

ACMRS Second Book Institute 2023 Evaluation Report

July 2023

Prepared by:

College Research and Evaluation Services Team (CREST)

Karen Gordon, PhD

Wendy Miedel Barnard, PhD



INTRODUCTION

The Second Book Institute offers support structures for midcareer scholars of premodern critical race studies who are in any stage of writing their second book. The Institute is part of the RaceB4Race Mentoring Network, a Mellon-funded initiative based at Rutgers University-Newark.

The goals of the Institute include:

- Make progress on the writing of a first book, starting from any stage.
- Discuss what is unique about the second book, and how it differs from a first book.
- Discuss publishers' expectations of a second book project.
- Discuss the unique challenges of writing a second book at a busy stage of professional life, and explore strategies for meeting those challenges.

All Institute attendees are expected to attend all Institute sessions, read and discuss the work of fellow members, and write and present their work at an Institute session.

In 2023, the Second Book Institute ran from February through June. Participants met virtually twice per month via Zoom to discuss and workshop their writing. During the Second Book Institute, participants also received mentorship and insight into publishing. Participants in the 2023 RaceB4Race Second Book Institute program's director is Dr. Patricia Akhimie and the Second Book Institute was led by Dr. Jean E. Howard.

This evaluation report details the following:

- [Program descriptive information](#)
 - Participants
 - Evaluation methods
- [Evaluation findings](#)
 - Initial Perspectives
 - Experiences
- [Summary and recommendations](#)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Participants

Eleven midcareer scholars participated in the 2023 Second Book Institute. Of the 11 participants, 10 took the evaluation survey for a response rate of 91%.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation survey included open and closed ended survey questions on the following:

- how they heard about the Second Book Institute
- what about the description of the program made them feel like they would be a good fit
- if there was anything in the description of the program that made them worry they would not be a good fit
- what they were most nervous about encountering during the Institute
- their expectations when they enrolled in the Book Institute
- if their expectations were met, and what they would have preferred to have happen if their expectations were not met
- their goals for themselves during the Institute
- if they met their goals
- if anything could have been done differently during the Institute to help them meet their goals
- what components of the Institute helped them to meet their goals
- what they liked about the Institute
- what they wish would have happened during the Institute
- their overall rating of the Institute
- if they had any additional comments

To draw attention to the core of the elements of the comments provided, some words in the participant responses are **bolded** within this report. When reviewing numbers, please note that the percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Initial Perspectives

Learning about the Second Book Institute

Participants were asked to explain how they had first heard about the Second Book Institute. Some mentioned more than one means of hearing about it. Responses included the following:

- Email from RaceB4Race (n=2)
- Patricia Akhimie (n=2)
- Email from ACMRS (n=2)
- From a colleague (n=2)
- Social media (n=2)
- ACMRS (unspecified origin)

- From a former participant
- Email (unspecified origin)
- Saw notice about the First Book Institute, so they looked to see if there was a Second Book Institute (did not specify where they heard about the First Book Institute)

Second Book Institute Description: Participant Assessment of Fit and Concerns

Participants were asked open-ended questions about what in the Second Book Institute description made them feel they were a good fit for the program, if anything about the description made them feel they may not be a good candidate, and what they were most nervous about encountering during the Institute and if those things occurred.

Regarding the description of the Second Book Institute and assessing their possible fit, participant comments focused on the aspects of support and accountability, the focus specifically on a second book, and Jean Howard. All comments are displayed below.

- *That it would **focus on associate profs who notoriously do not receive much support**; that everyone would be thinking about race; that it would be a relatively **small group**--and of course the amazing **Jean Howard**.*
- ***Everything in the description piqued my interests**--from the **support**, facilitator **Jean Howard**, progress on second book no matter what stage the book is, the distinctive nature of second book from first book, and perspective of publishers/editors.*
- *My book project had been stalled (hadn't carved out consistent time to work on it). **The book institute seemed like a good way to prioritize working on the book and provide some accountability.***
- *The opportunity to **move ahead on the second book.***
- *I was drawn to the emphasis on **community and writing accountability**. I anticipated an opportunity to do more learning (with others) in the field of premodern critical race studies. I had talked to a friend who had completed the SBI last year, and I had a clear idea of what I would be taking on.*
- *I wanted to have a **community of like-minded midcareer scholars** to think about our early modern projects together.*
- *Two factors were key when it came to applying. First, the call for applications was clear that we could be at **ANY point in the second book process**. I am just starting a second book, so it was helpful to know from the outside that very early, in-progress work would be welcome. Second, I was very excited to learn that **Jean Howard** would be running the institute. I wanted to work with her, so her leadership drove me to apply.*
- *That it was designed to provide a **supportive community and mutual mentorship** among scholars working on PCRS.*
- *I was excited to take part in a process focused on the second book in a **community of peers at the same career stage** and navigating some of the same **issues around situating work on race**, reaching out to presses, etc. There are very few material*

supports available to scholars of color around second books (or first books) and I was grateful for the opportunity to benefit from this institute.

When asked about what made them think they would not be a good candidate, four said they did not have any worries and one person left the question blank. Another noted, “the description was very inclusive. It actually made me feel welcomed.” Two with concerns mentioned feeling their background in critical race was not strong enough. Those who had concerns had the following to say:

- ***I did not want to hoard resources** intended for others.*
- ***My first book is not under contract** yet.*
- *I was slightly **worried that my project did not have a strong-enough contribution** to the conversation about race/racial formation. Furthermore, I was concerned that I hadn't done enough of the reading in critical race studies compared to others.*
- *Yes, I came to learn about critical race theories and **my project wasn't necessarily centering race.***

Participants were asked to reflect on what they were most nervous about encountering during the Second Book Institute and if these things happened. None of those who mentioned things they were nervous about said those things occurred. Common worries centered on sharing their work with others, time, and the feedback they would get. All participant comments are listed below.

- *I was most nervous about sharing a really new book chapter and offering feedback to my peers on their second book projects.*
- *I was nervous about sharing my work (as everyone is, I'm sure) but the feedback for everyone has been so generous and actionable and supportive. I attribute this not only to the stellar participants themselves but to the amazing guidance and leadership of our Institute leader, Jean Howard, and to Dr Akhimie's vision and labor.*
- *Having to share a chapter draft, primarily because I wasn't sure I would be able to write anything "smart" before I had to share it. Not sure if I wrote anything "smart," but I got great feedback on the chapter.*
- *I was worried that I would fail to meet my own productivity goals.*
- *I was most worried about the ability to fit it into my schedule but it worked out.*
- *I was nervous about finding time to work on my own writing. In the end, I did not do as much writing as I would've liked, but this is mostly because I prioritized other more immediate writing deadlines and my mental and physical health. No regrets!*
- *I was worried about people turning into the infamous Reviewer 2 when workshopping pieces, especially since some of us were testing new work while others were sharing more refined contributions. I can attest that I never saw any aggression or uncharitable critique. People were able to give advice, and even critique, but in the most generous and thoughtful of ways. Everyone truly modeled constructive criticism.*
- *I was nervous about my status as Jean's former student long ago and about being older (and therefore far behind) than others. I was able to put those worries away immediately*

because Jean is so professional and so fair-minded and affirming that there was in my mind a real sense of collegiality and equality in the seminars.

- *I saw the list of names and many of the people on the list were "fancy" -- also I am not in English and so I was concerned that my work would not necessarily be translatable or understood. None of these things ended up being a concern-- I would definitely encourage more NON-ENGLISH scholars to join in future iterations.*

Personal Goals for the Second Book Institute

All but one survey participant said they were able to meet their goals during the Second Book Institute. The person who was not able to meet their goals said, "I don't think the goal was realistic, but I do think I'll be able to meet the goal by the end of the summer." Those who were able to meet their goals were asked to describe what components of the Institute helped them to meet their goals. Participants said the leadership, feedback, support, and structure were helpful in assisting them meet their goals. The most common theme was the leader of the Second Book Institute, Jean Howard, who created a supportive and welcoming environment with a clear structure. The participants said the following when asked what components of the Institute helped them to meet their goals:

- ***Jean created a community that was serious, focused, and friendly.*** *The seminar members took risks and were vulnerable and I appreciated that. Taking the workshop was a serious commitment for me and I learned so much that I was eager to write and moved when others responded so positively to my writing.*
- ***The facilitator made herself available for office hours,*** *preview of my chapter to be workshopped, and assignment of writing partner.*
- ***A supportive group leader and colleagues.***
- ***Professor Jean Howard was an incredible group leader! She modeled how to offer careful, thoughtful, encouraging, and thoughtful feedback--both in the live conversations and in the written comments. She wrote 2-3 pages of single-spaced comments for each participant. I'm someone who is relatively new to the world of reviewing, so it was really helpful for me to learn from Jean. Jean--along with Jennie Row, who was in our cohort--helped to arrange Zoom meetings with press editors (Penn and Northwestern). Talking to three editors, two acquiring and one series, was a fantastic opportunity to get our questions answered in real time. Finally, the atmosphere of the SBI was friendly and supportive; the two hours spent on Zoom, over the course of many months, worked to dismantle lingering feelings of isolation and insecurity which had been accumulating in my headspace for a long time.***
- ***Jean Howard's leadership was phenomenal. She was so encouraging and helped to cultivate a community in which we supported one another and gave honest and generous feedback. I loved the weekly feedback sessions on individual chapters (the fly-on-the-wall model was brilliant and, at times, really moving), and I found the smaller accountability groups to be very productive. I also enjoyed the sessions in which we heard from editors and from scholars who had published their second books.***

- The **clear structure** of the Institute established built-in deadlines, and the generosity of the other participants (for instance, I was inspired to share and therefore receive feedback on a 'draftier' piece of work than I had intended, rather than one which had already received some feedback, which ultimately was more beneficial for my project and progress)
- I loved every part of the institute and looked forward to it so, so very much. I appreciated that we had **different types of meetings: some with editors, some where we shared past experiences, some with other authors, and some where we workshopped pieces.** This approach provided me with a wealth of information. I would also say there was **a component of luck in that every participant was kind, smart, generous, and inclusive.** Certainly, this **group ethos and chemistry** comes from the reputation RaceB4Race has so intentionally cultivated. It can also be attributed to **Jean Howard's leadership** and example. Nevertheless, the generosity and vulnerability of the group was crucial to the success of the institute for me.
- The **weekly meetings** have been crucial, as well as the "work hunkers" we scheduled together. I think we could have done more to coordinate meeting in real life (i.e. at RSA, SAA)-- I would have loved to do a mini weekend retreat all together.

Participant Expectations

Participants were asked if their expectations about the Book Institute were met. All (100%) **said their expectations were met.** Participants were asked to reflect on what their expectations of the Second Book Institute were. Key themes were related to expectations of making writing progress, feedback, and learning from others. All comments on expectations are below.

- *To **have conversations about race and PCRS** that were intellectually demanding and to be moved to write a lot.*
- *I wanted to **write an additional chapter** of this project, **learn from the collective**, the book editors and the facilitator.*
- *Expectations to **revise some chapters and create a book plan.***
- *Work with smart, supportive colleagues, and **find accountability.***
- *That I would **share my work and get feedback**, learn from others.*
- *I expected to do **a lot of learning**--to be exposed to new arguments, archives, and approaches to the study of race in the premodern world.*
- *I had no idea what to expect. However, because I work in a department where second books are few and far between, I knew I would learn something. That was it--**a baseline expectation to learn something new.***
- *My expectations were **that I would be among colleagues who had similar questions** and that we would **work together to make progress** toward publishing our books.*
- *I had hoped to **learn from the wisdom and guidance of the Institute leaders and from my fellow participants**, especially around publishing the second book and how and where*

to do that; I hoped to gain some confidence in my second project; and I hoped to meet and build community with other PCRS scholars.

Participant Experiences

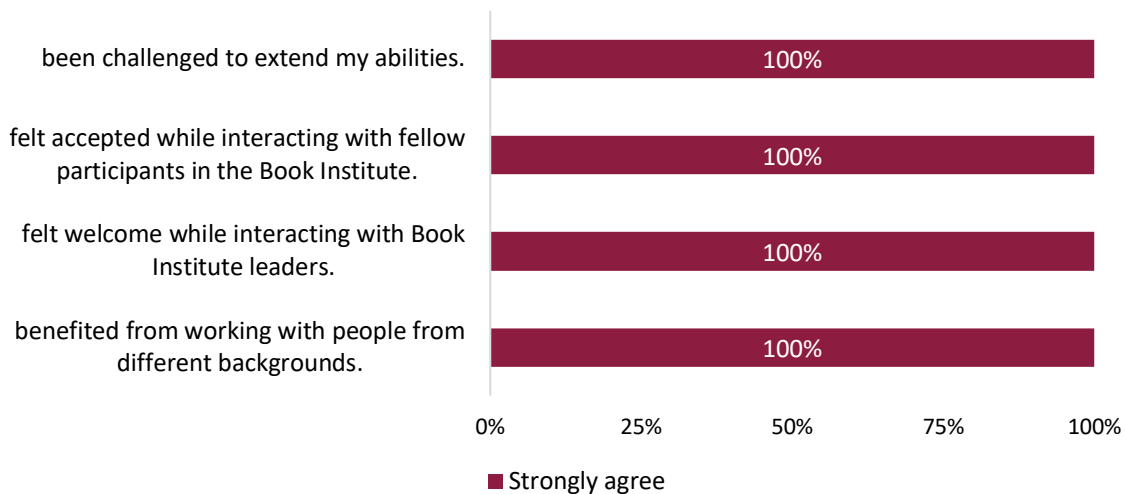
Overall Rating

Participants were asked to rate their overall experience as a participant in the Second Book Institute on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). The mean rating was 9.9. Nine (90%) of the 10 responding participants rated their experience as 10 out of 10. The remaining participant rated their experience as a 9.

Second Book Institute Environment

Survey respondents were also asked a short series of closed-ended questions about the environment of the First Book Institute. All questions began with “I have...” and centered on feeling welcome, feeling accepted, benefitting from working with those from different backgrounds, and feeling challenged. Response choices included strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. As shown in the chart below, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with each of these statements.

As a participant in the Book Institute, I have...



Participant Abilities

Participants were also asked to rate their agreement with several statements on their capabilities (“I can” statements) after the First Book Institute. The statements along with the distribution of responses are shown in the chart below. Respondents were provided a 4-point Likert scale for their ratings which included the options strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. As illustrated in the chart

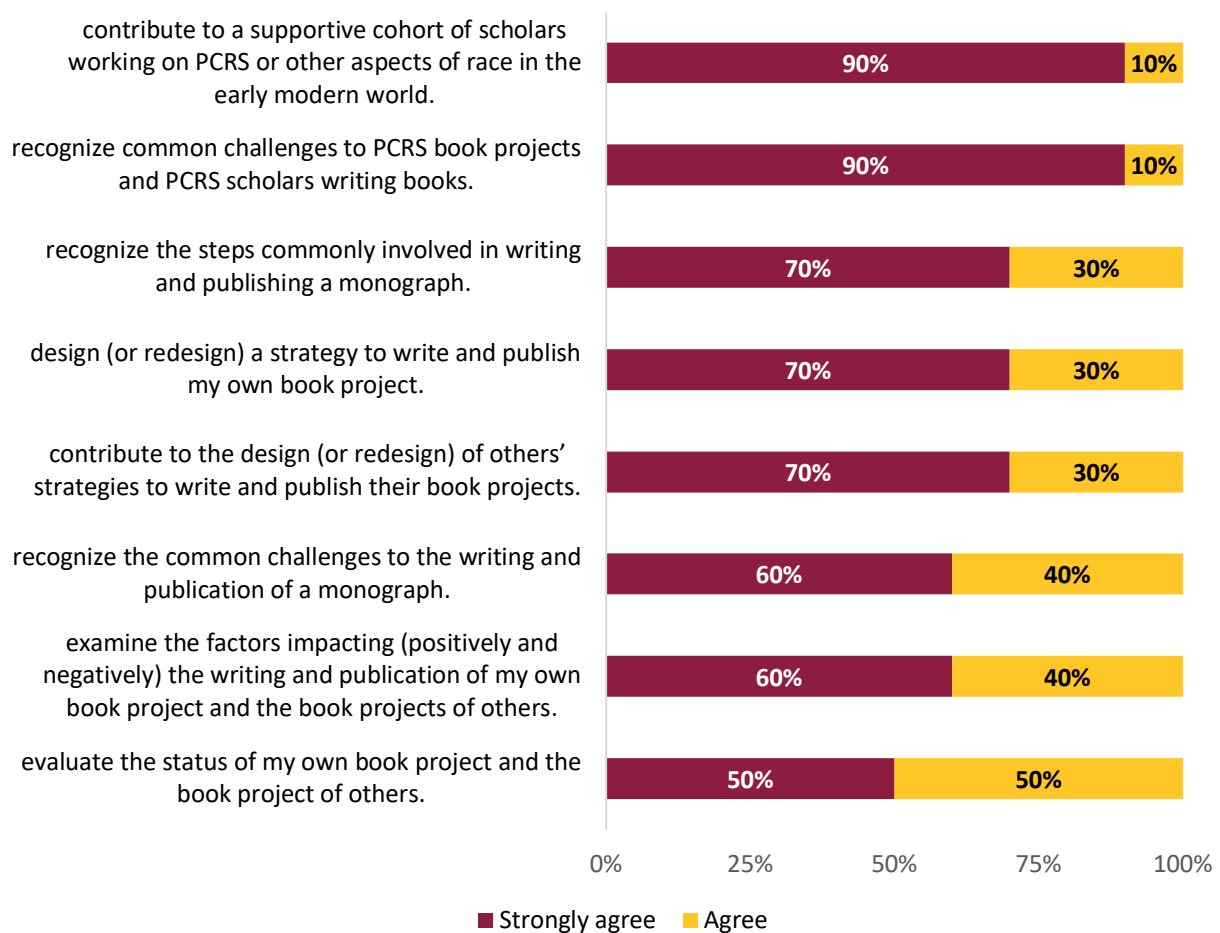
below, all participants strongly agreed or agreed with each statement. As shown in the chart, 90% (n=9) strongly agreed or agreed that they can:

- contribute to a supportive cohort of scholars working on PCRS or other aspects of race in the early modern world.
- recognize common challenges to PCRS book projects and PCRS scholars writing books.

While all participants at minimum agreed they can meet each of the objectives in the “I can” statements, the areas of weakest agreement where 60% or less strongly agreed included:

- evaluate the status of my own book project and the book project of others.
- examine the factors impacting (positively and negatively) the writing and publication of my own book project and the book projects of others.
- recognize the common challenges to the writing and publication of a monograph.

After attending the Second Book Institute I can...



What Participants Liked & Wished Was Different

All survey participants were asked what they liked during the Second Book Institute as well as what they wished happened during the Institute. Ten participants left comments on both questions. The comments about what participants liked commonly focused on feedback and advice, support, and mentorship from the leader. One noted liking meeting editors and one noted liking the diversity of academic disciplines. All comments about what participants liked are below.

- *We all read and commented on everyone's work in fly on the wall style; **we received brilliant feedback from Jean and one other person on our work**; there was no grandstanding by seminars; there was so much warmth and camaraderie and brilliance.*
- *Every session was encouraging for every scholar in the collective - no matter how uncertain we each were about your presented work, the collective always found comprehensive and compelling ways to inspire us as we continue to develop our second books.*
- *Fully of exceptionally smart and supportive people.*
- *We were able to be honest about our fears and struggles.*
- *The discussion was uniformly supportive, warm, encouraging, and forward-thinking. Everyone was able to share work and receive written and oral feedback (it felt like everyone made clear progress -- a sense of getting from Point A to Point B across the board is so satisfying and affirming). We were able to meet with our Institute leader one-on-one and in groups to learn from her experience and guidance.*
- *The professor leading the book was extremely supportive, thoughtful, and created a strong group dynamic.*
- *Jean Howard was a calm, wonderful, inspiring, brilliant, genius presence. And we made a bunch of new friends!*
- *We got to read chapters-in-progress (or drafts of book proposals); these offered a very immediate sense of how people were conceiving of the field's gaps and under-studied areas. I liked meeting editors; these authors-meet-editors meetings added variety to the workshop.*
- *Was open to and inclusive of individuals at various stages of the second book process and it brought together individuals from different fields/disciplines.*
- *I love the diversity of academic disciplines and personal backgrounds that the members represented. My work received fresh perspectives from individuals who are invested in PCRS but are outside of my specific discipline.*

When participants were asked what they wished happened during the Book Institute, one said, "Nothing. It was amazing as it was." The most common theme was more time, one recommended hearing more from second book authors who are not supported by R1 resources, one noted wanting to meet in person, and one wished they had gotten to know others outside their small group better. All participant comments are listed below.

- *I would love **more sessions and two chapters to share!***
- *I had **more time to spend during office hours** because they were incredibly encouraging and generative.*
- *Nothing this good lasts forever, but I do wish I could **extend my time with the BI. I'm not ready to say goodbye to this group!***
- *I **only wish the Institute could continue!** This has been such a wonderful experience -- one of the best of my professional life.*
- *We had even **more time!** My only other **constructive suggestion would be to hear from voices who write second books under conditions that are not supported by R1 resources.** Writing a second book is hard for everyone. But it is a very different endeavor for individuals as teaching/service-intensive institutions. Yet there are people at those institutions publishing! I would have loved to hear from them.*
- *We had had an **opportunity to meet in person!***
- *I got to know other individuals outside my small group better.*

Additional Insights

Participants were asked to provide any additional insights they wished to provide. Seven left comments, and comments typically contained expressions of gratitude and notes about the positive impact the Institute has had on them. All comments are listed below.

- *I feel so incredibly lucky --**this was by far one of the best professional opportunities I have had in my career!** I think having a writing community focused on race and second books is beyond fantastic. And I **can't imagine a better seminar leader than Jean. Thank you!***
- *Thank you for accepting me to the Book Institute. **It has been a life-changing experience. It's possibly the best thing I've done to advance my writing for the second book.** I'm grateful to everyone in my cohort, and especially grateful to Jean for her mentoring.*
- *The SBI has made an **enormous positive difference in my academic career.** I used to feel isolated personally and professionally. Academia can often feel like a popularity contest or a place where interpersonal social relations advance one's career. The SBI shatters this illusion by breaking the ice and making introductions. I love, too, that the **SBI mentor/leader was so available and supportive. It brings someone immediately into your corner, transcending institutional hierarchies. I feel that I have a community now.** The SBI and the Mentoring Network have been the most important professional activities I've done. Thank you!*
- ***An absolutely magical invaluable experience!!***
- ***It was fantastic! This is such an important program, and Jean Howard was a truly stellar leader.***
- *One of the scholars in the collective was attending the institute for the second time - I completely understand why. **This experience was unforgettable.***
- *I loved this institute so much. **It was warm, smart, productive, engaging, and helpful. I wish it were not ending!***

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants of the Second Book Institute found out about the Institute via emails from RaceB4Race or other sources, social media, colleagues, and a former participant. Participants reported they were drawn to apply to be part of the Second Book Institute because they were attracted to its focus on like-minded second book authors, accountability and support, and the leader. All participants said their expectations of the Second Book Institute were met. Further, participants said the leadership, feedback, support, and structure were helpful in assisting them meet their goals, and 90% said they were able to meet their goals.

Participants rated their overall experience with the Second Book Institute positively and appear to have benefited from their participation in the Institute personally and professionally. For example, all participants strongly agreed they had been challenged to extend their abilities, felt accepted when interacting with fellow Book Institute participants and leaders, and benefited from working with people from different backgrounds. All participants agreed or strongly agreed that they can contribute to a supportive cohort of scholars working on PCRS or other aspects of race in the early modern world, recognize the common challenges to PCRS book projects and PCRS scholars writing books, examine factors positively and negatively impacting the writing and publication of their book project and the book projects of others, recognize the common challenges to the writing and publication of a monograph, evaluate the status of their own book project, design or redesign a strategy to write and publish their book projects or contribute to others' design or redesign strategies, and recognize the steps involved in writing and publishing a monograph. Participants also expressed appreciation for the support and feedback they received and the Institute's leader.

Recommendations based on participant insights about their experiences in the 2023 Second Book Institute include:

- Bring in second author panelists or speakers who are not at R1 institutions.
- Continue, if feasible, effective individualized support (office hours) from the leader. For example, have leadership work with participants on a one-on-one basis to ensure they are sufficiently supported to meet their goals.
- Continue supporting participants to increase their confidence in their ability to evaluate the status of their own book projects as well as those of others.