

Preventing Cyberbullying Among Student Populations

It is undeniable that the internet has brought a lot of good things into education. If it weren't for the internet and social media, learning would've been at a complete standstill during the lockdowns that the COVID-19 pandemic caused. However, when it comes to the internet in schools, cyberbullying is one of the biggest problems that has appeared since the rise of the internet.

Cyberbullying is defined by stopbullying.gov as "bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets." This includes sending, posting, and sharing negative, false, or hurtful information about a person or group of people.

There are many different forms of cyberbullying, including flaming, exclusion, harassment, cyberstalking, outing, and masquerading.

While cyberbullying is most thought of in young children in elementary, middle, and high school, a study by the American Counseling Association showed that 22 percent of college students reported being cyberbullied and 38 percent of participants knew someone who had been bullied online.

Additionally, as apps like Yik Yak, an app that allows people to post content anonymously for people within a five-mile radius, gain popularity again on college campuses, cyberbullying is becoming easier and easier for people to achieve.

Yik Yak was banned from the Apple App Store in 2017 for reports of cyberbullying but returned to the internet in August of 2021 and almost immediately gained its popularity back on college campuses.

How can universities help students who are cyberbullied and prepare for situations of cyberbullying on college campuses?

First and foremost, universities should teach students where to go and what to bring when they're in situations of cyberbullying. According to affordablecollegesonline.org, when people are cyberbullied, they should compile all evidence of the attacks to give to school counselors and other officials. Some levels of harassment can even be brought to the police in certain situations, so having all evidence ready to go is a crucial step in stopping cyberbullying attacks.

Additionally, universities should make students aware of cyberbullying resources outside of campus, such as the Cyberbullying Research Center, which offers up-to-date information on different cyberbullying laws by state.

Many social media apps have a “report” section where people can report any kind of harassment to the apps themselves and have those posts taken down and removed from the site permanently. Instagram has a “Report Bullying” tab on its app, Twitter has a “Report Abusive Behavior” tab, and Facebook has an entire “Bullying Prevention Hub” that is geared toward students, parents, and educators.

On campus, all levels of school faculty should be trained in how to handle situations of cyberbullying, including campus security, local law enforcement, student services, and even the IT department. Support for students on campus should go beyond school counseling centers, and all members of the campus community should be equipped with the right tools to help stop cyberbullying.

Lastly, universities should open the conversation about cyberbullying and raise awareness about it on their campuses. Whether this be through email, the school website, or flyers posted around campus, students should feel supported and aware of what to do if situations of cyberbullying arise in their lives.