2020-2021 Praxis Program Charter

The Praxis 2020 Mascot: a paper puppet with brown bangs and dark eyes

## Preamble

This is a living charter that will evolve as we do. We intend to edit it as we progress through this year together. Any changes made beyond the first draft will be reflected by a change in text color.1

It’s 2020. COVID-19 is changing the way we’re learning and working together. Because we’re the first Praxis cohort ever to have all our meetings online, we’re striving to be more intentional about community-building, communicating well, understanding where we are in the world, being flexible, and being more forgiving of ourselves and one another.

In addition to naming our cultural and historical context, we would also like to name our institutional and systemic contexts. We strive to keep the toxic systems that we are nevertheless embedded within in mind and in check. Praxis offers us a safe platform to be critical of UVA as an institution and its practices, while also acknowledging that we’re a part of that institution and in many ways benefit from it as it simultaneously harms us (harms some of us more than others and in different ways). We hope this charter lays the foundation for a group practice of radical empathy.

## Common Goals

1. To make a project that is usable, portable, and adaptable. We don’t claim exclusive ownership of what we make, and we hope it can be co-owned and adapted by many others.
2. To make Praxis an enriching and exciting experience for everyone, and to keep everyone invested in the project.
3. To learn from each other! And, especially because this year is about pedagogy, to teach one another!
4. Keeping in mind our common interest in the everyday lives and lived experiences of people, we strive to focus on the quotidian in our Praxis work.
5. To have an internally presentable project by the last week of April, 2021.
6. To maintain healthy working habits, and to check in with one another about the boundaries we set for ourselves.2

## What we expect from one another (or, Cohort Culture)

1. To have a standing (Zoom) meeting on Mondays at 3 PM in the fall and Fridays at 11 AM in the spring.
2. To find ways to mitigate perfectionism–let the work be messy if it needs to be.
3. To check in with one another at the beginning of each meeting in order to actively support one another, and also share news and announcements.
4. To lead with kindness instead of niceness.
5. To prioritize community and humanity, knowing the full person, actively learning about each other, and making space for each other’s personal expression.
6. To be understanding of the random shit that pops up in people’s lives and make space/time for returning to the work/group. We’re all human!
7. To utilize the improv rule: “yes, and…”
8. To purchase at least three (3) bags of jalapeno peppers each.
9. To allow time for pets in the vicinity of Zoom meetings to say “hello” and “goodbye.”
10. When the project manager:
    * Mind the gap! Think about what we have, where we want to go, and how to bridge that gap.
    * Communicate clearly about sprint and meeting goals, including an agenda.
    * Let the team lead with mutual goals, offering reminders.
    * facilitate group meetings, e.g. naming note taker, ensure timely tasks are covered, encourage task progress, suggest timely transitions in meetings, do time checks during and at the end of meetings.

## What others can expect from us (or, Ethics and Accountability)

1. Make what we do accessible (multiple definitions of accessibility!) to anyone who wants to use it
2. Keep in mind who we’re accountable to (what communities? What ideas?)
3. Give credit where credit is due
4. Think about our positions/check our privilege/hold each other accountable/hold ourselves accountable
5. Call in and not call out
6. Collaborate (in dialogue) with people who are already doing the work!!! Bring in people who are already experts in the convo/not act like we’re the first people to do this when we’re obviously not/ask for engagement from experts from the jump.
7. Create a project that doesn’t merely describe or observe, but behaves and intervenes on the terms of whoever it is that needs what we make
8. Define specific processes for accountability along these principles as we go: once a month in the Fall semester, and again at the beginning of the Spring semester, once we’ve encountered our project and one another more clearly.

## The Process (or, Along the way…)

1. Playful experimentation emphasis—we’re having fun! We don’t have the pressure of like, trying to figure out how to get somebody to the moon
2. Honoring our different coding skills/equity and labor! Being flexible!
3. We will make everything we produce
4. Practice “popcorning” in our meetings to help with Zoom conversations

## Personal Goals

### *Emma*

1. Connect and stay connected with our cohort and folks in the Scholars’ Lab
2. Lead and listen with empathy, kindness, and generosity
3. Honor the gifts, perspectives, and responsibilities of this group
4. Become more comfortable with public scholarship
5. Be present to the work in front of you
6. Code creatively and from multiple perspectives
7. Ask for help when you need it
8. Make something accessible and useful
9. Stay curious
10. Have fun

### *Elise*

1. Listen first, speak later.
2. When trying something new, really commit to it, especially if it is intimidating.
3. Remember to be kind to yourself.
4. It is ok to try and work through a challenge on your own at first, but ask for help when you need it.
5. Honor the time committed to the project/Praxis work in general. Engage with it fully in the time allotted, but also set it aside when that time is over.
6. Be social (especially in these pandemic times!) with both the cohort and SLab in general–schedule the time if you have to! It is important to get to know everyone as people beyond their work
7. Be mindful of being one part of the group–you have a part to play, but the main goal is respecting the work, thoughts, ideas, and lives of the group as a whole
8. When things are busy, it can be difficult to maintain sight of the big picture; take time to embrace the privilege of doing this work and of working with these people.
9. Respect your own work boundaries and the work boundaries of the group.
10. Focus on positive self-talk.

### *Savanna*

1. Learn to collaborate while leading with empathy and valuing kindness, caring, and generosity towards others and myself above all else; this also means being honest and open about how I am feeling, actively setting healthy and appropriate boundaries, and respecting the boundaries of others
2. The SLab/PRAXIS 2020/21 communities have welcomed me with open arms and overwhelming warmth and kindness. Embrace this with humility, gratitude, enthusiasm, passion, and creativity and learn how I can best contribute!
3. Be better at listening and being attentive to others, as a peer and friend, and offer my support where I can. Don’t feel the need to fill the silence or talk over others.
4. Don’t be paralyzed by the “what-ifs” and be afraid to “do” and potentially “fail”, and don’t be disheartened by failure or confusion.
5. Learn to incorporate mindful and contemplative practices into collaboration in order to break down my relationship with toxicity and promote an experimental, playful, equitable, and socially conscious/considerate environment for everyone (and learn how to take these skills and incorporate them into future collaborative and/or pedagogical environments)
6. Approach all work and conversations with an attention to the lived experiences and active concerns of BIPOC, queer people, genderqueer people, trans people, women, disabled people, and other minoritized communities, and respect the experiences and ideas of others I am working with in and around PRAXIS. Do your best to make the project as accessible to all as possible, and be open to criticism.
7. Don’t get swept away by the details and inspiration and remain as grounded and attentive as possible to the present conversation and ideas.
8. Gain a better sense of the digital humanities, their potential, and the skills involved in various subsets so that I can be a better future collaborator, learn what I am capable of learning and which skills I already have, and know exactly what I can and cannot bring to the table

### *Grace*

1. Embrace frustration! Don’t give up just because.
2. Maintain a steady investment in the project.
3. Feel okay about telling other people in the cohort that you’re having trouble communicating/falling behind on communication, if that’s the case.
4. Look for other areas where you can contribute if you aren’t great at the thing everyone else is working on.
5. Engage seriously with the work and with everyone else’s ideas–you should want to contribute more than jokes!
6. Recognize that the process of the group brainstorming ideas and working through what we want to do/prioritize is valuable–it’s not just the end result that matters, and you shouldn’t rush everyone to try to get to the end result or discount the work that it takes to get there.
7. Be kinder to myself! I do bring things to the table.
8. Engage with the work of the rest of your cohort–but also, engage with them as people who are whole beings outside of their work!

### *Crystal*

1. Learn how to ask the right questions and seek out appropriate resources for coding and mapping, and try your best to expand your skills as you work on the project.
2. Get to know other Praxis and Scholar’s Lab folks as both people and academics (whatever that means!)
3. Take the time to pause and think before offering an answer to a question/problem.
4. Commit the necessary time and space to the people and the project, including room for exploration, play, and socialization…
5. …but also, take the necessary time to relax and decompress.
6. Be honest with yourself and others about when you need help!
7. Be flexible and generous with others’ ideas–don’t let your own sense of right or wrong get in the way of collaboration
8. It’s easy to get overwhelmed by the work ahead, but focus on one putting one foot in front of the other.
9. Be flexible with your own expectations for yourself.
10. Be better about checking the WhatsApp group chat!

### *Aaron*

1. Improve communication of ideas and plans while working on personal and group tasks.
2. Find expressive and useful ways of practicing and applying technical knowledge and skills.
3. Share what I already know with others to help achieve common and others’ goals.
4. Further develop skills for working in groups and with other scholars in a horizontal structure.
5. Learn communicative strategies and approaches for helping broader audiences (e.g. academics outside of DH, general public) see the importance of our work.
6. Find ingress into technical framework and environment for dissertation.
7. Broaden and deepen understanding of and involvement in DH world at UVA and elsewhere.
8. Make friends.

The bottom of it: a covered wrist extending up into a green sock puppet

1October 2020: Orange (#ff7518). 2January 2021: Blue (#4287f5).