2014-2015 Praxis Program Charter

#Praxis 2014-2015 Charter

##Ivanhoe The [Praxis team](http://praxis.scholarslab.org/) will collaborate on [Ivanhoe](http://ivanhoe.scholarslab.org/), the digital humanities project initiated by the Praxis 2013-2014 team. By the end of the academic year, our team will develop this digital resource with the goal of making it accessible and relevant to diverse communities.

Ivanhoe was conceived as a digital platform to support creative play. We will concentrate our efforts on broadening the appeal of this game for both academic communities, and broader popular audiences. In this context, we aim to both streamline the design of the game and clarify the rhetoric of its presentation in order to make it as accessible to as many people as possible. We are aware of the challenge we have in front of us: simplification implies some degree of exclusion, while broad accessibility reflects a desire for inclusion. While committed to accessibility, the team will be wary of diffusing our attention among too many goals, platforms, or disciplines. We will do our best to focus on a smaller set of outcomes to be developed to completion. ###Developing Skills By the end of the year, all members will become familiar with the basic technical skills and digital techniques necessary to function in the digital humanities community. In addition, we will educate ourselves about current issues relevant to the digital humanities as they intersect with our own academic disciplines and aims. Members will also become familiar with and take advantage of the many resources available at the Scholars’ Lab. ###Documentation and Publicity We will share the process of project development through platforms such as GitHub and the Praxis website. This orientation toward documentation and sharing is motivated by a belief that transparency is important when it enhances accessibility. We will share not only our final product, but also the work-in-progress, talking openly about our perceived failures and successes. Furthermore, we want to leave records of our work for subsequent generations of the Praxis team. We hope that sharing our process and progress will contribute to the wider digital humanities dialogue.

Documentation will take two forms. First, blogs will provide a public venue in which we express our individual interests and work on the project. Second, we will share the responsibility of taking notes (on a rotating basis) during all of our team meetings with the aim to preserve individual perspectives and group compromises while making decisions.

Furthermore, team members are committed to publicizing both the Praxis program and Ivanhoe to a broader audience. These efforts may extend beyond the 2014-2015 academic year; they may involve individual and group presentations, and publications. During our group presentations, we will enable each member to promote their specialized interests within the broader project.

##Our Team

###Diversity for Common Ground

We recognize that the platform we will construct— the Ivanhoe Game—is inherently a cultural product: both created through the effort of a diverse, multicultural, and multidisciplinary team, and embodying the conditions of its production within a space like the Scholars’ Lab in the privileged social context of a well-resourced American university. With this in mind, accessibility is one of our central goals; we aspire to an Ivanhoe game that is as culturally adaptive as possible. This means recognizing the cultural diversity of users and minimizing the degree to which this diversity becomes a source of barriers to playing the game.

We believe that diversity within our team can be a source of strength when paired with respect and recognition for differences, as well as a shared interest in finding common ground. We see each team member as bringing to this project a diverse set of skills and knowledge resulting from their different upbringings, cultures, life trajectories, and academic/disciplinary commitments. The common ground is not a place where differences are elided or erased; it is a place where we can come together in all our diversity, as team members embedded in a wider and still more diverse community, and discuss issues openly and respectfully. Each member is seen as a valuable contributor to the common project, but also recognized and respected as an independent thinker and scholar with specific ‘individual’ goals and objectives. ###Communication and Accountability We have devised several channels of communication to enable accountability for the common project goals and individual goals too. We commit to documenting carefully the process through which we make decisions as a team, so that we do not hide differences and diversity of approaches or sideline them through the so-called “consensual” decision.

We will write two [blog](http://scholarslab.org/archives/) posts per month. This venue will highlight the relationship between our individual goals and the group project debates/dynamics. The blogs will aim towards a broader audience, but also serve as a way of keeping each other accountable on individual progress.

To create an environment conducive to learning and collaborative work, we believe in open communication that starts with positive language and some kind of affirmation of valuable contribution, and follows with constructive criticism. We acknowledge that productive communication is a challenging task, but hope to get better at this skill by making explicit three tenets for our communication as team members:

* Criticism/Critique is not personal - we will learn to receive it with gratefulness and respect for ourselves and others;
* Give others the benefit of doubt or start with an assumption of good intentions i.e. think of fellow team members as wanting to help you and support you, not hurt you— either with words or actions;
* Express and discuss with the group any issue of communication that prevents you from contributing as you want towards the completion of our common project.

It is through conscious dialogue and open conversations that we seek to create a productive and inclusive team space. ###Ethos Failure is not final. In fact, it is a vital part of the learning process. As a team, we embrace the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively, learning both from each other and from experience. Moreover, we are committed to maintaining the fun and play embodied by the Ivanhoe game.

The team embraces the ethos of the digital humanities and Scholars’ Lab communities and believes cohesion and a positive attitude are integral parts of developing a productive work environment. Failures will be welcomed as opportunities for knowledge production, and necessary steps in the process. Problems and conflicts will be viewed as occasions for reflecting and retooling. Potlucks and dancing. ###Roles and Responsibilities We will strive to maintain a non-hierarchical structure among the roles that develop over the course of the year. Our fluid structure will not prevent a clear system of accountability, and any alteration of roles will be clearly articulated. ###Eupraxia and Relationship to other Cohorts Be nice. Be professional, but not too professional. Be respectful. Listen. Reach for consensus.

We will exercise respect toward the contribution of the past cohort in our work. We will make an effort to preserve their project either through version control, published articles, or other forms of documentation. With regard to future cohorts, we will document potential ideas and possibilities for Ivanhoe even if they are not manifested in our own work. We hope that future cohorts will continue to think about their relation to past and future Ivanhoe teams with similar intent ##Our Product: Its Future ###Licensing The digital tool will be produced in the spirit of open source. The particular open source software and Creative Commons licenses involved in Ivanhoe and related products of the Praxis Program will be selected in accordance with that spirit. ###Equal Credit All members of the Praxis Program team deserve equal credit for their contribution. We all have a vested interest in the success of the program; according to our skill-sets, we will be active participants, contributing time and creative direction. Therefore, we should all receive credit as equal partners in the program. That said, we posit two types of credit: credit attached to the project as a whole, and credit claimed for individual contributions. Our shared website should always list general credit in alphabetical order to emphasize the non-hierarchical ethos of the program. Whenever a member of the Praxis Program references the work to the outside community, the project as a whole should be credited to all members. Individual contributions may also be claimed wherever appropriate. ###Stewardship by SLab Faculty and Staff The Scholars’ Lab faculty and staff are equal participants in the Praxis Program, taking an active role in team decisions. They also act as teachers, coordinators, and (if need be) arbiters of conflict. All members of the Praxis team will work together to address disagreements in whatever way seems most appropriate to the spirit of the charter. The Scholars’ Lab will help to maintain our final project after the fellowship is over. We will attempt to balance concerns of sustainability, experimentation, and innovation. The team will work together to realize the level of preservation that we want for our project, with the understanding that no digital tool can be kept standing in its current state forever. ###Future Questions and Considerations This charter could not possibly account for all the challenges we will face, or the questions we will encounter. Therefore, we thought it was important include questions that we are grappling with at this moment. This section can be found on our Ivanhoe wiki. We anticipate that this list will change over time as our work takes on new challenges.

Moreover, we consider this charter a living document that will guide, but not restrict, how we grow as a team. We will revisit the charter at the beginning of the spring semester (and as needed) to ensure that it accurately reflects the state of the project and the team. Alterations and additions can be made upon agreement of all Praxis team members.

*Ratified*

This charter was ratified by the members of the [Ivanhoe team](http://scholarslab.org/announcements/fellows/) in October 2014.

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