



EMM LAB

Experimental Methods and Media

EMM Lab Values and Mission Statement - 1.3

Last updated: Summer 2024

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This statement is a living document, and will be updated over time. These updates can happen when new members join the lab, when existing members bring a concern to the table, and in annual review. Any changes made must be made with the approval of all current members of the lab.

We are a professional space of academic knowledge production that aims to support forms of inquiry that work outside of traditional academic publishing. This includes, but is not limited to, research-creation, critical making, media arts production, and participant action research.

As a space dedicated to supporting these forms of inquiry, we care about valuing these forms of knowledge production. We also care about valuing those who produce this knowledge. Finally, we care about finding ways to mobilize these forms of knowledge in productive, public facing ways.

We aim to do so in line with the principles of social, environmental, and climate justice. These terms, to us, refer to a broadly intersectional approach that takes into account issues of labour, colonialism, land access, and stewardship. We hold that it is not enough to merely imagine other worlds; we seek to build them in large and small ways through the practice of research.

Material Considerations (Procedures for Acquiring and Using Lab Equipment)

Acquiring Lab Equipment:

- Equipment acquired by the EMM Lab should be:
 - Repairable - We value the right to repair, as an environmentally conscious lab.
 - Reusable - Equipment that can only be used for a single project is not in line with an environmentalist ethos.
 - Sustainable - Equipment and materials used should (where possible) come from sustainable manufacturing processes, and should have post-use destinations other than landfills.
 - Open Source - The EMM Lab prefers open-source projects, software, and hardware (though technological barriers to use may exist).
 - Low-Cost and Accessible - We endeavour to work with materials that are inexpensive and can be acquired by other groups looking to iterate on our ideas.
- All of the above concerns are listed with the understanding that this lab exists in imperfect circumstances, and cannot have a fully substantive impact on larger systems of manufacturing and waste, and will not always be able to adhere to all of the above.

However, efforts to do so are worth a sincere effort, and will lead to useful insights about the systems in which we are imbricated.

Lab Equipment Policies:

- Lab equipment is purchased for the production of lab research and the pedagogical needs of its members and community.
- Lab equipment can be used for personal projects by lab members, with the permission of the lab director or Cultural Studies media equipment coordinator.
- Lab equipment may also be loaned out to non-lab members for scholarly and public-facing research projects that align with the methods, ideals, and goals of the EMM Lab.

Products of Lab Research

Privacy

- The EMM Lab is dedicated to ethical research, including, but not limited to, the right of research participants to their privacy. No private or confidential data, or research that could be used to uncover private or confidential data, will be published without the direct consent of those affected.
- Any private data collected or used will be destroyed upon the request of the respective individual.

Accessibility

- All EMM Lab outputs should be as accessible as possible, for all individuals. This includes both physical and technological considerations. As such, we aim to provide digitally-accessible alternatives to in-person events and screen-reader friendly, plain text documentation of our digital work.

Commercial and Non-Commercial Outputs

- Outputs of the EMM Lab are not for making markets nor intended for financial gains. Outputs should instead tend towards public experiments, public research, developing technological imaginaries, and encouraging new ways of being.
- Part of the output of the EMM Lab is the process by which projects are undertaken. In alignment with the EMM Lab's Ethos of Learning, and with its goal of public-making, experiments should be reproducible, and documentation should exist so that others may more easily reenact and iterate on our projects and works. To this end, we frequently use open-source and creative commons licences when distributing our work.

Social Media and Public Facing Media Outputs

- The EMM Lab maintains a Twitter (@emm_lab) that serves as a lab book and record of lab progress, lab successes and failures, and thoughts around those topics. The Twitter account is designed to be a tool to be used to forward conversations about progress, the acceptability of failure in academic spaces, and to forward the process of “learning together” that EMM Lab supports under its Ethos of Learning (see below).
- EMM Lab is not beholden to updating its Twitter (and any subsequent social media presences) on any regular schedule, or with any standardized forms of content production; all EMM Lab social media is a tool to be used, rather than something that uses us.
- EMM Lab’s social media accounts will not be used to retweet, share, follow, or support other Tweets or accounts without the express permission of either the Lab Manager, or the Lab as a collective. Exclusions to this are as follows:
 - EMM Lab will acknowledge and reply to comments on, and retweets of, its own tweets and content.
 - EMM Lab will follow academic accounts that are producing relevant and interesting work, helping to place the EMM Lab in conversation with like-minded scholars and scholarly spaces. This includes collaborators, lab members, and friends of the lab.
 - EMM Lab will follow or tag scholars and groups that we cite in documents, or read as a lab, allowing the twitter account to serve as an externalized, visual bibliography.
 - EMM Lab will re-follow accounts that follow the EMM Lab twitter, pending Lab Manager or group review.
- EMM Lab will tweet using the first person plural “we,” before providing specific attribution to lab members. For example, if Anne has been working on setting up a new solar panel, @emm_lab may tweet “This week we’ve been working on further solar work, and Anne has made plenty of progress in assembling and setting up our newest solar panel!” or something similar.
- Per our Primacy of Care and policy of rest, EMM Lab social media accounts may take time off, as either activity in the lab slows, or lab members become busy. Again, we are not beholden to specific levels of output. More broadly, EMM Lab holds that social media account usage should be useful, meaningful, and/or fun; when an account ceases to be those things, there is no obligation to continue producing content with it.
- Per our commitment to ethical research and the importance of privacy, the EMM Lab social media requires informed consent before posting names, pictures, or other identifying information of people or groups.

Lab Culture

Inclusive Space

- We intend for the EMM Lab to be a safe and inclusive space, and for lab members to carry our values outside of the lab. As such, we recruit lab members, and collaborate with people outside the lab on the basis of these shared goals and values. We are a group that comes together through common interests in media technologies and research methods informed by intersectional theories of feminism, race, colonialism, and disability.
 - Put in more direct terms, the EMM Lab is a space that rejects all ableism, bullying, colonialism, homophobia, fascism, racism, sexism, and transphobia (alongside other forms of systemic violence or prejudice not listed here).
- The EMM Lab has an Open Door policy for lab management on issues of lab culture. Our policies for interviews and conflict processes are evolving, but seek to incorporate and bolster these commitments.

Ethos of Learning

- The EMM Lab is more interested in learning than in efficiency. In practical terms, this means that the EMM Lab is interested in learning-focused teaching, collaborative efforts, and skill-sharing practices.
- This also extends to acknowledging that incoming lab members will have both their own, unique skills and competencies, and their own, unique knowledge gaps, which may include a lack of scholarly or technical knowledge on the part of any given lab member.
 - With this in mind, knowledge of lab members is varied--and valued in that variety. Additionally, knowledge building is a shared project within the lab and between lab members, rather than a condition for entry.
- To this end, we aim to learn together instead of specializing and siloing the work of research. Lab members will regularly teach what they know to other lab members, such that all lab members have the opportunity to learn all the skills integrated into a project. Lab members are also expected to produce beginner-friendly documentation of their projects when finished. This keeps a living archive of skills in the lab community and fosters more holistic forms of knowledge of the topic.

Academic Space

- The EMM Lab is primarily a professional, academic, and collaborative space, rather than a social one (though see Primacy of Care, below). As such, the EMM Lab should primarily be a space for generative work, though socialization is, of course, permitted within the Lab. Non-lab related social interactions should be practiced with both an ethos of care and inclusion in mind (i.e. we are not a clubhouse).

Primacy of Care

- The EMM Lab is a space of care and collaboration, and is invested in the personal and professional flourishing and wellbeing of lab members. As such, if the lab work is taking an undue mental or physical toll on any lab member, those members should prioritize their health over contributions to the lab.
- Lab members' contributions to the lab are an expectation, but not an obligation. This includes acknowledging the fact that participation and work output will wax and wane over time for both individual lab members, and the lab as a whole. As such, a key ongoing goal of the EMM Lab is to support the participation and collaboration of lab members to the extent that they would like to collaborate and participate. This includes paid sick and vacation days for employees, as well as periods of coordinated rest for lab activities.
- Whenever possible, lab members should communicate about interruptions to their availability and capacities so that work can be redistributed or lessened for the group.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

- Group work is full of social tensions and rewards (sometimes in equal measures). Disagreements are productive and necessary to collective deliberations. For lab work to work well, we'll have to disagree sometimes--potentially often!
- That said, it can often be difficult to dissent with peers or the lab director. Power imbalances and a desire to maintain smooth social waters can result in conflicts getting 'brushed under the rug.' Conversely, lab members may at times agree to a direction they don't want to pursue and ultimately will not do, just for the sake of moving a meeting along. These outcomes can lead to small problems becoming big ones, and/or to lab work being left incomplete.
- Lab members should be respectful and responsive in relation to conflict. You have a responsibility to let lab members know when they have let you down, and you have a responsibility to do so in a way that is both direct and non-confrontational. Failing to do so prevents lab members from learning from mistakes, prevents mistakes from being acknowledged as a human trait rather than a personal slight, and inhibits the development of a truly collaborative lab culture.
- Conflict between lab members should be first and foremost a 1:1 conversation between the parties involved. Please make time to meet--ideally face-to-face--to discuss issues when they arise. If this fails, seek a third party--either a peer or the lab director--to mediate.
- Consider using techniques from [non-violent communication](#) when discussing conflict. Be specific and neutral in pointing to the source of conflict, express how this makes you feel and the needs those feelings connect to, and end with a request (not a demand).

Health and Safety

COVID-19 and other Infectious Diseases

It seems like COVID-19 spread will be with us for quite a while. This is not benign, and requires a collective analysis of risk. This differs in our day-to-day lab work and in our participation in group events and activities.

Unfortunately, there is no entirely risk-free way to share space and resources. Acknowledging this, it's important to consider the evolving character of risks and make plans to mitigate them. The following considerations are understood to be additive, beyond the health strategies articulated by [Trent University](#) and our [local health unit](#).

In the Lab:

- It's always the case that, at the request of any lab member, the whole lab will mask when working together in the same space. The lab member does not need to specify why, but it's broadly acknowledged that everyone (and the people they're in close contact with) may have a range of medical (pre)conditions, travel plans, and care responsibilities which are all good reasons to mask up.
- It's always the case that, if someone is experiencing any symptoms, the whole lab will mask when working together in the same space. It's good to disclose this before coming into the lab! Also, consider staying home!
- The lab is equipped with an air filtration unit and windows that can be opened. It's good to use these tools to reduce risk.

At In-Person Conferences:

- Travel and shared conference venues bring increased levels of risk. Accordingly, before traveling together, the travel group should meet and discuss:
 - Local risk indices (see, for example, [this Canadian risk forecast](#)).
 - The extent to which risk will be shared across the group (are we eating together? Staying in the same accommodations?).
 - Risk mitigation strategies (i.e. eating outside, masking indoors), their pros and cons, and the extent to which the whole group agrees on their value.
 - Contingency plans for if someone gets sick (who will take on their part of the conference presentation? Can they quarantine from the rest of the group? What local resources would they need, and where are they located?).
 - How to (perhaps unofficially) support remote participation at the conference venue for a lab member that will not be physically present because of their risk assessment or sudden need to quarantine.
 - Making a shared Google map with resources flagged.
 - Everyone's contact information, and plans for who to contact if they need help or have concerns to share.

- When traveling, the group should take a lab-provided kit that includes high-quality masks, COVID tests, cold meds, and a thermometer.
- If a lab member becomes sick at a conference they are entitled to paid sick leave thereafter.

Electronics

Dealing with computer hardware, microelectronics, and any kind of electrical systems is also not without risk. As this is an ongoing component of EMM Lab work (through both investment and investigations of solar power, and through ongoing usage of open-source hardware), lab members should be prepared to follow adequate electrical safety protocols when working with batteries, electrical circuits, or power sources.

The following considerations are understood to be additive, beyond any safety instructions articulated by Trent University, the [Ontario electrical code](#), and any device specific instructions.

- Safety is paramount. If you are not comfortable with a specific electrical task, do not undertake it.
- Do not work with live electrical circuits above 10 volts. Disconnect all power sources before working with these kinds of circuits.
 - Never assume that a circuit is not live - double check!
- Make use of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). If the appropriate PPE is not available, do not proceed with the work.
 - If you are dealing with more than 10 volts of electricity, use safety gloves.
 - Use a fume extractor when soldering, or when working with any devices or systems that might aerosolize materials or produce fumes. Consider also using a ventilator mask.
 - PPE for live electrical work is not available in the EMM Lab - do not work with live electrical circuits above 10 volts.
- Ensure that you have a safe plan of work beginning any tasks - confirm that your actions will not lead to unnecessary danger.
 - Assess your work area before beginning work - ensure that there are no highly conductive surfaces (such as spilled water, metal flooring, etc), or environmental hazards.
- When working with Lead Acid Batteries:
 - Do not keep these batteries in a tightly enclosed space - if you have to, ensure that there is proper, consistent ventilation.
 - Do not touch liquid near a Lead Acid Battery - always assume it is battery acid, and clean it with a damp cloth (while wearing gloves).
- Double check. Slow is safe. Slow is clean, and clean is fast.
- When energizing a circuit, do so with caution. When dealing with solar, remember:

REMEMBER :

Connect in this order:

1. Battery
2. Charge controller
3. Solar panel



REMEMBER :

Disconnect in this order:

1. Solar panel
2. Charge controller
3. Battery

Lab Meetings

EMM Lab holds big meetings once a month, as well as shorter check-in meetings (usually on a weekly basis). Check-ins are for providing short summaries of weekly progress, and for staying up to date on parallel projects across the lab. Big meetings are for longer deliberations and co-learning opportunities. The scheduling of all meetings is set at the start of the semester. Everyone should try their best to attend all meetings, although it's understood and expected that everyone will not attend all meetings all the time. Lab members should protect lab meeting times in their calendars, but also protect their own time when they are sick, in a project time-crunch, or on vacation.

Big Meetings¹

- Every meeting begins with a check-in, asking how lab members are faring, with curiosity and compassion for their health.
- Big meetings are then broken up into 1-3 smaller sessions, 15-45 minutes long.
- All sessions should have a designated host, who is responsible for facilitating this part of the meeting. Lab members will be invited/scheduled to host sessions on their projects at mutually agreed intervals, providing de facto deadlines to present their work in progress and invite other lab members in on their learning.
- At least once a year, a session should be dedicated to reviewing the Lab Values and Mission Statement.
- Sessions can also be programmed around wellness, professionalization, writing feedback, and technical skill development. Anything of mutual interest is fair game.
 - Co-hosting is welcome.
 - Lab members should strive to minimize the time they spend preparing to host a session. Polished PowerPoint presentations are not expected. A friendly and relaxed exchange is our aim.
- Possible options for sessions include (and are not limited to):
 - A skill share, teaching lab members how to do something/use something new,
 - Sparking a discussion about an interesting article, something in the news, or a creative work,

¹ Our thanks to Evan Bowness and the TEST lab for inspiration for this section, <https://www.evanbowness.ca/test-lab>.

- Practicing a conference talk,
- Workshopping a piece of writing (unfinished drafts are welcome!),
- Brainstorming about shared research questions, methodological considerations, or experiences in the lab or in the field,
- Teaching/sharing/discussing wellness strategies,
- Training lab members on safety protocols