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Words Without Faces: Anonymous Social Media on Campus

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WORDS WITHOUT FACES

ANONYMOUS SOCIAL MEDIA ON CAMPUS

WRITTEN BY EVELYN KELLY

DESIGNED BY ALLYSON LYNDAKER

A new anonymous social media app, Fizz, has announced intentions to launch on Messiah University's campus.

Anonymous social media apps allow users to post within a set community without their comments being traced back to them. One such popular app around campus is Yik Yak.

Yik Yak's guidelines agree to no direct naming, bullying, or spreading rumors. However, it was banned by school administration when it first was popularized, because of the crude nature of content by students, spreading of false information, and the posting of a threat to the campus community in which the police got involved.

Doug Wood, Dean of Students at Messiah University, views these apps as largely detrimental to the community.



"I think there's something disingenuous to not be named in criticizing other people or events. I very much prefer someone have the courage and integrity and conviction to want their name to stand alongside their convictions," Wood said.

Wood does not view anonymity as a negative thing in itself. A few years ago, an anonymous member in the Messiah community wrote hundreds of encouraging post-it notes and left them on student mailboxes.

"If the apps were used similarly, I would see that as a benefit," Wood said.

Scrolling through recent posts on Yik Yak will reveal complaints about the ice on sidewalks and frustrations with specific leaders in Messiah's community, stories about running into fellow students at local liquor stores, and in which parking lots the Department of Safety is actively writing tickets.

After being turned down by students unwilling to talk directly about their current anonymous app usage, the Pulse sent out a survey to the whole student population. Only forty students filled out the survey, most preferring not to share their names.

Among the reasons why students shared that they downloaded an anonymous social media app, the most common responses were for entertainment purposes or because friends use them.

One student responded that they downloaded the app to say things without a fear of judgment and see if others on campus related to what they were thinking about.

Junior Noemi Garcia had a different reason for downloading Yik Yak.



"As a student leader on campus, being able to keep up with what is bothering students is helpful so I know how to better do my job," Garcia said.

She believes that issues can not be solved if they are not brought up to proper sources on campus to create change.

"Many students who use these apps are those who are unlikely to come to things like Student Senate, where their ideas can be shared openly. I think it is beneficial to know how students are reacting to things and how as a university we can better serve the entire student body," Garcia said.

Personal privacy, a communal space to talk about shared experiences, sharing frustrations without judgment, and humor were most quoted as benefits of these apps.

One response to the survey said they check Yik Yak three times a day.

"No connections to one's name so you can post freely. To see and post 'tea'; it's simply just fun," they said.

Among the downsides voiced by students on the survey were gossip, lack of consequences, lack of accountability, bullying, hookup culture and toxicity.

One anonymous freshman expressed how the culture of Yik Yak can affect their own outlook on the campus community.

"I have found plenty of things I didn't really mind in the beginning that I ended up mad about because I scrolled seeing other people complain about it for hours," they said.

Another student who did not want to share their name believes that anonymous social media apps defeat the purpose of social media.

"I do not like anonymous social media apps, because they removed the intimacy that social media provides and strips away everything that it stands for. While I understand why people enjoy it so much, I think it creates more of a divide and is just for incessant gossip and spilling tea that should not be shared (subjectively)," they said.

"People disassociate from their identity -they are not responsible for their online behavior," Junior Paris Emerie said.

