

Fediverse Social Media: Proposal to CMDS Faculty

Robert W. Gehl, @rwg@aoir.social

I propose that our department establish itself on federated social media. Much as we would with X or Instagram, we can use it as a platform to share news about the department and connect to potential students. Unlike those services, our federated social media would be under our control.

What's the Fediverse?

The fediverse is a network of small, community-run social media servers that can communicate with a shared protocol. In a sense, it is similar to email, where people on different servers (e.g., Outlook, Gmail, Tutanota) can communicate with one another.

The fediverse is now a global network of tens of thousands of communities. While getting total account numbers is difficult, it includes ~14m accounts and is growing.

Why might we use it?

As I am sure you are aware, corporate social media have had major changes recently. Meta's recent content moderation changes are, in my view, particularly hateful. As for Twitter/X, Musk has not only shifted the platform to the far-right, he has used his power to insinuate himself into the US government with damaging effects.

Instead of relying on US-based social media, we can run our own and set our own moderation rules. Or we can find an existing server that has a good moderation team and a code of conduct we agree with and join that.

How might we use it?

There are three ways I can imagine: the **Ambitious Plan**, the **Less Ambitious Plan**, and the **Easy Plan**.

The Ambitious Plan

We set up our own server for students, staff, and faculty. We collectively come up with server content moderation rules and everyone agrees to them.

The Less Ambitious Plan

We set up a server for only one account. This is a common practice on the fediverse: the "server of one." That account, "@CMDS," posts about our students, staff, faculty.

The Easy Plan

We set up an "@CMDS_YorkU" account on an established server. Content moderation is handled by others (much as on corporate social media)

Costs

Ambitious Plan Costs

- Domain name registration (~\$30/year)
- Robust hosting (~\$100/month)
- Posting labour
- Content moderation labour
- Server upkeep labour

Less Ambitious Plan Costs

- Domain name registration (~\$30/year)
- Hosting (~\$10/month)
- Posting labour
- Much reduced (but still needed) content moderation labour
- Server upkeep labour (but less intense)

Easy Plan Costs

- Posting labour
- Some content moderation
- Most decisions out of our hands
- Some fedi folks don't agree with orgs having accounts like they are people

Benefits

Regardless of our plan, establishing ourselves on the fediverse would put CMDS at the forefront of decentralized social media, getting our messages onto a growing network and demonstrating our abilities with emerging digital media.

We would gain

- Access to ~14m (and growing) fediverse users
- Access to ~300m Meta users (if we choose)
- Access to ~30m Bluesky users (if we choose)

Finally, appropriately enough, this would be a moment to “buy Canadian”! This is because our social media can be entirely hosted in Canada.