

## August 2025 Ethical Navigation: Bait and Switch Concerns

---

[The Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admission Counseling \(PCACAC\) Admission Practices Committee](#) is excited to present *Ethical Navigations*, an educational effort to proactively explore issues that might face professionals involved in the college admissions process. This month's Ethical Navigation was submitted by Michael Nixon, Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions at the University of Maryland, College Park.

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:***

Red Drum (R.D., they/them) Recruiter is excited to hit the road again this fall and talk with students about Gone Fishing University. Fishing is well known for many strong programs, but like numerous colleges, has been battling some enrollment challenges lately. This has been especially prevalent in some of the university's smaller, more specialized majors, like Noodling Studies.

Each year, GFU's admissions department hosts training for its recruiters before they begin their travel. They invite offices and departments from across campus to provide updates and a summary of what they would like to share with students.

This year, the Noodling Studies department shared that they are in danger of having to close their department if they do not get enough students to enroll this year. They are asking the recruitment team to push the major when talking to students and encourage students to apply to their major and enroll. They've also asked that the staff not share the possible closure with students, as they fear it will deter students from applying to, and enrolling in, their program.

### ***The Conundrum:***

R.D. finds themselves in an uncomfortable situation. They love Gone Fishing University and are proud of the diversity of majors and programs it offers. They have often cited Noodling Studies as one of those unique offerings, and it is always a crowd pleaser. But they do not feel right in pushing it to students, knowing it is in danger of closing. They want the program to continue and remain successful, but also want students to be informed. R.D. can see this as potentially being seen as "bait and switch" if the program is not able to continue.

What could R.D. do? Does the Guide provide any direction?

### ***Possible approach:***

In hopes of finding some guidance, R.D. could refer to one of NACAC's Core Values, Trust. This value states, "*We believe our profession is based upon trust, and honesty with one another and with students.*" Would R.D. be breaking this trust if they followed the direction shared by Noodling Studies?

For further direction, R.D. could also refer to Section 1.A.1 of the GEPCA, which states, ***“Truthfulness and Transparency: Guiding Principles and Rationale: Members should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will allow all parties to make informed decisions...”***

Specifically, the Guide outlines, ***Members should a) Accurately describe, represent, and promote their schools, institutions, organizations, and services to students and to colleagues and should not misrepresent themselves or their institutions...”***

In addition, Section 1 A. 1. Further encourages that ***“Colleges should make publicly available comprehensive, accurate, and current information concerning: h) Academic majors and other academic offerings and programs, such as honors programs and off-campus study.”***

With this direction, R.D. could confer with their Dean or Director about best practices moving forward. They could work with their team to strike a balance between sharing the benefits and uniqueness of the Noodling Studies program without giving it any extra attention or time during their high school visits and college fairs. They could also be sure to answer honestly any questions that students, families, or counselors may have about the program.

In addition, R.D. could look to identify similar programs or parallel majors at Gone Fishing University that students can pursue if their chosen major no longer becomes available and work that possibility into her talking points.

---

*If you have any questions feedback, or proposals for future Ethical Navigations, please contact [info@pcacac.org](mailto: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.*