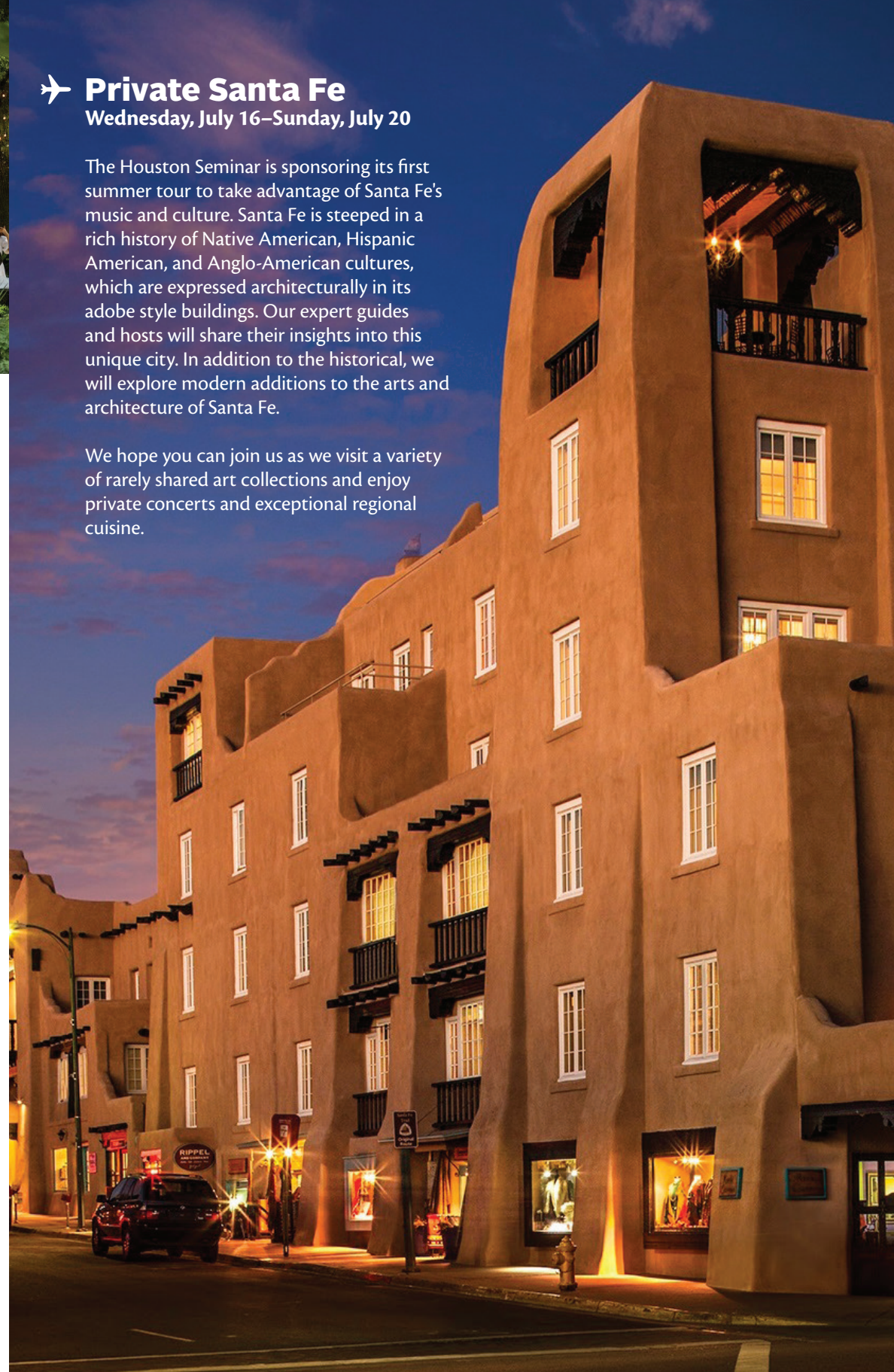
Stephen Fox is an architectural historian and lecturer at the Rice University School of Architecture and the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston. His work focuses on architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a particular emphasis on how architecture engages such social constructs as class identity, cultural distinction, and regional differentiation.

For trip pricing and further information,
or to place your name on an interest
list, please call 713-666-9000 or email
registrar@houstonseminar.org.

✈️ Private Santa Fe Wednesday, July 16–Sunday, July 20

The Houston Seminar is sponsoring its first summer tour to take advantage of Santa Fe’s music and culture. Santa Fe is steeped in a rich history of Native American, Hispanic American, and Anglo-American cultures, which are expressed architecturally in its adobe style buildings. Our expert guides and hosts will share their insights into this unique city. In addition to the historical, we will explore modern additions to the arts and architecture of Santa Fe.

We hope you can join us as we visit a variety of rarely shared art collections and enjoy private concerts and exceptional regional cuisine.



METRO

COURSES

Exploring Houston's Public Transportation

Lecture: Thursday, January 23, 6:00–7:30 P.M., Kilroy Visitor & Education Center, Bayou Bend, 6003 Memorial, 77007.

Transportation tour: Saturday, January 25, 10:00 A.M.–Noon. Location to be provided to subscribers.

Since Houston got its first railroad line in 1856, Houstonians have been arguing about public transportation. Our history is full of trolley, bus, and light rail lines that shaped the city we know today—and unbuilt projects that hint at what Houston could have been. In this two-part course, **Christof Spieler**, an urban planner, author, and former Houston METRO board member, will take us through the history of Houston public transportation, from the 1920s streetcars through the creation of METRO, the unbuilt monorail, the park-and-ride network, the light rail lines, and bus rapid transit. Mr. Spieler will outline the current landscape: what plans are on the books, their current status, and who is making these decisions. He will discuss the role of public transit in Houston, how more transit could change the city, and how Houston compares to other cities. In the second session, we will experience first-hand today's transit system, riding a freeway express bus, our only BRT (bus rapid transit) line, the busiest local bus in Texas, and the light rail.

Christof Spieler, PE, AICP, LEED AP is director of planning at Huitt-Zollars, a lecturer in transportation at the Rice University School of Architecture, and the author of *Trains, Buses, People: An Opinionated Atlas of US Transit* (Island Press, 2018). His planning work includes reimagining regional rail in Philadelphia, bus transformation in Boston, bus network redesign in Fort Worth, a rail station in Austin, alternatives to a proposed freeway expansion, a community vision for Galveston, commuter rail planning in Albuquerque, greenways in Houston, street design manuals for Dallas, and flood resilience in Houston.



History Has Its Eyes on You

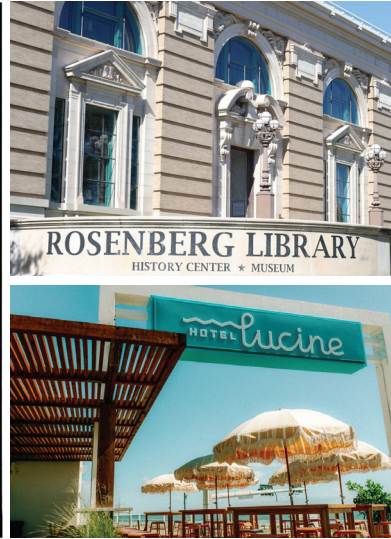
Wednesday, January 29, 10:30 A.M.–Noon. Private residence. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

The American political landscape of the 2000s has been marked by unprecedented events that hearken back to the transformative spirit of the nation's founding. Much like the tumultuous period of 1776, when the future of a fledgling nation was in flux, the 2000s saw profound shifts with the election of the first Black president, Barack Obama, and the election of Donald Trump, whose initial tenure reshaped the political landscape and culminated in the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in 2021. In this charged environment, the sentiment of the Broadway show song "History Has Its Eyes on You" from *Hamilton* resonates strongly, capturing the gravity of a moment where the stakes are high. **Alison Leland** and **Christine LeVeaux-Haley** will examine with us the nation's foundational texts and historical contexts as we aim to uncover how the principles and compromises of the past continue to influence contemporary issues and debates.

Alison Leland is an instructor in political science and the director of the Honors Pre-Law and Public Service program at the University of Houston's Honors College. She is a graduate of Spelman College and the Georgetown University Law Center. Ms. Leland is a trustee of the Menil Collection and is a board member of the Texas Defenders Service, which provides representation to indigent death row inmates, and the Mickey Leland Kibbutzim Internship Foundation, which sends high school students to Israel.

Christine LeVeaux-Haley is a political science professor in the Honors College of the University of Houston. She is a graduate of Spelman College and earned her PhD at Louisiana State University. Her teaching and research interests include legislative politics, Black politics, and political behavior. Professor LeVeaux-Haley has published in scholarly journals and appeared frequently as a political commentator on television. She sang throughout college and is known to break into song in her lectures because "music makes everything better."





Galveston Beyond the Palms

Thursday, February 13, 9:30 A.M.–5:00 P.M. Directions will be provided to subscribers.

Galveston Island is more than sun, sand, and sea, and there is no better time to explore the vibrant arts culture in Galveston than on the cusp of spring. Join the Houston Seminar for a day trip (round trip travel by bus from Houston is included) as we check out another side of Galveston Island. We will begin by touring the historic Rosenberg Library, followed by a trip to First Presbyterian Church to view the beautifully restored Tiffany windows (*Texas Monthly* documented their intricate restoration). A lunch with views of the Gulf of Mexico at the newly renovated Hotel Lucine will be a welcome midday break. The afternoon will find us exploring the Galveston Arts Center followed by a tour of the Galveston Artists Residency, where the group will talk with resident artists and view current exhibits.



Food for Thought: Cooking for Neurological Health

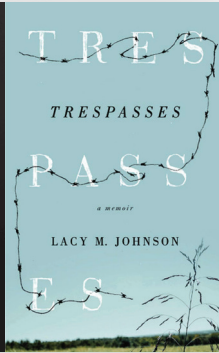
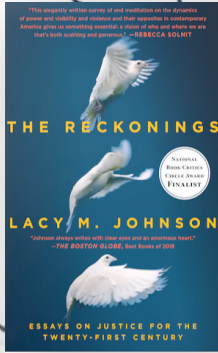
Saturday, February 22, 10:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M. Private residence. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

Neurologist **Reeta Achari** is an advocate for healthy eating. She integrates clinical findings with neuroimaging, neurophysiology, and other studies to form an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment plan. Over the years, Dr. Achari developed the specialty of nutritional neurology, which uses scientifically validated laboratory testing to assess cellular micronutrient content and needs, with the goal of promoting neurological health and preventing neurological diseases. She traces the ancient roots linking food and health and employs that knowledge in treating her patients.

In this course, Dr. Achari will demonstrate how to transform ingredients fresh from local providers into a delectable, nutritious feast. The session will conclude with a wholesome meal. Participants will leave with recipes and a list of selected regional farmers and butchers who regularly offer goods at local farmers' markets.

After working at TIRR (The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research) and several hospitals, Dr. Achari entered private practice in 1997. She is also a clinical associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at McGovern Medical School where she actively mentors future physicians and neurologists.





Courtesy: Lacy Johnson

Writers on Writing

Tuesday, March 4, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Private residence. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

“People on the outside think there’s something magical about writing,” Harlan Ellison once wrote, “that you go up in the attic at midnight and cast the bones and come down in the morning with a story, but it isn’t like that. You sit in back of the typewriter and you work, and that’s all there is to it.” In this class, we will take an introductory look at contemporary literature from a writer’s standpoint.

Writer **Lacy M. Johnson** will guide participants through specific excerpts from a group of authors chosen to demonstrate a variety of perspectives on writing and the writing process. Under consideration at press time are short essays by Alexander Chee (from *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*), Annie Dillard (from *The Writing Life* and/or *Teaching a Stone to Talk*), Anne Lamott (from *Bird by Bird*), Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize Lecture, and Mary Oliver (from *A Poetry Handbook*). Final selections will be shared with registrants to allow for considered conversations.

Lacy Johnson describes herself as a professor, curator, and activist. She has been lauded for *The Reckonings* (Scribner, 2018), *The Other Side* (Tin House, 2014), and *Trespasses: A Memoir* (University of Iowa Press, 2012). She is co-editor, with Cheryl Beckett, of *More City Than Water: A Houston Flood Atlas* (University of Texas Press, 2022) and teaches creative nonfiction in the Rice University English department.



Photo: Benjamin Lowy

Mariachi Dreams: A Year of Music, Magic, and Belonging on the Border

Thursday, March 20, 6:00–7:30 P.M., MATCH, 3400 Main, 77002.

Mariachi music education programs are exploding in schools and colleges across the country, from California and Arizona to less-expected states like Oregon, Iowa, Indiana, and Missouri. In Texas alone, more than one hundred high schools take part in the University Interscholastic League’s annual contests. On the heels of her popular November 2022 *New York Times Magazine* story, “A Championship Season in Mariachi Country,” journalist and cultural anthropologist **Cecilia Ballí** has been following three of the country’s top high school varsity mariachis as they experience the ups and downs of a year of competitions, culminating at the Mariachi Extravaganza, considered the national championship of school and college mariachis. The three groups are neighboring rivals in small, rural Starr County, Texas, bordering the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Ballí’s book in progress, *Mariachi Dreams*, studies contemporary American high school through the eyes of Mexican American musicians, the spread of mariachi music, and life along the U.S.-Mexico border.

This program will walk us through the history and the vibrant and competitive world of mariachi music. The evening will conclude with a performance by Los Pasajeros, an award-winning mariachi ensemble from the Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Cecilia Ballí is a writer and journalist who has been writing for magazines for more than twenty years. In 2000, she became the first Latina or Latino writer at *Texas Monthly*, where she published long-form stories and essays as a writer-at-large. She has written extensively about Tejano history and culture, immigration, the murders of young women in Ciudad Juárez, U.S.-Mexico border drug violence, and Mexican military disappearances and torture, among other subjects. She has also published stories in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Harper’s Magazine*, and *Columbia Journalism Review*.



POST Houston: An Inside Look at a Bold Architectural Transformation

Wednesday, April 9, Noon–2:00 P.M., POST Houston, 401 Franklin, 77201. Limited enrollment.

The Barbara Jordan Post Office has been a downtown landmark since its 1961 opening, but sat vacant after sorting operations moved elsewhere in 2014. Its distinctive design by Astrodome architects Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson includes Cold War—era details such as fallout shelters and other security features, with hidden lookout galleries to allow supervisors to monitor the mail handling process.

Although adapting this massive structure presented many design challenges, Houston-based real estate firm Lovett Commercial had a vision for the historic building. Working with architects OMA New York/Jason Long and Powers Brown Architecture, Lovett created a mixed-use redevelopment with a food hall, art exhibits, coworking offices, a music venue, a media arts center, a five-acre rooftop park designed by Hoerr Schaudt, and a sustainable organic farm. The team's use of historic tax credits involved a delicate balance between preserving the building's original design while introducing more light, energy efficiency, and technologically advanced spaces. The redevelopment's first phase opened to the public in December 2021.

Following an overview of the project by Managing Director **Kirby Liu** over a lunch featuring selections from the Food Hall, we'll visit highlights of the 500,000 square foot complex, including a tour of the rooftop SkyLawn and SkyFarm.

Kirby Liu is the Managing Director of POST Houston, spearheading its development from conception through construction and programming. Prior to POST, Kirby studied architecture at Harvard University and worked as an investment banker internationally. Note: this event will involve at least an hour of walking.

Opera as a Spiritual Journey: *Tannhäuser* and *Breaking the Waves*

Wednesday, April 16, 4:00-5:15 P.M., Private residence, 7:30 P.M. Dress Rehearsal for *Breaking the Waves*, Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas, 77002.
Tuesday, April 22, 4:00-5:15 P.M., Private residence, 7:00 P.M. Dress Rehearsal for *Tannhäuser*, Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas, 77002.

Are you one of those people who thinks opera is outdated and inaccessible? Maestro **Patrick Summers**, artistic and music director of Houston Grand Opera, is here to prove you wrong and guide you through the joys and intricacies of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and Missy Mazzoli's *Breaking the Waves*. In two sessions, Maestro Summers will delve into themes of sensual pleasure and spiritual enlightenment that are heavily present in both works. And for film aficionados, he will analyze Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* and István Szabó's *Meeting Venus* and discuss how they relate to the two operas' epic stories portrayed on the Brown stage at the Wortham Theater Center.

Patrick Summers has been a central figure at the Houston Grand Opera for over 25 years, conducting a vast range of repertoire during his tenure. First appointed to the company in 1998 as Music Director, in 2011 he assumed an expanded role as the company's Artistic and Music Director. Maestro Summers has enjoyed long associations with Opera Australia and the Metropolitan Opera in addition to conducting for major companies throughout the world. He teaches at the Rice University Shepherd School of Music, where in August 2024 he was named a distinguished lecturer in opera studies. This year, Maestro Summers will release two novels and a volume of poetry.



Courtesy: Houston Grand Opera



Courtesy: POST Houston

Chocolate: Food of the Gods

Tuesday, March 11, 3:00-4:30 PM

Private residence. Directions to be provided to subscribers.

The word chocolate conjures up sybaritic images throughout time. In Houston today, there are chocolate sections in every grocery store and at every checkout counter. Simultaneously there is a burgeoning number of private chocolatiers making artisanal chocolate for the local market.

Join Molly Voorhees (co-owner of Winfield's, Agnes, and Beck's Prime) and her chocolatier Rachel McKinley to learn about the history of chocolate and enjoy a chocolate tasting.



Discounts

Teachers and students with a school I.D. may attend classes for a discounted fee. Please call the registrar for details.

Refunds

For refund requests that occur at least two weeks before a course begins, a 20% cancellation fee will be charged. If others have been turned away from a limited-enrollment course, no refund will be issued unless your place can be filled. Refund policies for courses involving travel will differ.

Enrollment

All courses are available on a first-come, first-served basis. You may enroll by mail, email, phone, or online.

Gift certificates

These are available for a single session, a specific course, or a dollar amount, which the recipient may apply toward any course(s). Please call for more information.



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Sign up for our email list to receive announcements of pop-up events, course updates, and other news.

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PLEASE ENROLL ME/US IN THE FOLLOWING COURSES:

STUDY TOURS		For trip pricing and further information, please call 713-666-9000 or email registrar@houstonseminar.org.
French Twist: Exploring the Acadian Region of Louisiana Thursday, March 27–Sunday, March 30		
Private Santa Fe Wednesday, July 16–Sunday, July 20		
Exploring Houston's Public Transportation Thursday, January 23, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$40 Saturday, January 25, 10:00 A.M.–Noon, \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> IP January 23 <input type="checkbox"/> IP January 25	
History Has Its Eyes on You Wednesday, January 29, 10:30 A.M.–Noon, \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> IP January 29	
Galveston Beyond the Palms Thursday, February 13, 9:30 A.M.–5:00 P.M., \$200	<input type="checkbox"/> IP February 13	
Food for Thought: Cooking for Neurological Health Saturday, February 22, 10:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M., \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> IP February 22	
Writers on Writing Tuesday, March 4, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> IP March 4	
Mariachi Dreams: A Year of Music, Magic, and Belonging on the Border Thursday, March 20, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> IP March 20	
POST Houston: An Inside Look at a Bold Architectural Transformation Wednesday, April 9, Noon–2:00 P.M., \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> IP April 9	
Opera as a Spiritual Journey: Tannhäuser and Breaking the Waves Wednesday, April 16, 4:00–5:15 P.M., 7:30 P.M. dress rehearsal and Tuesday, April 22, 4:00–5:15 P.M., 7:00 P.M. dress rehearsal, \$75 per session	<input type="checkbox"/> IP April 16 <input type="checkbox"/> IP April 22	
Chocolate: Food of the Gods Tuesday, March 11, 3:00-4:30 PM, \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> IP March 11	

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Course List and Reservation Form



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Daytime

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History Has Its Eyes on You

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Study Tours

French Twist: Exploring the Acadian Region of Louisiana

Private Santa Fe

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