What is BookLab?

BookLab is Maryland English’s dedicated space for the study of the codex book in all of its material, historical, cultural, and imaginative diversity. It is a makerspace, a studio, a library, and a community press.

Who is it for?

Most anyone! Whether from the English department or beyond, students, faculty and instructors of all tracks and ranks, university staff, as well as members of the community. Put another way: We’re interested in whoever’s interested in us.

Who administers and staffs BookLab?

BookLab was co-founded and is directed by Professors Matthew Kirschenbaum and Kari Kraus. It is staffed by two graduate assistants, Mal Haselberger and Britt Starr.

How does BookLab fit with the department, campus, and community?

- We have specialized equipment and hardware, like two tabletop hand presses and a type collection for letterpress printing, that no other makerspace on campus has
- We offer a reading space and a hands-on library of unusual, experimental, and innovative books in the heart of the department, as well as examples and exhibits of historical writing technologies
- We support classroom instruction and host visits from a variety of classes and student groups
- We run regular workshops, public activities, and public programs like lectures and symposia
- We offer a focal point for grant-writing, curricular and research innovation, and campus collaborations
- We serve as one public face of the department, offering a destination for prospective and current students, alumni, visitors, and donors
- We build relationships with community organizations beyond campus, such as (for example) Pyramid Atlantic Arts Center

What do people actually do there?

- Learn fundamentals of book history and physical and descriptive bibliography
- Set letterpress type and print on two different kinds of tabletop presses
- Experiment with 3-D printing, electronic sensors, circuitry, and other tactile computing elements
- Engage in papermaking, bookbinding, and other elements of the traditional book arts, as well as zines and zine-making
- Touch a sheet of 15th-century vellum, or a book printed with waterproof pages, or a page printed in Braille
- Explore our library of several hundred artist’s books, experimental books, and books about books
- Participate in talks and workshops from visiting artists and scholars
How does BookLab approach diversity and inclusion?

BookLab is fully committed to the department’s practices of diversity and inclusion, both as set forth in its Statement of Values and through the ongoing work of the IDEA committee. To that end, we actively seek to collect resources in non-Western and non-Roman alphabets, as well as from underrepresented groups in book history and the book arts, such as women, persons of color, and non-cis or LGBTQ-identifying individuals. We are also attentive to different modes of access for our differently abled patrons, and offer examples of books and writing systems for the visually- and neuromuscularly-impaired.

When can I come visit?

We post regular open hours every semester (approximately 20 hours/week), and are also available to open the space by appointment.

How do I keep up with BookLab?

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram: @umd_booklab. We also publish a thrice-yearly newsletter.

Our restored Baltimore #12 parlor press, manufactured by Baumgarten and co. of Baltimore in the 1890s.