Digital Life Together: Commitments for a Community of Learning

In conversation with the original commitments, the added blue text is an invitation to reimagine our lives together in digital spaces.

At EMU our life together supports our work, and in turn, our work shapes our life together. EMU serves the church and the world by engaging in academic inquiry in conversation with God's story through scripture, Christ, and the church. As a Christian university in the Anabaptist tradition, we encourage each other in Christ-like ways of living and learning.

The following ideals describe the learning community we aspire to be. They are derived from scripture as read in the Anabaptist tradition, our own century of tradition as an academic church institution, and the traditions we continue to make together today. Formal policies and procedures outlined in EMU faculty, staff, and student handbooks are designed to hold us accountable to these principles and sustain the identity and values that bind us together while creating space for questioning that identity in a spirit of continual renewal. We commit ourselves to regularly review and update all university policies in light of these ideals.

We are living into new communities with emerging geographies for and around relationships, where we inhabit "in-person" and "digital" spaces simultaneously. The informal gets formalized, and that takes more work--sometimes in ways that we don't realize. Lines are blurred between "in-person" and "digital" spaces, requiring new attention and labor.

Our digital life together is an expression of our material, physical, social, and spiritual lives. Within our lives, all space, including the digital, is politicized, (culture and?) racialized and gendered. Existing inequalities and inequities are re-produced in digital spaces, and new inequalities and inequities emerge. Because we aspire to life together that is just for all, this presents an opportunity for our community to notice, acknowledge and uncover the "unwritten" or "hidden" rules and "unseen" cultural norms at work in our community. Let us notice and acknowledge together whose labor makes our life together possible.

For each of the following commitments, we will ask ourselves and each other: "How am I/we living into this commitment at this moment, in this digital space? Who is this for? Who will benefit from my/our digital engagement?

Love for God and one another: Our most important work is to love as God loves us, as shown in the life of Jesus. We seek relational, collaborative, and restorative approaches to teaching and learning, administration, policy, and discipline. We commit ourselves to practice generosity and hospitality, demonstrating reconciling love, sustained by collective worship and spiritual formation.

We commit to relational, collaborative, and restorative approaches in our digital presence with one another. May our digital lives reflect love of God through practicing generosity, hospitality and reconciling love. In what ways does our digital life together draw us closer to God and move us toward one another and a deeper engagement with community?

Wisdom: Our learning community pursues truth and seeks wisdom in its practice. We bring creativity and rigorous inquiry to our academic work, including our curricular distinctives of peacebuilding, social justice, cross-cultural engagement, and sustainability. We listen to each other with compassion and boldly share our own authentic statements of faith and doubt. We commit ourselves to intellectual, physical, and spiritual growth in all aspects of academic and social life.

We commit to pursuing truth and seeking wisdom in digital spaces. We bring creativity and inquiry to our academic work, developing our digital presence and engagement for listening well to each other and sharing authentically. Our commitment to intellectual, physical and spiritual growth extends to the formation of digital critical thinking in community, especially in social media where we are tempted to consume knowledge and information that is dubious or even harmful. How do we practice active discernment and deep examination as a learning community, recognizing that wisdom is found and discernment happens in community?

Equality: Because each person has immeasurable worth in God's eyes, we value participatory processes and pedagogies. Each person has a right to be heard, and to work and study in a safe environment. Policies and procedures aspire toward equity, including individuals of all backgrounds in the benefits of community membership and giving everyone a recourse against abuse of power. We commit ourselves to show respect for the rights, dignity, and full personhood of one another.

We commit to being mindful of the diversity of experiences we each bring into digital spaces and the various ways barriers of inequality prevent everyone's full participation in our community. For this reason, a commitment to equality continues to mean addressing each other's unmet basic needs. One way we do this is by clarifying community expectations. We commit to maintaining personal connection and tending relationships - through multiple communication channels. We acknowledge time, and our shared use of it, to be critical to ensuring equity - sometimes calling for pauses or "time outs". Equality in digital spaces means being deliberate to check the "room": Who is visible? Who is audible? Who is taking up air time? How is power and privilege being expressed or perhaps abused?

Sustainability: We strive to use God's gifts wisely and generously, emphasizing well-being and supporting policies that enable students and employees to live balanced lives. We commit ourselves to exercise responsibility in our care for the earth and our use of resources as we practice stewardship of mind, time, abilities, and finances.

We commit to balance in our use of digital resources, even as we increase the frequency of engagement with one another digitally. We take seriously the implications of using resources that are not sustainable if treated as disposable. Our commitment to sustainability leads us to ask questions about the costs and effects of those devices, both in terms of their production (e.g. in terms of non-renewable energy and resource extraction) and their impact on our social relations (e.g. in terms of our relationships with "things" replacing/ minimizing our relationships with people). While the boundaries of digital life are less clear, we expect the wise and generous use of resources, emphasizing well-being for enabling ourselves and others to live sustainable and reparative lives. How do we find healthy balances in digital spaces, where boundaries are not always clear?

Accountability: Our individual and collective actions affect the health of the entire community. We expect each person to conduct themselves ethically and faithfully in personal and public matters, in order that all may thrive physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. We commit ourselves to mutual accountability motivated by love in a spirit of generosity and grace.

We commit to acting toward collective health within our digital communities. Our actions, in all mediums, create impacts for ourselves and others. We bring integrity to digital courses and community, expecting honesty from and building trust with one another. Our shared expectations for ethical and faithful conduct persist, as will accountability responses when harms occur in digital spaces. How am I (are we) practicing these commitments? What is being asked of me in order to live into this right now?

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