

Yak at Your Own Risk: ITS, McFadden May Be the OP

Sarah Farnam
Staff Writer

Alongside the Facebook and Twitter icons on college students' smartphones is a cartoon picture of a yak; the icon for the anonymous app, Yik Yak, which is stirring up controversy on college campuses around the country. The app allows anyone within a certain radius to post nameless statuses, and others in the area can view posts and vote on them.

Given the freedom of anonymity, students are able to post about what ever they like, no matter how vulgar or offensive it may be. "Kids act like high schoolers," said sophomore Tod Oram. He added that the amount of drama and sexual tension revealed on the app is juvenile and often cruel.

Senior Devin Conwell says Yik Yak gives students the opportunity to say things that they would not normally feel comfortable saying. "People constantly talk about each other," he said. "There is a lot of negativity on there."

Last year, as Yik Yak began to grow in popularity, MU President Dave McFadden noticed this negativity. "It was used to treat people poorly, and some people were being bullied," he said. "People can just be vicious with each other." The problem grew so prevalent that there was discussion over whether it should be shut down on campus.

"The anonymity is problematic, because we can't go in and do anything about it," he said. "Anything that really destroys community or tears down individuals, or could be construed as bullying, really bothers me."

Though Campus Safety does not monitor Yik Yak, officials do acknowledge that, if the negativity grows to an extreme level, MU has the ability to step in. "Yik Yak is not as private as users believe it to be," said Director of University Safety Harold Napier. "It is very easy to pin point the phone that is sending any serious threat by obtaining a couple of warrants."

He adds that several

college students around the country have already been arrested for threats that they've posted onto the app.

Despite its downfalls, some identify ways in which Yik Yak benefits the MU community. Campus ITS uses the app to see what students have to say about the technology on campus. If there are complaints posted about Wi-Fi or TV channels, ITS will know to address those issues, said Travis Steele, director of IT operations. "It gives us limited information, but at least we're aware that there's a problem." Though the ITS team recommends that students call the Help Desk to get problems fixed, many are more likely to tell Yik Yak first.

President McFadden sees other positives to the app. "People can communicate with each other even if they don't know each other," he said. "You can see what other people around here are thinking." Oram notes that it is useful "if someone lost their keys, or if someone's car lights are left on."

This month marks two years since the app was released, and it is still going strong at Man-

chester. "I thought that it would die out over the summer, but it bounced back somehow," said Conwell. "I think it's still got some time of staying alive."

President McFadden isn't too concerned about the future of the app, because readers have the ability to police the content. If a post is disliked, or voted down, by five people, it will disappear from the feed.

"Yik yak has built this in as a way of saying if the people in your community think you're being stupid, they can get you off Yik Yak," he said. MU students will take advantage of this power, because they will want to maintain the integrity and dignity of Manchester's campus, President McFadden said.

"If someone is really inappropriate, students can act on that."

Oram says many problems would be solved if people relied less on social media. "People need to learn to just talk face to face and not over Yik Yak," he says, using the compliments and flirtations that happen anonymously as an example. "Just go up and tell her she's cute!"

