

## New home for Yale's Digital Humanities Lab opens in Sterling Library

By Mike Cummings | OCTOBER 4, 2018



The Franke Family Digital Humanities Laboratory opens Oct. 9 in Sterling Memorial Library. The space features a glass cube that provides a secure space for researchers to work on specialized projects involving high-powered equipment. (Photo credit: Mara Lavitt)

Scholars have a new space at Yale to explore the humanities in detail using digital tools and STEM-related methods.

The Franke Family Digital Humanities Laboratory will open in Sterling Memorial Library on Tuesday, Oct. 9, [as part of the university's Founders Day celebration](https://news.yale.edu/2018/10/03/all-are-invited-celebrate-yales-317th-birthday-founders-day-oct-9) (<https://news.yale.edu/2018/10/03/all-are-invited-celebrate-yales-317th-birthday-founders-day-oct-9>).

The space, previously the Franke Family Reading Room, underwent a renovation that preserved its character while outfitting it for the lab's high-tech mission.

"In recent years, we have seen growing interest among Yale faculty and students in working at the cutting edge of humanities research," said Susan Gibbons, the Stephen F. Gates '68 University Librarian and deputy provost for collections and scholarly communication. "We have been able to support their work with our physical collections as well as technology and expertise in data management and analysis. Now we have an extraordinary new room that will optimize our support with advanced computing, specialized tools, and collaborative spaces."

Established in the fall of 2015 through a grant from the Goizueta Foundation, [the Digital Humanities Lab \(DHLab\)](http://dhlabs.yale.edu/) (<http://dhlabs.yale.edu/>) assists scholars in applying technology and quantitative methods to humanistic questions, and serves as a collaborative space for projects that combine STEM fields with the arts and humanities, efforts known as "STEAM."

Appreciating the power and potential of Yale's leadership in the digital humanities, Richard Franke '53 B.A. and his wife, Barbara Franke, made a gift to fund the room's transformation from the Franke Family Reading Room into the Franke Family Digital Humanities Laboratory. The Franques previously supported a renovation of the reading room in 1998.

For three years, the DHLab has been based in a suite of offices on Sterling Library's third floor. The new space provides much more room for consultations, presentations, and the nitty-gritty work of completing complex digital projects, as well as places to sit back and think. With the larger space, the DHLab has expanded its office hours for individual consultations to Monday through Thursday from 2 to 3 p.m.

“Already in the new space we’ve welcomed a physics doctoral student analyzing 3-D scans of dancers, and a graduate student in history and African-American studies text-mining the writing of Pauli Murray,” said Peter Leonard, director of the DHLab. “We know this new space will serve these and future researchers whose projects have yet to be imagined.”

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“**We want this space to facilitate serendipitous connections.**

—CATHERINE DEROSE

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Visitors enter the new space through a low-ceilinged anteroom where the reading room’s original ornately carved reference desk serves as a welcome point. From there, they move into the main lab space, where they can get to work underneath the room’s vaulted ceilings and chandeliers.

The space is divided into three sections. The first is a flexible workspace equipped with wheeled furniture to enable multiple layouts to accommodate consultations, small groups, workshops, and other events.

“We want this space to facilitate serendipitous connections,” said Catherine DeRose, the DHLab’s manager. “Maybe two scholars working here in different disciplines discover that they share a method in common and decide to begin collaborating.”

A 5’ by 11’ high-definition screen, composed of six individual touchscreen monitors, can accommodate detailed presentations. Patrons can connect in their laptops to 10 additional high-definition monitors mounted along the room’s walls at regular intervals to present their work and enable discussion.

An open-ceilinged glass cube located past the flexible workspace is the revamped room’s most striking new feature. The cube provides a secure workspace for projects requiring high-powered computation and specialized gear. The glass walls will allow scholars to leave, lock the door behind them, and feel confident that their work will not



be disturbed. The secure space enables researchers to continue working after the library closes and run complex computations over several days if need be, said DeRose.

The final section, located behind the cube, is equipped with individual workstations and soft chairs. Desks located in each corner of the room provide space for subject librarians to consult with patrons.



(Photo credit: Mara Lavitt)

The reading room opened in 1931 as a reserve book room lined with shelves containing books from the university's various academic departments. Books continue to line the walls of the renovated space. The room's shelving, and its detailed wooden scrollwork, was restored and modified to house the DHLab's collection of hundreds of volumes on the digital humanities.

"Physical books are still important," DeRose noted. "We often had researchers stop by our previous space to peruse our shelves for instruction or inspiration. We're delighted this can continue in the new space, with even more room for additions to the collection."

An adjoining conference room and staff offices open onto the lab area and have glass doors so that patrons can see if a staff member is available for consultation. A framed poster in the conference room offers a window into the early days of applying technology to the study of the humanities.

“Computers for the Humanities?” asks the poster, which advertises a conference sponsored by Yale — funded by a grant from IBM — that was held on January 22-23, 1965. The poster features Rodin’s “The Thinker” in silhouette and speckled with little white rectangles representing the holes in early computer punch cards.

[More information about the DHLab, including descriptions of its service and current projects, is available on its website \(http://dhlabs.yale.edu/\).](http://dhlabs.yale.edu/)

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