

The Yak is back, but at what expense?

By: Sydney Edwards

BEVERLY – After four years, the infamous Yik Yak has returned at Endicott College and proves to be a double edged sword for students.

The app gives students the freedom to post what they want, but the effects of these posts are taking away the freedom they have to do what they want.

Yik Yak is a location based app that ruled over college campuses and high schools after its launch in 2013. The app's most appealing feature was the anonymity it gave each user, with it being the only social media that did not require a phone number, email address, or even a username to set up. This meant that all of the posts were anonymous, giving users the freedom to 'yak' whatever was on their mind.

After having taught his Social Media Theory and Practice course at Endicott for almost a decade, Professor Randall Livingstone remembers that Yik Yak was "pretty popular" on campus during its prime from 2013-15. "It seemed like most students were using it and a number of faculty were there to see what was being said," he said.

Because of Yik Yak's anonymity and 5 mile posting radius, bullying, harassment, and serious threats prevailed on the app in different schools across the country. Schools started banning students from using the app to prevent future offenses..

"I don't remember here at Endicott there being an overwhelming number of harassment and bullying...although I think there was some of that," Livingstone said. "I do remember that the president of the college at the time and some other people were concerned that it could be a place for bullying and harassment, so the administration was very aware that everyone had [Yik Yak] on their phones at the time."

In May 2017, Yik Yak shut down because of the effect the negativity had on its popularity and usage among students. From what Livingstone remembers, the app's gradual decline left Endicott students unfazed that it was seemingly gone for good. But, like scrunchies and mom jeans, Yik Yak is now back from the dead for a new generation of students to determine its success.

Right before the start of this school year in August, it was announced that Yik Yak was relaunching after a four year hiatus. Since then, it has taken over college campuses like it once did, with Endicott being one of them.

Students at Endicott who use Yik Yak tend to scroll through it periodically throughout the day, upvoting what they agree with and downvoting what they disagree with. Because of the app's anonymity, one of the main reasons why students post is to vent without the fear of repercussions. Students post about the dining hall food, their workload, and even other students.

"Especially when you can't have a name attached to a criticism of something about this school or the people around it, it's nice to get that out," freshman Casey Allen says. "People find solace in it."

Students also have used it to let each other know what is happening on campus, especially on weekends, according to senior Peter McLaughlin. Posts are made about where and when people are going to gather, as well as what "theme" they should be following with their outfits.

When these events scheduled on Yik Yak played out, students noticed the increased presence of campus police, leading them to believe that campus police are aware of the app and what is being posted to it. Because of this, students were conflicted about what to do.

"I think there's people out there that are nervous about the presence of campus police and I think it's definitely driving them away from gathering with friends," McLaughlin said.

McLaughlin and senior Ethan Richards agree that student life was more relaxed before Yik Yak was around. Richards says he's never seen anything like what is happening with gatherings before Yik Yak.

Freshman Alanna Baker believes that at the beginning of the school year, Yik Yak was a way to bring students together, but now she thinks that it's toxic because of all of the hostility and negativity it presents.

In the middle of the Yik Yak spectrum is Allen, believing that Yik Yak was overall made with good intentions but is just misused, with the negatives being looked at more than the positives. One of these positives that shines through for her is Yik Yak's ability to make people feel like they're not alone.

"Sometimes I see yaks that say 'am I the only one going through this' or 'am i the only one to relate' and there's a way to find comfort in that," Allen said.

For now, the future of Yik Yak is unknown. Like a crock pot meal, only time will tell how it will turn out.

"Everything that goes in seems good at first, but we can't say it's going to be good in the end," Allen said. "We don't know if the ingredients are going to work together."

