

Minutes

Unique senate session -- we will open the floor for dialogue despite this not being an Open Forum. Rolanda Williams, chair of Minority Clubs United, is bringing a proposal to senate.

Rolanda Williams

- chairwoman of MCU
- insight about Yik Yak
 - social media website
 - information shared anonymously within a 5 mile radius of a particular location
 - posts can be voted up or down
 - app combines GPS and messaging
 - prevents usage in locations with high/middle schools
 - individuals under the age of 18 are not allowed to use the app
 - takes 5 down votes for post to be permanently deleted
 - popularity of this app increased on campus last year
 - many comments negatively targeting minority groups have been made (examples include fac/staff, PEG, VWIL, SOULS, Ida B. Wells, etc)
- School has no tolerance policy -- how is this still happening? Campus bans bullying (whether it is online or physical or verbal)
- This issue should not be dealt with an “out of sight out of mind” approach
- Must keep in mind that yik yak reveals a larger, deep seated issue
- Why ban yik yak?
 - An offense to one is an offence to all
 - threats have been made, hostile situations have arisen, defamation of character, racist comments -- grounds for legal pursuit
 - potential to incite riots
 - will be making a statement about standing with inclusivity and diversity
 - we will limit the resources that people have to spread hate
 - should not wait until an actual physical altercation occurs before we take action
 - Students’ and faculty/staff names are being identified on the app
 - decrease tension in our community
- Issues with banning this app
 - violation of freedom of speech
 - many of the racist comments made on this app are exceptions to the First Amendments
 - Why punish all for the wrongs of some
 - there are consequences for all actions and negative consequences will follow

- This will not solve the problem
 - This is the first step
- UNC Chapel Hill is in the process of banning this app, Vermont University has blocked access. More examples of colleges banning Yik Yak.
- What are we telling students if we simply tell them to “down vote”?
- This is embarrassing to the college
- This projects a very negative image of the campus -- high school counselors tell students to check Yik Yak before committing to a campus
- (Slides giving examples of roughly 20 of the hateful posts made on Yik Yak)
- Student was found guilty at Bridgewater college or making hateful comments via this app, and he has been convicted of a misdemeanor and he is serving some jail time.

Senators are going to vote whether to support MCU’s proposal

Open Floor:

- Elizabeth Stelling, OIT: You can ban it and tell the students not to use it, but we can do nothing to block it. Were we to find a way to block it on the MBC network, they could still access it on 3G or 4G
 - Rolanda: Company itself is able to ban it, so other colleges have gotten in touch with them. First step is to block it on the MBC network. Being forced to use your own data will decrease the number of posts
 - Elizabeth: Other colleges banning it on the network is a symbolic gesture. Maybe a proposal can also be made to the legal department because we have PEG students who are underage.
- There are offensive posts on many other avenues of social media. If we ban Yik Yak, do we go ahead and ban everything else as well?
 - Jazmine: What sets Yik Yak apart is that it is anonymous.
- Sierra Short: It is possible to use false information on Facebook and Twitter to make hateful comments. In the past, Yik Yak has collaborated with law enforcement.
- Mackayla Waters-Crittenton: It is far easier to make such comments on Yik Yak because of the anonymity.
- Roniqua Jackson: Yik Yak is really showing us the problem with the community in the 5 mile radius
- Danielle: I am concerned that if Yik Yak is blocked, other forms of social media will become popular for threats, defamation, etc. While the advantage is that they will no longer be anonymous, I am still concerned that the volume will prevent us from dealing with it.
- Ciara Dacosta-Reyes: Right now, our issue is with Yik Yak. We’ve not had issues with Facebook and Twitter, so we need to deal with this now.

- Noni Stevens: as we focus on the main issue at hand, we will reach our goal. Focusing on Yik Yak and looking at the 5 mile radius will begin eliminating issues.
- Tiara: I think the problem is bigger than Yik Yak itself. There is tension within minorities in America itself. A way that we can make a difference is to create platforms where we can understand each other. People are saying that they don't understand what Id B. Wells etc is, so we need to educate each other. People need to come to senate more, and we need to break this cycle that is broader than Yik Yak.
- Brittany Small: The problem with Yik Yak is that it's not just Yik Yak, but the Staunton community
- Diamonique Anderson: Speaking on behalf of BSA -- the main issue I have with Yik Yak is that prospective students look at Yik Yak, and I would like for all minorities to feel comfortable coming to this school and that this community accepts people. Everybody should feel like this is wrong.
- Dylan: I wanted to say that Yik Yak was only launched in 2013. It's popularity has skyrocketed, and I would just like to say that if we ban this app, another one can take its place and the problems won't go away.
- Rolanda: We come to this school for an education. We want to use this education to change the world. If we don't do something about this issue at hand, our education will amount to nothing. There is something that we can do about it; there is something that we can do about it, and we can do it today.
- Elizabeth Stelling: Blocking the app is impossible to do. There are at least two or three other apps that do the same thing. The immediate thing that we can do is use Yik Yak's own policy, which is to down vote all negative posts. We need to do this as a community.
- Reverend Scott: Symbols are extremely important, and by blocking Yik Yak on MBC's network, we are making a statement about we we as a community do not tolerate intolerance.
- Tralen Neal: Every year, we go to convocation and we go to charter day and we pledge inclusivity. Posts on this app are telling people that they don't matter. Symbolic gestures matter a great deal, and that our community is inclusive and that our administration is in support of this. This is something that is destroying our community as a whole.
- Ciara Dacosta-Reyes: These comments have been going on since last semester, so clearly, only down-voting and reporting has not changed behaviour.
- Something to consider is that a lot of positive comments are still made on Yik Yak. And because it's anonymous, people who need help and support and advice can use it.
- Aji: Yik Yak has been used for positive things, but everything used for good can also be used for bad. I don't think that students need this anonymity to plead for help. We have resources to help these students. If you are a black student who is thinking about self harm and you see such posts on yik yak, they might take really drastic measures. As an Area Director and an international student, it is so difficult to watch this happening.

- Rolanda: Saying that Yik Yak is a crutch for students, it is going against the fact that we have the health center, office of inclusivity, student life, etc. How are people supposed to help someone who is thinking of self harm or suicide if they don't know who it is?
- Noni Stevens: I don't want people to think that this is restricted to African Americans. Hateful comments are being made about sexual minorities, religious affiliations, etc. It's not just African American students.
- Elizabeth Stelling: This is a big issue that is across the country, not just here. But I have to stress that this is a legal app, and it is beyond our purview to block legal apps. Please do some research and look into this issue.
- Koren Okpodu: It wasn't til negative posts were being made that I found out about it. People encourage others to download to look at the gossip and negative comments. I think this movement is very effective because now people are being told that hat they are doing is wrong.
- Ceara McLaren: Racism is an emergency issue, and another issue on Yik Yak is confidentiality. JB and HC case confidentiality is an issue. We have to bring up to Yik Yak that we have students here as young as 12. There are apps similar to Yik Yak, sure, but there's also websites similar to Facebook, but do we use them?
- Danielle: Take screenshots of what is happening, and this will serve as evidence. Please remember that you are not alone.

Voting to support MCU's proposal: paper ballot

Majority in favour of the proposal. Senate is endorsing MCU's proposal.

Motion to adjourn: Theresa Jones.

Seconded.