

April 2024 Ethical Navigation: Deposit Deadline Conundrum

PCACAC is excited to present *Ethical Navigations*, an educational effort to proactively explore issues that might face professionals involved in the college admissions process.

Each month, *Ethical Navigations* explores a hypothetical scenario and potential avenues to approaching the situation using [NACAC's Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission](#) as the lens. This guide is built on the *principles* of honesty, transparency, equity, and respect for students and fellow professionals while including the *core values* of education, access and equity, professionalism, collegiality, collaboration, trust, and social responsibility.

This month's scenario: Arbor Day, the counselor at Spring is Sprung High School, is meeting with a counselee. The student has maturely approached the college process and is now trying to make a final choice. But there is a problem. Financial aid is part of the student's process and not all institutions have awarded packages. And now, the student's top choices have provided different information and enrollment deadlines:

- Redwood University is sticking to May 1 because they provided a tentative package which the college has stated should be accurate.
- Elm University has moved to May 15 with hopes to release financial aid packages "soon."
- Magnolia College has extended to June 1 but has not indicated when packages might be available.

The student has come to ask Arbor for advice because all three schools ask for a non-refundable enrollment deposit. If finances did not matter, the student believes Magnolia would be their top choice, followed by Elm U. But the package from Redwood appears strong. Unfortunately, there is no way to compare packages at this time. Arbor is unsure how to advise the student. Does the NACAC guide provide any direction?

Possible approaches: As May 1 approaches, students, colleges, and counselors face unprecedented times. Everyone is under different pressures—students to choose a college, colleges to enroll a class, and school counselors to provide information/support. Does the GEPCA provide any direction?

First and foremost, the Guide is based on Core Values which include Education, Collaboration, and Trust. Thus, to start the conversation with the student, Arbor should acknowledge that the FAFSA delays are causing challenges. While some colleges have extended deadlines, and many others are doing so as the delays continue, other colleges may not. However, colleges typically do want to be honest and collaborate. Thus, the student and/or counselor might want to reach out to Redwood to ask about a possible extension or if the deposit could be refundable. This can be done by a number of ways:

- Arbor and the student could check the college's website/student portal to see if Redwood has made a recent announcement extending the deadline,
- Arbor (with the student in the office) could call the admission office to describe the predicament and ask for advice,
- Arbor can encourage the student/parent to formally request an extension. This request could include other relevant information like an explanation of the importance of aid in this student's situation, the focused number (in this case 3) of schools the student is considering, and/or the timeline the student needs. Arbor could develop and provide an e-mail/letter template that the family could use.

Beyond the Core Values, some specific parts of the GEPCA might influence the conversation:

- Article II, A, b) “National Candidate Reply Date: Colleges should use the widely recognized date of May 1 as the earliest enrollment confirmation deadline...students should have time to hear from each school that admitted them and receive notice of: i) offers of financial aid and scholarships.”
Usually, admission professionals think of May 1 and not having deadlines before this date. Because of the FAFSA delays, students might not have all of their offers by May 1. While it would be nice if all colleges could extend their deadlines, this might not be possible at every institution given other institutional demands. But, mentioning to Redwood that the student does not have all the information would be fair.
- Article II, A 1 C) ii) “Offers of admission should state if the deposit is refundable or non-refundable.”
In this case, if Redwood says they are willing to make the May 1 deposit refundable, Arbor (or the student) could ask for that in writing to make sure.
- Article II A. 1 e) “Students should not be required to submit an enrollment confirmation until the institution has notified them of all offers of financial aid and scholarships.”
For Arbor, this is important because Elm and Magnolia have not released packages. The importance is to educate the student that dates might still change again.
- Article 1, B. 1. B. iii) “To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should: Educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including counseling students that it is unethical to: Maintain an active enrollment deposit or the equivalent at more than one US college.”
While not ideal, a student might have to submit a deposit at one college by May 1 even though an extension or refund is not possible. Then, if new information arrives later (like a later package), Arbor might need to counsel the student to withdraw from the first college to submit a deposit at the second college. Also, the counselor should remind students that if they used the Common Application, the student made the following affirmation when submitting the application, “I affirm that I will send an enrollment deposit (or equivalent) to only one institution; sending multiple deposits (or equivalent) may result in the withdrawal of my admission offers from all institutions. [Note: students may send an enrollment deposit (or equivalent) to a second institution where they have been admitted from the waitlist, provided that they inform the first institution that they will no longer be enrolling.]”

If you have any questions feedback, or proposals for future Ethical Navigations, please contact info@pcacac.org. Do you have a question about NACAC’s recommended ethical practices or a suggested revision to the [Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission](#)? Please submit via [this form](#) and a member of the national AP committee will follow up with you.